

“GERMAN EUROPE”

(ULRICH BECK)

Mathilde Durand | *Project Manager Germany at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

This synthesis sets out to illustrate the main arguments and ideas expounded by Ulrich Beck in his latest book *German Europe*. He suggests notably a comparison between Niccolò Machiavelli and Angela Merkel in what he calls the “Merkiavelli model”.

Ulrich Beck’s¹ latest book² opens with a quote from Thomas Mann who, in an address to students in Hamburg in 1953, warned against a “German Europe” and argued that a “European Germany” would be a preferable goal. That expression was later to be repeated over and over again at the time of Germany’s reunification. Yet in the words of British historian Timothy Garton Ash, few people had predicted the current situation, which is more akin to “a European Germany in a German Europe”. Beck’s latest book endeavours to explain how the present circumstances, particularly the economic and financial crisis, have led to this situation.

This synthesis sets out to illustrate the main arguments and ideas expounded by the book’s author³.

1. Europe torn apart by the crisis

Ulrich Beck argues that, despite the EU’s numerous successful achievements – things that now seem so natural to us that we are barely even aware of them any longer –, the EU is still incomplete. The EMU also suffers from an original flaw, namely the absence of a genuine common economic policy, which needs to be developed as rapidly as possible. In the author’s view, “while there are periods of ‘pusillanimous politics’ happy simply to implement the rules, there are other periods of ‘great politics’ which modify established rules. (...) A period of ‘great politics’ is what we need now in order to address the crisis in the euro zone, climate change, and unbridled financial capitalism”.

Nor, indeed, is the collapse of the euro the only dramatic event to be averted: we also need to safeguard Europe’s values (in particular, openness to others and tolerance) because “Europe is nothing without its values of freedom and of democracy, without its cultural origin and dignity”. The crucial issue of

solidarity is measured against the yardstick of those values. Yet even today national (electoral, media-related or economic) interests prevail over the common interest to a large extent.

Ulrich Beck then returns to the concept of a “risk society” which he explored at some length in an earlier work⁴. In his view there is a divide between two rationales, namely the rationale of risk and the rationale of democracy. He asks: “what degree of democracy does an imminent catastrophe allow to survive?”.

The EU’s future development may be threatened by four kinds of tension:

- **Strengthening the EU vs. strengthening its member states:** The risk of collapse is prompting “Europe’s architects” to dream of a new Europe. It is necessary for people to wake up to the fact that national sovereignty must be set aside, and that sovereignty can only be recovered at the EU level on the basis of cooperation.
- **Action required by the threat vs. action prohibited by existing legislation:** “Europe’s architects” are appealing for more Europe on account of the imminence of the threat, yet current legislation prevents them from pursuing such a development. Thus there is tension between the “sovereignists” in favour of “action which is illegitimate but legal”, and Europe’s architects who favour “action which is illegal but legitimate”.
- **The rationale of the threat of war vs. the rationale of the threat of risk:** While war is something that is clearly identifiable and quantifiable, risk is not concrete and there is usually no intent to harm.

- **Global capitalism vs. national politics:** “Europe’s architects are convinced that they have good solutions for the current problems, but those solutions are likely to be extremely unpopular in the member states and thus harmful for national governments’ re-election prospects”.

2. A new balance of forces in Europe

The economic and financial crisis has brought about major changes in the balance of forces in Europe. There are several voices in Europe today, yet only that of Angela Merkel appears to be making itself heard.

This imbalance in Europe is particularly discernible in three areas:

- **EMU members vs. members of the EU alone:** Those countries that are not in the EMU play no role in the important decisions relating to the EMU’s (and thus the EU’s) institutional reforms. They should be encouraged to rapidly consider joining the EMU. Until very recently, however, they enjoyed the power of veto (see, in this connection, the UK vote on the Fiscal Compact).
- **Creditor countries vs. debtor countries:** Indebted countries depend on creditor countries, which might point to the advent of a kind of “federalism or neo-colonialism, or even feudalism”. Ulrich Beck also makes a distinction between “external outsiders”, in other words those EU member state that are not members of the EMU, and “internal outsiders”, which are both in the EU and in the EMU yet which need to seek aid and thus have to agree to relinquish certain aspects of their sovereignty and to suffer an attack on their national dignity.
- **A two-speed Europe:** The fact that certain member states can move forward more rapidly than others in certain fields is nothing new. Joschka Fischer aired the possibility in an important speech which he made in 2000 (although he subsequently backtracked). This differentiation “has become a reality in every aspect of democratic legitimacy”, in particular between indebted countries and “Europe’s architects”.

In these three spheres we can see that Germany’s power has grown stronger. This is an example of an

“unexpected collateral effect”: “Berlin only exercises its leadership unwillingly, preferably in the economic sphere, rarely in the sphere of foreign policy, and never in the military sphere”.

3. Germany, an accidental empire

While Germany has undeniably acquired a certain amount of clout in Europe, nevertheless several terms are still taboo: it is still preferable to talk about “responsibility” rather than “power”, about “Europe, peace, cooperation or economic stability” rather than “national interests”, and about “leadership” rather than “steering” (*Führung*). Indeed even the expression “a German Europe” continues to be very much disputed, because it harks back to a “formula contaminated by history” and to a still extremely sensitive taboo which enforces words on a situation that exists *de facto*.

In view of the power that Germany has acquired, it “cannot afford the luxury of not making a decision” on the major issue currently facing Europe: “to be or not to be”.

The construction of Europe was initially designed to prevent fresh conflict from breaking out among neighbouring countries (it was a matter of settling the “German question”) but it did not necessarily rest on common interests. If Germany has proven capable of taking on board the Western values of freedom, capitalism and democracy, it is thanks to the construction of Europe. It feels, for its part, that it has “learnt the lesson” and become a “model in the fields of democracy, the phase-out of nuclear power, the economy and pacifism”. If we look at the country’s past history, we realise that “this is the best Germany we have ever had”.

Yet many Germans are experiencing a kind of “nostalgia for normality” after years of “confessing the sins of National Socialism”. At this juncture the Germans wish “to be seen as schoolmasters and enlightened moral spirits in Europe”; they consider that they have the “historic task” of “preparing the Greeks, the Italians and the Spanish for the global marketplace”.

This “German Europe”, which entails a hierarchical dependence among countries, may have numerous social consequences; it may lead, in particular, to a loss of faith in Europe and to a mutual loss of

confidence on the citizens' part. This, because in Ulrich Beck's view, **European confidence rests of four principles:**

- the principle of fairness: all decisions and obligations linked to the construction of Europe must be perceived by all involved as being fair;
- the principle of equality: the protection of the weak must be *the* priority;
- the principle of reconciliation: this principle must prevail despite the jigsaw puzzle of economies, countries, cultures and democracy;
- a principle preventing "the exploitation" of the weak by the strong.

4. The "Machiavelli model", or the policy of hesitation

Ulrich Beck devotes a large part of his work to exploring what he calls the "Machiavelli model". According to Niccolò Machiavelli: "a prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by so doing it would be against his interest, and when the reasons which made him bind himself no longer exist". Adapting that maxim to the situation today, we might say that: "it is possible to do today the very opposite of what you announced yesterday if by doing so you increase your chances of winning the next election".

Angela Merkel has proven capable of "seizing the opportunity to alter the balance of forces in Europe". Considered by some to be "Europe's uncrowned queen", she draws her strength from her hesitation to act throughout the crisis, but also from her ability to change her mind out of domestic political opportunism, as we can see, for instance, from her decision to phase out nuclear power or to agree to the concept of "euro bonds".

In Ulrich Beck's view, the "Machiavelli model" rests on **four factors which are inevitably bound to bolster each other's strength:**

- When it is a matter of helping indebted countries, Angela Merkel does not pronounce an outright "yea" or "nay" but tends to shilly-shally. Thus she takes great care not to afford priority either to "Europe's architects" who are

demanding German guarantees, or to the "sovereignists" who are opposed to all forms of aid. She keeps her two options open and prefers to peg the grant of credit "to the indebted countries' amenability to subscribe to the terms of Germany's stability policy".

- According to Machiavelli, if the prince is to ensure that his position prevails, he needs to "display virtue, political energy and determination", while "Merkel's power rests on the wish to do nothing, on her propensity for not acting just yet, for postponing any action, for dithering", "This art of selective procrastination, this mix of indifference, mingling a rejection of Europe with commitment to Europe is behind Germany's position of strength in a Europe badly battered by the crisis".

Thus Angela Merkel has proven capable of perfecting this unwilling domination by pursuing a policy of hesitation, and Germany has become the hegemonic power in Europe thanks to its economic strength rather than by force of arms.

- Angela Merkel has also successfully managed to "square the circle by merging in one and the same person the ability to be re-elected in her own country and the ability to pass herself off as one of Europe's architects". "This means that all measures necessary to salvage the euro and the European Union first need to pass their aptitude test inside Germany's borders" and thus "reflect the requirements of German interests and of Merkel's position of strength".

Machiavelli asks in the *Prince* whether it is preferable to be loved or to be feared: "The reply is, that one ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting". Angela Merkel again applies this principle, in that: "she wishes to be feared abroad and loved in her own country", which brings with it a formula of "brutal neo-liberalism outside her country and support tinged with social democracy inside it". This has allowed her to bolster both her own position of strength and that of "German Europe".

- And lastly, Angela Merkel seeks "to enforce on her partners what passes for a magic formula

at the economic and political level in Germany (...), namely making savings for the sake of stability!" But this is in fact "an extremely brutal form of neo-liberalism [involving painful cuts in pensions, training, research, infrastructures and so forth] and it is now going to be built into the European constitution in the shape of a fiscal compact, without worrying too much what Europe's grass roots think of it (because they are too weak to put up any resistance)".

These are the four factors that make up the "hard core" of German Europe. Though perhaps we should add that Angela Merkel has even encountered "the situation of urgency to which the prince must prove capable of responding: Germany as an 'amiable hegemonic power' (...) is forced to give priority to that which is required by a dangerous situation over that which is forbidden by law". "In order to achieve the enforcement of Germany's austerity policy on the whole of Europe in a binding manner, Merkiavelli considers that democratic standards can become flexible or even be circumvented entirely". Thus decisions are not reached in a democratic fashion but are the result of economic strength.

Yet "the Merkiavelli method is [apparently] reaching its outer limits, because it has to be admitted that Germany's austerity policy has not been successful anywhere so far. On the contrary, the indebtedness crisis is now also threatening Spain and Italy, and it may even be France's turn soon". Thus a counter-power may see the light of day in an attempt to come up with an alternative to the German chancellor's policy, which is "often very populist, and above all it is built around Germany's interests alone and driven by the fear of inflation". This alternative could "be modelled more on the US Federal Reserve's policy for growth".

5. A new "social contract" for Europe

Ulrich Beck argues the case for a new "social contract for Europe" along the lines of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "social contract", which should rest on several factors:

- **A strengthening of freedom:** Taking his cue from philosopher Vincenzo Cicchelli' work on young people, Beck argues that it is necessary to further reconcile vertical integration (the

European institutions and the member states) with horizontal integration (the experience of Europe through the Erasmus programme, for example).

- **A strengthening of social security:** He considers it necessary to strengthen solidarity in Europe and to return to the concept of a "European *Community*". Safeguard mechanisms should no longer be created for banks but for people.
- **A strengthening of democracy:** The construction of Europe is often perceived through its institutions, thus any strengthening of democracy tends to require institutional reform. Yet it is necessary to view democracy from the individual's standpoint. "If the ability to see things through others' eyes is the precondition for the birth of a European democracy, we need to campaign for Europe's cosmopolitan education".

Ulrich Beck was one of the signatories of an op-ed entitled "Let's create a bottom-up Europe"⁵ signed by, among others, Jacques Delors, Helmut Schmidt, Jürgen Habermas, Herta Müller, Senta Berger, Richard von Weizsäcker, Imre Kertész and other great Europeans, urging the "Doing Europe". In their view, European democracy has to "start from the bottom", because they have realised that there is no such thing as a "European people" but a "Europe of individuals who have yet to become the sovereign stakeholders in a European democracy". These personalities have called for the adoption of a "European Year of Volunteering for Everyone", arguing that exchanges should not be restricted to students or to the elite but be open to everyone, be they workers, the unemployed or pensioners, so that they can experience Europe by discovering a different country and a different language area.

In Ulrich Beck's view, the fault that people find with the EU's institutional architecture is that, when a European election is held, the citizens "do not really decide Europe's fate". And even if the election really did revolve around European themes, it would not resolve the issue of funding for European policies, which "still depend largely on the member states' financial means".

It is in the interest of every European country to strengthen European cooperation and solidarity,

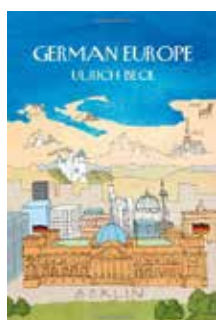
thus to forge a "European social contract", the establishment of which the author tells us requires "a vanguard of cosmopolitan countries" comprising not only indebted countries (Italy or Spain) or countries that have benefited from the crisis but that are now threatened by their indebtedness (France), but also countries that are still benefiting from the crisis (Germany). The "Merkiavelli" model would then need to be replaced: "the allocation of credit would no longer be pegged to budget discipline or to neo-liberal reforms but to member states' amenability to contribute to the new social contract, to accept broader budget autonomy for the European institutions and to move forward step by step towards political union".

Yet in the present circumstances, it is necessary to set up not only this "European social contract" but also a "liability union". If such a thing were established, Ulrich Beck argues, it would allow the "European social contract" to gain two allies, namely the players on the world's money markets because the existence of a new institution responsible for losses in the event of a crisis would enable Europe to regain their confidence, and the inhabitants of the indebted countries who would find it easier to identify with the European project.

Conclusion: Towards a European spring?

Taking his cue from the Arab Spring and the American Fall (the movements that occupied Wall Street and then spread to the rest of the United States), Ulrich Beck wonders whether the EU, too, is going to experience its "European autumn, winter or spring". Protests in Europe to date have tended to be directed against national governments over their implementation of Germano-European policy. Yet "given that the EU alone is capable of effectively countering the origins of the disastrous situation, cooperation on the part of all of the 'superfluous' players [i.e. all those people affected by the crisis] is necessary, not in order to call for less Europe but, on the contrary, to ensure that the EU honours its founding political and social-democratic principles".

According to Ulrich Beck, the crisis in the euro zone has undermined the legitimacy of neo-liberal Europe, and we can detect an asymmetry between power and legitimacy: "the power of capital and of governments is strong but their legitimacy is weak, the exact opposite of the protesters whose power is weak but whose legitimacy is strong". Thus he calls on the protesters to take advantage of the imbalance in order to make "the quantum leap towards a capability for transnational action", otherwise "German Europe" is in danger of continuing to rule the roost.



Ulrich Beck, *Das deutsche Europa. Neue Machtlandschaften im Zeichen der Krise*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2012.
Published in English as: Ulrich Beck, *German Europe*, Polity Press, Cambridge/Oxford, April 2013.

1. Ulrich Beck is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich and the author of *Risk Society, Towards a New Society*.
2. Ulrich Beck, *Das deutsche Europa. Neue Machtlandschaften im Zeichen der Krise*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2012. Published in English as: Ulrich Beck, *German Europe*, Polity Press, Cambridge/Oxford, April 2013. The translations in this synthesis are from the translator of this synthesis.
3. The views expressed in the book are not necessarily those of *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*.
4. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society. Towards a New Society*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 1992 (original edition: *Risikogesellschaft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986).
5. "Let's create a bottom-up Europe", *The Guardian*, 3 May 2012. A manifesto in favour of this "European Year of Volunteering for Everyone" is also available [on line](#).

On the same themes...

GERMANY, FRANCE, EU: ACTING TOGETHER

António Vitorino, Daniela Schwarzer and Mathilde Durand, *Tribune – Viewpoint, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, January 2013

ENOUGH SAUERKRAUT AND BEER

Jacques Delors and Joschka Fischer, *Tribune, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, January 2013

REFORM PROPOSALS FOR THE EURO ZONE

Jacques Delors and Henrik Enderlein, *Tribune, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, December 2012

"GERMANY STRONGLY EVOLVED DURING THE CRISIS"

António Vitorino, *Tribune, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, July 2012

COMPLETING THE EURO: A ROAD MAP TOWARDS FISCAL UNION IN EUROPE

Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa Group (coord. Henrik Enderlein), Foreword by Jacques Delors and Helmut Schmidt, *Studies & Reports No. 92, Notre Europe*, June 2012

WHERE IS GERMANY HEADING?

Elvire Fabry and Renaud Dehousse (dir.), Timo Behr, Janis A. Emmanouilidis, Almut Möller, William E. Paterson, Stefan Seidendorf and Henrik Uterwedde, *Studies & Research No. 79, Notre Europe*, October 2010

KARLSRUHE'S EUROPE

Katrin Auel and Julio Baquero Cruz, *Studies & Research No. 78, Notre Europe*, octobre 2010

Managing Editor: Yves Bertoncini • The document may be reproduced in part or in full on the dual condition that its meaning is not distorted and that the source is mentioned • The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher • *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* cannot be held responsible for the use which any third party may make of the document • Translation from French: Stephen Tobin • © *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*