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THE GERMAN ELECTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

Compared to other countries of similar size and importance, South Africa has had a special role in German policy and in the minds of many Germans. This, however, has faded in the last four or five years. There was a renewed rush of attention before the South African April elections and for some time afterwards South Africa was news and a major talking-point. Since then the country seems to have dropped out of sight. From a German perspective, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, problems of reunification - both economically and in the 'national psyche' - have been pre-eminent. The changes in Eastern Europe and its effects on Western Europe have further pre-occupied minds and purses.

Still, there remains empathy for South Africa among many Germans. Germany is among the top three investors in South Africa in terms of trade, credit/banking and tourism. A significant number of South Africans also claim German descent. German politicians, the media and general public still give more attention to South Africa than to other medium-sized developing countries. Has that outlook changed since the elections for the German Bundestag on 16 October 1994?

NARROW MAJORITY

As long as the present coalition government holds together in Germany in spite of its narrow majority of ten seats (and there are no indications that it could be forced to proclaim an early election before

the end of its four-year term), there will not be a fundamental shift in German policy towards Pretoria. Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel holds a strong bargaining position as his party would be the linchpin for any change in government, despite its electoral support having dropped from 11% to 6.9%. Less dramatically the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under Chancellor Helmut Kohl lost support, while its more conservative Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), survived relatively unscathed.

Despite increased support, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) narrowly missed its chance with the help of the leftist 'green' party, Bündnis90/Die Grünen, to have its candidate Rudolf Scharping elected as Chancellor. Thus the SPD did not have to face the dilemma of possibly being elected only with the indirect help of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the 'reformed' successor of the former communist East German governing party, but also had to cope with the strong rise of support for the PDS in the five new Eastern federal states and in Berlin. This shift indicated discontent with the path and pace of the unification process and the relatively high rate of unemployment in the East. While many worry about rising xenophobia and racism among some Germans, especially among youngsters in the former DDR, rightwing Republicans have decreased their already small support base to less than 2% of the electorate, a far smaller support for radical rightwing politics than in many other European states.

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The election results for the last three elections to the German Bundestag have been as follows:

	16/10/1994	02/12/1990	25/01/1987
CDU	34.2%	36.7%	34.5%
CSU	7.3%	7.1%	9.8%
SPD	36.4%	33.5%	37.0%
FDP	6.9%	11.0%	9.1%
Bündnis90/Die Grünen	7.3%	3.8%	8.3%
PDS	4.4%	2.4%	-
Republikaner	1.9%	2.1%	-

Of the 672 seats in the next Bundestag, the CDU/CSU will hold 294, SPD 252, FDP 47, Bündnis90/Die Grünen 49 and PDS 30. The coalition thus holds 341 seats, the opposition parties 331.

STRENGTHENING BONDS

There are only limited differences between the major parties regarding Germany's foreign policy. The issue of German soldiers joining UN peace-keeping missions is one example, however. Parties hardly differ on their Southern African policy, especially after the change of government in Pretoria. The differences lie more in rhetoric and style than in fundamental issues. But the special bonds developed by some politicians towards specific regions or themes should not be underestimated. In Germany there is an astonishing number of people with special connections with or interest in South Africa, ranging in political terms from right to left, and invariably with a positive image of the country.

Thus it is important that Kinkel - in contrast to his predecessor as Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher - has kept a soft spot for Africa ever since visiting South Africa and (especially) Namibia earlier in his career as head of the planning section of the Foreign Office. This personal stance somewhat counters the sad lack of interest in Bonn. It was no coincidence that the first regional meeting of German ambassadors that Kinkel organised and attended was the meeting for Africa-based German ambassadors held in Accra in May 1993. In May 1994 (albeit only fleetingly) Kinkel was the first German Foreign Minister to have visited South Africa since 1978. Another indication of a 'special' relationship is the appointment of Ambassador Harald Ganns as head of the Africa Department of the Foreign Office. He had been Ambassador in West and Central Africa and more recently in Windhoek. He is an 'African' in heart and mind and innovative in his approach, as is his deputy, the head of the Southern Africa desk.

In spite of only minor differences of emphasis, an election victory by the Social Democrats might have reinforced German official ties with South Africa. Its shadow foreign minister, Günter Verheugen, has always kept close contact with South Africa, visiting it frequently and even writing a book on the subject. The SPD has traditionally been closer to the ANC than the CDU. A decade ago, when ANC officials were still, as in many other Western states, shunned in public by government ministers, the Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung - close to the opposition SPD - had strengthened its dialogue with the ANC by inviting Oliver Tambo to speak in Bonn and meet politicians.

Tambo was accompanied by the then Information Secretary of the ANC, Thabo Mbeki, who has since kept close contact with Germany and its businessmen. During his first visit to Bonn as First Deputy President, scheduled for early January 1995, he is booked to see the 'full house': the German President and Chancellor, as well as ministers and leading businessmen. Bonn might then also hope to counteract some irritation among ANC politicians about a 'private' visit of Second Deputy President F.W. de Klerk to Bonn where he arranged talks with the Minister of Co-operation and Development, Carl-Dieter Spranger (CSU), and enticed 'special allocations' in German development aid without the German Foreign Office being initially involved. That seems to have created some misgivings about a special agenda of the National Party in cultivating ties with discordant CSU elements, forged initially by its deceased leader Franz Josef Strauss. These irritations were addressed at the first ever government-to-government negotiations in Pretoria on development aid in mid-November.

Over the past few years, several German-sponsored trips involving a cross-section of South African politicians and academics have contributed to both the reassessment of policy options and to the mood of reconciliation. Some of them tried to strengthen the process of change drawing on significant parallels, both psychological as well as economical, between the unification processes of West/East in Germany and black/white in South Africa. One example of those encounters will come in early December: almost all the judges of the South African Constitutional Court will visit Germany's 'judicial capital' - Karlsruhe - and spend two full days of debate with the 16 German constitutional judges (some of whom, again, have shown special attachment to South Africa, academically and emotionally). The German Constitutional Court was a model for the South African court, just as some other aspects of the South African constitution, especially its federal elements, have been

influenced by the German constitutional experiences.

In Germany, the Foreign Office will generally take and implement policy decisions, but major issues are influenced by the Chancellor's Office. Kohl is, however - as is his rival Scharping - more interested in domestic than in foreign matters, and he shows little interest in Africa. There is some criticism, not unfounded, that the Department of Co-operation and Development which is responsible for development aid is pursuing a 'sideline' foreign policy not in full accordance with 'official policy'. South Africa will in the future, according to its own wishes, be regarded more as a developing country than previously. South Africa now receives direct government-to-government development aid instead of individual help via NGOs like churches and foundations. Between 1975 and 1993 Bonn sponsored development projects in South Africa to the amount of R1.1 billion; and for 1994 it has budgeted R250 million. At the German embassy in Pretoria two new posts were recently created and filled - a development and a military attaché.

Non-Governmental institutions do and will play an important role in bilateral relations. This applies not only to churches, sports bodies, interest groups such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement and to development agencies, but also to German politically-orientated foundations represented in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Each of the four foundations is linked closely to a party in Bonn: the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung to the CDU, the Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung to the SPD, the Friedrich Naumann-Stiftung to the FDP and the Hanns Seidel-Stiftung to the CSU. The Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung is credited with having used its influence with the Inkatha Freedom Party to call off its election boycott, and with offering constitutional advice. The Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung has helped the ANC in its search for constitutional options and in redefinition of its economic policy, especially in small and medium enterprise development. The Friedrich Naumann-Stiftung puts stress on human rights and on conflict resolution. The Hanns Seidel-Stiftung encouraged, at an early stage, contacts between the army and Umkhonto we Sizwe (through its support for the Johannesburg-based Institute for Defence Policy) and thus contributed to the military integration process.

BERLIN INITIATIVE

The process of international integration has limited the scope for an independent national (German) foreign policy more strongly than generally realised. One example where that may be

favourable to Pretoria is Kinkel's recent 'Berlin initiative'. Immediately after South Africa had joined in early-September he hosted the foreign ministers of the twelve European Union nations, the four EU candidates, and the eleven SADC states to a conference in Berlin.

Although Kinkel was accused of stage-managing the meeting for the benefit of the German elections, he undoubtedly envisages a 'special relationship' between Germany and the SADC. There is a danger, however, that the 'Berlin Declaration' will lose its impact and drive following the changeover on 1 January 1995, when Paris will follow Bonn as co-ordinator of the EU for the routine six-month term.

BUSINESS

Alongside the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan, Germany has for a long time been one of South Africa's major business partners. This has been reinforced by Germany's leading role inside the European Union. In 1993, it was South Africa's second biggest trading partner after Washington, with R9.3 billion exports to South Africa and R3.1 billion imports from it. Yet since 1989 bilateral trade has been decreasing in importance, and at present represents less than 1% of German foreign trade. German 'direct investment' in South Africa totals about R5 billion, representing about 1% of German direct foreign investments worldwide, more than German investments in Portugal and twice as much as in Norway. About half of the investment falls into motor manufacturing (Volkswagen, Mercedes-Benz, BMW); while the chemical industry (Hoechst) and electrical industry (Siemens) also have a major share. Altogether there are 360 German subsidiary companies in South Africa.

The German elections will hardly influence economic relations. There has been a renewed though 'guarded' interest by German business in South Africa since the April elections. During the sanction years, German companies experienced less pressure than Americans to disinvest, and few did. A major softening influence was the moderation of German trade unions, especially of the powerful metal federation *IG Metall*. They preferred to have German companies sign a code of conduct to adhere to '14 points' detailing decent labour relations and to strengthen South African trade unions, rather than to disinvest.

Nevertheless, Germany companies usually tried to keep a low profile in South Africa. That has now changed. Some companies have opened offices only

recently, especially those that work in such politically sensitive areas as the Daimler-Benz company Deutsche Aerospace AG which is involved in airplane and space technology. On the other hand, the Bavarian car producer BMW AG has put a clear choice before government and the trade unions in South Africa: if the government decides on a clear and acceptable industrial and trade policy before the end of 1995 and the unions themselves also behave 'responsibly' (which does not imply, as BMW Chairman Bernd Pischetsrieder clarifies, that they should refrain from every strike), BMW might expand its plant considerably to world scale. This could mean 'hundreds of millions' of rands in investment. If not, BMW will consider closing its plant.

Such a blunt warning is all the more remarkable as it comes from a member of the 'Springbok mafia'. Pischetsrieder and the chairmen of other leading Germany companies including AEG and ABB, have worked at their South African subsidiaries, positively influencing their respective companies to remain engaged in South Africa. That applies specifically to the designated chairman of Daimler-

Benz, Jürgen Schrempp. Without his emotional bonds to South Africa, his company might well have reacted more harshly after the strikes at its East London plant.

In cultural relations, the impending re-opening of the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg - offering cultural exchange and language lessons - will signal a fresh beginning for the old cultural agreement suspended by Bonn in 1985.

CONCLUSION

As with the recent US Congressional and Senate elections, the outcome of the German election is thus likely to have little impact on German policy towards South Africa which has remained constant and favourable even during the apartheid years. However, the crucial determinant of the intensity and warmth of relations remains South African domestic policy; this in turn will entice or scare-away German investors, who are among the largest foreign companies in the Republic.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The South African Institute of International Affairs is an independent organisation which aims to promote a wider and more informed understanding of international issues among South Africans.

It seeks also to educate, inform and facilitate contact between people concerned with South Africa's place in an interdependent world, and to contribute to the public debate on foreign policy.