

Berlin professor sees Germany as the “taskmaster” of Europe

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“In the long run, the role of ‘paymaster’ can only be played by one who is also ready to play the difficult role of ‘disciplinarian’,” writes Herfried Münkler in his new book *Macht in der Mitte* (Power in the Center). The Berlin political scientist openly argues for German hegemony in Europe. Germany has “become the central power in Europe,” writes Münkler, and must “play the corresponding role.”

Münkler justifies German claims to hegemony on the grounds that “the European integration process has come to a standstill” and its resumption cannot “be expected for the time being.”

“The idea that a European nation could one day emerge from the European project” has failed, says Münkler. Due to the longstanding economic crisis in France, the “Berlin-Paris Axis” has “become in the last years a German center.” Under these circumstances Germany is obliged as the “power in the center” to take on the task of “holding Europe together” and of “getting Europeans into line.”

“Germany must lead in Europe,” demands Münkler. He adds that the country will have to proceed carefully, something that “should not be confused with hesitancy and indecision.” The role of a “power in the center” can “no longer be confined to that of a financial regulator,” but includes “determined political and economic leadership.”

Münkler is quite aware that the German claim to hegemony for which he argues faces opposition from the German population as well as from other European countries. He must admit that “a glimpse into the history of the last one and a half centuries is one single enormous warning sign regarding the geopolitical constellation of a strong center.”

“Probably the most severe vulnerability” of the policies he advocates, says Münkler, is “that of German history: the possibility that at any time reference could be made to the rise of National Socialism and its racist ideology; the

policy of extortion and annexation that Hitler had enacted since 1938; the war of aggression beginning in September 1939; the crimes of the Wehrmacht, especially in the war against the Soviet Union; and finally the murder of the European Jews.”

The fact that the German ruling elite committed unspeakable crimes in their last attempt to dominate Europe does not, however, deter Münkler from propagandizing the same goal once again. A large part of *Macht in der Mitte* is dedicated to refuting such objections and to arming German foreign policy against them.

First of all, Münkler proposes to largely suppress the democratic process. “European integration remains a much too complex process to be left to the control and objections of the population,” he writes, singling out the “voting habits of citizens” as the “Achilles heel of European politics.”

“We have to give up wanting to be popular with everyone,” he notes at another point, “because that is not possible for a power in the center, if it wants to live up to its task.” He states: “Anti-German demonstrations on the margins of the EU zone” and “anti-German invectives” should “not surprise and irritate us.”

For these reasons, says Münkler, ruthless politicians are necessary. As the “leading power on matters of security policy,” Germany requires a different “model of the political elite.” It needs representatives who not only administer wealth but who are also capable of “making risky decisions.”

One could dismiss Münkler’s book as the arrogant work of a pompous professor, if it merely expressed his personal opinions. However, the Chair of the Department of Political Theory at Berlin’s Humboldt University is closely connected to Germany’s political elite and operates as an advisor to political parties, the government and the military. Many themes in his book are to be found in discussions and research organized by Germany’s

foreign and defense ministers over the last year.

As part of the project “Review 2014 – A Fresh Look at German Foreign Policy,” Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier ordered more than 50 international “expert opinions,” all of which concluded that Germany would have to take on “more responsibility.” Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen spoke a month ago at the Munich Security Conference on the theme “Leadership from the Center,” echoing Münkler.

Münkler’s book summarizes these views, justifies them and develops them further. It is propaganda text, political guidebook and attempt at historical excuse making all in one. Accordingly, grotesque contradictions and ideological contortions abound.

Münkler repeatedly argues that Germany has “not pressed for and not even promoted itself” as a central power and has “actually recoiled” from playing such a role. But—“intentionally or not”—Germany “has assumed the position of a *Macht in der Mitte*” and must now “cope with it.”

At one point, Münkler even attempts to turn the crimes of the Nazi regime into a positive. The “historic vulnerability of Germany” is possibly “not a handicap at all, but a prerequisite for the acceptance of a leadership role for Germany in Europe,” he explains. The EU members would probably not have allowed “a politically invulnerable player to become the European central power.” Considering European history, they would “only accept a vulnerable hegemon, one they believe they would be able to rein in if necessary.”

In order to justify the need for a central power, Münkler embarks on a long excursion into history. He deals with the empire of Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Carolingian dynasty and the Habsburgs, the Crusades, the Thirty Years War and the Napoleonic Wars. He even has the presumption to claim that “the irrefutable need for a center” is an “anthropological constant.”

One question, however, Münkler constantly avoids: What social interests underlie the striving for German domination of Europe?

One year ago, Münkler led a fierce campaign against the historian Fritz Fischer. In 1961 Fischer had given proof in his groundbreaking book, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, that these aims were rooted in the interests of German capital and the strategic requirements of its military forces. He documented the fact that the goals pursued by Hitler in the Second World War were largely in line with these aims.

We commented at the time: “Münkler’s attacks on Fritz

Fischer and his advocacy of a more aggressive imperialist foreign policy are closely linked. To prepare new crimes, German imperialism’s historic crimes—to whose understanding Fischer has greatly contributed—must be played down and glossed over.”

Münkler’s latest book confirms this assessment. It argues for the German domination of Europe and obscures the interests this domination would serve. It arises neither from an abstract “need for a center,” nor from the call by other countries for “German leadership,” but from the historical dilemma facing German capitalism since its development at the end of the 19th century as the strongest in Europe.

In order to assert itself on the world market and to expand, it must organize Europe, which is fragmented into 50 countries, in its interest. Twice before—in 1914 and 1939—German capitalism attempted to do this by force, and both attempts led to a catastrophe. The worsening of the international financial and economic crisis and the sharpening of national and social tensions in Europe are now driving the ruling elite of Germany to make a third attempt that will also come to a catastrophic end if the working class does not get in its way.

In Ukraine and Greece, German imperialism has already shown what it is capable of. In Ukraine, the German government, in collaboration with the United States, supported a pro-western putsch that has driven that country to civil war and brought Russia and NATO to the verge of a possible nuclear war. In Greece, it is the driving force behind the austerity diktat that has set back the living standards of the working class by decades.

According to Münkler, both cases should serve as models for German policy as Europe’s central power. He writes: “Summarizing the essential elements of Germany’s approach to the euro crisis and to the conflict with Russia and Ukraine, one has the essential features of the policies which Germany should follow in the coming years in order to fulfill its duties as the *Macht in der Mitte*.”



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