# *Rationality and moderation: German chancellors' post-war rhetoric*

**CHAPTER 6 RATIONALITY AND MODERATION: GERMAN CHANCELLORS' POST-WAR RHETORIC**

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**Abstract**

This chapter will use examples from post-1945 German chancellors' public speeches in parliament as well as televised addresses to the nation to explore how culture affects the rhetoric of political leaders. Historical experiences following the devastating Nazi dictatorship led to a wariness of collectivism and of an emotionally charged public sphere. Political structures in post-war Germany entail a need for power sharing between the federal government and federal states as well as between coalition partners, leading to moderation of controversy. Secularization and individualism further lead to a primacy of politics catering to, and a rhetoric addressing, interests rather than ideals. Historical experiences with disunity and the division into two German states between 1949 and 1990 necessitate a rhetoric that avoids recourse to metaphysical or grand narratives of the nation and instead emphasizes compromise and stakeholdership. These elements of German political culture will be traced in two central speeches by different chancellors over time: the 1950s (Konrad Adenauer), the 1970s (Willy Brandt), the 1990s (Helmut Kohl), and the 2010s (Angela Merkel) through a qualitative, rhetorical, discourse analysis.

## 6.1 Introduction

The analysis of political discourse has been a flourishing field of research in Germany since the 1970s (cf. Burkhardt, 1996; 1998), analyzing "semantic battles" in political discourse (Klein, 1989; Stötzel & Wengeler, 1995), as well as scandals and outrage provoked by some politicians' speeches and utterances (Heringer, 1990). A formal association for the study of German political discourse (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sprache in der Politik e.V.) exists since 1991 (Language in Politics, n.d.), since 2005 regularly holding conferences to analyze the language in general election campaigns. Researchers have also investigated political discourse in different pre-1945 periods of German history, in particular Nazi language and rhetoric (Kämper, 2019 provides a bibliography).

The keen interest in the shape and style of public discourse can be considered a consequence of dramatic historical events over a relatively short period of time. This provides a case study in how the same language, spoken by the same people in the same place, can be utilized differently in public discourse, changing according to political circumstances. In the 20th century Germany started as a monarchy headed by an Emperor until the end of World War I, becoming a republic until 1933 when the Nazis took power and established a dictatorship. At the end of World War II it became occupied territory (1945-1949) and then divided into two states between 1949 and 1990. Its political culture changed substantially every time, with few elements worthwhile retaining, other than unification in 1990 that maintained the constitution, laws, and institutions of the Federal Republic when the former East German Democratic Republic was incorporated into the renewed German Federal Republic.

Even if prior to this few elements of previous German political instantiations were considered suitable to carry into the future, these developments still shaped today's political culture, even if ex negativo: Imperial Germany's militarism was seen as partly responsible for the First World War, leading to the initiation of a civilian army in the Federal Republic until it was replaced by a professional army in 2011. The weakness of the democratic Weimar Republic and extremism of some of its active parties were countered by the German constitution's provisions to prevent destabilization of democratic governance. The resurgence of extreme nationalism and racism during the Third Reich is countered today by a comparatively extensive memorial culture. Human rights and

civil liberty violations in the former German Democratic Republic are also comprehensively documented and memorialized. Such historical factors shape contemporary Germany's political culture, in turn shaping the political discourse to be examined in this chapter.

The chapter analyzes how post-war German political culture is reflected in eight speeches by German heads of government between 1952 and 2011. It starts with the observation that high-level public speech in post-war Germany remains remarkably unremarkable (section 2), proceeding to discuss factors emerging from Germany's past and shaping its political culture to-date –helping to explain the lack of grand rhetorical gestures in post-war Germany (section 3). After this contextual exploration, the methodology will be explained (section 4). The analysis (section 5) traces recurrent rhetorical choices made by different German chancellors. These choices illustrate an orientation towards rationality and moderation, two characteristics that can be linked to the main determinants of political culture in post-war Germany.

The political systems, culture and conditions for public speaking were very different in the two German states that existed between 1945 and 1990. Since it would not be possible to do justice to both in one chapter, I will focus exclusively on the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and not the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (for public discourse in the latter, cf. Fix & Barth, 1996; Pappert, 2003; Dreesen, 2015). As East Germany's GDR was incorporated into the West German FRG, the latter's political culture remained dominant after 1990.

**6.2 On the absence of notable speeches in post-war Germany**

While public speeches by German chancellors after 1945 occasionally received attention as part of the lively field of political discourse, they generally remain notably inconspicuous. There are, of course, other high positions in German politics with a chance to widely disseminate rhetoric, such as the Federal President (a non-partisan office with largely ceremonial duties), the Speaker of the parliament (the Bundestag), federal ministers, and executive ministers within the federal states. The chancellors, however, are the head of the national executive, they hold the most political power, set the executive agenda, and chair the cabinet meetings with federal ministers. Their rhetoric is therefore highly relevant, but not often remarkable. While there are chancellors that stand out for the length of their tenure and/or the way in which they set the political agenda, arguably no German chancellor is remembered much by their rhetoric alone.

Konrad Adenauer is remembered as the first German post-war chancellor (1949-1963) and for prioritizing the "Westernization" of the Federal Republic, i.e., integration into emerging European institutions and NATO – over attempting at all costs to keep the country from disintegrating. The Eastern part was occupied by Soviet Russia between 1945-1949, seeking to implement socialism in their sphere of influence. Western parts were occupied by the U.S., the U.K. and France, seeking to implement Western style liberal democracy in their spheres of influence. This situation eventually led to the founding of two German states that existed between 1949 until unification in 1990. While Adenauer adhered to democratic procedures that he helped to establish, he had a somewhat autocratic style of leadership with a distrust in the Germans' aptitude for democracy. He is not remembered for delivering rhetorically notable speeches.

Willy Brandt's relatively short tenure (1969-1974) is remembered for his policy of détente and rapprochement between East and West in the context of Germany divided along the frontlines of the Cold War. He received the Nobel Peace Prize for these policies in 1971. His most memorable gesture, however, was nonverbal – when apparently spontaneously weighed down by remorse he

went down on his knees on the first state visit by a German chancellor to Poland in 1970 in front of a memorial to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Helmut Kohl's long tenure (1982-1998) is remembered for the unification of the FRG and GDR and his endeavor to intensify European integration. His style of public speaking, though, including his southwestern regional accent, was subject to ridicule more than anything else. Around the beginning of his chancellorship, Kohl repeatedly referred to his ambition to initiate a collective mental and moral re-orientation (geistig-moralische Wende) (cf. Hoeres 2013), meant to sound inspirational and aspirational beyond day-to-day politics. However, it was undermined by a scandal involving lobbyist donations to his party, and Kohl infamously unable to recall relevant details during the investigation into the scandal (Leyendecker, Prantl, & Stiller, 2000), thus undercutting trust in his own moral authority, and the political system more genrally, only a short while after talking about invigorating values.

Angela Merkel has been in office since 2005. She is the first woman to hold the office and the first chancellor to have grown up in the former GDR. She is renowned for her matterof-factnes; at the beginning of her chancellorship commentators focused on her use of silence rather than speech (Schröter, 2013). During her predecessor Gerhard Schröder's tenure (1998-2005), the media's profound influence on political discourse became notable, in line with developments in other countries. Spin started to be discussed as the politicians' way of dealing with the media's agenda-setting powers, and due to his readiness to accept airtime opportunities, Schröder was labelled "the media's chancellor" (Medienkanzler) (Birkner 2016). Merkel returned to a more serious and conventional style of political communication.

In short, while post-1945 German history was by no means free from excitement, there were few speeches remembered for rhetorical craft; as far as political oratory is concerned, German post-war history is rather unremarkable (Klages 2001). In the following section, I will discuss some of the factors underlying German political culture ( König, 2010; Müller, 2003; Reichel, 1981) that explain rhetorical choices made by German public political speakers, including blandness, and the kind of rhetoric that might be most acceptable to as many citizens as possible, as well as internationally.

### 6.3 Determinants of Political Culture in Post-War Germany

Political culture is influenced by, reflected in, and amenable to, a multitude of aspects. Here I wish to highlight key aspects which provide particularly strong points of reference to describing and comparing political cultures (Kranert, 2019). First and foremost, political culture is influenced by historical experience. For some countries, this might mean maintaining traditions while gradually adapting to new circumstances and requirements. Germany, however, was shaped by discontinuity.

Since 1800, what is now the Federal Republic of Germany underwent eight iterations of different state formations, including the absence of a nation state between 1806 and 1871 (Kitchen 2006). However, apart from the 1918-1945 period Germany maintained confederate structures. When the FRG came into being in 1949, federalism was considered by the Allied Forces as much as by the committee that drafted the FRG's constitution to be worthwhile maintaining. It was also retained through unification in 1990, adding 5 new federal states to the previous 11 West German states. Presently, Germany's 16 federal states help to encourage, maintain, and institutionally enshrine historically rooted regional identities, thus helping to moderate nationalism embodied by a centralized state. The FRG's new 1949 constitution also incorporated provisions clearly based on lessons from the recent past (Görtemaker 1999), such as proportional representation and the provision that parties need at least 5% of votes to even enter parliament. This is to avoid

parliamentary over-factionalism, a problem in the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) that made it easier for the National Socialists to undermine Weimar's new democracy by grabbing power in 1933.

The National Socialists maintained an emotionally charged public sphere and a rhetoric of collective endeavor where the value of the individual was seen in their contribution to the "Volksgemeinschaft," the community of ethnic Germans. Not least also because collectivism was maintained in the socialist GDR, chancellor Adenauer often mentioned the emergence of mass society (Vermassung) as something to counteract. Wider ideological shifts in the post-war era not specific to Germany underpin increasing individualism after a sharp break with Nazi dictatorship collectivism. The Nazi dictatorship permeated and controlled public discourse, also triggering attention on language use in the post-1945 Germany's public sphere by the Allies (Deissler, 2006); Germans also saw a need to re-learn constructive political debate (Kilian, 1997; Verheyen, 2010) – a lot of attention was paid to language criticism, highlighting how totalitarian ideologies were promulgated by ways of speaking. Viktor Klemperer's Lingua Tertii Imperii, first published 1947, and Sternberger et al.'s 1957 dictionary of inhuman words (Wörterbuch des Unmenschen) were widely read in post-war Germany (Dodd, 2018).

Another consequence of historical experience for the FRG was its orientation towards international structures and alliances as a means of protection but also of regaining trust and through this, power and scope for action. Hence, the FRG joined NATO in 1955 and promoted European integration, at various stages including the FRG's relinquishing national decision-making to European institutions and policies (Thränhardt 1996).

Thus, political processes and institutions reflect and shape political culture. Proportional representation, combined with the 5% threshold, means that Germany has mostly been governed by a coalition of only one bigger and one smaller party. Even parties obtaining only around 8% of the total vote can take part in setting the legislative agenda. Separate elections are held for federal state parliaments (the same 5% threshold applies); federal state governments are also mostly sustained by coalitions.

Further decreasing power centralization is the upper chamber Bundesrat consisting of the sixteen federal states' First Ministers, with a rotating presidency. It can initiate legislation, needs to approve some of the new legislation that passed the Bundestag, can demand changes to legislation drafted by the lower chamber, or block legislation altogether. Power is thus shared between the national level and the state level, and also between parties in that twoparty coalitions are the norm with some federal state governments run by other parties than those leading the national government. Moreover, there is a system for dealing with conflicts that can arise from this constellation to avoid a complete blockage of new legislation. Finally, affiliation with supranational institutions adds to the moderation of political positions and demands as German parties also send representatives and form factions with other EU countries' sister parties in the European parliament.

Organizations such as trade unions, interest- and issue-based associations as well as industry and business organizations can lobby political parties and representatives but are not part of the political system. The most effective way to set the political agenda in Germany is by way of a political party as reflected in the relative success of environmentalism along with the founding of the Green party in 1980. The FRG is a secular state; the church and church leaders are not part of the political system. Disaffiliation from religious belief is reflected in a Eurobarometer poll from 2018: 28.6% of Germans consider themselves Catholic, 25.8% protestant and 26.9% atheist or agnostic (Federal Agency for Citizenship Education, 2020). This is another indicator of increased individualism, but also

in part a heritage from the socialist GDR where religious affiliation was discouraged – still reflected in a larger proportion of agnostics and atheists among the East German population.

These are the most relevant, necessarily general parameters of political culture in Germany. They go some way to explaining why the rhetoric of German political leaders has remained somewhat unremarkable. Nationally, the power-sharing structures of German politics necessitate compromise and therefore moderation of adversity between political parties. Internationally, compromise and moderation are equally needed for building consensus within and maintaining scope for action by international organizations, especially important in the EU context with regulatory powers previously held nationally.

While the FRG clearly aligned with Western countries in the Cold War context between 1949 and 1990, the most precarious and heavily guarded border during the Cold War ran between both German states and through Berlin, dividing many German families. Despite the obvious animosity between both German states, this situation also required moderation in the midst of Cold War tensions. In the German context, aggression was particularly risky if it could lead to another war, and complete antagonism and estrangement between people in East and West Germany would have endangered any long-term prospects of unification.

The grip of national grand narratives was much reduced in post-1945 Germany. The division as well as the discrediting of nationalism post-Third Reich in the light of the atrocities driven by extreme nationalism in combination with racism contributed to this development. Especially since the 1990 unification, there is much ongoing internal conflict between those who want to position Germany as a diverse and multicultural society and a right-wing political movement that seeks to undermine such consensus. In other words, below the level of political leadership, there are different extreme views producing emotional rhetoric and promoting widely differing narratives regarding the state of the nation.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the rhetoric of political leaders at different points in time. In addition to the generally reduced currency of grand narratives, individualism coupled with an historically-based wariness of an emotionally charged public sphere has led to a politics addressing and seeking to balance interests rather than promoting ideals, highlighting rational choices rather than emotionally-driven positions. The reduced salience of traditional, especially religious, values led to emphasizing secular values and individual stakeholders for maintaining democratic citizenship rather than taken-for-granted beliefs. Rationality and moderation can therefore be considered key characteristics of contemporary German political leaders' political discourse. These elements of post-war German political culture will now be traced in and across speeches held by different post-WW2 German chancellors.

### 6.4 Methodology

Two speeches have been selected from each of the more notable German chancellors (briefly introduced in section 2) between 1952 and 2020. While Brandt's tenure was relatively short (5 years as opposed to 14 in the case of Adenauer and 16 each in the cases of Kohl and Merkel), his chancellorship was notable because of profound social change following the generational unrest around 1968 and recalibration of the relationship between the FRG and the GDR.

Different types of speeches are included here. According to Schröter (2006), chancellors give three major types of speeches. First, speeches in parliament, including their inaugural speeches (Korte, 2002), as well as at their own party conferences; second, lesser publicized speeches for a variety of stakeholders on various occasions (e.g., opening a new production plant or an anniversary assembly

of the German association of journalists); and third, commemorative speeches (e.g., at a memorial site and related event or at an event celebrating notable anniversaries of historical personalities) and televised "addresses to the nation," most notably every New Year's Eve (Holly, 1996). The speeches in the second category will be disregarded here as they vary widely, given the degree to which they are tailored to the specific audience; thus, it's impossible to offer a small representative sample.

Regarding the type of speech and speech event, the ones analyzed below comprise four speeches of the first category by German chancellors in parliament: (1) a speech by Adenauer (Adenauer, 1952) at the beginning of the debate about the General Treaty which restored sovereignty to the FRG and led to it joining the NATO in 1955, basically enshrining Adenauer's approach of Westernization; (2) a speech held by Brandt (Brandt, 1973) about the treaty between the FRG and the GDR with a view to normalizing the relationship between the two German states. Both these speeches are about substantial political issues that were rather controversial at the time. Further to this, there is (3) one inaugural speech made by Kohl (Kohl, 1982), initiating his first term in October 1982; and (4) a speech by Merkel (2011), providing a rationale for phasing out the use of nuclear energy in Germany in response to the damage at Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant following an earthquake and tsunami.

Four additional speeches belong to the third category, three of which were televised addresses. One of these (1) the annual New Year's Eve televised address given by Kohl (Kohl, 1989) when the Berlin Wall had just come down and before the process of unification had officially started; (2) a speech by Brandt from November 1970 (Brandt, 1970) at an event commemorating Friedrich Engels' 150th birthday. Any position regarding the socialist intellectual heritage involved a balancing act for a West German chancellor in the face of the other, socialist German state. Two further televised addresses were given based on specific political issues seen as crises; (3) Adenauer (1961) addressed the nation in response to the GDR government's building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961; and (4) Merkel (2020) addressed measures and policy changes in the wake of the spread of the Coronavirus.

These speeches are notable in that they relate to deep controversy (1952 and 1973) and/or crisis events (1961 and 2020 and arguably the New Year's Eve address 1989/1990 at a time of profound change). The commemoration of socialist intellectual heritage (Brandt's 1970 speech), initiating substantial changes to energy provision with knock-on effects across the industry and infrastructure (Merkel's 2011 speech), and handling transition of power after a vote of no confidence in the preceding government (Kohl's 1982 inaugural speech), also tread on controversial territory. None are quite day-to-day business or routine stance-taking. Thus, it is especially interesting to see the extent to which rhetorical choices pertaining to rationality and moderation apply.

These speeches are analyzed together, as a pool with shared features: they will not be presented one-by-one, nor analyzed with regard to changes over time. The general determinants of political culture leading to rationality and moderation as key characteristics of post-1945 German rhetoric described in section 2 have remained largely stable over time. The aim is to link these to rhetorical choices; to this end, a qualitative rhetorical analysis was conducted. The speeches are analyzed synoptically for recurrent rhetorical features pertaining to rationality and moderation. Rationality comprises features that highlight analysis of facts, events or developments, argument and conclusion, as well as stylistic choices akin to rational or academic discourse. Moderation comprises features that lack uncompromising or extreme stances, instead appealing to realism and measured expectations or advocating patience and compromise. Attention will be given first to features of structure, including intertextual references and argumentation. Second, attention is paid to stylistic features, especially choice of vocabulary and metaphorical conceptualization. Particular attention is

also paid to those features that pertain to, or possibly demonstrate lack of, rationality and moderation. If similar traits can be observed across different speakers at different points in time, this will be considered to support the argument that rationality and moderation resulting from the above corner stones of political culture have an impact on the rhetorical choices made by political leaders in Germany. All translations of quotes from the German speeches are by the author.

## 6.5 Analysis of Selected Speeches

### 6.5.1 Rationality

#### *6.5.1.1 Structure*

In light of the above, what is striking in the chancellors' speeches is metacommunicative framing: speakers position their speeches at the onset in a context and explicate what they are about to do, including a rationale for their speech emphasizing democratic values of transparency and accountability. In his 1952 speech opening the parliamentary debate about the General Treaty, Adenauer (1952, p. 871) explained the aims of his speech by stating that "we owe the German people and the world a clear position regarding the basic principles of these contracts," and that "this debate needs to give the people clarity about the basic problems so that they can form an opinion about the parliament's and government's statement." In his inaugural speech, Kohl (1982, p. 853) opened his long account of planned measures by stating that "our people are entitled to the truth, the truth about what has been done and the truth about what needs to be done." Two-thirds into his long speech, Kohl revisited this point: "our citizens are entitled to know about the aims and premises on which our politics for the future will be based" (ibid., p. 863). Merkel opened her TV address in 2020 by explicating: "I chose to address you in this unusual manner because I want to tell you what guides me as chancellor…in this situation. This is part of an open democracy: that we make political decisions transparent and explain them. That we communicate as well as possible and give reasons for what we do, so that it becomes comprehensible."

Metacommunicative framing is used by the chancellors to position themselves as providing guidance and information to enable their audiences to draw conclusions and to form an opinion. Elements of rational discourse and ideals of democratic transparency are both evoked in such metacommunicative statements.

Second, there are references in each speech to preceding texts, such as international agreements, draft legislation, data and figures, sequences of events, examples illustrating a point, academic texts, expert advice, or historical documents. I consider this a structural feature because it situates the speech as one textual event in a chain of texts. This is less the case in the speeches broadcast via radio and television, but even there Adenauer (1952, p. 1493), referred to international agreements, Kohl (1989, p. 2) to a document laying out a plan for unification that he had previously presented to the parliament, and Merkel (2020) twice to advice from experts. In his speech commemorating Engels' 150th birthday, Brandt (1970) quoted academics and a range of historical documents written by Engels and his contemporaries to underpin the point Brandt was making about resisting a one-sided and onedimensional appropriation of (Marx and) Engels by socialist countries. He stressed instead the context of their own time, the genesis and development of their works, and instances where they had positioned themselves not in radical tones but rather ones of compromise. In his speech about the General Treaty, Adenauer (1952) quoted several sections of the treaty and associated documents verbatim and referred to a series of historical events in order to contrast and illustrate the support and trust West Germany had received from the Western Allies with the repression of Eastern European countries and the lack of Soviet Union reliability, explicitly signaling a

conclusion from these illustrative historical examples: “Juxtaposing the actions of both systems of power in relation to Germany yields the following results…” (ibid., p. 875). Merkel (2011) in her speech relating to nuclear power quoted a range of data and figures regarding energy provision in Germany, albeit without naming sources for the data. Likewise, Kohl (1982) referred to a multitude of figures – albeit unreferenced – such as numbers of unemployed people, youth unemployment, figures relating to taxation, investment, and public finances. Such references serve to legitimize the government’s position and potentially to discredit the opposition, and therefore need to be considered selective and persuasive. However, the main point is that persuasion is attempted through elements of rational discourse: evidence and references.

Third, the speeches are structured in argumentation sequences. They don’t dramatically build up towards a climax, possibly followed by resolution of tension, but largely follow an analytical pattern of “what is the situation” and “what follows from this situation.” In parliamentary speeches, the second part tends to be sequenced along a range of specified measures and proposals that in the case of Kohl (1982), Brandt (1973) and Merkel (2011) are in parts blandly enumerated. Rhetorical flourishes of repetition and intensification are rare. TV addresses differ from this; they are shorter, hardly refer to proposed policy measures, and all initially refer to recent events: the building of the Berlin Wall (Adenauer, 1961), the fall of the Berlin Wall (Kohl, 1989), and the coronavirus outbreak (Merkel, 2020). In each case, the situation was sketched and described in evaluative terms with reference to how the event is likely to make people feel, followed by an interpretation of its implications in terms of what needs to be done or avoided. In the first case, the conclusion was to not mistrust the continued support of the Western Allies, in the second case to work towards unification and further European integration, and in the third case for every citizen to be aware of their responsibility to curb the spread of the virus and to act accordingly. This means that while emotional implications of the events are initially acknowledged, it is not followed by amplification of such emotions but rather by translating the situation into political premises and measures going forward. The stated sentiments are moderated and contained rather than intensified.

Fourth, these types of macro-structuring are underpinned by repeated microsequences where premises are explicated, followed by conclusions along the pattern “if X, then it follows that Y.” For example, in his inaugural speech Kohl (1982, p. 860) surveyed the new government’s approach to foreign policy and states at the onset: “The foundation of German foreign- and security policy is the North Atlantic alliance and the friendship and partnership with the United States of America…This leads to clear priorities for this government.” This is followed by an enumerated list of points pertaining to foreign policy in which a number of international agreements are referenced. In her speech upon phasing out nuclear power, Merkel (2011, p. 12960) declared at the onset: “In Fukushima we had to take note of the fact that even in a high-technology country like Japan, the risks of nuclear energy cannot be safely managed. If we realize this, then the necessary consequences need to be drawn. If we realize this, we need to re-evaluate.”

Across the speeches, there are various instances where premises – in the examples; maintaining established alliances; re-evaluating limitations of risk management – are followed by conclusions pertaining to government action: to therefore engage with negotiations and adhere to agreements; to therefore work to avoid these risks completely.

*6.5.1.2 Style*

Chancellors used elements of academic terms through their use of analytical vocabulary. Adenauer (1952, p. 873) referred to “problems,” their “evaluation” in “context,” the need to “analyze” the present situation with a view on its “tendencies of development” and to “investigate” the

"consequences" of rejecting the General Treaty. Brandt (1973, 158f.) refers to "factors" that cannot be considered "in isolation," to "dimensions of this problem," "questions" that "pose" themselves, "factors at play," to "drawing conclusions," "learning lessons," and respecting "the given parameters." There are also definitional sequences, such as: "We don't understand the law as an instrument of rule, but as a negotiation of understanding between free citizens on the basis of shared values" (Kohl, 1982, p. 863). Here too, instances of such academic usage are suggestive of rational discourse.

Across the speeches, there are first-person phrases that indicate the speakers' own thought processes, positioning themselves as rational beings that analyze situations and draw conclusions on that basis. Thus, chancellors may emphasize that they themselves have established, and are defending, their positions. In a sequence that brought forward counter arguments to "some publicly voiced questions," Adenauer stated (1952, p. 876): "I consider these claims to be wrong." He went on to concede that a reunification of Germany could only take place in negotiations with all four Allied powers, and continued: "it is my conviction that it is wise to secure at least the help of three of these four to begin with" (ibid.) While stating that "I do believe that it will be possible to get to the negotiating table with Soviet Russia at the right moment" (ibid.), he countered claims to take up Stalin's offer of a unified, but neutral Germany with apprehensions about Soviet Russia's willingness to relinquish East Germany without risk. In this context, he stated that "I cannot in any way understand" (ibid.) how anyone would take such a risk.

Merkel (2011, p. 12960) described Fukushima as an instance providing evidence for the ultimate impossibility to contain the risks of nuclear power, the need to "draw consequences" and to "reevaluate" the situation, and to question the "reliability of probability analyses." Remarkably, she then openly conceded her own change of mind on the issue, stating: "As much as I have…argued in favor of prolonging the running periods of nuclear power stations in Germany in the fall of last year, I unequivocally state today to this House: Fukushima has changed my position towards nuclear energy" (ibid.) While politicians often are confronted with evidence of changing positions as a sign of weakness and negatively-evaluated wavering, Merkel sought to establish that a change of attitude can be a consequence of rational evaluation of evidence in response to changing parameters.

There are explicit appeals to reason and references to a harmful lack of rationality. Words pertaining to unascertained information (rumors, neurotic fright, nostalgia, utopia, dream, illusion), to rigid stances (dogma, blindness) or lack of consideration (mistrust, unreasonable), were used in contexts where these phenomena and dispositions were dismissed. In his TV address in response to the construction of the Berlin Wall, Adenauer (1961, p. 1494) stressed "in such a situation every step needs to be carefully considered", the need to "negotiate" and to "wait for what follows with calm and determination" and to avoid "unjustified mistrust." Brandt (1970, p. 1774) called for a balanced evaluation of Engels' heritage, stating that the times were over "where something reasonable was rejected by the majority purely because the stamp 'socialist' was applied to it." He argued for a balanced view on Marx' and Engels' intellectual heritage, to emphasize "without dogma, that it is necessary to humanize human society" (ibid., p. 1772), whereby dogma indicates a lack of rational evaluation. He criticized conservatives for "having lost the historical thread," "striking up antisocialist sentiment," and "impressing their neurotic Marxist fright on others" (ibid., p. 1773). That way he ascribed a lack of rationality to the opposition, as well as the intention to intensify emotional responses.

Merkel (2020) appealed to rationality in her TV address, labelling it as "reasonable" household behavior to keep a certain stock of items, but as "unreasonable" to "hamster, as though goods would never be available again." She appealed to "take seriously what the current situation is about"

while warning against falling "into a panic." At the end of her speech, she described the situation as "dynamic" with a need to "continue learning" so that the approach can be adjusted when necessary, to which she added the appeal to "not believe in rumors, but always only official statements" (ibid.). Believing in rumors would be the irrational response, whereas the government would provide reliable information based on a continuous evaluation of developments. Kohl (1982, p. 855) in his inaugural speech dismissed "nostalgia" and "utopias" and held "a sense of reality" and "self-responsibility" against them. He labelled unconditional pacifism as "an understandable desire, a beautiful dream, but most of all a dangerous illusion", and unlimited armament "a lethal blindness" (ibid., p. 860), suggesting gradual disarmament as the rational choice. While these examples also illustrate how references to (ir-)rationality were used for the purposes of persuasion, the observation remains that rationality per se was an important point of reference in German chancellors' speeches.

The indicators of rationality described so far do not entirely preclude elements of hyperbole and reference to emotions. Kohl (1982) painted a picture of deep economic crisis at the beginning, using intensifying language to sketch the situation in which his new government was taking over as drastic and requiring urgent action. He then, however, embarked on a long litany – the speech comprised roughly 11,000 words – of proposed policy measures and approaches, economic and labor market policy, social policies, foreign and security policy, environmental protection, German federalism, youth and family policy, German-German relations, the status of Berlin, and basic principles for the new legislature. At the onset of the Coronavirus outbreak Merkel (2020) expressed empathy with the audience's worries and apprehensions. These sequences are followed up with reassurance and appeasement, rather than attempts at intensifying those sentiments. Therefore, acknowledged emotions become a background or basis for legitimizing government action in response to such sentiments with the aim to contain them – rather than a springboard for amplifying them. Here, the structure of the speeches as a whole offseted the initial intensification or references to emotions.

### 6.5.2 Moderation

#### *6.5.2.1 Structure*

As I have described elsewhere (Schröter, 2006; 2014), elements of dialogue with imaginary addressees are characteristic of chancellor's speeches, and this also applies to this chapter's example speeches. Of particular interest are the high frequency and variety of microsequencing "yes – but" patterns, where potentially differing opinions are drawn on in the "yes" part and then followed and countered by the "but" move as a way of drawing in and dissipating dissent in monological speech. For example, in his inaugural speech, Kohl (1982, 859) stated: "Integration does not mean loss of one's own identity, but foreigners and Germans living together with as few tensions as possible". In the first part of the statement, Kohl pre-empted criticism that foreigners might be asked to assimilate and in the second part argued against this the need for easing social tensions. Further in the same speech Kohl sought to pre-empt criticism regarding the distribution of wealth: "We do not ask those on low incomes to make these necessary sacrifices, but instead we turn to those who can cope better with making such sacrifices" (ibid., 866). This pattern allows implicit acknowledgement of possible criticism and differing positions without explicit fingerpointing towards stakeholders who are skeptical or in disagreement. Again, while this pattern also backgrounds possible dissent and foregrounds the "but"-movement aiming to persuade addressees to accept the speaker's point of view, this relatively restrained treatment of dissent can be considered a feature of moderation.

#### *6.5.2.2 Style*

Moderation is inherent in appeals to patience, going along with the metaphorical conceptualization of politics as a path or journey; there are "steps" to take, so as to "progress" along a "road" towards the goal. Speakers use the path-metaphor to suggest that large gains cannot be expected in short timeframes and that slow progress is acceptable as long as it is clearly directed towards an aim. For example, Brandt (1972, p. 157) described the process of rapprochement between Eastern and Western Europe as "a long and stony road," and as a process of "arduously laboring out of positions that have become regrettably negative" (ibid., p. 161). Kohl (1982, p. 863) described the program detailed in his inaugural speech as "beginning a politics of renewal, first steps on the way out of the crisis." In response to strong concerns over the construction of the Berlin Wall, Adenauer (1961, p. 1494) emphasized that "every step in a situation like this needs to be carefully considered," and pushed demands for action into a longer-term perspective in which "the right to self-determination and freedom will be victorious if we persist in our efforts." The scope for action on part of the FRG government was limited, and thus Adenauer avoided dramatizing the situation.

Each chancellor mentioned stakeholders in decision-making, at times explicitly acknowledging different points of view, complexity of processes, and range of interests to be considered, as well as the need to strike compromises. Again, this is often embedded in metaphorical conceptualizations of different "sides" with different "views" and the need for "balance." For example, in the debate about the agreement for peaceful cooperation between the two Germanies, Brandt (1973, p. 159) stressed that the agreement "did not allow either side to achieve their maximal aims. Of course, it could only result in a compromise." He also referred to "multiple levels" of policy making and their interrelatedness, positioning the agreement as part of a "fabric of negotiations, agreements and contracts" (ibid., p. 160) and labelling the government's policy as a "policy of balance," as "real balancing of interests," and stressing the overlap between "our German interests and the interests of our Allies" (ibid., p. 161). Adenauer (1952, p. 871) labelled the General Treaty a "compromise," noting that it "is the nature of compromise that nobody's views get accounted for one hundred percent," especially given "international agreements of such substance and with the multitude of involved parties." Towards the end of his speech, he reiterated "that no country involved in this agreement was able to have their positions accepted in every point. I shall be allowed to point out that in each country government and parliament needed to pay tribute to public opinion in their countries and that this public opinion differs in each country" (ibid., p. 876).

Notably, of the speeches analyzed here, these are the two speeches pertaining to the most crucial and most controversially debated issues. They are also the ones in which the chancellors appeal most to moderation by acknowledging the need for balancing interests and finding compromise. While such management of expectations also pre-empts criticism, stressing multilateral balancing of interest avoids blaming the involved parties for setbacks.

### 6.6 Conclusion

German chancellors' speeches comprise a range of rhetorical choices that pertain to a decidedly rational discourse as well as to moderation of adversial and extreme positions. This is not to say that they are not politically controversial or don't attempt to persuade. However, the rhetorical means reflect a political culture in which German chancellors consider a rhetoric that highlights measured reason and that contains emotion to be effective. While the chancellors frame problems in line with their own intentions and priorities, never undisputed, the way in which German chancellors try to persuade their audiences reflects rhetorical practices that are widely acceptable.

It should, however, be noted that this chapter studied the public rhetoric of high-level, elected political leaders. Contexts such as election campaigns temporarily bring up more adversarial

discourse styles; and the rhetorical choices of lower-level political actors might be different. However, the "style at the top" can reflect more widely shared ideal norms, thus relevant for an exploration of political culture.

Rationality and moderation are functioning and applicable norms of political culture in Germany. This is not to say that this could not change. In the light of German history the stability of post-war German democracy and political culture is remarkable, but perhaps more than ever before there are now groups and forces at work that threaten to undermine it from within. Social friction and disenfranchisement do exist, and the neoliberal narrative of no alternative to capitalism after the historical discreditation of socialism leaves little prospect of substantial change despite a still broadly functioning social welfare system and free access to education. Educational attainment and social mobility of working-class citizens, including most of Germany's immigrant population – in 2019, 26% of Germany's residents have a migration background (Federal Office for Statistics, 2021) – lag behind the rest of the population.

Moreover, there are still notable differences in attitudes and political orientation between East Germans socialized in the GDR and West Germans socialized in the FRG, especially since the absorption of the former into the latter. Political culture and identities pertaining to the GDR were devalued and wiped out in a very short time span, privileging those who grew up in the Western parts. A growing New Right movement is currently undermining the post-war consensus, promoting an ethnically homogeneous population, campaigning especially against Muslim immigrants, and trying to contain gender diversity. There are also attempts from the New Right to re-evaluate post-war German history and to roll back the memorialization of the Holocaust. They reframe Allied re-education and memory culture as supposedly silencing German victimhood and instilling into all Germans a feeling of perpetual collective guilt about the Nazi atrocities to prevent Germans from developing a positive national identity and pursuing their own interests by preventing any future German assertiveness.

The discourse of the New Right is not geared towards rationality and moderation; it is aimed at scandalization, uses hyperbole, links to conspiracy theories of the "great exchange" – the belief that political leaders conspire to replace the ethnic German population with (Muslim) immigrants, thereby re-introducing Nazi tropes such as "Lügenpresse" ("mainstream media" spreading lies). Such nationalistic and racist discourses have grown louder since 1990 and are now partly represented in a new political party, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, founded in 2013). In the general election of 2017, the AfD obtained 12.6% of the vote, so that for the first time in post-war German history a party with a decidedly right-wing program and a number of extreme right activists passed the 5% threshold, forming the third-largest party in the Bundestag. The continuing frictions in German society are also illustrated by the fact that these discourses – and the AfD – find more resonance in East Germany, among former GDR citizens. To what extent the rationality and moderation traced in previous Chancellors' rhetoric, reflective of post-war German political culture, will hold out against these competing discourses remains to be seen.

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