

# Where Does Europe End? Christian Democracy and the Expansion of Europe\*

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## Abstract

In this article, we argue that an analysis of the conflict around the nature and limits of European integration that arose between Catholic and Protestant Christian Democrats in the post-war era can shed new light on the expansionary dynamics that gradually came to characterize the project of European integration. Catholic Christian Democrats framed the unification of Europe as a relatively exclusionary cultural-civilizational endeavour, while Protestant Christian Democrats favoured a more inclusive conception of Europe that prioritised free trade over cultural homogeneity. Focusing specifically on Germany, we suggest that the eventual resolution of the intra-party struggle between the two camps in the early 1970s was a crucial enabler for including more and more countries into the European project. For it was only thereafter that Catholic Christian Democrats began supporting the expansion of European integration beyond the core Europe of the original Six, with geopolitical concerns gradually crowding out cultural ones.

**Keywords:** Christian democracy; European integration; EU enlargement; ideology; Catholicism; Protestantism

## Introduction

There is wide agreement that Christian Democratic parties had a significant impact on the course of European integration (the go-to study is Kaiser, 2007; see also Conway, 2020; Forlenza, 2017; Forlenza and Turner, 2018; Hien, 2020; Invernizzi-Accetti, 2019, 2020; Johansson, 2002a, 2002b; Müller, 2018, esp. pp. 234–41; Nelsen and Guth, 2015). In the years after World War II, when Christian Democracy had a near-hegemonic role in continental Europe, Christian Democratic leaders – most notably the ‘European founding fathers’ Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi and Robert Schuman – used the power they wielded to promote new forms of cross-national cooperation that should forever pacify the conflict-ridden continent. While much of their day-to-day political work was devoted to such practical matters as ‘taxation rates for small businesses, child allowances and the price of sugar beet’ (Conway, 2004, p. 82), the broader project of uniting Europe that these leaders and their parties pursued was driven by distinctive visions of what Europe is and, by implication, who should belong to it.

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The most well-known of these visions is arguably that of Europe as *Abendland* (translated typically as ‘occident’ or just ‘the West’) (for example Granieri, 2004; Conze, 2005; Mitchell, 2012, pp. 92–9; Forlenza, 2017; Forlenza and Turner, 2018). Endorsed especially by Catholic Christian Democrats, the notion of *Abendland* evoked romanticised imaginaries of uniformly Catholic medieval Europe, the world of *Rex Pater Europa* Charlemagne and Pope Gregory I.<sup>1</sup> It framed the unification of Europe as a relatively exclusionary cultural-civilizational project to be pursued by countries that ‘share the traditions of Catholicism and confessional politics’ (Kaiser, 2007, p. 235). Less familiar is perhaps the alternative vision of Europe that many leading Protestant Christian Democrats advanced. While also sometimes adopting the language of *Abendland*, the latter saw free trade as the primary mechanism of integration, and were naturally more sympathetic to including non-Catholic countries like the UK or the Scandinavian countries in a unified Europe (Granieri, 2004; Nelsen and Guth, 2015, p. 246). Theirs was a Europe that was not united by culture but by markets, and less French and German than Anglo-Saxon.

Especially in the powerful and influential German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a serious conflict about the nature and limits of European integration erupted between Catholics and Protestants in the post-war era; and in this article, we show that a reconstruction of this conflict can *shed new light on the expansionary dynamics that gradually came to characterize the project of European integration*, that is, the successive enlargements of (first) the EEC and (later) the EU. Approaching Christian Democratic parties as composed of individuals with (potentially conflicting) political views and preferences (on this conception of parties, see Rosenbluth and Shapiro, 2018; Strøm, 1990; Wenzelburger and Zohlnhöfer, 2020; Wolkenstein, 2019), we suggest that *the resolution of this intra-party struggle in the 1970s was a crucial enabler for including more and more countries into the European project*. For it was only thereafter that Catholic Christian Democrats began to support the expansion of European integration beyond the core Catholic ‘heartland’. As the 1980s drew to a close and Communism collapsed, then, geopolitical considerations largely replaced even the last traces of the *Abendland*-culturalism that was ‘one of the dominant discourses of the occupation years’ (Mitchell, 2012, p. 93) and mattered so much to the European ‘founding fathers’.

In sum, the argument we advance offers a novel interpretation of the European integration’s drift away from the ‘original Six’ to a Union of 27 with considerable cultural and economic heterogeneity. Importantly, we are not advancing a monocausal explanation for this development, but wish to highlight how a much-neglected political conflict shaped the thinking and actions of some of the most central actors in the history of European integration. While our primary focus is on German Christian Democracy between 1945 and 1990, moreover, we cover a much wider terrain by exploring how German Christian Democrats interacted with Christian Democrats in countries like Italy or France, and how their ideas and visions were related to each other. The discussion relies on primary sources as well as on the already-mentioned secondary literature.

<sup>1</sup>The term has a long history: it entered the German language already at the time of the Reformation, was filled with further content during the Romantic age, and eventually became a political buzzword after the First World War with the publication of Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (meaning, roughly, the ‘decline of the West’, 1918) (Conze, 2005, pp. 27–8).

## I. The Post-War *Abendland*-Discourse

The notion of *Abendland* is one of the few key political concepts with a patently anti-modern ring that, in one form or another, was appealed to by several of the Christian Democratic parties that were founded after World War II.<sup>2</sup> These parties broke decisively with the reactionary legacy of pre-War political Catholicism and accepted the modern democratic state as a legitimate system of cooperation, but some of its leaders evidently remained sympathetic to some of the traditionalist connotations that attached to the vision of Europe as *Abendland*. To cite just one prominent example, Robert Schuman argued, in 1957, that the

original outline of a united Europe was that of Christian, medieval Europe under a twin authority – a spiritual one personified by the Papacy, a temporal one embodied by the Emperor, head of the Holy Roman Empire. This unity withered after more than six centuries of existence, when the Renaissance weakened religious ties; the Reformation likewise disrupted religious unity and the Empire lost its prestige to newly sovereign nations. Europe split into a large group of states whose interests and aims conflicted to such a degree that fierce battles ensued (Schuman, 1957, p. 5).

In this statement, the anti-modern rejection of nation-states (which is deployed to justify supranationalism) is paired with barely disguised anti-Protestant sentiment. Schuman pulls no punches, blaming Protestant forces for the conflicts and chaos that the whole continent suffered from since the Reformation. In addition to the dogmatic anti-Communism that virtually all Christian Democrats subscribed to – which was also supported by papal dogma, notably Pius XI's 1937 encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* – such open attacks against Protestantism were far from uncommon among Catholic Christian Democrats after the War.

Consider Germany, our primary case. There, many Catholics were still influenced by the memory of the long-standing fight of the German Protestants against the Catholic Church, which culminated in Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* in the 1870s (the Bismarck-era Catholic *milieu* persisted until the late 1950s, see Loth, 2018, ch. 4). This led them to conceive the *Abendland* in similar terms as Schuman. Indeed, as Mitchell (2012, p. 95) shows, CDU Catholics 'had long understood the *Abendland* as anti-Prussian' and, by implication, anti-Protestant. Furthermore, 'the simultaneous collapse of the Nazi regime and the dismemberment of the Prussian state symbolized for many ... the symbiosis between Prussianism and Nazism' (ibid.). Many Catholics, including key Christian Democratic leaders like Konrad Adenauer, argued that this was because Protestantism and Nazi ideology shared in common the 'materialist' orientation of secular modernity. By this was meant that they prioritised political and economic power over the dignity and value of the individual person (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2019, ch. 1).

An instructive example is Konrad Adenauer's, 1946 speech at the University of Cologne – the city in which Adenauer served as mayor from 1917 to 1933. In it, the

<sup>2</sup>Given that *Abendland* is a German-language concept that only translates awkwardly, it was naturally only *literally* used by Christian Democratic parties in the German-speaking world, for example in the CDU's first party programme (the 'Kölnner Leitsätze') of 1945 (CDU, 1945, pp. 2 and 4) or in a famous 1946 campaign-poster with the slogan 'save the *abendländische* culture'. As we show, however, Catholic Christian Democrats from non-Germanophone countries often had a similar understanding of Europe (see fn. 3).

future Chancellor of Germany and European ‘founding father’ exhorted his listeners to remember that

Since the founding of the German Empire under Prussian *supremacy*, the state transformed ... into a sovereign machine. The great external successes of the Bismarckian Empire that ... were granted his conception of state and power, the rapidly accelerating industrialisation, the agglomeration of great masses of people in cities and the concomitant uprooting of people, paved the way for the devastating spread of the materialist *Weltanschauung* among the German people. The materialist *Weltanschauung* necessarily led to the excessive idealisation (*Überhöhung*) of the state and of power, [and] to the devaluation of ethical values and the dignity of the individual. (Adenauer, 1946).

Granting the state such a powerful, nearly all-encompassing role, he continued, was squarely against the *abendländische Weltanschauung*, with its roots in Christian ethics and natural law, and its respect for the ‘human person.’ It opened the door to totalitarian forms of rule, such as Nazism and Soviet Communism, both of which are anathema to Christian politics (see CDU, 1945, p. 2; Chappel, 2018, p. 132). These were also the dangers that European integration should guard against; indeed, the ‘EU was to be built in their counterimage’ (White, 2020, p. 1294).

Baldly put, the understanding of *Abendland* that key Christian Democratic leaders like Adenauer and Schuman (and also many of their Catholic followers) endorsed after the War drew a bright line between Catholic and Protestant Europe.<sup>3</sup> Protestants were explicitly or implicitly scolded for their ‘materialism,’ which ostensibly gave rise to a dehumanizing conception of political authority, expressed in the centralized, secular-bureaucratic state. Catholics, on the other hand, were portrayed as suffering from Protestant power excesses, as well as combatting them – including the Nazi regime – in the name of *abendländische* values. In Germany, this latter narrative of resistance was especially popular after the War (Mitchell, 2012, pp. 82–5).

That the Catholic Christian Democrats’ idea of Europe was hostile to Protestantism had momentous political implications. For one thing, it meant that *membership of Protestant countries* in a united Europe was looked to with scepticism. For another thing, *interconfessional cooperation* between Catholic and Protestant Christian Democrats was made rather difficult. As far as membership questions are concerned, it was most notably the UK that was initially excluded from the unified Europe to come. As Nelsen and Guth (2015, p. 197) write, ‘Schuman’s decision not to consult his British counterpart before announcing plans for the coal and steel community underscores his view that Britain was apart from Europe – a notion that ... the British did little to counter’ (see Wolkenstein, 2020). In his memoirs, Schuman explains in even greater detail the reasons for his resistance against treating the UK as part of Europe. There, he notes that the problem was not only that the UK was ‘[i]nsular and cosmopolitan, traditional and instinctively distrustful of any ideological innovation,’ but also that it is ‘hostile, on principle and in all circumstances, to any form of integration or federal structure’

<sup>3</sup>Another European ‘founding father’, Alcide de Gasperi, framed the united Europe to come as a ‘Christian democratically updated version of a Carolingian *res publica cristiana*’ (cited in Kaiser, 2007, p. 244). For de Gasperi and others, ‘the Carolingian Empire appeared as a supranational political, cultural and geographical space tantamount to the Europe envisaged in Schuman’s plan’ of 1950, which was realised in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and laid the foundations for the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) (Forlenza, 2017, p. 267).

(Schuman, 2010, pp. 32–3). (Unsurprisingly, Adenauer himself was also hesitant to include the UK.)

At any rate, while the ‘consensus on the concept of a core Europe with supranational features excluding Britain continued to grow within ... Christian Democracy between 1947 and 1950’ (Kaiser, 2007, p. 233), domestically Christian Democrats were confronted with a very different challenge. This was the fact that several member states of the ‘original Six’ were populated by *both* Catholics and Protestants. In Germany and the Netherlands in particular, the latter were not just a small minority but a sizable, politically efficacious group, and they also organised in Christian Democratic parties. And, they were not exactly excited by the *Abendland*-rhetoric that was so prevalent in Catholic circles. In the immediate post-war period, for example, many politically organised Dutch Protestants saw European integration ‘as the rebirth of Catholic-Vatican Europe, a new Holy Roman Empire, representing a Counter-Reformation or indeed a Catholic plot’ (Forlenza and Turner, 2018, p. 16). In Germany too, Protestants were palpably ‘put off’ by the early CDU’s all-too-emphatic, and in many respects exclusionary, conservative Catholicism (Mitchell, 2012, p. 68).

## II. The Emergence of the Gaullist-Atlanticist Conflict

Because Catholics and Protestants were organized in the same parties, or tried to build cross-party alliances, it gradually became clear that the Catholics’ unabashed hostility to Protestantism was politically unsustainable. Catholics needed to promote some sort of inter-confessional cooperation (see Mitchell, 2012, p. 85). In Germany, it was eventually ‘anti-Socialism [that] became the actual glue, the cement of Protestant-Catholic cooperation. Only in anti-Socialism did the different, traditionally fragmented Protestant milieus find their larger *bürgerliche* identity; only anti-Socialism led the Protestant bourgeoisie into the political embrace of the ultimately still despised and mistrusted Catholics’ (Walter, 2009, p. 26).

By ‘anti-Socialism’ is here mainly meant the aforementioned antipathy to Marxist doctrine and Soviet Russia (‘anti-Communism’ is perhaps the more accurate term). Conservative Northern German Protestants typically abhorred Communism because of their liberal-capitalist pretensions, while Rhenish or Bavarian Catholics rejected it because it was based on a materialist worldview that was incompatible with Christian teaching. So, if the notion of a common ‘Christian soil’ prepared the ground for inter-confessional cooperation, it was having a shared enemy that really brought it under-way (Bösch, 2002, p. 15). At least in internal debates and correspondences – party programmes and manifestos were anyways rather short and under-developed in this period (ibid., pp. 22–3) – Protestants even began to use the language of *Abendland* in connection with anti-Communism, *as if* the term had no anti-Protestant pedigree. That *Abendland* gradually entered the inter-confessional Christian Democratic vocabulary was certainly aided by the fact that it was ‘sufficiently diffuse and imprecise’ to allow ‘multiple forms of appropriation’ (Forlenza, 2017, p. 282).

One way of looking at the developments discussed so far is to say that the Christian Democratic idea of *Abendland*, in its immediate post-war usage, implied two borders of Europe. The first border ran between non-Communist Europe and the Communist East. On this demarcation line both Catholics and Protestants could agree, and as we just noted,

Protestants were even willing to employ the language of *Abendland* in this first, anti-Communist sense. The second border, on the other hand, was more contentious and problematic: it separated Catholic ‘core Europe’ from Protestant-dominated Britain (and Scandinavia). For obvious reasons, this sat uneasily with the inter-confessionalism that key Christian Democracy parties like the German CDU avowed. It helped give rise to an alternative understanding of Europe that would eventually become known as ‘Atlanticism’. Advanced predominantly by Protestants and secular conservatives within the CDU, this vision was less about drawing clear-cut borders (except the border to Communism) than geopolitical and economic considerations.

The simplest way of describing this alternative position is to say that it was less committed to a Europe of ‘the Six’ (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, West Germany), and more in favour of close cooperation with the UK and the US, than its Catholic counterpart. In Germany, Federal Minister for Economics (and later Chancellor) Ludwig Erhard – a Protestant with decidedly (ordo-)liberal views – was at the forefront of promoting this alternative conception of Europe. Erhard and his followers within the CDU supported early efforts at European integration, but

preferred an Atlantic community that de-emphasized religious-philosophical speculations in favor of pragmatic cooperation, and rejected an exclusive Continental focus. This position, originally endorsed by more secular liberals, especially North German Protestants, as well as export-oriented segments of the economy, would gain adherents through the course of the 1950s (Granieri, 2004, p. 17).

A prominent and distinctive feature of Atlanticism was the role ascribed to economics. Though Erhard and those sympathetic to Atlanticism also generally thought of Europe as a community of (Christian) values, in the end they believed in free trade as the main motor of European (and indeed global) integration (Lappenküper, 2001, pp. 391–2). Following the new brand of ordoliberal economics that was gaining ascendancy in centre-right circles, they in fact imagined a larger liberal world order integrated by shared norms and rules for international trade (Nelsen and Guth, 2015, p. 246; Slobodian, 2018). In light of this, it is also hardly surprising that they deemed the creation of a common market among the Six insufficient – Erhard spoke of ‘macroeconomic nonsense’ in this connection (quoted in Nelsen and Guth, 2015, p. 246) – and pressed for a wider trade agreement that included the UK and allowed for harnessing the economic hegemony of the US (Almeida, 2012, p. 121). This contrasted sharply with the views of Rhenish and Southern German Catholics, who ‘generally found cooperation with France or Italy easier’ (Bösch, 2002, p. 23), and believed in the primacy of politics over economics.

A version of the Atlanticist position was gaining more support within the CDU and the general public over the course of the 1950s, evidenced (for instance) in the fact that the CDU’s ‘Hamburg Programme’ of 1953 emphasized that the unification of Europe ‘necessarily’ has to proceed in ‘close connection’ with the rest of the ‘free world, especially NATO’ (CDU, 1953, p. 43). Reacting to this, many CDU-Catholics who retained a commitment to a Europe that was free from American influence increasingly began to look to Charles de Gaulle as a natural ally. De Gaulle became President of France in 1959, after the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958, and supported a vision of a smaller ‘core Europe’ that resonated with the idea of Europe favoured by German Catholics. Like Adenauer and other leading Christian Democrats, he also located the

responsibility for achieving a functioning cooperation among European states with political elites.

Indeed, as Granieri (2009, p. 18) writes, with ‘his strong appeal to Europe, de Gaulle capitalized on long-standing fears of Americanization among postwar Christian Democrats,’ leading the latter to see Gaullism as ‘a kind of Christian Democracy without Christ’. Adenauer famously ‘viewed de Gaulle as a vital ally against the unreliable “Anglo-Saxons”, concluding a special Franco-German Friendship treaty [the Élysée Treaty] in January 1963’; and a ‘large proportion of Adenauer’s followers, especially in the CSU, viewed French Gaullists as natural political friends’ (Granieri, 2009, pp. 18–19; also see Conze, 2005, pp. 361–71). De Gaulle himself pleased the Gaullists within the CDU by continuously emphasising the cultural superiority of continental Europe that (he thought) qualified it as a third global power between the Soviet Union and the United States. That the French Christian Democratic party, the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), already lost much of its power in the 1950s (and eventually dissolved in 1967) also turned out to be conducive to this political ‘friendship’. A collaboration between genuinely Christian Democratic parties was clearly off the table, and so de Gaulle became the French politician that many German Catholics considered their main French associate.

While the Gaullists were less numerous than the Atlanticists in the CDU/CSU, they were generally more cohesive, due to the strong bond that their Catholicism and their loyalty to Adenauer provided (Geiger, 2008, p. 524). Even within this cohesive fraction of the German Christian Democrats, however, there existed two different strands: one that was more in tune with de Gaulle’s idea of a Europe of strong nation states, and another one that argued for a federal path to European integration. This division can be explained by the fact that some of de Gaulle’s more central commitments flew in the face of many Catholic Christian Democrats’ preferences concerning European integration. Most importantly, de Gaulle harboured an ‘obsessive opposition to supranational forms of integration’, and thus also opposed the deepening of the integration process within the EEC Treaty framework (Kaiser, 2007, pp. 308–9). Instead, he was strictly committed to inter-governmental cooperation between sovereign states. This also translated into an aggressively unilateral foreign policy that raised many eyebrows among Catholic Christian Democrats.

### **III. Erhard’s Chancellorship (1963–1966) and the Peak of the Gaullist-Atlanticist Conflict**

The CDU’s intra-party conflict between Gaullists and Atlanticists was becoming increasingly heated as the 1950s drew to a close. This was a time when ‘the CDU gradually began to polarise’ internally – not only about the question of European integration and Germany’s primary allies, but this was arguably a major dividing line (Bösch, 2002, p. 92). Especially after Adenauer’s retirement in 1963 the struggle ‘over whether the Germans should place primary loyalty in Washington or Paris, which had emerged in Adenauer’s last years, burst forth with great vehemence’ (Granieri, 2009, p. 19). A major reason for this was the fact that Ludwig Erhard, a key representative of the Atlanticist camp, became German Chancellor in the same year, following in Adenauer’s footsteps. Erhard not only had a radically different view of Europe and European integration, in

contrast to Adenauer he also lacked the political skill to foster alliances between the opposing wings in the party. As one influential historian of German Christian Democracy puts it, the 'liberal Protestant Erhard lacked ... a sense for the different roots of [the CDU]. Especially its Rhenish-Catholic, Christian-Social tradition was neglected by him' (Bösch, 2002, pp. 92–3).

Erhard's lack of political skill also made itself visible externally, in that his 'Chancellorship was marked by overt disagreement with de Gaulle' (Almeida, 2012, p. 121). Before expanding on this, it is useful to recall that Erhard, who served as federal minister for economics before becoming Chancellor, was the most important political representative of the Freiburg school of ordoliberal economics. Shaped by this strand of economic theory, and in sharp contrast to Adenauer and de Gaulle, he did not see *politics* as the motor of societies or European integration but *economics*. Accordingly, he believed that a main task for Germany and Europe is to establish a well-designed regulatory framework that renders political interventions into the market at once impossible and unnecessary, and he rejected the 'bureaucratically manipulated Europe' of the Rome treaties that Adenauer had signed in 1957 (Lappenkueper, 1991, p. 89). The EEC commission with its president Walter Hallstein, moreover, incarnated in his view the 'spirit of French planification,' which would 'inevitably lead to the dirigiste methods of central planning' (ibid., p. 90; on ordoliberalism and 'planification,' see Tholl, 1965). This was anathema to Erhard.

If Erhard's political and scholarly convictions were at odds with Adenauer's and de Gaulle's, his difficult relationship with de Gaulle and the CDU-Gaullists had another source: Two years before becoming Chancellor, Erhard's Atlanticist convictions led him to oppose the Élysée Treaty. His objection was that the version that should be signed on 22 January 1963 was too exclusively modelled to the special relationship between France and Germany. He thus pressed for an add-on to the treaty that substantially played down the importance of the bilateral relationship between Germany and France, emphasizing instead the special relations of West Germany with the US (Lappenkueper, 1991, p. 100). At this point, though, Adenauer was still in the driving seat, and when Adenauer and his foreign minister Gerhard Schröder left for Paris to sign the Treaty, Erhard was not invited to join them (Schoenborn, 2014, p. 381).

When Erhard became Chancellor in 1963, he was freed from the shackles of Adenauer's disciplinary power. Coinciding with this was a broader power shift: the CDU entered what some call the party's 'Protestant phase' (Geiger, 2008, p. 523). While the party was almost entirely in the hands of *Catholic* Christian Democrats before 1963, suddenly the most central government offices were filled with *Protestants*, who typically also had Atlanticist leanings. Chancellor Erhard, foreign minister Gerhard Schröder and defence minister Kai-Uwe von Hassel were the three most important Atlanticists in the cabinet, and they used their power to promote their alternative vision of European integration. In the first years of his Chancellorship, Erhard worked towards the accession of the UK and Scandinavian countries to the community. In 1966, he embarked on a promotional tour to Scandinavia for his transatlantic trade project, where he suggested that the neutrals (like Sweden) should join (Lappenkueper, 1991, p. 118).

The fundamental disagreements about the nature of European integration, created frictions between the German and French governments that grew so strong that they put the broader project of European unification into jeopardy. De Gaulle twice (in 1963 and 1967) vetoed the UK's accession to the EEC – arguing that the country was 'not

sufficiently European' and that its accession would 'drown Europe in the Atlantic' (quoted in Kaiser, 2007, p. 309) – and he became more and more convinced that, with Erhard's Chancellorship, the German government had deserted to the American camp (Lappenkueper, 2000, p. 255). Erhard instead continued bull-headedly to try to implement his Atlanticist vision of Europe by supporting the accession of the UK and Scandinavian countries.

Interestingly, the exclusively Catholic Italian *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) – one of the most powerful Christian Democratic parties in post-war Europe – positioned itself in some crucial respects closer to Erhard than to the Gaullists. Not only were they broadly sympathetic to a 'transatlantic' foreign policy orientation (Lucarelli, 2015, p. 42). Virtually all key Italian Christian Democrats were also deeply critical about de Gaulle's claim to French leadership in Europe. In 1962, Christian Democratic Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani even declined de Gaulle's offer of closer Franco-German-Italian cooperation, as he worried that Italy would not be able to safeguard its own interests against the two more powerful states (Masala, 2001, p. 365). This worry was compounded by the fact that the DC at that time formed a minority government that relied on the support of the socialist *Partito Socialista Italiano*, which opposed 'any privileged cooperation among continental-European states as well as the broader European intentions of de Gaulle' (ibid.). When de Gaulle vetoed the UK's EEC membership on 14 January 1963, and the Élysée Treaty was signed eight days later, indignation was the dominant sentiment within the DC. The party's answer was to press for the inclusion of the UK into the EEC, in order to create a counterweight to Franco-German dominance.<sup>4</sup>

While the DC was now ready to support the UK's membership of the EEC, Erhard pursued his avowed goal of including the UK with increasingly less impetus. Succumbing to the pressure of the Empty Chair Crisis that started in 1965, and de Gaulle's threats to collaborate with Russia, Erhard ultimately all but stopped talking about UK accession. At this point, Germany's relations with France had reached their post-war low, with Germany becoming increasingly isolated under Erhard's leadership (Türk, 2006, p. 18). Reacting to this, a dissenting group of CDU Gaullists began communicating directly with de Gaulle, providing him – behind Erhard's back – with information about the plans of the Atlanticists within the CDU (Geiger, 2008, p. 519). Trying to avoid a total rupture with France, Adenauer and CSU leader Franz Josef Strauss eventually toppled Erhard in 1966. This opened the door to the subsequent grand coalition between Christian and Social Democrats (SPD) with Kurt Georg Kiesinger as Christian Democratic Chancellor.

#### IV. The Softening of the Atlanticist-Gaullist Controversy, 1966–1969

The election of the moderate Gaullist Kiesinger as the CDU's Chancellor candidate in 1966 implied a power shift away from the Northern German Protestant and Atlanticist groups within the CDU, towards the Southern and Western German Catholic and Gaullist parts of the party (Türk, 2006, p. 19; Gassert, 2006). Kiesinger, an 'integrative' leader who honed his skills for crafting intra-party (and interconfessional) compromises as Minister President of Baden-Württemberg between 1958 and 1966 (Bösch, 2002, p. 94), promoted incorporating both Gaullist and Atlanticist positions into the official

<sup>4</sup>The DC also supported the inclusion of the Scandinavian countries (Almeida, 2012, p. 120).

party agenda. Kiesinger's later election manifesto emphasises, for example, the 'special importance' of 'Franco-German cooperation' in the 'political unification of Europe' (CDU, n.d., no. I.2) – but also that 'Germany and Europe ... can retain their security and sovereignty only in an alliance with the USA' (CDU, n.d., no. I.3).

In addition, the CDU also underwent democratising organisational reforms under Kiesinger: while the party was previously organised in a strict top-down fashion, which meant that the burden of crafting internal compromises fell almost entirely on the party leader, candidate selection procedures were now democratised and internal debate became more open and pluralistic (Bösch, 2002, pp. 95–6). These organisational shifts, together with the need to compromise with the CDU's pro-Atlanticist coalition partner, the Social Democratic SPD, further helped to defuse the corrosive intra-party conflict that dominated the Erhard-era.

In this context of coalition government and internal depolarisation, even previously hard-nosed Gaullists changed their minds on some central issues. A case in point is the conservative Bavarian Gaullist Franz Josef Strauß. Strauß ensured the SPD during the coalition talks that he was in favour of UK accession (Türk, 2006, p. 23), and, in a 1966 speech to the Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament, stressed that,

from the viewpoint of capacity, but not least because of psychological considerations concerning America, it is necessary that Great Britain also one day become a member of a political union – if Europe wants to achieve a real balance within the Western alliance (Strauß, 1966).

This endorsement of British membership heralded a broad-based departure of the anti-British views that were routinely voiced by many CDU-Gaullists, though the appeal to the importance of achieving a 'real balance within the Western alliance' can be read as a concession to Gaullist geopolitics (see above). At any rate, this more permissive view indicated that CDU-Catholics were willing to renounce (at least parts of) their traditional culturalist view of Europe – which would have important implications for their pursuit of European integration over the following decades.

In 1968, with five member states actively supporting the UK's EEC-accession, it seemed that the country would finally be able to join. However, during a bilateral meeting with Kiesinger in Bonn on 27 September 1968, France started to pull the breaks. De Gaulle hardly reacted to any of the ideas that Kiesinger put forward and the meeting was widely described as a disaster for Kiesinger. The torpedoing of British membership by France created so much mistrust between the two countries that SPD-leader Brandt even speculated about a possible *secret agreement* between France and the Soviet Union to keep the UK out of the EEC (Türk, 2006, p. 193). As the Franco-German relationship worsened again through 1968, Kiesinger described the relations between France and Germany as an *Ausblutungsprozess* ('process of bleeding dry') (ibid., p. 197). Rather unexpectedly, this all came to a sudden end when de Gaulle resigned after a failed referendum on the reshuffling of regions in France in 1969. Together with the easing of the Gaullist-Atlanticist tensions in the CDU, this opened the door for the UK's accession in 1973. Kiesinger already foresaw at that point in time that, while the accession of UK would not change the Communities, the accession of 'Ireland, Denmark, Norway and maybe later also Sweden, Spain and Portugal' would lead to a Europe that was very different from a Catholic 'core Europe' (ibid., p. 201).

## V. Helmut Kohl between *Abendland* and Geopolitics

The quasi-resolution of the intra-party conflict between Atlanticists and Gaullists under Kiesinger meant that a more pragmatic and inclusive understanding of European integration gained ascendancy within the CDU. This implied a greater openness, even among key CDU Catholics, towards further expanding the Communities and including Protestant countries like the UK. In 1973, Helmut Kohl became chairman of the CDU, and over the next decades he would influence the party's vision of Europe more than any other Christian Democratic politician. Into this time fell key decisions on deepening and widening European integration like German reunification, Maastricht and the accession of Finland, Austria and Sweden. What, then, was the Europe that Kohl envisioned? Were his choices and decisions just an expression of the CDU's newly-found pragmatism that was made possible by the reconciliation between Gaullists and Atlanticists? Or were they driven by a more particular normative vision of a unified Europe?

While Kohl often described himself as 'anti-ideological' (Wicke, 2015, p. 6), many of his contemporaries portray him as a pure *Machtmensch* – a person who is more interested in exercising power than in ideas and visions (ibid., p. 77). What is certain is that Kohl was greatly influenced by growing up in the Rhineland, close to the French border. As one of his biographers observes, the fact that the territories around the Rhine so quickly 'changed nationality' as it were (during the War, his home region belonged to Bavaria, only to be reshaped into the new region of Rhineland-Palatine by the French, who prior to Kohl's birth, after the collapse of the Imperial German Army in 1918, had occupied the area) instilled in the young Kohl a 'deeply-held belief in the relativity of political borders' (Schwarz, 2014, pp. 31–3). Experiencing the catastrophe of the Second World War first hand as a young man, he was also convinced, like his idol and fellow Rhineland-Catholic Adenauer, that a return to Christian values and *abendländisch* culture would help Germany to overcome its dark legacy of nationalism and totalitarianism, as well as unify Europe (Wicke, 2015, p. 77; also see Banchoff, 1997).

The great role he ascribed to *culture* was a streak in Kohl's political thinking that seemed to align him squarely with earlier CDU-Gaullists. Mirroring de Gaulle's views about France, Kohl saw Germany as a '*Kulturnation*, fundamentally founded on a culture rather than political identity'; and he thought of his Catholicism and his 'Palatine homeland as being central to the culture of the *Abendland*' more generally (ibid., p. 297). Therefore, his vision of Europe also centred on the Franco-German relationship. For all these reasons, and because he avowedly saw it as his 'duty to represent the ideology of the founding father of his party [namely Adenauer]' (Wicke, 2015, p. 77), some have indeed concluded that Kohl broadly followed the path paved by Adenauer and de Gaulle.

In fact, however, Kohl's positions were more complex than that. For one thing, unlike many earlier CDU-Gaullists, he never harboured any negative feelings toward the US; he was certainly not an 'Anglophobe' like de Gaulle himself. Importantly, Kohl firmly believed that the US had saved Germany from the totalitarian excesses of the Nazi regime and put the country 'back on track'. A good relationship with the US was therefore part and parcel of his 'Staatsraison' (Larres, 2007). Kohl also genuinely *liked* the US: Hailing himself from a rural region, he could easily relate to the down-to-earth provincialism he associated with much of the US, as well as the 'hands-on attitude' that he believed that many Americans had, as well as the high degree of religiosity.

For another thing, from the mid-1970s onwards, Kohl gradually came to endorse a ‘pan-European’ view of European integration that marked itself off from a narrow Catholic-*abendländisch* understanding of Europe. One of his biographers describes this development as follows:

He grew up in the community of the Inner Six and [wanted] to hold on to the idea that they form the core of the European Communities. He had also learned that no fruitful further development of [the Communities] is possible without Great Britain. Whoever wants to involve [Britain, though], also has to include Ireland and Denmark. Astonishingly, he also dedicated himself in the eighties to enlargement to the South [i.e. the accession of Greece (1981), Spain and Portugal (1986)]. Next to [the French President François] Mitterrand, the Spanish Prime Minister González became something like his favourite ally in the politics of integration (Schwarz, 2014, p. 711).

In line with his affirmation of a unified Europe that extended way beyond the original ‘Six’ and included countries without established Christian Democratic traditions,<sup>5</sup> Kohl also worked on expanding his transnational network of allies beyond the family of (predominantly) Catholic parties in the 1970s. Together with Franz Josef Strauß, he pursued the project of ‘transforming the [European People’s Party] into a European-level people’s party in the image of the CDU/CSU’, which inevitably meant ‘the integration of Christian democratic and conservative traditions and parties’ from non-Catholic countries (Kaiser, 2007, p. 316). This project also involved closer cooperation between the CDU and Margaret Thatcher’s UK Conservative Party, which was driven not least by the two parties’ growing concern with defending *freedom* (represented by Europe and the West) against the looming threat of *socialism* (represented by the Soviet Union and domestic left-wing parties) (Steber, 2017, p. 412).<sup>6</sup> As the political language of the Cold War gained new salience within the CDU in the late 1970s and 1980s, the collaboration of conservative parties of all stripes was increasingly framed as necessary to defend a free Europe (ibid., p. 413).<sup>7</sup>

Kohl’s – and the CDU’s – vision for a unified Europe was further broadened after the collapse of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As new states began to form in Eastern Europe, Kohl remarked that the Federal Republic of Germany no longer is the ‘limes of the *Abendland*’ (cited in Schwarz, 2014, p. 710). There was in his view a whole new, and potentially democratic, Europe to be constructed. The end of the Cold War would imply, moreover, that Finland, Sweden and Austria no longer need to be neutral states located in between East and West, but could join the Communities. Accordingly, Kohl began to push for Northern enlargement in the early 1990s, as well as for the

<sup>5</sup>The Spanish Partido Popular was ideologically much closer to the conservative secular Protestantism of Thatcher and the British Conservatives than to German Christian Democracy (see Hien, 2020, p. 1377).

<sup>6</sup>The CDU’s main election slogan for the federal election of 1976 was ‘Freedom Instead of Socialism’ (*Freiheit statt Sozialismus*) – a slogan that Thatcher was so excited about that she promised Kohl to adopt it for her own campaigns (Steber, 2017, p. 412).

<sup>7</sup>This project was opposed especially by the Italian DC: In a personal letter to Kohl, DC party secretary Benigno Zaccagnini remarked that the inclusion of ‘conservative’ parties would ‘harm the credibility of the EPP’ and thus potentially lead to ‘great damage’ for us all (Zaccagnini, 1977). Although the parties were by now committed to similarly expansive understandings of European integration, the DC’s rapprochement with the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) in what became known as *Compromesso storico* of the 1970s was anathema to the firmly anti-Communist CDU. Some within the CDU even proposed threatening the DC with breaking up the EPP, should the Italian Christian Democrats decide to form a coalition government with the PCI (Wegener, 1979).

accession of Austria. This undoubtedly also had a ‘geo-strategical component,’ in that the ‘cultural and economic influence of the Baltic Sea-states Sweden and Finland extends to Poland and the Baltic states, up until ... Saint Petersburg, which now also [like Poland and the Baltics] will undergo democratising and marketizing reforms’ (ibid., p. 712). Similar considerations also led Kohl to propose the inclusion of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Communities; and it was obvious to him that Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia should likewise join on the long run (Banchoff, 1997, p. 65). These commitments also found their way into the CDU’s lengthy 1994 party programme, which stated:

The community must be open for new European members, which meet the political and economic requirements for joining. Accession at the *earliest possible point in time* is the aim (CDU, 1994, p. 88, emphasis added).

Initial support for this ever more expansive understanding of enlargement came not from Kohl’s presumably more ‘natural’ allies in France and Italy, but from the Prime Ministers of the UK (John Major) and Denmark (Poul Schlüter) – both of whom were conservatives but certainly not Christian Democrats. Indeed, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal tried to delay the inclusion of Sweden, Finland and Austria, such that accession negotiations could only begin in 1992.

Should we conclude that Kohl was, as he said himself, ultimately ‘non-ideological’ in his orientation? He certainly invested great energies into forging political alliances with non-Christian Democratic politicians and parties. Was he a *Machtmensch* with a distinctive sensibility for Realpolitik? He was certainly acutely aware of geopolitical dynamics and pressures. Yet it is difficult to capture Kohl’s position(s) with a single adjective or noun. His position(s) altogether transcended the earlier Gaullist-Atlanticist divide (see Wicke, 2015, p. 86; Schwarz, 2007, p. 232),<sup>8</sup> but neither were they entirely decoupled from previous Christian Democratic understandings of European integration. Especially his post-1989 mantra that continuing the project of European unification be a ‘question of war and peace’ – that is, necessary for securing peace in the new Europe – and the concomitant revival of the idea that ‘German unity and European unity represented “two sides of the same coin”’ echoed some of Adenauer’s more central post-war themes (Banchoff, 1997, pp. 61–6). Both of these narrative strands were linked to new prescriptive implications, however, namely that ‘deeper European integration was necessary to master new policy challenges in the East’ (ibid., p. 65). The last more obvious border of Europe that remained for Kohl was the Islamic world: that Turkey one day would become a member state of the European Union was unthinkable to him.

## Conclusion

The time around 1990 marked a turning point globally, and certainly also with respect to what Christian Democrats deemed imaginable in terms of European integration. Helmut Kohl and his pursuit of the expansion of the EEC (and, indeed, the EPP) emblematically represent this shift in Christian Democratic thinking about Europe. While the resolution of the intra-party conflict between Gaullists and Atlanticists under

<sup>8</sup>Compare that, in a speech following his re-election in 1994, Kohl emphasised his commitment to ‘adhere to the proven course of German foreign policy, most of all to the solid integration of Germany in the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union’ (quoted in Banchoff, 1997, pp. 63–4).

Kiesinger opened the door to a more streamlined and expansion-friendly stance on European integration, Kohl moved the Christian Democrats even further away from the more restrictive conceptions of Europe that were so popular among earlier Christian Democratic leaders. Despite his personal background as Rhenish Catholic, he seemingly responded more to geopolitical power shifts than to the major normative ideas of the post-war era. Kohl's protegee and successor, Angela Merkel, eventually supported the further expansion of the EU, notably the 'Big Bang' enlargement in 2004.

The Kohl-era was, then, the last straw for traditional *Abendland*-thinking. Ever since, the term *Abendland* and the main ideas associated with it have all but disappeared from the vocabulary of Christian Democratic politicians and parties (even if the term makes a brief appearance in the 1994 party programme, see CDU, 1994, p. 28), indicating a major change in how Christian Democrats rationalise and justify the pursuit of European integration. Meanwhile the language of *Abendland*, with its undertones of a culturally exclusive, predominantly Christian Europe, has seen a renaissance on the far right. The German *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), for instance, commits itself in its main party manifesto to the 'preservation' of '*abendländisch* Christian culture' (Alternative für Deutschland, 2016, p. 11). The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), to cite another example, used '*Abendland* in Christian hands (*Abendland in Christenhand*)' as one of its main slogans in the 2009 European Parliament elections. The far right thus increasingly appropriates the formerly Christian Democratic idea of a smaller, more homogenous Europe for its own political purposes.

At any rate, we hope to have shown that Christian Democrats have successively renounced the idea of a core Catholic *Abendland* in favour of a broader, but – for the better or the worse – also ideologically more indistinct, vision of Europe that could accommodate gradual enlargement. And we hope readers will agree that the above analysis provides a fresh look at the expansionary dynamics that gradually came to characterise European integration. To be clear, the present paper offers no fully-fledged alternative theory of European integration, nor does it present a monocausal story; however, by tracing the evolution of the ideas that animated key Christian Democratic leaders in their efforts to unify Europe, it sheds new light on events and processes that are all too easily overlooked in standard EU integration research that focuses only on rational incentives or functional imperatives. As a number of like-minded recent studies of ideology in the European Union show (for example Hien, 2020; Invernizzi Accetti, 2020; White, 2020; Wolkenstein, 2020), ideas matter quite a bit in the context of European integration.

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