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The Theory and Practice of Intergovernmental Consultations: The Case of Germany¹

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Abstract

A rather important goal for international relations is to improve methods for studying interstate dialogue. In this article, the author pays attention to the practice of intergovernmental consultations and explores this practice drawing on the example of Germany, which uses this approach in its dialogue with 12 states. The challenges with this approach are not yet explored in Russian political science in a detailed way. Usually, intergovernmental consultations are established by one power to promote cooperation with another power or with a very important ally among small and medium-sized states. The frequency of meetings is established for each consultation. Compliance with the agreed frequency, or violation of it, especially when involving interruption of work, are indicators of the dialogue's development. One meeting in the consultation lasts only one day and determines the scheme of the negotiations. The countries should focus on the most perspective and, on the contrary, the most problematic tracks of the agenda of bilateral relations, even if these negotiation priorities differ from the conceptual guidelines for each state. The key variants at the end of the meeting are presented.

The article explores the geography and chronology of intergovernmental consultations with German participation. Before the 21st century, there was a long period of time between the launch of every two new consultations. In the early to mid-2010s and the early 2020s, there were waves of newly established consultations. The author stresses the absence of such meetings between Germany and Arabian and African states, as well as Iran, and explains the reasons for this. Germany also faced difficulties establishing consultations with the Anglo-Saxon states. Other problems since the mid-2010s have been the “freezing” of some consultations (with Russia), long interruptions in their functioning (with Brazil, Italy, Poland, and Turkey), and violations of the agreed frequency (with France, Netherlands, and Spain). The article examines the reasons for such situations in each case. At the same time, there has been stable functioning of the mechanism with India and China, even after the confrontation between the PRC and the U.S. began. The author concludes that, in the 2010s, Germany tried to make the system of intergovernmental consultations global. But, by the beginning of the 2020s, these efforts had proved unsuccessful and there was a degradation of the process.

Key words: foreign policy, interstate dialogue, institutionalization, negotiations, Anglo-Saxon powers, France, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Russia, Israel, China, India, Japan.

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Introduction

An urgent scientific task is to improve methods for studying interstate dialogue. One of the ways is to explore the potential of the practice of intergovernmental consultations (in some cases, interstate ones). This refers to regularly held meetings with the participation of all, or the majority of, ministers and the head of government (or the state) of each country. Interstate dialogue has permanent elements such as a system of diplomatic missions, individual contacts of officials at the high and highest levels, and interaction on the fields of international organizations. The practice of intergovernmental consultations is an optional element for interstate dialogue. However, its advantage is that it allows consideration of the functioning of the structure as an indicator of the state of the dialogue. Usually, intergovernmental consultations occur at the initiative of two powers, that is, states whose influence and resource base in terms of volume and intensity of use has significantly exceeded the corresponding characteristics for the vast majority of other countries. That is why each use of intergovernmental consultations makes a rather significant contribution to international processes. Each negotiation presents a comprehensive overview of significant issues under discussion, and each meeting in a consultation usually lasts only one day. This hard time limit means the sides must focus on both the most problematic issues and those that have the most potential. It ensures that the priorities of each side are understood, especially in comparison with national conceptual guidelines.

The goal of this article is to explore the functioning of intergovernmental consultations using the example of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the late 2010s–early 2020s. Germany gained experience using this bilateral platform with 12 states (by 2023) and tried to combine it with a commitment to multilateralism. Compared to other western powers (especially the U.S. and the UK) Germany has used this format more actively.

Foreign and Russian scientists have studied interstate contacts at the high and highest levels, as well as the interaction of states on the fields of international organizations, but they have not paid enough attention to intergovernmental consultations of not specific state. In the case of Germany, specialists have studied several bilateral mechanisms (usually as part of more general subjects)—these were the consultations with China, France, Israel, and Russia [Asseburg, 2015, pp. 2–4; Belov, 2013, pp. 5–7; Tchernega, 2019; Tsvyk, 2019, pp. 212–214]. However, there has been no complex research on this subject.

The Features of the Functioning of the Format for Not Specific State

The practice of intergovernmental consultations is, first, an attribute of dialogue between the powers. The absence of such consultations in relations between one powerful state at the regional or

global level and another power that is an ally or strategic partner indicates that intergovernmental consultations are not the norm in interstate relations.

An indication of the equality of the participants is that negotiations are held alternately on the territory of each. The partner that was the host for the first meeting is usually also the one that had shown the greatest interest in the launch of the platform. The COVID-19 pandemic, with its “freezing” effect, added two more research issues to the study of such consultations: the readiness of the state to organize virtual negotiations and the speed of return to face-to-face meetings.

The agreed frequency of meetings illustrates the degree of trust in bilateral relations. The usual variant is every two years. More frequent meetings, every year or even every 6 months, means the most advanced level of dialogue, although a longer interval does not necessarily prove otherwise and could be caused by the disproportionality of resource bases of the sides. In such a situation, the fact that negotiations are ongoing means there is an advanced level of dialogue. A sign of stable or progressive development of dialogue is compliance with the frequency and especially exceeding it. The symbol of the crisis or the degradation of bilateral relations is frequency violation, especially over the long-term and repeatedly. The extreme options are interruption of the work of the consultation for over seven years (the duration of two legislative periods for most governments in), its “freezing” abolition.

The one-day duration of each meeting in the consultation creates a time crunch for the negotiations themselves. The problem is made even more acute by the opening and closing ceremonies. This can be minimized by holding alternate meetings of delegations in full and in parallel at the highest level (separately from others) or in pairs or groups (two-to-four officials of the corresponding rank on each side) of ministers in the thematic blocks. The key themes for these meetings are foreign policy, security and defence; cooperation in economic and energetic fields; cooperation in information and cyber spheres; and culture, education, and science. As in the case of any negotiations at the high and highest level, the holding of each meeting is the result of the experts elaborating. Usually, they cooperate in working groups, which can be narrow or wide in scope. General coordination functions belong to the office of the head of government and/or state. Unlike the final agreement on issues (at the negotiations in the format) the preliminary work is practically not covered officially.

Options for concluding consultation meetings are very different. The first scenario is via the announcement of a final statement, which usually consists of the points divided into thematic blocks. The general characteristics are presented at the beginning of the document, less often also at the end. The final statement is second in importance only to interstate treaties and agreements. The document provides not only a comprehensive description of the current state of relations, but also a vision of its prospects. The adoption of the final document is accompanied by a press

conference (usually joint, less often separately) of the heads of delegations of the sides. The second scenario is that negotiations are concluded without any written statement. This may be the norm, suggesting that the dialogue is far from reaching full-fledged cooperation, or an exception to previous practice. The last scenario means the decline of the dialogue. The rarer variants are other options. These include the absence of a final press conference, which almost certainly indicates a failure of negotiations, or the signing of an interstate agreement or treaty. Especially if it repeats, the variant with signing of agreements gives additional political importance to the format.

The Geography and Chronology of Intergovernmental Consultations Launched by Germany

Geographically, the greatest number of intergovernmental consultations initiated by Germany was with European democracies (six of 12, or 50%). In Western Europe they were France and the Netherlands with officially declared plan to add this list by Great Britain [Federal Chancellery, 2022c]. From Southern Europe were Italy and Spain, and from Eastern Europe was Poland [Federal Chancellery, 2022d]. The only consultation established with a state outside the European Union (EU) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was with Russia. Its function was suspended after 2014.

In Northern America, Germany expressed interest in launching the platform with the U.S. [Rhein-Neckar Zeitung, 2021], but the idea was not supported by the White House. In South America the only consultation was with Brazil [Federal Chancellery, 2015]. The launch of an intergovernmental consultation with any other regional player can hardly be expected, taking into account the lack of Germany's strategic political and military contacts in the region as a whole.

In Asia, Germany launched consultations with Israel and Turkey as two states in the Near East, China and Japan as two in the Far East, and India in Southern Asia [Federal Chancellery, 2022d]. Thus, there were three platforms (25%) in the Indo-Pacific region. These states belong to the collective West (Japan, Turkey with some reservations), or are quite friendly to it (Israel, India), or they are giant powers in terms of population and many other potential parameters (China and India).

This format was absent in relations with the Arab states and Iran, and African countries in general. In the case of the latter, this was due to the absence of any developed dialogue with any large state in Africa for a long time. In the future, Egypt may become an exception given the trajectory of interstate cooperation from 2015–18 by President Abdul-Fattah Al-Sisi. Traditionally, contacts with the Arabian monarchies, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, were rather important for Germany. But in the late 2010s–early 2020s, Germany decided to reduce cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Berlin encouraged its partners to abandon military operations in Yemen. But, by 2022, Germany demonstrated renewed interest in

growing bilateral cooperation [Federal Chancellery, 2022a]. However, Saudi Arabia now demonstrates a restrained attitude toward Germany's initiatives. Really, the establishment of intergovernmental consultations will reduce Germany's opportunities to influence the Saudi Arabian position. But the establishment of the platform in the future is possible, taking into account the growing contribution of Germany to the containment of Iran.

Chronologically, until the 21st century, the launch of every two new consultations was separated by a long period of time. Since the 2010s, there have been waves of new consultations, illustrating their growing importance for Germany's foreign policy.

During the Cold War, West Germany established consultations with France (largely on the French initiative since 1963, based on the Elysee Treaty), Italy, and Spain [Federal Chancellery, 2022d]. All of these partners were continental European western democracies. This illustrates not only the organic integration of Germany into the Euro-Atlantic community but also the limits of its influence inside and especially outside it. The influence was less than that of any of the western powers.

In the post-bipolar context, Germany established the first new intergovernmental consultation in 1991 with Poland, which was fixed in a "big" political bilateral agreement. This step, and the launch of the Weimar Triangle (1991), have become elements of Germany's line to ensure strategic penetration into Eastern Europe and the larger post-socialist space. Continuing this course in the post-Soviet space (as part of post-socialist space as a whole), Germany established consultations with Russia (1998) [Belov, 2013] against the background of its noticeable weakening. The decision was the result of parallel interest from both states. As in the case of Poland, the format with Russia was created in parallel to another platform (the "triangle" of Germany-France-Russia). Unlike other consultations with the FRG's participation, only the one with Russia was characterized as *interstate*, but not *intergovernmental*. This was determined not only by the features of the internal structure of Russia (the president or its analogue has enormous powers not only in Russia, but also in Brazil, China, and France), but also due to Russia's special attention to Germany.

In the mid-2000s, the format of intergovernmental consultations with France was transformed into the mechanism of interministerial meetings [Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d.]; also, Germany established the new one platform of intergovernmental consultations with Israel (2008) [Embassy of the State of Israel in Berlin, n.d.]. These steps meant that Germany was actively looking for ways to improve the system of consultations in the sense of their reorganization and expansion. France became the first state with which Germany established both formats (with a chronological difference of 40 years). This illustrates the level of cooperation within the partnership. The restructuring of format of intergovernmental consultations with France (2003) was caused by the increase in the number of tracks of foreign political activity (first, of Germany)

which meant the objective reduction of time for senior officials to develop each pre-existing track of cooperation. Both Germany and France considered the transformation as a symbol not of decline, but of progress in the development of the dialogue. Symbolically, the reorganization was implemented when the dialogue partners tried to prevent the intervention of the U.S., the UK, and the coalition of the willing to Iraq (2003). Another element of Germany's efforts to spread influence in the Middle East was the establishment of the intergovernmental consultations with Israel. The state became the first such partner outside Europe. Israel was not a large state by population and area, but it was rather developed economically and possessed weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the format of intergovernmental consultations became one of the manifestations of Germany's special historical responsibility for the Holocaust.

The new wave of the establishment of consultations was in the early 2010s, when Germany's efforts to strengthen its strategic positions at the global level, especially outside the West, reached their culmination in the era of A. Merkel (2005–21). The majority of countries with which Germany established consultations were rising powers—China and India (in both cases the platform was created in 2011) [Tsvyk, 2019, pp. 212–4], Brazil (2015) [Federal Chancellery, 2015], and Turkey (2016) [Foreign Office, 2016]. As a result, the system of consultations had begun to acquire signs of a global reach. The choice of Turkey could be explained by Germany's hope to ensure full cooperation in the struggle with mass, non-controlled migration from the zones of armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq toward the EU. The FRG tried to institutionalize its relations with the most powerful states in the Far East, Southern Asia, and Latin America, and decided to freeze interstate consultations with Russia. The decision was part of Germany's contribution to the deterrence of the Russian Federation and showed the unreadiness of the FRG to recognize Russia as a rising power at the global level.

In 2013, Germany established the format of intergovernmental consultations with the Netherlands [Federal Chancellery, 2019]. Among the same partners, the Dutch Kingdom was the only state that could not be counted among the powers (but the Netherlands was the power in historic retrospective). The exception was due to the role of the Netherlands as the closest ally for Germany, politically and militarily, to the fact that they had rather developed economic cooperation. In 2014–23, in the decade after the consultation process had launched, each one of the three land brigades of the Dutch armed forces was integrated (2014, 2016, 2023) into one of the three divisions of Germany's army [Federal Chancellery, 2023b]. Institutionalization of Germany's dialogue with the Netherlands (2013) also illustrates the FRG's de facto recognition that the system of intergovernmental consultations with western democracies required quantitative rearing.

The problem was even more evident in the early 2020s, when Germany decided to launch the new wave of intergovernmental consultations. In the first half of 2021, the German elite had

shown interest in creating the same format with the U.S. [Rhein-Neckar Zeitung, 2021]. The FRG wished to institutionally strengthen the bilateral relations with Joe Biden's administration after the "ice age" during the presidency of Donald Trump. In parallel, Germany raised the same issue with the UK. Germany has considered intergovernmental consultations as rather important elements of its interstate bilateral contacts in the post-Brexit era [Federal Chancellery, 2022c]. Additionally, Germany established the platform "2+2" (the meetings of foreign and defence ministers) with Australia and Japan as a potential forerunner to intergovernmental consultations [Foreign Office, 2021]. Germany tried to establish the platform primarily with the Anglo-Saxon powers and Japan for reasons related to the sensitivity of the FRG to the phenomena of Trumpism and Brexit and to Germany's efforts to ensure strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region. There has been a rebuilding of the system of contacts between the western democracies which located in the region (first, the U.S., Australia, the UK, and Japan) as illustrated by the activation of QUAD and the establishment of AUKUS (2021) and Partners in the Blue Pacific (2022) [Vasilyev, 2022]. In the situation when their member states as regional actors in Indo-Pacific region strengthened cooperation, Germany, as an external player for the region, tried to create bilateral platforms with these states. The results have been contradictory. The FRG established intergovernmental consultations with Japan [Federal Chancellery, 2023c]. In the future there is a great window of opportunity for active bilateral cooperation at the platform. But Joe Biden's administration ignored Germany's initiative. The UK agreed to the establishment of intergovernmental consultations in 2023 [Ibid.] but by no means forced their launch. In the case of Australia, there is very little prospect for the establishment of consultations based on the "2+2" platform. The common cause has been the strategic discontent of the Anglo-Saxon powers with Germany's desire, since the 2000s, to further increase its weight and influence in Europe and in the world, including a certain distance from the position of the Anglo-Saxon powers on some important issues. In demonstrating unreadiness and stalling the launch of consultations with Germany, the Anglo-Saxon powers themselves have shown a "special" position in relation to the FRG. And Berlin has found itself in the role of petitioner.

The Functioning of Consultations with Germany's Participation: Procedural Aspects as Indicators

Most intergovernmental consultations had to work with a two-year frequency (Table 1). For the FRG, this means that for every full government legislature (four years), there would be an average of two meetings with each partner. The exceptions to this were the consultations with Germany's partners in Western Europe (as the "domestic" region) and Russia (before 2013). For the consultations with France and the UK (which were members of the informal group of western powers)

the frequency of meetings was a year or less. The frequency of meetings with the Netherlands was every three years (Table 1). This was caused by the differences in the volume of resource bases. In the case of Russia, there was a strictly observed annual frequency before 2012. This reflected that Germany's interest to the using of the platform was at least than that of Russia.

Table 1. The Frequency of Germany's Intergovernmental Consultations: The Plan and the Compliance

Frequency	States (Presence of Frequency Failures: Yes (-) or No (+))
From 0.5 to one year	France (-)
Annually	United Kingdom (no launch steel), Russia (-)
Every two years	Brazil (-), Israel (-), India (+), Spain (-), Italy (-), China (+), Poland (-), Turkey (-), Japan (first time in 2023)
Every three years	Netherlands (-)

Source: Embassy of the State of Israel in Berlin [n.d.] Federal Chancellery [2015, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d], and Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs [n.d.].

The Russian Federation was attentive to the requests of its partner. In 2003 and 2004, Russia and Germany signed two agreements on transit air and rail transportation of Germany's armed forces' troops and military cargo to Afghanistan. As a result, Germany was the first NATO member that was allowed a logistically convenient and safe build-up of military presence in Afghanistan. The presence of Germany's armed forces there was the largest among those outside NATO's area of responsibility for Germany. By 2012, the sides had used interstate consultations for final approval and signing of various agreements and protocols on economic cooperation [Belov, 2013, pp. 5–7]. But the consultations were not yet organized in 2013. In spring 2014, Germany decided to freeze interstate consultations with Russia but, until the end of 2021, the bilateral high-level working group on security policy issues continued to function. Before the consultation process stopped, the working group had been the key platform for elaboration up to the pre-final agreement on the provisions of cooperation in the strategic sphere. In 2013–21, the high-level working group had continued to function autonomically, as the most important element of the frozen consultation. At the meeting of the group in Berlin in 2021, the sides discussed responses to non-traditional security challenges (such as drug trafficking and international terrorism), strategic stability, and the military-political situation in the world and in the Ukraine [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF, 2021]. But after the beginning of Russia's special military operation Germany decided to stop cooperation with Russia on all institutional tracks, including interstate consultations as part of the system of the mechanisms [Federal Chancellery, 2022d]. This decision by the FRG reduced its capabilities as a potential bridge in the future restoration of contacts between western democracies and the Russian Federation.

Before 2014, Germany had hardly encountered the problem of long-term interruption of consultations. But in the second half of the 2010s, there was a growing number of such cases

(Table 2). Moreover, the main initiator of the temporary interruption of consultations was usually the partner rather than Germany.

Table 2. The Features of the Functioning of the Formats of Intergovernmental Consultations

The Partner of Germany	The Number of Meetings (by 2023)	The Date of Last Meeting	The Country of the First Meeting (Germany or the Partner)	The Interruption of the Work, More Than Two Years (+ or -)	The Country of the Last Meeting (Germany or the Partner)
<i>With western democracies</i>					
Spain	25	2022	partner	+	partner
Italy	32	2023	partner	+	Germany
Netherlands	4	2023	Germany	-	partner
Poland	15	2018	partner	+	partner
Turkey	1	2016	Germany	+	Germany
France	23 (+ 80) ²	2023	Germany	-	partner
Japan	1	2023	partner	-	partner
<i>With the states outside the community of western democracies</i>					
Brazil	2	2023	partner	+	Germany
Israel	7	2018	partner	+	partner
India	6	2022	partner	-	Germany
China	7	2023	Germany	-	Germany
Russia	14	2014	Germany	+	partner

Source: Embassy of the State of Israel in Berlin [n.d.] Federal Chancellery [2015, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d], and Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs [n.d.].

By 2023, meetings with Brazil and Turkey have only been held once (2015 and 2016). In the first case, this was due to the internal situation in Brazil. The key problems were the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (who had played a key role in the launch of the consultations) and the sceptical attitude toward the platform held by Rousseff's opponents, especially President Jair Bolsonaro. The relaunch of the format became possible in 2023, with the presidency of Lula da Silva. The second meeting was organized in Berlin on 4 December 2023. Almost all attention was paid to trade and economic issues, with limited attention paid to political ones [Federal Chancellery, 2023e]. Brazil was not ready to participate in the deterrence of Russia. Germany was forced to accept its partner's approach. The key reason was Germany's strategic weakness in Latin America. In the case of Turkey, the reason was specific to other western democracies foreign policies, especially in the Near East and Northern Africa. This made it unlikely that consultations would be relaunched in the near future.

There were long interruptions in the meetings with Italy (since 2016), Israel, and Poland (since 2018). In each of these cases the last meeting was held on the territory of the partner of Germany. Without articulating this directly, Italy demonstrated dissatisfaction with the limited

²In the brackets the number of meetings in the format of intergovernmental consultations (1963–2003) is indicated, the format that was before the launch of the platform of inter-ministerial meetings.

attention by Germany to the security problems in the Mediterranean. Intergovernmental consultations were relaunched only in November 2023. Israel was disappointed by Germany's unwillingness to follow the U.S. decision (2018) to move its embassy to Jerusalem and recognize Israeli sovereignty over the whole city. Germany supported creation of a Palestinian state. After the Hamas attacks in Israel on 7 October 2023, Germany politically supported the actions of Israel, including the land military operation in Gaza. The rapprochement of the countries makes it possible to restart the intergovernmental consultations in the near future.

Poland was unhappy with the volumes and speed of increase in German military spending and also with the use of German armed forces in NATO's groupings in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Warsaw was not interested in strengthening the quantitative and qualitative advantage of German armed forces over Polish ones. It was unique to German practice when, in 2018, not only state, but also officials of the Law and Justice party, participated in the intergovernmental consultations. This situation made negotiations even more difficult [Kellerman, 2018]. Illustrative of this is the functioning of the Weimar Triangle at the highest level, which stopped work after 2016 due to the decline of German-Polish dialogue. Since 2018 there was an interruption of intergovernmental consultation meetings. The Weimar Triangle, with the participation of the German chancellor and the president of Poland, met again in early February 2022. This shows the possibility of relaunched consultations—strengthening its positions in the dialogue with Poland, Germany could reactivate the platform.

In the case of Spain, the lengthening of the intervals between meetings in the intergovernmental consultations compared to the original schedule was caused not so much by contradictions, but by rather low levels of cooperation, primarily in the sphere of security and defence [Federal Chancellery 2022d].

At the turn of the 2010-s – 2020-s there was noticeable reduction in the frequency of the work of interministerial meetings. In 2003–18 there were 20 meetings (on average 1.2 per year) and in 2019–23, only three (on average 0.5 per year). The 21st meeting was organized in France in October 2019, the 22nd only in May 2021 (in Germany) and the 23rd only in January 2023 [Federal Chancellery, 2023a; Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d.]. It has become a sign of declining trust between the consultation partners. In 2017–18, Emmanuel Macron announced the “European army” project, referring to the multilateral military forces of the EU. After a pause, Germany basically supported the strategic project but was in no hurry to implement it. The priority for Germany was that it should be accepted as the framework nation, that is, the coordinator and key contributor for the multinational military contingent. Germany has tried to be that framework nation for as many NATO groups as possible [Glatz, Zapfe, 2017]. The FRG's desire for a Germany-centric concept of strengthening NATO's armed forces became noticeable in the early 2020s

[NATO, 2023]. It was a unique response to leadership ambitions in the European army. Its creation moved at an extremely slow pace. Germany did not participate in the precedent, Takuba (2020–22), the EU mission with a combat component mission that operated in the Sahara-Sahel region with the leading participation of France. France, as the former metropolis for the region, lost the strategic positions rather quickly in the majority of the regional states (primarily in Mali and Burkina Faso). Germany has lost its military presence there more slowly, although in the end with the same result. There was a desire for less strategic coordination inside German-French tandem in the deterrence of Russia and the containment of China. France, in January 2023, had decided to send tanks to Ukraine, and Olaf Scholz visited Beijing in November 2022 without notifying of Emmanuel Macron. At the same time, mutual interest in preserving the tandem exceeded the increased “irritants” in the dialogue. The interministerial meeting in January 2023, with the participation of senior officials, demonstrated this [Federal Chancellery 2023a].

There was the deviation from the declared frequency, but only one-time and for only one year in the consultations with the Netherlands. The fourth intergovernmental consultations were postponed from 2022 to 2023 [Federal Chancellery, 2019, 2023b]. The Netherlands sent a signal to its ally, demonstrating the necessity for Germany to toughen its approach to the deterrence of Russia. Germany committed after the summer of 2022 [Federal Chancellery, 2023b], underscoring the continuation of the FRG’s increasing involvement in the confrontation.

By the early 2020s only two intergovernmental consultations were functioning with a given frequency. They were the platforms with China and India. Germany pays special attention to each of the Asian powers in the context of the formation of a new world order. Moreover, the negotiations with India were mainly devoted to trade, economic, and environmental issues. The sides practically did not touch upon political, or especially military, issues. The situation has been the same even after Germany started its strategic penetration into the Indo-Pacific region [Federal Chancellery, 2022b]. In the case of the consultations with China, the parties paid almost no attention to military issues, but only to political ones. Unlike the example of Russia, with China, Germany in the early 2020s did not try to freeze the functioning of the platform but rather to preserve it. The regular consultations were postponed from 2020 to 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but they were organized virtually. As a part of the community of western democracies, Germany was not ready to participate fully in two parallel confrontations (with Russia and with China), taking into account the scale of strategic and trade costs. However, the consistency of this approach in the future is not guaranteed. A key reason is the influence of Anglo-Saxon powers and Japan over Germany. A sign of this, also of the reduced effectiveness of German-Chinese intergovernmental consultations, is the actual refusal of the parties to produce joint statements. One was published after the fifth meeting in 2018 and fixed the readiness to cooperate on the issue of

reform of the UN Security Council (obtaining a permanent place on it was one of the key goals for Germany). Also, China demonstrated a balanced perception of the EU as a player [Tsvyk, 2019, pp. 210–2]. But neither in 2021, nor in 2023, were there joint statements. In the case of 2021, it could be explained by the virtual nature of the negotiations, but in 2023 they were held in person. It is significant that in principle there was no talk about reframing intergovernmental consultations as interstate ones. The chair of the People's Republic of China did not take part in the work of the consultation.

Joint statements ended the work of the consultation with the Netherlands, starting from the third meeting (2019) [Federal Chancellery, 2019] of the interministerial meetings with France [Federal Chancellery, 2023a; Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, n.d.]. But the “big” political Aachen agreement (2019) that supplemented the Elysee agreement (1963) was not signed at the consultation meeting. This was one more indicator of growing contradictions between the partners. In general, the publication of joint documents was by no means a widespread practice for the finishing of intergovernmental consultations with Germany’s participation. This element was absent in the cases of India [Federal Chancellery, 2022b] and Spain [Federal Chancellery 2022d].

At the beginning of the 2020s, FRG’s consultations with the actors outside the West were focused on trade and economic issues. The meetings with western democracies were used primarily for negotiations on political and military aspects. The most illustrative are the meetings with the Netherlands since 2019 [Federal Chancellery, 2019, 2023b] and with Japan [Federal Chancellery, 2023c]. These two consultations were the most effective for Berlin. The evolution of the agenda fully reflected the growing involvement of Germany in the deterrence of Russia and its opposition to the formation of the non-West as a community.

Conclusion

Since the early 2010s, Germany has been creating a global network of intergovernmental consultations. But the process has not finished yet. Many consultations fell out of use for a long time (with Brazil, Italy, Poland, Turkey) or were ended (with Russia). The new wave of consultations established by Germany in the early 2020s have only been with western democracies. The FRG has stressed its full participation in their community and the political distance from the states of non-West. There were problems in the launch of consultations with the Anglo-Saxon powers (the U.S., the UK, and Australia). They tried to strengthen their role as the core of the community of liberal democracies and ensure greater predictability of Germany's foreign policy for themselves.

This goal has been achieving not by the creation of the platforms of intergovernmental consultations, but by the ignoring or postponing of such projects with Germany. In general, the factor of the confrontations between western democracies and Russia (primarily) and China had a

noticeable deforming effect on the functioning of the consultations. At the same time the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic with its freezing effect was minimal. By the mid-2020s, the system of intergovernmental consultations has not become global. Indeed, it has degraded and become much more western-centric.

In general, by the mid-2020s, the effectiveness of using intergovernmental consultations turned out to be quite limited. There was almost no case in which Germany strengthened its positions as a leading player in the dialogue.

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