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France saying 'Non' to the EU  
Constitution and Federal Elections  
in Germany: The Likely Impact on  
Intra-European Dynamics and  
Transatlantic Relations

Dr. Michaela Hertkorn: France Saying 'Non' to the EU Constitution and Federal Elections in Germany: The Likely Impact on Intra-European Dynamics and Transatlantic Relations

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## **France Saying 'Non' to the EU Constitution and Federal Elections in Germany: The Likely Impact on Intra-European Dynamics and Transatlantic Relations**

The call by German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder for new federal elections one year before originally scheduled reflects Germany's precarious economic situation.

*"The announcement by the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, that he wants to hold early elections is a sign not only of how serious the defeat in North Rhine-Westphalia is – but also of how desperate his position has become".* ('Analysis: Germany's Election Bombshell', BBC News, May 23, 2005)

Both, the likely change of government in Germany by Fall 2005 and the no-vote by French citizens concerning the ratification of the constitution of the European Union will have their impact on intra-European dynamics and on transatlantic relations.

Under a new leadership, Berlin will likely strengthen ties with London and Washington. Berlin will probably re-emphasize relations with Central and Eastern Europe, the so-called 'new Europe', and generally with smaller European countries, whether in the East or West. Thus, the idea of a so-called 'two speed Europe' with a number of countries pushing ahead with further integration, while others stay out, will probably be reevaluated by a new government. With regard to France, the fateful 'non' arguably means that the French won't be part of an ever deeper integration process that transfers national sovereignty to more areas than the European Monetary Union (EMU). With the Bavarian Christian Social Democrats as a likely governing party in Germany, more emphasis will be placed on regional independence from an over-regulating bureaucracy in Brussels. This does not just concern regulations proclaimed by the constitution, but any plan for a so-called European 'super-state'. Thus, Joschka Fischer's idea of a 'European federation' may not be nullified, but it is questionable, whether a new government would look at 'deepening', the way the current government has done. Given Germany's enormous economic problems, much emphasis will have to be put on the stability of the Euro and on European Union subsidies. This has the potential for tensions between Berlin and Paris.

In January 2005, Chancellor Schröder made a surprising case for national sovereignty. This in the only area where the European Union successfully managed to transfer sovereignty to the transnational level: the economy. Schröder "demanded that the EU's near-defunct stability and growth pact be relaxed by exempting swathes of public spending from its budget-deficit ceilings. He added in a Financial Times article that 'intervention by European institutions in the budgetary sovereignty of national parliaments [should be] permitted only under very limited conditions.'" ('Europe's Stability Pact. A Case for Nationalism', Economist, January 22, 2005) While suddenly supporting national sovereignty with regard to fiscal and budgetary policy, the Chancellor opted to bypass decisions made by the German Bundestag not to lift EU sanctions previously put on China; thus encouraging the European Commission to end the sanctions. The strong support by Germany's Chancellor to lift the sanctions needs to be seen in the light of Germany's growing export dependency from China and thus, strong economic national interests. The issue was discussed during President Bush's visit to Europe in Spring

2005. It promises to remain on top of the list with regard to future transatlantic disputes. It seems that growing economic rivalries between some European countries, such as Germany, and the United States could form the basis of future transatlantic problems. Growing export dependency by Germany from China is paralleled by an unprecedented energy dependency from Russia; two countries that play a decisive role in international relations with regard to conflicts, such as North Korea, Iran or Syria. It is troubling to which extent the relationship between German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to be based on national economic interests, while concerns about democratic reform in Russia seem not to be the decisive factor in Berlin when dealing with Moscow.

During a security conference in Munich in January 2005, Chancellor Schröder surprised NATO allies with a proposal to reform the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). German Defense Minister, Peter Struck arguing NATO as an organization had not adjusted well enough to a changed geo-political landscape and had outlived its purpose as the main organization facilitating transatlantic dialogue, presented the new Schröder 'vision'. The remarks were not well received within the Alliance and upset Germany's opposition, too. NATO General Secretary, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declared, NATO was well capable militarily and politically to meet all current challenges. NATO was the body where major transatlantic consultations took place. Javier Solana, the High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union emphasized, NATO had not lost its relevance. The remarks by the German Chancellor came only a few days after the visit by US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, to Europe – a visit generally well perceived by the European press. After her talks in Berlin, Rice obtained a pledge from Chancellor Schröder to do more to help Iraq. The Chancellor highlighted the Iraqi need for democracy and stability and that Germany, which had begun training Iraqi police officers in the United Arab Emirates, was ready to help if the Iraqi government asked for it. Schröder's surprising NATO declaration also came after NATO had agreed to expand its Afghanistan mission during a February meeting in Nice; and after the Chancellor had told Rice that Germany would 'accept a new command structure for peacekeeping and anti-terror operations in Afghanistan, under the condition that the two missions remained separate'. At the same time, backed by the Alliance's Secretary-General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, pushed every NATO member to contribute to a NATO training mission in Iraq. NATO members by late 2004 had agreed to either send troops to Baghdad, to train Iraqi officers outside the country, or to donate to a trust fund financing the mission. Why the German Chancellor chose to present his surprising 'NATO-vision' one week before the visit of President George W. Bush to Europe, remained unclear. During President Bush's visit, French President Jacques Chirac expressed support for the Schröder 'plan'. Did the Chancellor look for a way to put his proposal on record with both, an international and national audience? Were his remarks mainly aimed at a domestic audience, possibly to deflect from growing economic and other problems? At another previous Munich security conference in 2002, the Chancellor chose to surprise allies when he suggested Germany and the Netherlands could assume the leadership role for NATO peacekeepers in Afghanistan – a proposal that had not yet been shared with The Hague. With regard to Germany's domestic economic problems, a recent article in Forbes Magazine titled 'Germany's Dismal Future' identifies three main reasons for why the country is now facing an unprecedented level of unemployment: a level that is unprecedented since the end of World War II and that arguably resembles Weimar conditions. The article well characterized the domestic constraints for German foreign policy, while putting them into an international context:

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*“...The power wielded by its old-fashioned trade unions, German unions insist on short hours, high wages, immense social security benefits and conditions of work that make productivity increases virtually impossible... The input of the EU bureaucracy in Brussels: The EU imposes endless rules, whose net effect is to stifle enterprise and squelch innovation. The push toward a European superstate has proved an unmitigated disaster for Germany, which, despite its relative economic decline, is still the biggest net contributor to EU funds. Germany thus ends up financing programs such as the Common Agricultural Policy that work against its interest. Germany pays the EU piper, while France calls all the tunes. Indeed, Germany’s subservience to France is one of the most astonishing and inexplicable features of today’s world. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder seems content to play the poodle to President Jacques Chirac in the most humiliating and groveling way, following tamely in courses that demonstrably work against Germany both at home and abroad. When Germany looked to US leadership between 1950 and the early 1970s, it prospered. Since Germany submitted to French direction, the country has plunged relentlessly into the pit. Eventually, the German people are going to grasp the salient truth; when they do, the consequences for Europe will be dramatic... Germany’s acute sense of failure and unhappiness. This is a collective psychological depression that effectively prevents Germany from taking action to remedy its ills. The Germans agree they’re in a mess, and many see the obvious way out. The country needs to make the kinds of structural changes in its economy that Prime Minister Thatcher carried out in Britain 20 years ago, changes that have completely transformed the performance and expectations of the British people. But, though most Germans know this, they lack the will – and, of course, the leadership – to carry it out...”* ('Germany's Dismal Future', Forbes, January 31, 2005)

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