

A Study on the Influence of Germany on EU Policy Towards China

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Abstract: The EU's China policy has always been the focus of research in international relations, among which there are many variables and multiple research perspectives. Due to the special status of Germany in the European Union, this paper takes the study of Germany's China policy as the starting point and the EU Council and the rotating presidency as the carrier to compare and quantify the commonalities and differences between EU and Germany's China policy trends. Through the study of Germany's influence on the EU's China policy, we hope to explore the future Sino-German and Sino-European overall relations and promote the development of bilateral and multilateral relations. In order to further expand the areas of cooperation between the two sides, deepen the integration and interaction of common interests between China and the EU, promote the enhancement of the international voice of China and the EU, and safeguard the security and development interests of both sides.

Keywords: The European Union, German, China policy, China-germany relations, China-Europe relations

1. Introduction

The EU's China policy has always been the focus of international relations research, which has many variables and diversified perspectives, among which the US-oriented policy has always been the mainstream of the EU's China policy. Through consulting certain materials, the author believes that Germany, the main engine of the EU today, has played an extremely important role in the EU's China policy. Therefore, this paper will take the study of Germany's China policy as the starting point, and the EU Council, rotating presidency, etc, as the carrier, to compare and quantify the commonalities and differences between EU and Germany's China policy trends. Through the study on the influence of Germany on the EU's policy towards China, we hope to explore the overall relations between China and Germany in the future and promote the further development of bilateral and multilateral relations.

2. The Council of the European Union, one of the carriers of EU policy towards China

The policy paper on China represents the EU's current judgment on China and China-Eu relations and its strategic plan for the next stage. It is the fundamental basis for studying changes in the EU's policy position on China. The official documents issued by the European Council and the European Commission constitute the framework and cornerstone of the EU's engagement with China, and the European Parliament's resolutions on China, which are formed through discussions and competitions

among the main political parties and groups, are also playing an increasingly important role within the EU and internationally. Due to the special status and role of the Council of the European Union, this study selects the Council of the European Union, one of the three institutions of the European Union, as the research variable, and takes the Council of the European Union as the research carrier to analyze the penetration and influence of Germany in the European Union's China policy.

According to the policy documents on China issued by the Council of the European Union, the EU's policy stance on China has generally gone through a "honeymoon period" (1995-2006), a period of competition and cooperation (2006-2019), and a period of uncertainty under the background of great changes (2009-present).

2.1. Council of the European Union

The Council is one of the important institutions of the European Union[1]. It is made up of ministerial representatives of the governments of the member states, who are accountable to their governments, so the Council is also called the "Council of Ministers". The governments of each member state appoint corresponding ministerial representatives to attend the Council according to the topics to be discussed at the Council meeting, such as the Council of Ministers of Environment, the Council of Ministers of Agriculture, the Council of Ministers of Finance, etc. The General Council is composed of foreign ministers of each country. If the meeting covers multiple topics at the same time, more than one minister will participate in the discussion. The Council is thus "the institutional heart of the European Union" and plays an important role in EU decision-making.

2.2. Germany's position in the Council of the European Union

Germany is one of the largest member states of the EU and one of the "twin engines" of this giant ship[2]. Germany's position in the Council of the European Union is mainly reflected in the following two aspects: first, the influence of the eastward expansion of the European Union, and second, the rotating presidency[3].

2.2.1. The fifth eastward enlargement of the EU

On May 1, 2004, the EU ushered in the largest eastward enlargement in its political history. Two Southern European countries, Malta and Cyprus, and eight Central and Eastern European countries, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, have officially become members of the EU[4].

Germany is the most economically powerful country in the EU, and the Central and Eastern European countries that have been helped by Germany in terms of development are also susceptible to Germany in terms of politics, which is particularly beneficial to Germany in terms of the balance of power within the EU. Some people even believe that after the enlargement of the EU, Germany will become the "center" of Europe not only geographically but also politically. The fifth eastward enlargement of the EU has added more "Allies" to Germany in the EU Council, further strengthening Germany's voice in the EU. 2. Structural defects of the organization

2.2.2. Rotating presidency

The presidency of the European Union plays an important role in the European Union. Although the rotating presidency lasts only six months, it has very limited formal powers to directly influence the EU's agenda. However, during this term, it is the person in charge of EU affairs and has a significant influence in promoting the EU policy agenda. Therefore, the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union needs attention in the research of this section.

On 1 July 2020, Germany will take over the six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union, the 13th time it has held the rotating presidency. In 2020, amid the severe COVID-19 epidemic, "controlling the epidemic and promoting recovery" in this special period is the core task of Germany's term. Germany's six priorities include: first, responding to the epidemic and promoting economic and social recovery; Second, building a stronger and more innovative Europe; Third, a fair Europe; Fourth, to build a sustainable Europe; Fifth, a Europe of security and shared values; Sixth, to build a stronger Europe on the global stage. On the diplomatic front, in addition to continuing negotiations with the UK on future relations, Merkel believes that the EU has three major tasks: conducting accession negotiations with Balkan countries, holding a good EU-Africa summit, and managing strategic relations with China.

During this term, Germany's "taking over" in the face of COVID-19 difficulties and special times was not opposed. It can be seen that Germany's position in the EU Council was outstanding when it proposed specific EU policies with German characteristics and thought about its relations with China.

3. The influence of Germany on the EU's policy towards China

3.1. The direction of Germany's policy towards China

Germany's policy towards China cannot be separated from two variables: first, economic geography; second political geopolitics. The two factors influence each other, showing the direction of China's policy in different periods.

Stage 1: The "period of detachment" after the establishment of diplomatic relations in the 1970s

The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Federal Republic of Germany was a major strategic breakthrough in China's diplomacy in the Western capitalist world in the 1970s. At that time, the Federal Republic of Germany had already played an important role in the global economic pattern, but it was still an "abnormal country" in the international system in terms of politics and diplomacy. Therefore, despite the distance between economic and political geography, Sino-German relations did not develop substantially in the period after the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1972.

Stage 2: The Sino-German "Ice-breaking Period" dominated by economic geography. The central feature of the China policy formed during the Kohl government (1982-1998) was to expand the economic geography as the main goal and actively pursue the benefits brought by economic and trade cooperation. Its China policy mainly served such economic geostrategy[5].

Stage 3: The "honeymoon period" between China and Germany at the beginning of political geopolitics

During the Schroder government, Germany's political and geopolitical interests and goals at this stage were to hope that the European Union led by Germany would become a pole in the world's multipolarity and achieve a non-confrontational parity between the EU and the United States in the process of promoting multipolarity. China, which is still far away in geopolitics, is also an active advocate of the multi-polar world. Both China and Germany are committed to positioning themselves in the global geopolitical pattern by promoting multipolarity and both hope to change the status quo of the unipolar world dominated by the United States. Therefore, in the political geopolitics, the two countries have no actual disputes in interests and coincide in visions. Therefore, at this stage, China and Germany strengthened their cooperation and entered the "honeymoon period".

Stage 4: The "cooling-off period" between China and Germany under the influence of political and geopolitical convergence and tension.

During the Merkel period, Germany not only successfully led the EU to cope with a series of international crises, but also played an increasingly important role in the global political and economic pattern, beginning to transform from the "leader" of Europe to a leading global power. Different from

previous German policies toward China, Merkel's government considers more political and security interests shaped by values when dealing with Sino-German relations, while proximity and common interests in economy and geography no longer occupy an absolute dominant position[6]. At this time, Germany sought to become the "defender" of the Western international order, while China, as the "rival" and "other" in the competition of the Western political system, became the opposite of Germany's emphasis on its role as a leader of the West. At the same time, as Germany aspires to become a global power, its geopolitical interests in the Asia-Pacific region have also begun to increase, and its China policy, which prioritizes economic interests, has also begun to have security and geopolitical considerations. This means that there are conflicts and tensions between economic geopolitics and political geopolitics in Germany's China policy. The interweaving of the two complicates China-Germany relations. Even close economic ties cannot bridge the increasingly emerging conflicts and tensions in the political and security aspects. China-Germany relations have entered a "cooling-off period".

3.2. The direction of the EU's China policy

The adjustment of the EU's China policy is accompanied by changes in the international system and the process of interaction between China and the EU and constitutes the strategic foundation of our relations. China is the largest developing country in the world, while the EU has now become the largest group of developed countries. China relations are of great importance to both China and the EU. However, the development of China-Eu relations has not been achieved overnight. The geographical distance between China and the EU is far away. The reason for the contacts and exchanges between the two sides is the complementarity between China and the EU. First of all, as a rising developing country, in the era of globalization with rapid economic development, China's greatest national interest lies in domestic construction, the most important foundation of domestic construction is sustained and stable economic development, and China's economic development is in urgent need of market, capital, management, science and technology, etc. The European Union, as a consortium of developed countries, has been expanding continuously. With a total population of more than 500 million, a huge market, abundant capital, rich management experience, and advanced science and technology, there is a great economic complementarity between China and Europe, which directly contributes to the exchanges between the two sides. In addition, both China and the EU oppose the unilateralist hegemonic politics of the United States, and both sides jointly advocate a multi-polar world and methods of global governance.

Driven by such factors, China and the EU began to engage. This section can analyze the direction of the EU's policy towards China by referring to the EU Document on China.

Table 1: EU Policy towards China[7]

Time	Features	Representative documents
1995-2006	Honeymoon Period	Long-term Policy on EU-China Relations, 1995
2006-2019	Competition and cooperation	The European Union and China: Closer Partners, More Responsibilities, 2006
2019 -- Present	Period of uncertainty in the context of great change	No specific policy paper on China has been issued

The EU has not issued a specific policy paper on China since 2006, but its overall policy direction towards China is to serve its overall strategic tone in East Asia. Therefore, the EU policy paper "EU Foreign and Security Policy Action Programme for East Asia" issued in 2012 was used to summarize and summarize the policy.

In general, after several adjustments and adaptations to its China policy documents, the EU's overall strategy towards China has shown obvious features such as practicality, cooperation, coordination, and continuity. These overall characteristics also make the EU's China policy positive and constructive in its main tone, which has continuously promoted the steady development of China-Eu relations.

3.3. The spillover trend of Germany's "China policy" toward the EU

The embodiment of Germany's "China policy" is mostly divided by the stage of the government, while the "China policy" of the EU is mostly characterized by its policy documents on China. As one of the "engines" of the EU and the most dominant country, Germany's "China policy" affects the direction of the EU's "China policy".



Figure 1: Quantitative chart of policy trends towards China [8]

As is shown in the chart, the EU's China policy and Germany's China policy show a general trend. Although there are twists and turns, they still show an overall upward trend.

As one of the engines of the EU, Germany greatly influences the direction of the EU's "China policy".

4. Conclusion

There are many variables in the EU's policy towards China, and Germany's policy orientation towards China is one of the more important variables. Therefore, to explore the EU's policy orientation toward China in the future, we must take Germany into account and find a solution to the development trend of Sino-German relations in the future.

On July 13, 2023, the German government released the country's first China Strategy. The document covers politics, economy and trade, culture, science, and education, and touches on German-China, and EU-China relations as well as multiple dimensions of global issues. It aims to "correct" the past policy towards China and set the tone for the future strategy towards China. Germany's perception of China's "institutional rival" and "economic competitor" has been further strengthened by the combination of major power games and epidemic factors. In addition, the Green Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, and other parties that advocate a hardline stance on China have entered the cabinet and held key positions, and the voice of friendly China in Germany lacks effective balance in the "post-Merkel era".

In general, the future of China-Germany relations faces both challenges and opportunities. Facing the new background and new challenges, China needs to take a proactive approach, rationally view the future challenges of China-Eu relations, advocate seeking common ground while shelving differences, and further deepen cooperation.

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