

MERKEL'S UNFINISHED BUSINESS: WHY GERMANY NEEDS TO ACT STRATEGICALLY

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel will soon face parliamentary elections. On her eight-year watch, her governing coalition has failed to develop foreign policy, security, and defense strategies. This weakens Europe's ability to think and act strategically and limits the European Union's (EU's) influence in its immediate neighborhood and beyond. There is much unfinished business that the next chancellor, be it Merkel or someone else, will have to manage.

Key Findings

- During Merkel's first term in office, she repaired relations with the United States and the countries of Eastern Europe. She won wide support from EU member states to push through the Lisbon Treaty designed to make decisionmaking in the union more effective. And Merkel put human rights and values at the top of her foreign policy agenda.
- Merkel's second term was dominated by the euro crisis, with Germany setting the agenda for coping with it. But Berlin also let many of its priorities drift.
- The German government has paid little attention to rebuilding the transatlantic relationship or encouraging Europe to develop a strong security and defense policy.
- Berlin has done nothing to move Europe toward greater integration. Yet a more united and coherent continent is sorely needed to help stabilize Europe's neighborhood and restore European influence.

Priorities for the Next German Government

Engage in a debate about Europe's future. The next government must decide if it supports a more integrated Europe or one in which the member states continue to pursue their own national interests. Either choice will have immense implications for Europe's role as an economic and political player. This will also mean deciding whether the EU should be enlarged.

Take the U.S. shift away from Europe to the Asia-Pacific seriously. This pivot will leave a security vacuum in Europe that cannot be ignored by Germany or other European countries.

Decide on a security strategy. Such a doctrine is urgently needed and must reflect the changes taking place not only in the United States but also closer to home, in Turkey, Russia, and the Middle East. The strategy must be European in outlook and outline the kind of security and defense structures Europe needs in order to defend and articulate its interests and values. Germany, with support from other countries, particularly Poland, should start taking the lead on all these issues.

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