

THE ALLIED FORCES IN
GERMANY AS SEEN BY
THE GERMAN PUBLIC

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The relationship between the German population and the stationed allied troops, with which this paper will be concerned, is situated on an interpersonal level. The relationships formed on this level are, however, very dependent on a multitude of other determinants and basic conditions that go beyond the individual level. Political tensions between states also impair the interpersonal relationship. If two states are at war, then the respective citizens will hardly treat each other in a friendly manner. But also contrasting systems of government or huge differences in the social-economic standard increase the social distance. History, religion, language, colour of skin, customs and traditions can either promote or impede the development of a common frame of reference.

All in all, the general basic conditions influencing the interpersonal relationship between German citizens and stationed allied forces are favourable. The Federal Republic of Germany is an industrially developed and democratic society -as are the other states which have stationed troops on German territory within the framework of the NATO forward defense strategy. The members of NATO and the EC refer to the same fundamental values and basic convictions. The retired German ambassador to NATO Rolf F. Pauls called them the "value community of the West".

The network of cultural, economic and political relationships is tight. The right of free movement prevails to a large extent. Foreigners are nothing unusual in the societies of Western Europe and America.

Naturally, there are characteristic national features and peculiarities, but they are not so constituted as to cause a European or American visitor to experience "culture shock". Just the opposite. Today, Western Europe and North America form a cultural complex in which the common elements outweigh the divisive ones - and this is particularly evident in youth culture. The West German population lives in a civilizatory, cultural and political world that is the spitting image of American society - both as regards good and bad features.

Language is the most important vehicle for personal interaction and communication. If you cannot make yourself understood, you can easily become socially isolated. But once again the starting position tends to be favourable here. In the course of the past quarter of this century, the knowledge of foreign languages in the Federal Republic of Germany has increased rapidly. According to studies conducted by the EMNID Institute in 1984, 43% of the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany are certain that they can make themselves understood in English; in 1958, only 13 percent were of this opinion. The knowledge of French has also increased from 8 percent in 1958 to 18 percent in 1984 (EMNID Information No. 6/7-1984, pp. 21-23).

The rise in proficiency in a foreign language primarily applies to' the young generation and particularly concerns the spread of English. For 14- to 19-year-olds, proficiency in English is common knowledge in the meantime: in 1984, 85 percent stated that they could make themselves understood in English, and no less than 47 percent were of the opinion that they could make themselves understood in French. Even if these statements are not factually true, the results do indicate that proficiency in English has become a matter of course for the young generation.

England, France and the United States can be counted among the countries that traditionally rank highest in the sympathies of the West German population (Allensbach 1983). The general climate of opinion towards the Americans, English and French is altogether positive. For many years, approximately 80 to 90 percent of the West German citizens have favoured - especially as regards questions of security - close contacts to the United States and the main allies in Western Europe. In January 1987, 85 percent of the West German population were in favour of "creating an especially good relationship to the United States of America" (EMNID Information No. 1-1987, pp. 4-8).

For more than 40 years, foreign armed forces have been stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to a trend question that has been asked by EMNID since 1952, almost every second German citizen asked in 1986 considered the presence of the allied troops to be an "unavoidable necessity"; one third rated the allied

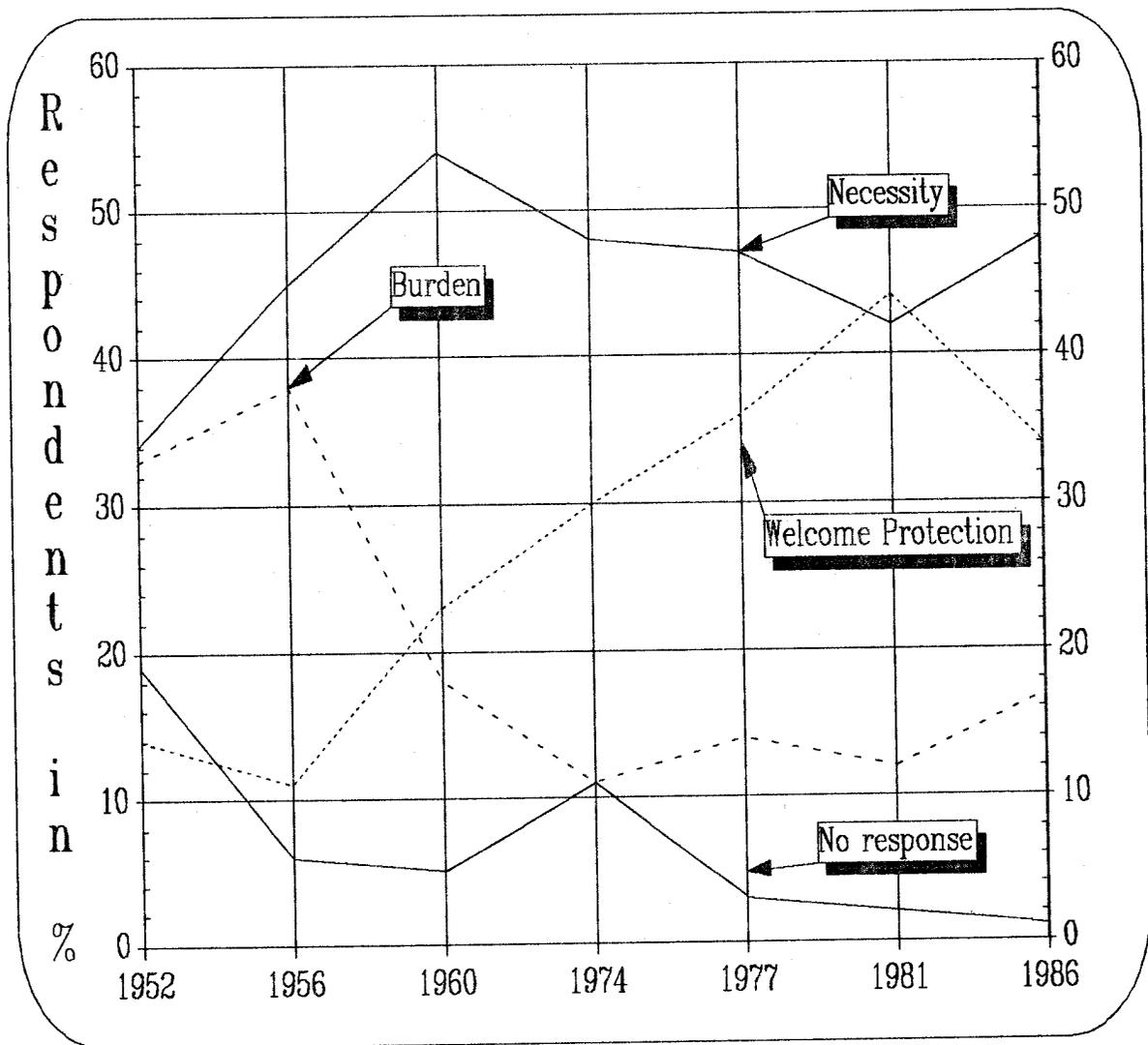
troops as a "welcome protection"; 17 percent of the respondents felt that they were an "undesirable burden" (graph 1).

Graph 1 Allied Troops in the Federal Republic of Germany

Question: Do you consider the allied troops that are currently in the Federal Republic of Germany to be primarily a welcome protection, an unavoidable necessity, or an undesirable burden?"

Sample: Representative cross-section of the population of 14-years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: EMNID Information No. 8/9-1986, p. 11



Although the unqualified support for the stationing of allied troops has been decreasing since 1981, more than 80 percent of the population view the stationing of American, British, French, and other allied contingents on West German territory as a welcome protection or at least consider them to be a necessity.

The public conduct of the allied soldiers is rated substantially more positive today than thirty years ago: in 1956, 17 percent of the West German citizens judged the behaviour of these soldiers in and towards the German public to be "bad" and only 34 percent viewed it as "very good/good". Whereas in 1986, two thirds (66 percent) rated the behaviour as "very good/good" and only 3 percent considered it to be "bad" (graph 2).

The result may seem surprising because it rather refutes the negative impression that one may obtain from many local press reports about the public conduct and behaviour of the allied soldiers in Germany. At any rate, the trend on the whole makes evident that in the course of the years former members of occupation forces have become accepted defense partners.

Among the West German population approval of NATO and of the United States as the leading power continues -to be high (Allensbach 1987, EMNID 1987). In any case, there is much more consensus as regards the basic questions of peace and security policy than is expressed in publications. Despite the peace movement and widespread public discussions, the main features of the security policy - in spite of definitely diverging opinions concerning individual questions - are approved by a large majority of the population, and in particular also by the leading elite.

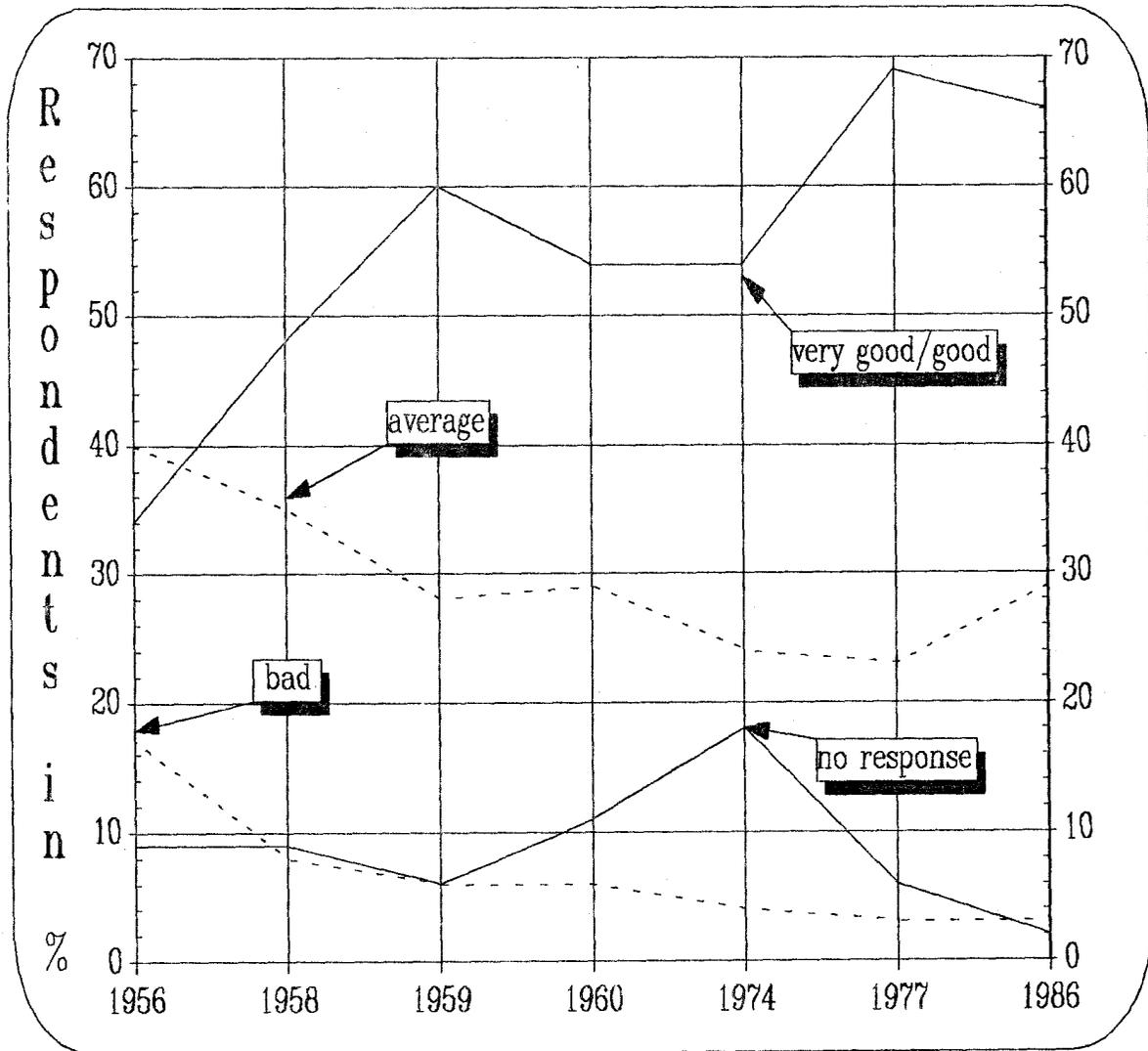
The priority of peace, the demand for security on the part of the population, the assessment of the East-West relationship, the approval of membership in the alliance, as well as the approval of the presence of allied troops and of the German Federal Armed Forces are the constants determining the attitudes and opinions of the majority of the population. They have hardly changed in the course of more than two decades. Even in the discussions on security policy, which have become more heated recently, these attitudes proved to be remarkably stable. As a matter of fact, the structure of attitudes at the moment has been strengthened and intensified.

Graph 2 Behaviour of the Allied Soldiers

Question: And do you think that the behaviour of the soldiers towards the German public is very good - average - or bad?"

Sample: Representative cross-section of the population of 14-years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: EMNID Information No. 8/9-1986, p. 12



Fluctuations in attitude in the past years did not exceed those of the 1960s (Vietnam) and the 1970s (Détente) (EMNID 1986, Social Research Institute of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation 1986, MARPLAN 1987). In contrast to the reports published in gazettes in the early 1980s, domestic and foreign scientific studies regularly obtained the result that there could be no mention of a radical change in attitude of the West Germans towards the Atlantic Alliance and the United States (Flynn/Rattinger 1985, Schmidt 1984).

Starting in 1981, the media adapted a new slogan: there was talk about an "increasing anti-Americanism" among the population of the Federal Republic of Germany.

After all, the subject was considered to be so important that a substantial number of scientists, persons engaged in the cultural sector and politicians - the latter also includes the American ambassador - made public comments, and the academies of churches and parties put, great effort into organizing panel discussions, symposia and weekend conferences.

I do not want to go into detail about the so-called anti-Americanism, especially because the term is so imprecisely defined that it is of no use to me. Furthermore, it contributes little to illuminate the political reality. In this connection, the SPIEGEL wrote altogether appropriately about an "unsubstantial debate" (DER SPIEGEL, No. 49/1981, p. 101). Noelle-Neumann viewed the discussion on anti-Americanism as "another self-enhancing combination of media reports and of the young generation's critical attitude towards America, in particular those who capture the attention of the public as Greens" (Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1978-1983, p. 616).

Ernst-Otto Czempiel and other authors from the Hessian Foundation for Peace and Conflict Research attested that the peace movement had got stuck on the "crude level of prejudice", and they advised that the "dismaying" erroneous perception of American foreign and security policy be corrected through a "constant process of peaceful self-enlightenment" (Czempiel et al 1984, p. 297 ff.).

Independent of such irrational information blockades, which had already been present in certain circles before, the German-American relationship has certainly changed in the course of the years. The post-war generation has retired. The Federal Republic of Germany is beginning to deviate from the role of the American model pupil and is starting to grow up.

A new political consciousness is developing, which more strongly emphasizes national-cultural traditions. This creates more distance to the "American way of life", which, as a result, no longer functions as a model. The situation is similar in most West European countries - including England and France, who had had a "special relationship" with the United States for a long time. In most Western countries a critical attitude - also regarding the person and policy of the American President - is common, without this being interpreted as "anti-Americanism".

Thus, the gradual process of separation, the abandonment of the father's over-identification with America is rather a step towards political normality. It accompanies the growing "Europeanism" that binds us closer to the English, French and Italians. This has just as little to do with "anti-Americanism" as the tendency of equidistance and neutralism that is occasionally ascribed to West Germans. In the public opinion polls, no proof can be found for this. Just the opposite. In the 1950s and the 1960s, the number of neutralists was much higher than today.

If - according to Allensbach's latest figures - 72 percent of the citizens of West Germany are in favour of remaining in NATO, and, at the same time, 58 percent want "to work equally closely with America and Russia in the future", then that is no contradiction. On the contrary, the result expresses the perception of a specific national interest. There is a difference in the level of security within the Atlantic Alliance. Some live in a citadel, others on the glacia - as Günter Gaus recently put it. In contrast to the Americans, the West Germans can feel the physical closeness of the dreadful military threatening potential of the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, their confidence in NATO strategy,

which provides for, or at least does not exclude, the use of nuclear weapons, has been declining steadily. Thus the number of persons who try to avoid a confrontation with the Soviet Union from the start and at the same time urge their government to improve the political relationship with the Eastern superpower is increasing. However, this does not mean an estrangement or even an abandonment of the United States.

As for the rest, one can have considerable doubts whether it is possible to reliably determine a definite potential of neutralists by means of traditional methods of questioning. Neutralism is a politically irrelevant and unrealistic option. Asking about it encourages dreaming. Very few of the persons questioned think of drawing political consequences from an affirmative answer. At any rate, no majority is in sight far and wide that would support a policy directed against America "in the national interests of Germany".

The fact that the conditions of life of the stationed allied armed forces and their dependents - in particular that of the Americans is being increasingly discussed by the media can be attributed to the public discussion about "anti-Americanism", "equidistance", and "neutralism" - and, in addition, such other subjects as "terrorism" and "the weak dollar". The Deutsche Allgemeine Sonntagsblatt, DIE WELT, DIE ZEIT, the Süddeutsche Zeitung, radio stations - all of these have recently reported about the life of foreign soldiers in West Germany.

The German Federal President, Richard von Weizsäcker, demonstratively visited the families of American soldiers in Gießen on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1986. In an interview that he gave in the summer of 1986, the Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Defense, Peter Kurt Würzbach, summoned both sides to dismantle barriers and to "treat one another in a more lively, manifold and uncomplicated manner" (Weltbild No. 15 of July 18, 1986).

In May 1986, already two months before this interview, when Germany was deeply affected by the threat of terrorism, General Altenburg, the Chief of the Armed Forces Staff at that time, called for "more understanding and solidarity" towards the American soldiers and said he was concerned about "the -way that Americans are treated by us": a small, but loud minority was in the process of exceeding beyond the Americans' threshold of pain in various ways (bundeswehr aktuell, No. 51 of May 7, 1986).

The concern that was awakened in the Federal Ministry of Defense at this time also led to some empirical results. In the annual opinion poll conducted by EMNID in the autumn of 1986 regarding the "public opinion on the politico-military situation", the Federal Ministry of Defense included for the first time a question about the relationship between West Germans and Americans stationed in this country. 1,969 West German citizens 16 years or older, in other words a representative sample of the population, were asked to describe the general relationship between Americans stationed here and West German citizens. The result: 7 percent considered the relationship to be "very good", 50 percent thought it was "good", 37 percent said it was "moderate" and (only) 5 percent rated it as "bad"; 1 percent of the respondents gave no answer (graph 3).

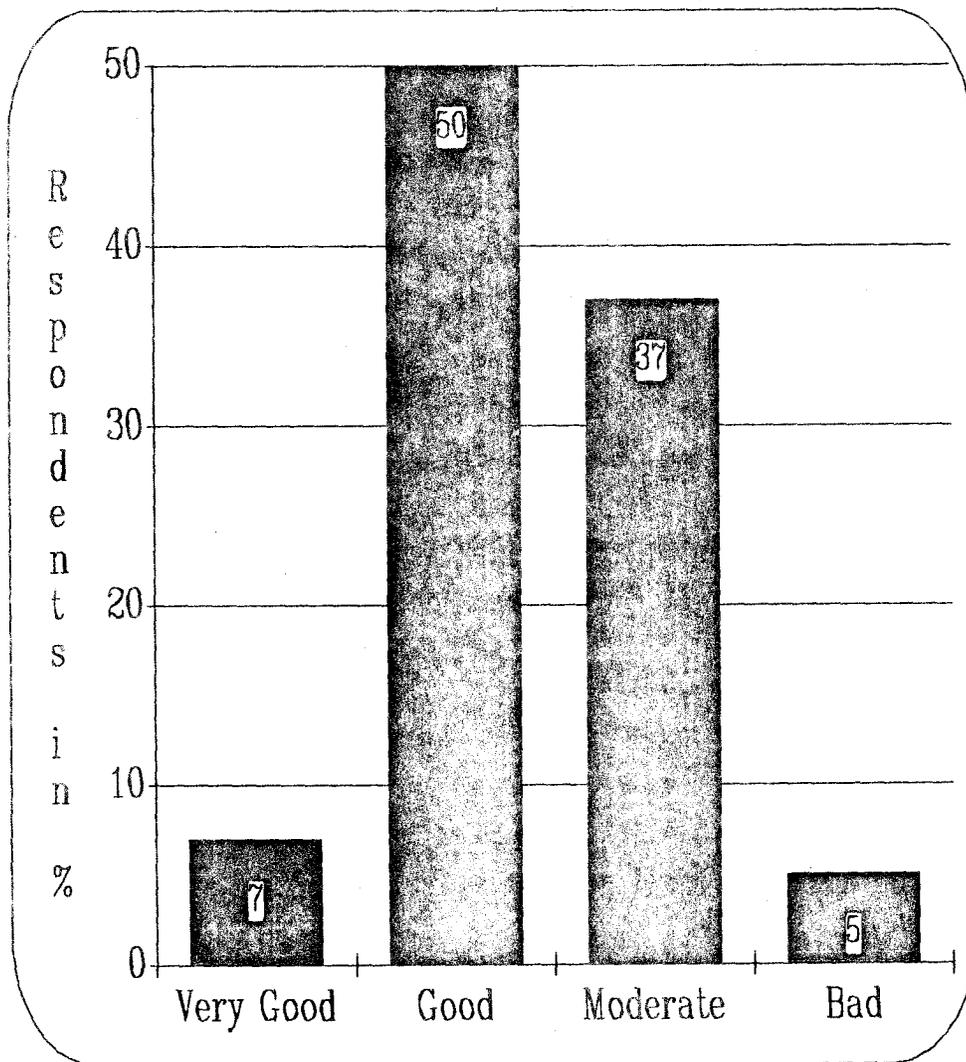
Graph 3

Relationship between Americans stationed here and West German citizens (I)

Question: How would you describe the overall relationship between the Americans stationed here and West German citizens?" (Choice of four replies)

Sample: 1,969 West German citizens 16 years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: EMNID, Public Opinion about the Politico-Military Situation - Autumn 1986



There were hardly any differences between men and women: a few more men than women described the relationship as both "very good" (8 percent) and also as "bad" (6 percent). However, the responses only differed by 2 percentage points. Yet the differences between the age groups are larger: older respondents judged the German-American relationship more positive than younger ones; but also among the young persons questioned (16- to 24-year olds), a clearcut majority responded with "very good/good" (48 percent); only 5 percent of the 16- to 24-year old respondents considered the relationship to be "bad" .

When evaluating the responses on the basis of education, those made by persons with a level of education deviate markedly from the others : the majority - namely 55 percent - of persons with a secondary school degree, students and graduates considered the relationship between Americans stationed here and West German citizens to be "moderate" and only 37 percent replied with "very good/good". But also in this group, only 7 percent answered with "bad". On the other hand, the majority of persons with other levels of education considered the relationship to be positive.

The largest differences in the response behaviour can be found when evaluating the replies according to party preference of the respondents. Whereas the majority of the supporters of the CDU/CSU, SPD and FDP judged the relationship between Americans and Germans to be positive and only a very low percentage responded with a negative evaluation, merely one quarter of the "green" respondents considered the relationship to be positive (25 percent); 58 percent with party preference for the "Greens" rated the relationship as "moderate", 14 percent as "bad", 3 percent gave no response. The aforementioned evaluations of Noelle-Neumann and Ernst-Otto Czempel are evidently supported by the empirical results (graph 4).

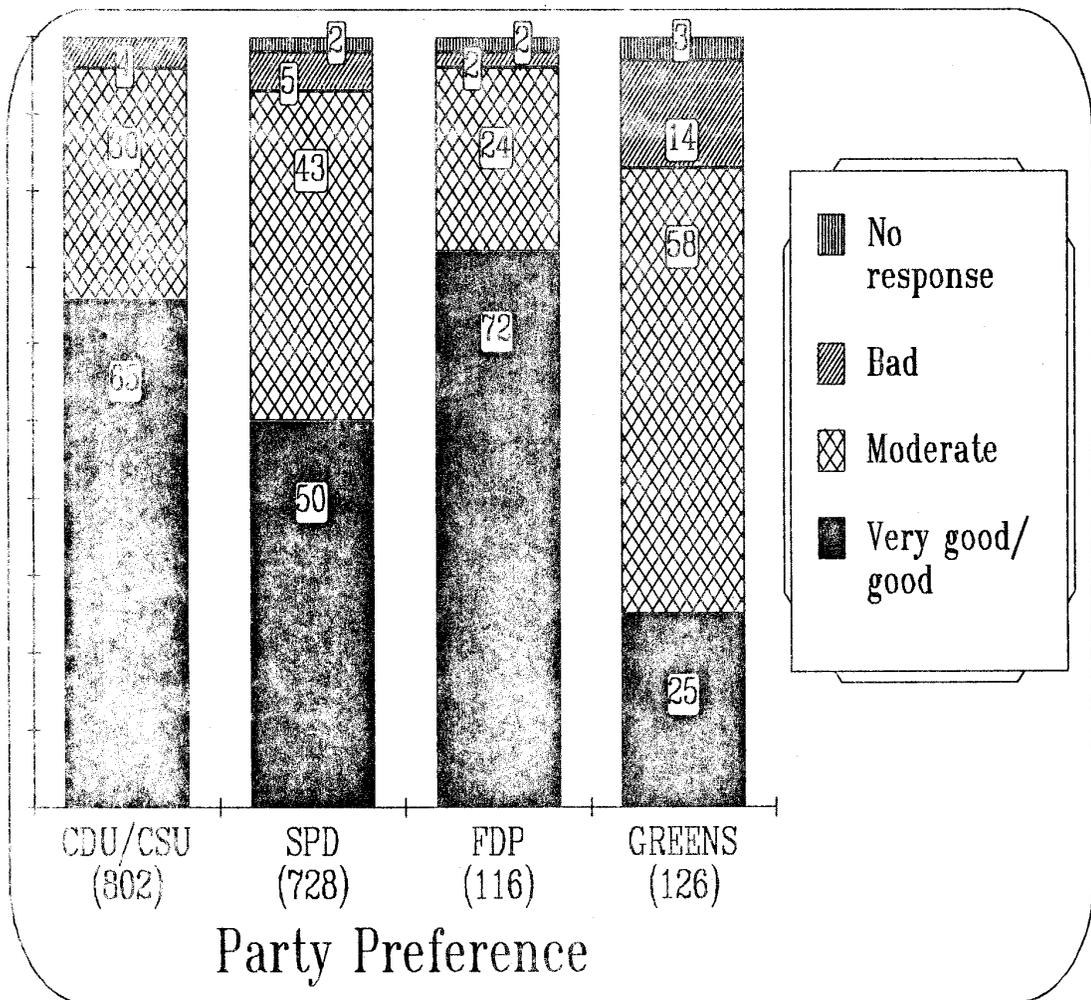
Graph 4

Relationship between Americans stationed here and West German citizens (II)

Question: "How would you describe the overall relationship between the Americans stationed here and West German citizens?" (Choice of four replies)

Sample: 1,969 West German citizens 16 years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: EMNID, Public Opinion about the Politico-Military Situation - Autumn 1986



EMNID commentators spoke of an altogether "high reputation that the American soldiers enjoy in the public opinion of the Federal Republic of Germany". This evaluation is relatively independent of the respective fluctuations in the East-West relationship, in other words of whether the prevailing outlook for the future is optimistic or pessimistic. But it is considerably dependent on one of those stable, long-standing basic convictions, which I mentioned before. The large majority of the citizens of West Germany is still convinced that the presence of American troops on West German territory is for the benefit of securing peace. A corresponding trend question has been asked since 1970. In 1986, 81 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the chance of securing peace could be improved by the presence of American soldiers; on the other hand, 16 percent considered the presence of US troops to be a threat to peace (graph 5).

Therefore, the large majority of the citizens of West Germany - namely three quarters of the respondents - is against an - even partial - withdrawal of the American troops from the Federal Republic of Germany (graph 6).

In view of these altogether favourable basic political conditions, it is understandable that the assessment of the interpersonal relationship between Americans stationed here and the West German population turns out to be predominantly positive. The attitudes are consistent and stable.

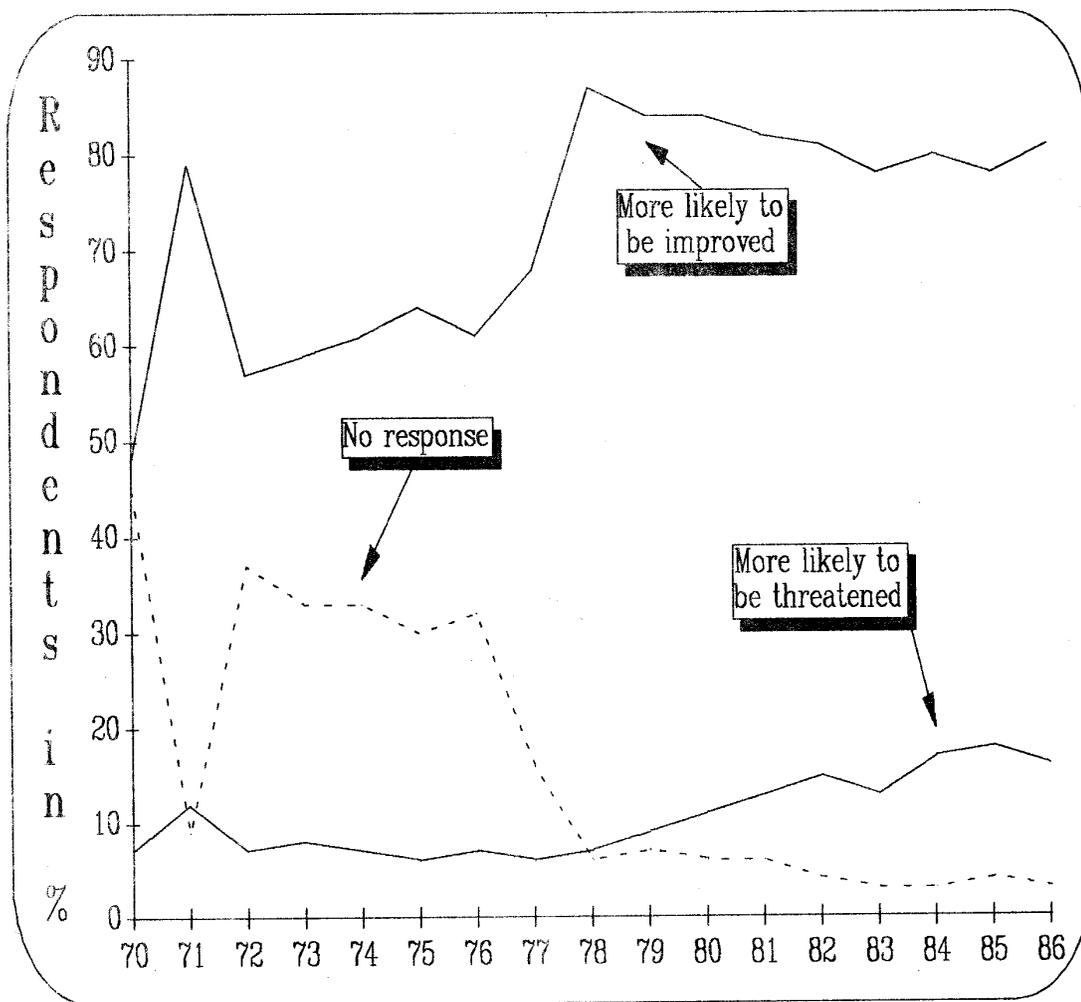
Graph 5

Securing peace through American soldiers in the Federal Republic of Germany

Question: "And will the chance of securing peace more likely be improved by the fact that we have American soldiers stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany, or is peace more threatened by the presence of the American soldiers?"

Sample: Representative cross-section of the population 16-years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: EMNID, Public Opinion about the Politico-Military Situation Autumn 1-986



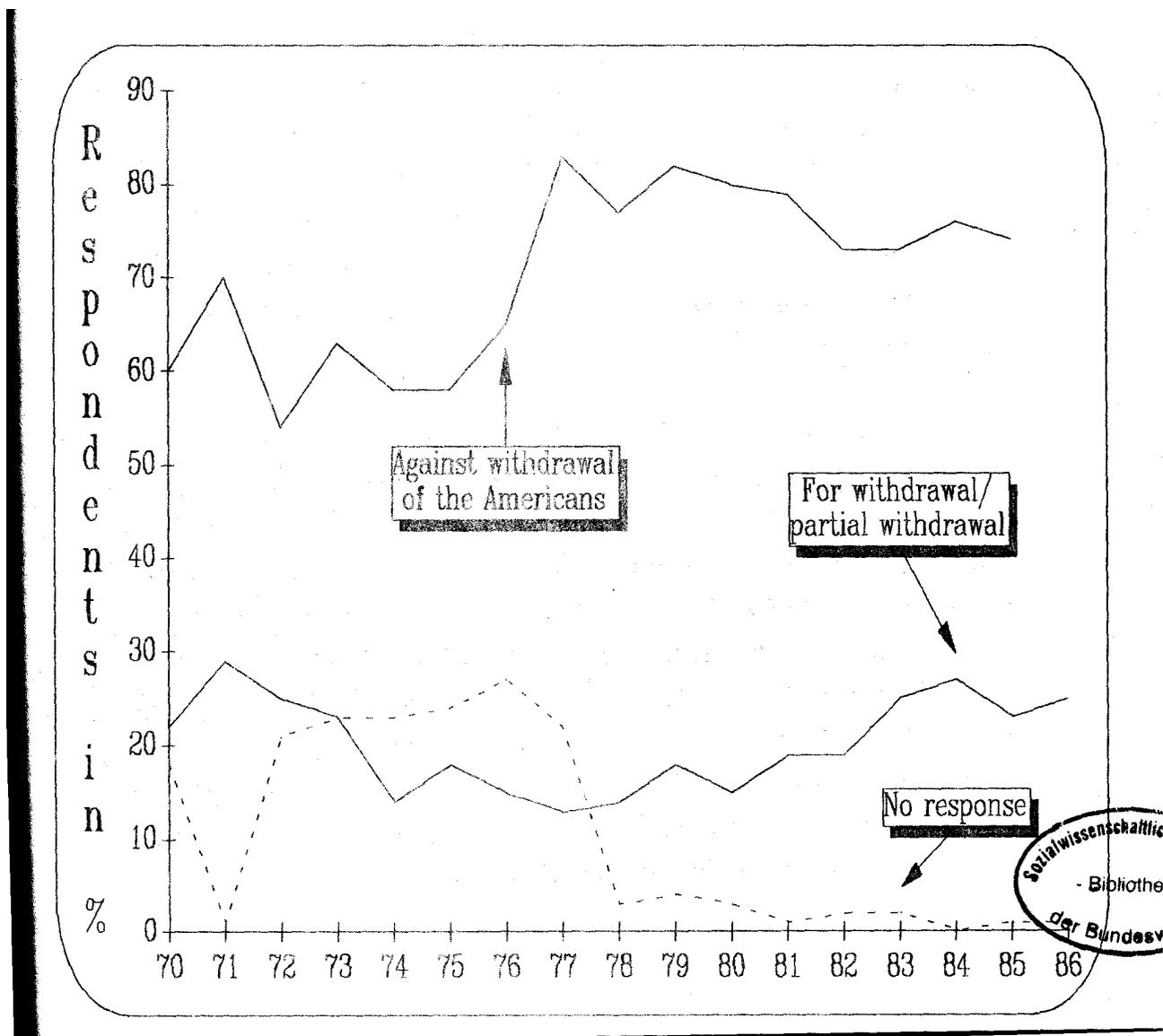
Graph 6

Withdrawal or stationing of American troops in the Federal Republic of Germany

Question: Would you, all in all, favour the withdrawal or partial withdrawal of the Americans from the Federal Republic of Germany, or are you against the withdrawal of the Americans?"

Sample: Representative *cross-section* of the population 16-years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: EMNID, Public Opinion about the Politico-Military Situation - Autumn 1986



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All the illustrated trend tables have one peculiarity. The drastic drop in the answers of the category "Do not know/No response" from the beginning of the 1970s until today is striking. This remarkable change in response behaviour, the decline in the category of uninformed, indecisive, evasive persons documents the change in political subjects that has taken place in the Federal Republic of Germany since the mid-1970s. Peace and security policy - once the exclusive domain of an informed circle of experts - has become the dominating political theme for all. Peace has become the central category of all political actions. And this is also evident in the replies of the citizens questioned in the respective opinion polls.

The promotion of peace and security to the leading position of the political list of priorities is, amongst other surveys, also proven by the study conducted in 1986 by the Social Research Institute of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation: in March/April 1986, the period of time when the opinion poll was held, 88 percent of the population considered the securing of peace a central political task. No other political theme achieved such a high rating. The population is highly sensitive towards questions of security and peace policy. In view of this sensitivity, which has caused the decline of a formerly large number of indecisive answers, one can proceed on the assumption that the appreciation of the Atlantic Alliance and the presence of allied troops also obtained in international comparisons reflects a carefully considered response behaviour.

In February 1987, the results of an international study on security policy were published; this study had been conducted by the Offenbach MARPLAN Institute for the newspapers "Libération" (Paris) and "The Guardian" (London) between November 1986 and January 1987 in the four large Western European nations. The study showed that in the Federal Republic of Germany an absolute majority was in favor of maintaining the military alliance with the United States (54 percent); in Great Britain a relative majority supported this (41 percent). However, in France and Italy only 26 percent and 19 percent respectively were in favour of continuing the military alliance with the United States (graph 7).

Graph 7

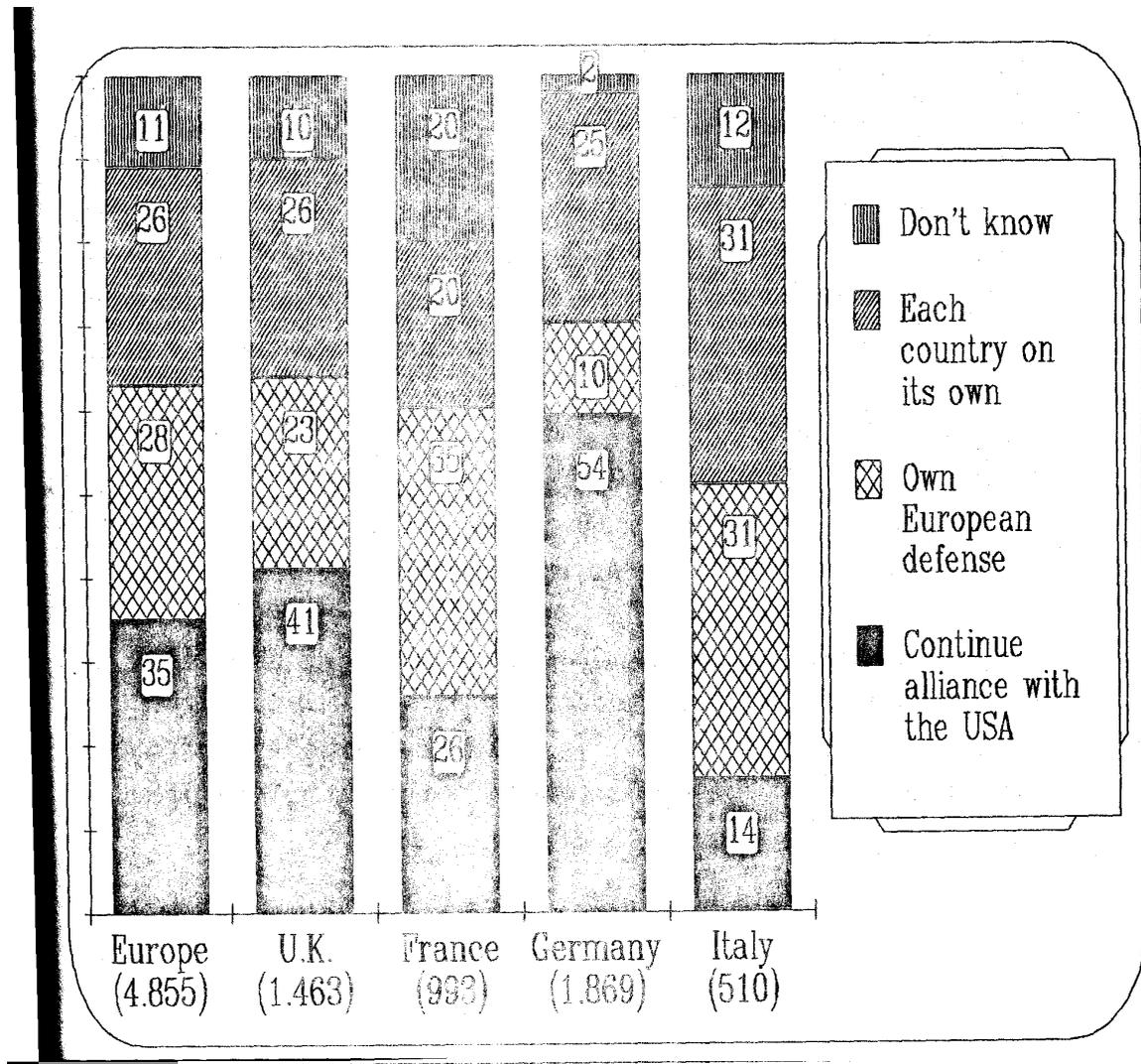
Defense with the ZOO States in NATO

Question: The defense of most West European countries is connected. to the United States in NATO. In your opinion, what course of action should the West European countries follow:

- continue their military alliances with the USA;
- create their own European defense organization that is independent of the USA and NATO;
- or should each European nation be responsible for its own defense?

Sample Representative cross -section of the population 16-years or older in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (excluding West Berlin)

Source: MARPLAN, Armament in Europe, March 1987



As far as we know, the publication of these results did not cause any sort of discussion about "anti-Americanism" in France or Italy. The French Minister of Defense, Giraud, however, seemed anxious about his countrymen's "indifference" towards national defense.

The low share of the West German "Do-not-know" responses (2 percent) becomes evident once more in the MARPLAN study. This signals that the West Germans are aware of the problems involved in questions of security policy in Europe. The subjects of alliance and peace policy are not viewed indifferently, rather they force one to take a stand. In this connection, the West Germans have shown themselves to be most consistently in favour of the Atlantic Alliance.

In view of all these conditions, the interpersonal relationship towards the Americans stationed here can only be regarded as positive, even if most of the respondents did not have personal contacts. Reaching any other conclusion would be in dissonance with the response behaviour, which the individual - according to Festinger - is trying to avoid.

What is true for the American stationed troops, also applies to the English, French, Belgian, and Canadian troops - under predominantly similar basic conditions. However, no quantitative opinion-poll data on the English and French is available, not to mention the Belgians, Canadians or Dutch. Yet, there hardly seem to be any problems here either. Measured on the basis of the 531,500 American soldiers and their dependents, the share of the others is substantially smaller: the British contingent comprises 162,100, the French about 75,000, the Belgian close to 52,000, and the Canadian approximately 16,500 soldiers and civilian dependents. The smaller size of the contingents makes them more invisible and decreases possibly arising conflicting situations. In addition, there are other peculiarities:

The British regular army has always been an expeditionary force. Military stations outside the home country - on the continent, overseas, or in the colonies - is nothing unusual. As a matter of fact, they are the rule rather than the exception. The British Army of the Rhine does not need the local Germans, just as the British expeditionary corps was never dependent on native inhabitants overseas. The army sees itself as one large family; it also integrates the dependents of the soldiers and feels responsible for them. The regiment is not only the place of work but also a kind of home; no one is left alone. The children can attend boarding schools in England. Wives may use the military aeroplanes of the Royal Air Force for a symbolic fee. The everyday life of the wife of a British soldier is filled with a multitude of social activities and social events organized under military supervision and leadership. In any case, there is hardly time to establish contacts with the local population.

The situation of the French stationed troops is different, but also special. Most of their 30 stations are located close to the border. It is not far to France. French draftees who are stationed in West Germany are for the most part from the Alsace. Those who come from more distant areas of France, have volunteered to do service here. Evidently French soldiers and their dependents have no problems of integration in the francophile Palatinate. The contacts with the West German population are described as close and friendly. The lifestyle of France and the Palatinate are obviously very compatible.

As a summarizing evaluation, it can be said that the relationships between allied forces and West German citizens are definitely not bad, but they could also be better - in particular the German-American relationship. That is the general tenor in the reports of the media, the interviews and statements made on the subject, and the little empirical evidence that is available support this evaluation.

In his WELTBILD interview on July 18, 1986, the State Secretary Würzbach indicated from which direction the official German side expects an improvement in the relationship to originate: "It applies to all allies: they must approach us."

As a matter of fact, the "mature partnership" between Germans and Americans demanded by US ambassador Burt will not be able to develop on an interpersonal level, if there is no readiness to emerge from the military ghetto existence. By publishing a

letter-to-the-editor in response to General Altenburg's call for "more understanding" for US soldiers the German Armed Forces journal "bundeswehr-aktuell" gave an unequivocal signal:

"The indifference towards US soldiers determined by General Altenburg cannot solely be attributed to the Germans. If a US-dependent cannot speak a single word of German after three years of living in West Germany, if his view does not exceed beyond the fences of "small America", then a climate for personal relationships cannot grow.

To remedy this situation, the United States would have to prepare its soldiers more thoroughly for their stay in West Germany. Cuckoo clocks, Tyrolean hats, the Rhine River and a Nazi past are just as unrepresentative of Germany as sauerkraut, pickled knuckle of pork and Liebfraumilch wine " (bw-aktuell, no. 67 of June 11, 1986).

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