German foreign policy decision making during times of crises:
Changing patterns from Eurozone crisis to migration crisis

In the last years, the analysis of German foreign policy crisis behaviour has attracted increased attention in the course of the Eurozone crisis and, more recently, in the context of the escalating migration crisis. A particularly influential strand of literature has attempted to locate the German crisis behaviour in a more general debate of Germany as a hegemonic power. Two distinct patterns can be observed in this regard: While the German federal government was able to enforce a widely accepted leadership role during the Eurozone crisis, a similarly pursued role is increasingly questioned among European partners during the migration crisis. How can this discrepancy in the acceptance of Germany’s leadership role be explained?

So far, most studies dealing with German foreign policy behaviour during times of crises have primarily focused on a single case or a specific aspect within this case. However, this narrow perspective only provides situational insights and misses the opportunity to provide explanations for German foreign policy behaviour in times of crises as such. Against this backdrop, this paper refers to the methodological framework of a structured comparison in order to explain the divergence of outcome in the two foreign policy crises. Following the prevalent debate on Germany as a hegemon, we analyse the foreign policy behaviour against the theoretical background of Charles P. Kindleberger’s idea of benevolent leadership. We argue that political leadership in the European Union is exercised within a community environment. As a result, leadership is on the one hand functionally dependent on the willingness to transfer state sovereignty and on the other hand normatively dependent on responsibility and solidarity toward the EU. Both requirements are only partially met by the behaviour of German government.

The argument builds on the assumption that differences in the acceptance of leadership cannot merely be explained with recurrence to the reaction of external actors, but that they are fundamentally linked to the national decision-making process. The paper thus aims at approximating a more general explanation for German foreign policy behaviour in crisis situations by comparing the German decision making process during the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis.

Dr Siegfried Schieder
Acting Professor for International Relations
Department of Political Science
Technische Universität Darmstadt
Dolivostraße 15
D-64293 Darmstadt

Tel.: +49 6151 16-57342
E-Mail: schieder@pg.tu-darmstadt.de
www.politikwissenschaft.tu-darmstadt.de
www.eui.eu/~Fellows/Schieder.aspx

Halima Akhrif, M.A.
International Relations and European Integration
Department of Political Science
University of Stuttgart
Breitscheidstr. 2
D-70174 Stuttgart

Tel.: +49 711 685 81456
E-Mail: halima.akhrif@sowi.uni-stuttgart.de
www.uni-stuttgart.de/soz/ib/mitarbeiter/akhrif.html