

An 'Honest' Germany

By Karl-Heinz Kamp

BERLIN—Germany is in a state of political upheaval. After the federal president last night granted the necessary provisions for the dissolution of parliament, the country is facing new elections in autumn that will, according to most polls, bring into power a CDU-led coalition with Angela Merkel as chancellor. If

that prediction is correct, will Germany's foreign and security policy also change? What will future German policy look like?

It is of course too early to expect definite policy concepts and strategies. The two surprises in the last weeks came out of the blue. First, no one expected that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder would pursue new elections, thereby risking "suicide from a fear of dying." Secondly, the speed at which the coalition government fell apart and consequently became incapable of governing was also unanticipated. All of the opposition's conceptual planning was intended for the elections next year. Yet, that being acknowledged, clear outlines in the area of security policy can already be recognized.

Three principles will shape a new German security policy: the courage for honesty, a will for creating structured policy and a return to trans-Atlantic balance. While at first these fundamentals may seem to be little more than hollow words and political rhetoric, if these principles are consistently adhered to throughout the policy-formation process, a clear course can emerge.

Ms. Merkel's use of "new honesty" isn't without risk. As a general rule, elections require grand promises simply because the memory of the voting public is short. With respect to the army, honesty means confessing that there will not be a definite increase in defense spending. The process of transforming the armed forces must be accomplished with fewer resources and, in specific areas, it will probably last longer than some may have hoped. However, some necessary changes do not require huge financial means, such as the need for constitutional changes in order to use the armed forces for anti-terrorist operations inside Germany.

A desire to structure policy should once again move to the foreground. While at the beginning of his term in office Chancellor Schröder allowed developments to occur under the so-called "policy of the quiet hand," Ms. Merkel wants to actively influence policy, and consequently aims to strengthen structures in the federal chancellery. In this regard, the existing but thus far rather passive "Federal Security Council" could be expanded to become an active coordinating instrument with a national security coordinator at the helm—comparable to the U.S. National Security Council. Also belonging to a strong, structured policy is the ability to differentiate the vital issues from those of lesser importance. Thus, a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council presumably would not be an urgent goal for a CDU-led government, as its utility would be of symbolic rather than of real political substance.

A second focus of future German security pol-

icy must be a new trans-Atlantic balance. In the past Germany owed its political significance to a close friendship both with the U.S. and with its neighbor, France. In this mediating role, Germany could exert a large degree of influence in the European Union. Mr. Schröder's shift toward Paris has

destroyed this equilibrium and impaired the international weight of Germany. Moreover, in Eastern Europe, Mr. Schröder's "German-

French-Russian axis" was viewed with a sense of horror. Germany can and will loosen itself from the French grip without becoming blindly obedient to Washington. By showing respect, Germany will also win back the small countries within the EU whose trust was lost over the last few years.

Inside NATO, Germany will cease applying the brake to specific, individual questions and instead will direct its political energies toward the further development of the alliance. One of the central challenges for NATO is amending the strategic fundamentals of the alliance created in 1999, i.e. the "strategic concept," to today's new realities. In this matter, Germany will pursue an intense, trans-Atlantic security dialogue.

A new German government will promote the development of a European security identity founded on a European-Atlantic synergy, rather than one focused on European emancipation from the U.S. American dominance in the political, economic and military spheres will not die away in the near future. Indeed, American superpower status is not per se "good" or "bad." Rather, it is above all a fact that must be taken into consideration. To try to construe Europe as a counterweight to the U.S. is politically absurd and militarily impossible.

Chancellor Schröder took office in 1998 with the motto, "Change nothing completely, but make a lot better." A CDU-led government will have to change a lot in order to make it better.

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