

The "Queen of Europe" at the UN.

Why Angela Merkel should abandon Germany's Bid for a Permanent Seat at the UN Security Council

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FRANKFURT. When Angela Merkel arrives at the United Nations for the opening of the 62nd session of the General Assembly on Tuesday [25 September] to deliver her first address as German chancellor she will be very well received. Just after two years in power she has already become something like a foreign policy legend. "Call her Angie von Bismarck" read the title of a recent op-ed by Josef Joffe, one of the editors of the German weekly "Die Zeit". In her roles as chair of the G8 and as President of the European Union earlier this year Mrs. Merkel received highest marks for her leadership skills. The European Parliament offered standing ovations when she reported on the summit outcome at the end of June.

At the UN the "queen of Europe" (Joffe) is likely to get a similarly sympathetic hearing. Her call for concerted global efforts to stem climate change will resonate all around the world. Since the G8 summit at Heiligendamm she has become the standard bearer among world leaders on this issue. Much of her address is likely to deal with it.

There is another issue, however, which does not fit as easily with Mrs. Merkel's "soft power" and "honest broker" image. In her speech at the UN it may not show up, however, because Germany finds itself in a difficult position. The issue is the reform of the UN Security Council. For the future of global governance it is no less significant than climate change. However, Germany has been a key stumbling block in this field for the past decade due to its insistence to be granted a permanent seat. Merkel inherited this project from her predecessor, Gerhard Schröder. Initially it seemed as if she might redirect the course as she did with many other Schröder legacies. This expectation was nourished by her key foreign policy advisor, Christoph Heusgen, who went on record early on that he considered the whole idea an "illusion". Since Heusgen had worked before for Javier Solana, the High Representative for the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), many expected a pro-European realignment in Germany's UN-policy. However, little has changed. What is more, there are several hints that Mrs. Merkel may be as bent on securing a third permanent seat for a member of the EU as has been her predecessor. In 2004 when she still headed the opposition in the German parliament she stated unambiguously that Germany must not satisfy itself with "second rate responsibility". Rather it should aim for a permanent seat, she said, with all the usual privileges, including the right to veto decisions.

It is unclear whether this remains her position today. Since becoming chancellor Merkel has avoided taking a clear public stand. Her prodding in the back, however, suggests that she has not fundamentally changed her views. This is unfortunate since it complicates both the EU's role in global affairs and, more importantly, progress in UN reform. It is clear that the EU is one of the most powerful forces in the UN if it speaks with one voice. In the General Assembly it can usually count on more than a quarter of all states going along with unified EU positions. Yet on the issue of Security Council reform Germany and Italy are two of the key players in opposing camps. While Germany sides with a small group of countries hoping to secure permanent seats for themselves, Italy is among the leaders of a group of states fighting against new permanent seats. The result is a deep split within the EU where Germany can count on no more than six states supporting its bid. What is more, contrary to its self-

image of being a force for fairness in global governance ("civilian power") the EU collectively is one of major opponents against rebalancing the distribution of power within the UN system in favour of countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The broader irony is that Italy and Germany pride themselves as being model multilateralists and exemplar Europeanists. The realities of UN politicking of both paint a very different picture. This is particularly striking in the German case since Merkel's speeches are usually filled with Europhile multilateralist rhetoric. Towards the end of her address to the European Parliament in June she quoted an African saying: "If you want to move forward fast, go it alone. If you want to go far, join in with others." She added that for her this saying "encapsulates the wisdom underlying the idea of European integration". Indeed! Germany's UN-unilateralism has led nowhere. It has divided the EU and complicated UN reform. Therefore, joining in with its European partners shows the way ahead.

This need not entail an abandonment of the German ambition, to be represented on the UN Security Council more often than in the past. However, it would include a renouncement of the claim for permanent membership status and a switch towards the alternative of semi-permanent membership via re-election. In her address to the UN General Assembly Mrs. Merkel could commit Germany to this policy. Its EU partners would doubtlessly applaud her. More important still, if she were to couple this with a general acknowledgement of the need for a rebalancing of the UN's distribution of power in favour of states such as India, Brazil and South Africa both the US and the developing world would join in as well. At least two benefits would follow. It would help to get Germany re-elected to the UN Security Council more often. And it would improve the global political climate by making UN reform more likely.