

Germany in a Transatlantic Perspective

On Tuesday June 16, the Netherlands Atlantic Association and the Roosevelt Study Centre in Middelburg hosted a meeting with Prof. Gale Mattox and Dr. Dieter Dettke. The meeting took place in Sociëteit De Witte and was attended by some 40 participants. Several issues on Germany were addressed, like the history of the deployment of German troops, the role that Afghanistan will play during the upcoming elections, and German public opinion on the German mission in Afghanistan.

Gale Mattox works as a Professor of Political Science at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. From March through June 2009, she is a Fulbright Professor at the Roosevelt Study Centre in Middelburg. She started her introduction by drawing an overall framework of German troop deployment. At the end of the Cold War, Germany moved away from its policy of not deploying troops unless in case of self defence. Deployment was (and still is) only possible with a parliamentary majority vote in the Bundestag. The German army thus is a parliamentary army. Germany is still hesitant to deploy troops in conflict areas. One of the reasons is that public opinion towards deployment in those areas is very negative. Therefore, Germany's aspiration to be an international actor will not be soon realized. According to Prof. Mattox Germany plays an evolutionary role which is not developed yet.



After 9/11 former *Bundeskanzler* Schröder got the parliamentary support to deploy troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. Under Merkel, the focus lies more on the civilian side of the mission. Germany is proud of its Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT), although the coordination between the different institutions involved remains a problem. The troops are now deployed in the North of Afghanistan, but Germany is under increasing international pressure to commit troops to the South. This will not happen according to Prof. Mattox, because the mission lacks public support (and thus parliamentary support). 69% of the Germans considers the mission in Afghanistan a failure. This public support is expected to erode further. The German government did not convince the public on the need of German troops in Afghanistan, nor on link between the mission and terrorism. Deployment will thus be limited – to the great frustration of the government.

Dr. Dieter Dettke is Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He stated that there is a discrepancy between what the Obama administration desires and expects from Germany and what the country actually can deliver. After the German elections, the commitment of the country to Afghanistan will not change much. The present commitment of the Bundeswehr is already increasingly difficult to sustain. According to dr. Dettke, Germany is underperforming.

During the upcoming elections, four foreign policy issues will play a role. The first issue is the relation of the European Union with Russia. Germany holds a very special bond with Russia, due to their historical ties. In September 1991, the two countries signed the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness. There is also closeness on a more personal level between the heads of States and the 'people'. Many Germans feel that they should be grateful to Russia for allowing unification. Also their economies are complementary – the Russian market is important for Germany's future and Germany is Russia's modernization partner. Moreover,

Germany sees Russia as a reliable source for energy. The German-Russian relations are not exclusively bilateral. The relation with the EU is also essential, but it appears difficult to find a common position within the Union towards Russia. According to dr. Dettke, it is still an open



question how the Russian-European relations will develop. Russia is now primarily interested in the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and the Shanghai Cooperation Council. The key in these initiatives is to keep the West out of Central Asia, economically and in energy issues. This makes the situation in the Middle East the second issue in the upcoming elections. The role that the European Union plays in the Balkans is the third issue. According to dr. Dettke, the Balkan countries need to be included in the EU. The EU neighbourhood policy has been weak, due to

the difficult position of the EU *vis à vis* Russia. Stability in the Balkans, however, can not be achieved without the EU. When all Balkan countries become EU members, stability can return in the region. The final foreign issue in the elections will be Turkey. On this issue, dr. Dettke gave a very short explanation: Turkey should become a member of the European Union.

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