Re.: Conference Submission as Part of Dissertation

Title of Dissertation: The Social Time and Geographic Scope of Interaction, Meaning, and Interests: Relational and Domestic Sources of French and German National Interests and Foreign Policies

The paper “National Role Conceptions, National Interests, and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared,” which I submit to the workshop on national identity and public policy, is based on a chapter of my dissertation. National role conceptions are one of three sources of national interests and foreign policies of a constructivist-institutionalist model of interest formation and policy formulation that I develop in my thesis. My dissertation’s point of departure is the question when, under what circumstances, and with which limits the institutionalized relations between France and Germany affect what French and German governments define as French and German national interests, on the basis of which they formulate foreign policies. Why do these relations apparently have sometimes more, sometimes less effects, and sometimes no effects at all on French and German interests and foreign policies? This initial question requires engaging two more questions: The first asks about the very nature of institutionalized relations themselves. The second one asks about other sources which co-constitute interests together with institutionalized external relations. Regarding the former, I conceptually distinguish among regularized working relations, predominantly symbolic practices, and a net of parapublic infrastructure feeding and undergirding institutionalized public relations. Franco-German relations, then, are social structures composed of robustly institutionalized interaction and meaning. Regarding the latter questions, I have found two domestic sources of particular relevance in affecting national interests and foreign policies: national role conceptions, and features of the political system and modes of societal organization. These inquiries lead to a more general analysis of social structures, their social time and geographic scope. My model aspires to shed light on both process and outcome of national interest formation. Empirically investigating some 25 years of Franco-German cooperation in security, defense, and armament, I argue, with respect to my initial question that Franco-German relations at times indeed do have impact on French and German national interest formation and foreign policy making. Whether or not, and how much the bilateral Franco-German relationship generates such effects, however, depends on the relationship itself at a given time period and policy area, and the respective constellation with the two domestic sources of interests. Externally institutionalized relations’ effects degenerate, if their demands directly clash with national role conception-induced effects on national interests. A high degree of state strength is conducive to external relations’ impact, whereas fragmentation of political authority and low state autonomy from society tends to undermine their causal power.

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