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Book Review

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Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity*

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Contemporary German foreign policy remains a puzzle for many. Following unification and the reestablishment of full sovereignty after the end of the Cold war, Germany is perhaps one of the most powerful actors in Europe in economic, demographic, and territorial terms combined. Yet, in contrast to Neorealist expectations in the discipline of International Relations the Berlin Republic has not reassumed a role as a 'normal' great power nor has it tried to dominate the continent. Instead, Germany continues to exercise "power with" other countries in stark contrast to its historical Other which emphasized "power over" its neighbours in Europe and beyond.

Lily Gardner-Feldman's book adds an interesting facet to this phenomenon. Her main argument revolves around the concept of reconciliation and how it constitutes German foreign policy: "The cornerstone, perhaps the very definition, of German foreign policy after World War II became, progressively, reconciliation." She convincingly develops this argument in four detailed case studies, which focus on Germany's reconciliation process with its former enemies including France, Israel, Poland, and the Czech Republic. In order to analyze and compare these cases, Lily Gardner Feldman presents an elaborate theoretical model of reconciliation at the beginning of her book. In this model, she distinguishes four conditions that have to be met in processes of successful international reconciliation: history, leadership, institutions, and international context. History involves not just the initiation of reconciliation processes ("past as stimulus") but also determines its outcome ("past as presence"). Crucial to starting reconciliation, according to Gardner Feldman, is an acknowledgement and confrontation with past wrongdoings and the recognition of unjust behaviour, typically expressed through an apology. Such an apology need not be explicit ('I apologize') but may sufficiently be communicated through dialogues of mutual understanding, narratives to diverge from past behaviour, and symbolic interaction. Historical conditions have to be accompanied and inspired by political leadership ("visionary societal actors") that "set a tone and project a message to a broader public".

A third condition involves the rebuilding of common institutions and ties by governments and transnational groups. By institutionalization, however, Gardner Feldman means not simply a return to the status quo ante but includes the establishment of new frameworks and fora through which the process of reconciliation is institutionalized and carries symbolic relevance. This process of

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institutional transformation needs to take into account interaction both at the international as well as at the domestic level. Thus, non-governmental actors also play a crucial role by serving as either "catalysts" or "competitors" to reconciliation at the intergovernmental level. As catalysts, non-governmental actors display and advocate a public desire for a change in the relationship which adds legitimacy to the process of reconciliation while simultaneously inserts pressure on governments to act accordingly. As competitors, non-governmental actors can complicate and undermine reconciliation by withholding public legitimacy and thwarting governmental activity both at home and abroad.

Finally, the international context obviously is also relevant to reconciliation processes because the participation in multilateral frameworks and international organizations (e.g. the EU) can assure that actors involved in processes of reconciliation cannot avoid each other "thereby locking (them) in the relationship". Also, broader trends and developments in the international system (e.g. the demise of the Soviet Union) have been either conducive or discouraging to the process of reconciliation.

Lily Gardner Feldman's book presents a convincing theoretical argument embedded in admirably detailed case studies and based on an astonishingly number of sources and personal interviews. Thus, Gardner Feldman can rightly claim to provide a "comprehensive appreciation of how Germany's external reconciliation came about, was pursued in practice, and is maintained during the tectonic changes of the twenty-first century". There is only one minor shortcoming in this book, which, however, can hardly be blamed on the author because it relates to recent developments the bulk of which occurred only after the book was published. To some readers, Gardner Feldman's focus on reconciliation as constituting German foreign policy may seem to be at odds with current developments and practices. During the so-called Euro crisis many governments and people in Europe have come to view Germany as a 'great bully' that (ab)uses its financial and economic might to coerce its European neighbours to adopt unwanted domestic policies. This perception at first seems to undermine the significance of reconciliation in contemporary German foreign policy because it appears to reintroduce German "power over" into European politics.

However, there are at least two arguments that sharply contradict this rather superficial observation. First of all, it confuses cause and effect. Germany did not cause the Euro crisis nor has it exercised a coercive foreign policy. On the contrary, Germany has practiced solidarity with its neighbours by making substantial financial commitments (against major domestic head wind) to assist them in resolving the crisis. To be sure, Germany is not doing this for entirely altruistic reasons and attaches, at times, harsh conditions to its financial aid. Yet, its genuine interest and commitment to saving the Euro and also the process of European integration can hardly be argued against. Second, and more importantly, the construction of Germany as the 'great bully' in contemporary European politics does not reflect public opinion in Europe. On the contrary, a recent Europe-wide public opinion polls shows that Germany continues to be by far the most likeable country in Europe (BBC poll, 2013). In this sense, current developments arguably represent a continuation rather than an undermining of Germany's policy of reconciliation. That being said, German policymakers could do a much better job in explaining their actions abroad and make a more convincing case at home that 'saving Europe' lies in the German interest. To this end, Gardner Feldman's book presents a timely reminder to both European publics and policymakers.