

**Bio- and Bibliographical Sketch  
on  
Prof. Dr. Thomas Risse  
(Freie Universität Berlin et al.)**

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Thomas Risse studied at Bonn University from 1976 to 1980 with political science as a major and social science and catholic theology as minors. After his graduation he continued studies for a year at the Paris Institut d'Études Politiques before taking up a post as research associate in Frankfurt.

It is likely that some roots of later research interests are to be found in this time, such as the issue of the stationing of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) which also saw the emergence of e.g. a mass peace movement which at the time appeared to significantly influence the option space of German policy-makers. Peace had also been a defining issue for the German churches since the April 1963 papal encyclical "Pacem in Terris" which had called for a right order based on "legitimate authority" and came out against the arms race. The pope envisioned an authority constituted on common consent and negotiations at the international level to promote peaceful resolution of conflicts. Only a cooperative approach could avoid nuclear war. (Roncalli 1963) The Catholic Church itself is a long-standing example of a transnational actor. (Vallier 1971)

From 1981 to 1987 Risse worked at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), which since its establishment in 1970 has been a center of Liberalism/Neoinstitutionalism, bearing chief responsibility for a distinctive German contribution to IR theory in the field of peace and conflict research. From the outset, PRIF's objective was not just a study of the causes of conflict at the systemic level but also of national decision-making processes with its political and societal components, and suggesting ways to empower the latter in a way that enhances the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution. This direction was chiefly influenced by its co-founder Ernst-Otto Czempiel who also oversaw Risse's 1987 PhD thesis, and whose research interests in arms control and disarmament are reflected in the choice of Risse's dissertation topic: the issue of INF. In the resulting study, Risse is explicit about the assumptions that characterize his work and, more generally, that of PRIF: cooperation with the opponent while maintaining one's own security interests is possible and preferable. (Risse-Kappen 1988b:6)

The PRIF circle around Czempiel (e.g. Harald Müller, Gerd Krell and Thomas Risse) is seen as the key representative of liberal and "democratic peace" approaches in the German IR scene. Particularly Müller and Risse, who continue to cooperate closely have also been among the most visible exponents of the Social Constructivist side in the German part of the "4<sup>th</sup> debate" in the IR field which takes mainly place in *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* (ZIB). (Menzel 2000: 218)

Many publications of the early 1980s after joining PRIF make use of Risse's background in Catholic Theology by taking into focus the internal discussions of the Catholic Church on peace and its possibilities to positively influence détente as a non-state actor. (e.g. Risse-Kappen 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1984; Krell/Schmidt/Risse-Kappen 1983; and Kubbig/Risse-Kappen 1984) With the progress of his dissertation, the focus of his articles moved towards a broader view on the making of German foreign policy in the context of détente, arms controls and the INF challenge. The result of this work is published in Risse 1988a.(English version: Risse 1988b) The intent of the study on INF was to "make sense of the muddle of domestic and foreign policy, of public demands and decision-making processes within the political systems involved and the interactions between them." (Risse-Kappen 1988b:1f) It is anchored in the tradition of institutionalist studies of foreign policy. Besides the study of domestic public opinion and party politics, there also is already a hint at later Social Constructivist approaches: Soviet-US relations and German-Soviet relations are believed to influence the threat perception to European security and thus pose the determining environment for the arms-control negotiations while themselves being influenced by the negotiation process. (Risse-Kappen 1988b:2f) Besides the role of non-governmental actors that came into the public limelight, Risse finds an influence of German politics on US decision-making that is surprising given the relative disposition of power. This finding also instigated continued research which brought about his influential 1995 "Cooperation among Democracies". (Risse-Kappen 1995c: viii)

This work on INF brings with it assignments in the US (Cornell University 1988-90, Yale University 1991-92, and University of Wyoming, Laramie 1992-93); a time that exposes Risse more directly to the US field of IR scholars and the emerging debate that pits Social Constructivism against theories based on Rational-Choice. (e.g. Kratochwil/Ruggie 1986, Wendt 1987, Keohane 1989, Kratochwil 1989, and Wendt 1992).

When in 1990, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik* (DGAP), gathered to assess the state-of-the-art of the field of International Relations, Müller and Risse jointly took up the task to address the effects that both the domestic and the international environment of institutions and implicit and explicit rules have on the foreign policy decision-making of Western liberal democracies. (Müller/Risse-Kappen 1990) Risse there makes the case for a link between domestic structures and political-societal institutions to international politics that can be neglected only at the cost of significant loss of analytical value.

Again, in 1994 Risse turns to the classical aspect of “democratic peace” and the prediction that democracies would be less bellicose in an article in ZIB. (Risse-Kappen 1994) He comes to empirical indications that while democracy by itself does not predicate pacifism, it permits and fosters stability by allowing the construction of a sphere of (stable) democracies which among themselves (hardly ever) fight. In this aspect, Risse's study tails the findings of studies by Czempiel 1986 or Russett 1993. In his own 1994 study and a subsequent 1995 publication (Risse-Kappen 1995a), Risse intends to reunite the finding that democracies have a structural bias for peaceful conflict resolution (due to the economic rationale, complex and participative decision-making with checks and balances and their fostering of norms favoring peace and tolerance) and yet engage in wars rather often. The solution he proposes puts the focus on *perceptions* and *interaction*. Domestic structures of societal order are expected to reflect on the character of the foreign policy a country will pursue; furthermore outside spectators are believed to form their own foreign policy stance vis-à-vis a country on the base of their perceptions of the domestic politics of the country. They subsequently infer what kind of behavior that country will show in the international sphere. The security dilemma is thus resolved by a credit of trust in the structural pacifism of other democracies towards another stable, liberal democratic state in the international system. It remains prevalent, however, in the relations with authoritarian states who are perceived as potentially aggressive or even bellicose given their internal structures of domination.

Risse-Kappen 1995d is Risse's intervention at the nascent stage of the German debate on Social Constructivism as led in the ZIB; he claims that words are not cheap – i.e. that communication can very well develop its own reality forming the decision-space of state actors. Engaging in public deliberation is an action with which a state actor relinquishes some power as he puts his own interests and objectives potentially at disposition, exposing them to the arguments of the other actors. (cf. also Risse 1999) This opens up the way of influencing not only by state actors as counterparts but also by transnational actors (TNA), an issue that is present also in Risse-Kappen 1995d. “Cooperation among democracies” looks at *transgovernmental* actors as a particular form of TNA. Case studies show how individual state representatives act independently from national governments, building coalitions with their counterparts in partner countries to gain leverage at home for advancing certain projects. In the case of NATO in the 1950s and 1960s, Risse finds these to have been effective means of European influence in decision-making processes in the United States as the latently dominant partner. These are of particularly relevance in settings of “democratic peace” like NATO, as those are build as a normative community that facilitates the coalition-building of like-minded actors in and out of government, and whose structure and procedures open avenues of influencing the decision-making. One of the key influences for Risse's thinking comes as he acknowledges from the project on norms and international security that resulted in the publication of Katzenstein 1996. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:287)

Transnational actors are also the focus of an edited volume.(Risse-Kappen 1995b) It is put into a line of continuity with earlier works (Keohane and Nye in the US, Czempiel and Kaiser in Germany

– Kaiser 1969 is cited as the starting-point for his reflection). Risse however believes the 1970s debates to have presented a wrong, dichotomic choice between either a state-centered or society-dominated paradigm of world politics depending on the issue-area (Czempiel 1991, Rosenau: Turbulence in World Politics). The more interesting analytical thrust, according to Risse, lies in asking about the interactions of state and non-state actors (particularly as transnational coalitions), and the environment variables determining their emergence and likelihood of success. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:5) This is to be accompanied by a narrower definition of transnational action where only cooperation between sub-units of government and/or society that have a clear purpose and propose a “target state” are considered analytically relevant. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:7f) The proposed contribution to the field is seen as evolutionary: Risse makes clear that the ambition of the project is not to immodestly do away with the 'state' in order to introduce transnational relations in world politics but extend the analytical reach of IR Theory by concepts of transnational action that take over where the traditional interstate paradigm is exhausted. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:15f)

Stephan D. Krasner in the same volume (Krasner 1995) defends the primacy of (unitary) state actors but sticks to the broader 1970s concept of TNAs Risse had rejected in the introduction (Risse-Kappen 1995b:7f). As a consequence, the issues of how TNA can influence norm-setting and decision-making procedures are neglected by Krasner whose perspective is just reverse, i.e. on the possibility of state-control over the action of transnational organisations (mainly MNCs). Risse's proposition aims to integrate this point by making clear that domestic and international structures of governance determine important characteristics of TNAs, their preferences of policies to achieve target states, and the likely impact that these may eventually have. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:283) Methodologically, Risse suggests network analysis as potentially superior to the focus on intergovernmental bargaining in highly institutionalized structures of international governance that open up avenues of influence for TNAs “from above”. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:286)

While taking TNAs into account is already a progress along the lines of liberal Institutionalism in the IR discipline, Risse sees this as leaving open the desirable integration of Social Constructivism. This demand arises causally out of inclusion of TNAs, as Risse sees it, for it demands paying more attention to communicative action and to the logic of persuasion than instrumental rationality. These would be central in shedding light on the coalition-building dynamics and the way they influence the interests and preferences of actors. Moreover it is believed to provide additional insights into the domestic level politics on foreign policy as shaped by implicit and explicit norms and identities. (Risse-Kappen 1995b:312f) This demand bears visible traces of the wish to make the Habermasian concepts of communicative action and the 'power of the better argument' fruitful for IR theory. Habermas' 1981 publication of “Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns” and his later works in this context and towards an “Ethics of Discourse” have been of utmost importance in the German social sciences field.

According to the desires to bring Social Constructivist approaches together with Habermasian concepts, in his latest major article, (Risse 2003) Risse sums up the state of the debate between Social Constructivist and Rational-Choice positions and suggests a progressive synthesis under the mark of a 'moderate Social Constructivism'. Risse claims that the debate is not about methods, as both make use of qualitative and quantitative techniques, but is a debate about ontology in which Social Constructivism assumes a mutual, reflective constitution of actors and structure, which in turn brings up the importance of a “logic of appropriateness” in addition to and even contrast to a “logic of consequentialism” (Risse 2003:107 – in reference to March/Olsen 1998). Risse here puts another modus of action, more specific for the German debate, to the front: argumentative action that aims at achieving a common understanding (*argumentatives, verständigungsorientiertes Handeln*) as the base for further action/negotiation, which can also be in the interest of actors with an instrumental rationality. Engaging in communication about appropriateness, e.g. for legitimacy, supposes a partner who is potentially open to arguments and persuasion. This however, as already suggested in Risse-Kappen 1995d can be dangerously derailing to a pure instrumental rationality as it puts the own preferences, and potentially even identity, at disposition to counter argumentation.

With argumentation being an empirically relevant fact in the international sphere, Risse suggests that the focus for research should be on the consequences and conditions for communicative action. This should reflect the incorporation of a 'moderate Social Constructivism' on the action-theoretical base of liberal and institutional theories of international relations. As the Habermasian approach is also centered on actors rather than the structural level, this should simplify the debate with Rational Choice actor-models – which may even be embedded in the wider Social Constructivist approach.

Thomas Risse was called to the Free University of Berlin as head of the Center for Transatlantic Foreign and Security Policy in 2001. He there teaches among other things a seminar on “Social Constructivism in IR” where he distinguishes “moderate” and “radical” versions of the approach.

### **Current Research Interests:**

One topic that emerges from the mid-1990s interest for TNAs lies with the specific nature of the EU which “can neither be understood as primarily an intergovernmental nor a supranational institution” (Risse-Kappen 1995b: 286) The outgrowth of this interests is a project with his former colleague at Konstanz Bernhard Giessen, and combines the interest in communicative action and the EU as a highly structured international sphere. It intends to take the case of the reactions to Haider's FPÖ's participation in the Austrian government to see to what degree a European Public Sphere has been created. In an extension to this, a cooperation with Florence's EUI investigates the processes by which Europeanization impacts upon and transforms collective identities relating to the nation-state.

As a current “spin-off” of the ongoing “Frankfurt-connection” with Harald Müller, Risse helped develop a research project at PRIF that looks at “arguing and bargaining in international relations” (the project's title) and aims to investigate the conditions under which argumentative/communicative action influences the outcomes of multilateral negotiations. In a similar vein, Risse co-leads with Müller the project “Arguing in Multinational Relations” that builds on the theoretical insights published earlier by Thomas Risse in Risse 2000. This project's objective is to systematically investigate (i.e. with case studies) the role and impact of arguing based on communicative rationality as opposed to bargaining based on strategic rationality in international negotiations leading to the creation of international norms or agreements. Public discourses and diplomatic talks are considered with a special interest in the 'reflective' effects of deliberation and the mechanisms of influence for materially less powerful actors.

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