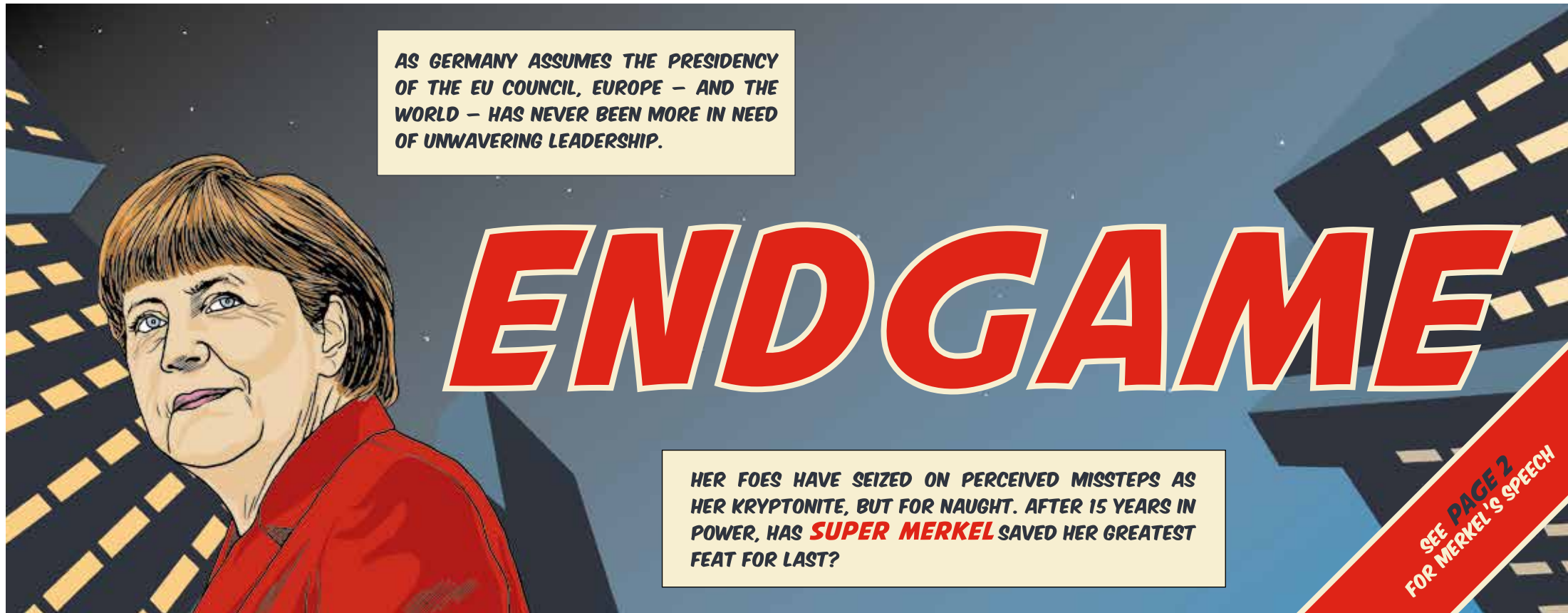


# The German Times

A GLOBAL NEWSPAPER FROM BERLIN

July 2020

ISSN 1864-3973



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## Commission possible

Ursula von der Leyen is working hard to offset the impact of the pandemic

BY SYLVIA SCHREIBER

The idea of selling the European Green Deal as Europe's "man on the moon moment" was no doubt very much to the liking of Ursula von der Leyen. She is an expert at setting the perfect stage for introducing policies with an emotive tone and professional glow. Last December, less than 14 days after being elected president of the European Commission, von der Leyen stepped up to the microphone to announce a new epoch – one in which green investments and regulations would usher in the ecological transformation of Europe. She spoke of the "mobilization of the entire continent" and called for the "decarbonization of industry and transportation," promising at least €100 billion in new funds. The goal was to render Europe climate neutral by 2050, with an interim target of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by at least 50 percent by 2030.

Although von der Leyen has a reputation for launching large projects without knowing exactly if or where they were going to land, her plan for a Green Deal actually came at the perfect moment, as millions of young people were taking part in the Fridays for Future demonstrations. After a somewhat bumpy inauguration, the new president – the first woman to head the

European Commission – garnered respect for her latest launch. She brought a breath of fresh air to the Brussels behemoth and encouraged her officials to bundle all planned environmental, energy and economic legislative proposals together in a new package under the Green Deal banner: the ambitious climate protection law, closed-circle economies, recycling regulations, sustainable agriculture,

there were even export bans of medical goods to other EU countries. There were also ugly scenes at border crossings and loud cries from Southern Europe, which felt abandoned, especially by Germany. The number of virus-related infections and deaths skyrocketed and the lockdowns began, with each EU country fending for itself.

In those early days of the pandemic, Ursula von der Leyen had

## Von der Leyen passionately presented what she called a Marshall Plan for Europe

CO<sub>2</sub> taxation, the rededication of entire budgets, etc. The year 2020 was supposed to mark the launch of the ecological age – with Europe at the very forefront of efforts to save the planet.

Of course, everything turned out differently. And in January and February, as COVID-19 made its way from China to Europe, as the first mass graves appeared in Italy and the healthcare systems of EU member states teetered on the verge of collapse, the EU was nowhere to be seen. Each nation pursued its own course on border closings and health regulations and

all but disappeared. "It was as if she didn't know whether there was anything she could even do with the commission at that moment," says one Brussels insider. After all, the EU does not do health policy, which is still the domain of each individual member state.

It was not until late March that the president emerged from her Corona shock, issuing the first guidelines for health-related border management, introducing a strategic EU stock of medical equipment and reopening the flow of goods at Schengen borders via the "Green Lane." The Euro-

pean Commission also cooperated with member states to bring back 600,000 EU citizens stranded abroad and in some cases loosened EU budgetary and financial regulations for EU countries and industries. Still, the EU had not yet provided any concrete road map for Europe to protect its citizens and emerge united from the crisis.

"Europe has been ambushed by an unknown enemy," wrote von der Leyen in the conservative daily *Die Welt*. Soon thereafter came the moment when the president – a passionate horse rider – took up the reins again. After Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Emmanuel Macron presented a gigantic reconstruction plan for Europe consisting of €500 billion in grants for EU members in need, von der Leyen added an additional €250 billion in credit for an EU recovery plan to be supplemented by the 2021–2027 EU budget with a volume of roughly €1.1 trillion.

With clenched fists emphasizing every sentence, von der Leyen passionately presented what she called a "Marshall Plan for Europe" to the EU parliament: "We will get out of this crisis together and make decisions about future investments together." The plan would later be given the more contemporary name "Next Generation EU."

By mobilizing this huge sum of EU funds, von der Leyen was

*continued on page 3*

## A HERCULEAN TASK

BY PUBLISHER  
DETLEF PRINZ

Anyone in 2020 with a pair of eyes or ears cannot help but recognize the enormity of the tasks and challenges confronting Germany's current presidency of the EU Council. At stake is nothing less than the internal reconciliation of Europe and the fortification of our continent in the eyes of the world, so that it can again play an important role in international affairs and speak with a united voice that can be heard across the globe. This is where we stand at the moment.

The fact that expectations of Germany's Council presidency also include the finalization of the EU's



financial framework, ambitious progress on EU climate policy and the sustainable reinforcement of our continent's digital sovereignty – not to mention addressing the never-ending conflict in the Middle East and the ongoing crisis with Iran – shows how critical German Chancellor Angela Merkel's political experience will be in the coming months, just as her much vaunted ability to distinguish between what's important and what's urgent will be indispensable in holding the European Union together by means of an appeal to both our larger and smaller member states. This is a herculean task. Nevertheless, I am personally convinced that if there is anyone in Europe up to the job of tying up the EU's many loose ends into one cohesive whole and giving our continent the boost it so urgently needs, that person is Angela Merkel. We should all wish her the best of luck, as Germans – and as Europeans.

BY WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

For more than a decade, the European Union has been in constant crisis mode – from the financial and the refugee crises to the seemingly never-ending Brexit negotiations. The COVID-19 pandemic is more than just the newest addition to this conglomerate of challenges that former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has dubbed Europe's "polycrisis." The economic and political repercussions of the pandemic are so severe that European leaders cannot resort to their usual tactics of incremental adaptation. This time, it will simply not be enough. With the European Union at the brink, all eyes have turned

to Germany. This is not just because Berlin happens to hold the EU Council presidency for the second half of 2020 – although this role does put the country in the driver's seat. All across Europe, governments are looking for German leadership because – whether it likes it or not – Germany has become Europe's "indispensable nation," as then-Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski proclaimed in 2011. This does not mean that Germany should assume the role of

hegemon in the European Union or that it could or should actually lead alone. It means that, without German leadership, there is not much hope for the EU to successfully cope with the challenges it is facing. Germany assuming a forward-looking leadership position, while not alone sufficient for Europe's economic recovery and the development of a truly common European foreign and security policy, is one necessary condition. For Germany, there is no more vital national interest than the

survival of the European Union – for both economic and political reasons. While we often discuss our economic dependence on exports to China, it is the European single market that will determine the future of the German economy, which would be devastated if European integration were to unravel.

As Chancellor Angela Merkel recently noted, "Germany will only fare well in the long term if Europe fares well." In political terms as well, Germany is dependent on European cooperation.

It is an exceptional moment in the history of Germany as it is surrounded by friendly neighbors who are (almost all) members of its most important international institutions, the EU and NATO.

Our security and our political influence in the world depend on these partnerships. In a world increasingly shaped by great-power strategic rivalries and transnational risks, the European nation-state alone offers no refuge – not even for the most populous member state of the European Union.

How Germany and its partners deal today with the pandemic and its repercussions will shape the European Union of tomorrow. Germany could become Europe's "enabling power" and,

*continued on page 2*

## Hanging together

Germany must enable the EU to become a stronger foreign policy actor



The tasks ahead of us are tremendous. They require tremendous exertions. They need parliamentary debate, they need political mediation, they need cultural transposition into our various countries and regions.

Five issues are particularly important to me at this time: our fundamental rights, cohesion, climate change, digitalisation and Europe’s responsibility in the world. These five issues are important because we must lastingly transform Europe if we want to protect it and preserve it. For only then will Europe be able to play a sovereign and responsible role of its own in a rapidly changing global order.

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious and unforgiving impact on people in Europe. It has claimed more than 100,000 lives in Europe alone. Our economy has been struck a heavy blow. The reverberations continue to shake us. Millions of workers have lost their jobs. Many EU citizens have come to fear for their livelihoods, in addition to fearing for their health and the health of their families.

In order to break chains of infection, temporary restrictions had to be placed on the most elementary fundamental rights. This was a very high price to pay, since generations of Europeans had fought hard to win these fundamental rights. As someone who lived 35 years under a system that denied its citizens freedom, the decision to limit these rights during the pandemic was one that I found immensely hard to take.

It is in this historic phase that Germany takes over the Council presidency. I have great respect for this task, but also a great passion for it. For I trust in Europe. I am a firm believer in Europe – not just as our heritage, but as providing hope and vision for the future. Europe is not just our destiny, a legacy that has been passed on to us, imposing obligations. Europe is a living entity that we can shape and transform. We will be able to preserve our beliefs and our freedoms with Europe – and not without it.

Just think of the tests and trials that Europe has recently survived – the failure of the Constitution for Europe fifteen years ago, the economic and financial crises and the refugee flows we saw in 2015 – Europe has overcome all these crises because ultimately everyone knew what was indispensable: fundamental rights and cohesion. Human rights and civil liberties, the inviolability of human dignity, free development of the individual’s personal, political and social being, protection from discrimination and disdain, and equality – not just theoretical but lived equality – these form the ethico-political foundation on which Europe is built. That is Europe’s promise. We must live

up to this promise by ensuring that citizens really can be free to live according to their religious beliefs, their cultural or political convictions, that they may pursue their own idea of happiness or the good life.

The pandemic has shown us all very clearly how precious fundamental rights are, how elementary the freedoms are that they guarantee. They must be bolstered and supplemented by the second principle that makes Europe what it is: cohesion. Europe will only emerge strengthened from this crisis if we are willing, in spite of all our differences, to find joint solutions, and if we are willing to see the world through each other’s eyes and to be understanding of each other’s perspectives.

Europe will be stronger than ever after the crisis if we strengthen our community spirit. Nobody will get through this crisis on their own. We are all vulnerable. European solidarity is not just a humane gesture, but a lasting investment. European cohesion is not just a political imperative, but also something that will pay off.

It is also the leitmotif of our Council presidency: “Together for Europe’s recovery.” Together with the federal government, I will devote myself passionately to this task.

The German presidency’s top priority is to see Europe emerge from the crisis united and stronger. But we don’t merely want to stabilize Europe for the short term. That would be too little. What we want is a Europe that gives grounds for hope. We want a Europe that tackles the tasks at hand courageously and with self-assurance. We want a Europe that is capable of coping with the future, that holds its own in the world in an innovative and sustainable manner. We want a new beginning for Europe.

This resolve was the springboard for the Franco-German initiative of mid-May. Together with French President Emmanuel Macron, I proposed a €500 billion recovery fund for Europe. I am pleased that the European Commission is incorporating many aspects of this Franco-German initiative into its proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework and the recovery program. Discussions on this basis are currently ongoing in the European Council under the leadership of Charles Michel. Our common goal is to reach agreement as quickly as possible. Because the extent of the blow to the economy calls for rapid action. There is no time to lose – only the weakest would suffer. The situation is exceptional – in fact, unprecedented in the history of the European Union. That is why Germany has advocated an exceptional and unprecedented exertion, to the tune of €500 billion.

Europe’s magic may bind again

Speech given at the European Parliament by Chancellor Angela Merkel on the objectives of Germany’s presidency of the Council of the EU 2020

Brussels, July 8, 2020



Start-up: German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Brussels on July 8, presenting Germany’s agenda for its presidency of the Council of the EU

What is important now is that we as Europe reach agreement.

I am convinced that the social dimension is just as decisive as the economic one. A socially and economically just Europe is crucial for democratic cohesion. It is the best way to counter all those who seek to weaken our democracies and question all that binds us together. For that reason, too, we will focus particularly on young people and children during our presidency. They are the future of Europe, and they are especially hard hit by the crisis.

We mustn’t be naive. In many member states, the Eurosceptics are just waiting to misuse the crisis for their own ends. We must now show them all exactly what the added value of cooperation within the European Union is. We need to show them that a

return to nationalism means not more, but less control, and that only joint action by Europe as a whole can protect and strengthen us.

Efforts to overcome the pandemic and its repercussions will shape our Council Presidency. At the same time, we must constantly keep an eye on the other major challenges of our age, challenges which have not gone away.

Firstly, climate change. About half a year ago, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented her climate program. She stressed that Europe needed to act now if our planet were to remain viable. I, too, am convinced that a global solution to climate change will only be possible if Europe plays a pioneering role in climate protection. The European Commis-

sion’s strategy for a Green Deal is therefore an important guideline for us. Following it closely during our Presidency, we want to manage the transition to a carbon-neutral economy and society and to a green economy with strong and innovative companies – an economy which will safeguard and strengthen key life resources and Europe’s competitiveness for future generations.

It is important to me in this context that we enshrine Europe’s aim to be climate neutral by 2050 in legislation. And so I welcome the European Commission’s proposal, as an interim step, of reducing emissions to 50 to 55 percent of 1990 levels by 2030. With this aim in mind, we will support the work on the European Climate Law.

Another major challenge is the digital transformation. Like climate change mitigation, it requires us to sustainably change the way we live and do business.

This makes many people scared – scared of losing all that is familiar, and scared by the speed of change. But the commitment to digitalization, like the commitment to climate change mitigation, does not mean abandoning all that we have built up and thus risking the jobs of millions of Europeans. On the contrary: this is a necessary transformation of our society which will bring greater protection and sustainability in the long term. It is important that Europe become digitally sovereign. We want to make progress, particularly in key areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, but also in the development of a trustworthy and secure digital infrastructure.

Protecting our democracies effectively from cyber threats and disinformation campaigns is also vital. Because a democracy needs a public arena in which knowledge and information can be shared and where people can enter into discussion and agree on how they want to live. Right now we see how the pandemic cannot be tackled with lies and disinformation, or with hatred and hate speech. Fact-denying populism is being shown its limits. Truth and transparency are needed in a democracy. That is what characterizes Europe, and that is what Germany will champion during its presidency of the Council of the EU.

The last issue is Europe’s responsibility in a globalized world. A glance at the map will show that Europe is surrounded on its external borders not only by the United Kingdom and the Western Balkans but also by countries including Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. At the same time, we are living in an age of global upheaval, when the patterns of power are shifting and Europe, even though many member states are part of the

trans-Atlantic alliance, is fending more for itself.

We can and must decide for ourselves what Europe wants to be in this rapidly changing global order – whether we are serious about Europe and whether we want a Europe that retains its freedom and its identity even in the age of globalization. A situation like this calls for a strong European Foreign and Security Policy.

The United Kingdom is and will remain an important partner in this context. Shaping our future partnership will occupy us a great deal over the next six months. Progress in the negotiations has been – to put it mildly – modest. I will continue to work for a good solution. But we should also make plans in case no agreement is reached after all.

During our presidency, we should do our utmost to make progress in three other areas of foreign policy as well: firstly, the accession conference at least with North Macedonia, perhaps Albania too – an important step towards giving the countries of the Western Balkans a prospect of EU accession – and, secondly, our relations with our neighbouring continent Africa and the African Union, which we want to intensify for the future at an EU-Africa Summit. This will still include issues relating to cooperation on migration. We bear a special responsibility to move forward on asylum and migration policy. This question requires much political sensitivity, but we must not look away; rather, we have to face up to this humanitarian and political task together.

Thirdly, and not least of all, we will be addressing our strategic relations with China, which are characterized by close trade links but equally by very different approaches to social policy, particularly respect for human rights and the rule of law. Even if the EU-China Summit unfortunately cannot take place in September, we want to continue the open dialogue with China.

During our presidency of the Council of the EU, we also intend to continue our deliberations on whether or not we want to retain the principle of unanimity in matters of foreign and security policy. And we should debate what lessons Europe can learn from the COVID-19 crisis, for example how Europe’s sovereignty in the health sector could be strengthened.

In December 2020, Ludwig van Beethoven, composer of the European anthem, would have been 250 years old. His 9th Symphony overwhelms me again and again, even after all this time. Every time I listen to it, I discover something new in the music that impresses and moves me – and it’s the same with Europe. Europe, too, can be rediscovered again and again. So permit me to end with the hope that Beethoven’s message, the spirit of brotherhood and harmony, may guide us in Europe. ■

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**Publishing House**  
Times Media GmbH  
Tempelhofer Ufer 23-24  
10963 Berlin  
Tel.: +49 30 21505-400

Printed in Berlin by  
Dogan Media GmbH  
An der Brücke 20-22  
64546 Mörfelden-Walldorf

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**www.times-media.de**

Press deadline  
July 17, 2020

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together with its partners, take decisive steps toward a stronger EU, endowing it with the necessary resources and capabilities to act effectively where nation-states cannot.

Or Europeans could watch the return of more nationalist policies and all that comes with them – the ultimate nightmare for Germany. This is why Berlin must embrace a European imperative.

Whatever it does in the months ahead, Germany should define and prioritize its actions according to two criteria: first, whether they enhance the EU’s ability to recover economically and politically; and second, whether they enable the EU to become a more credible international actor, able to protect its values, interests, and sovereignty in an increasingly harsh international security environment.

Fortunately, German elites seem to have understood that the pandemic is the final wake-up call. The recent Franco-German initiative for a recovery

fund may indeed be a historic step for European integration. It sends an explicit and powerful signal of empathy and solidarity – a message so sorely missed of late. If adopted, it will helpfully help the whole of Europe to recover and indeed prosper.

Yet, German leadership will also be needed in strengthening Europe’s position in the world. Given the changing character of the trans-Atlantic partnership and the more confrontational policies of both Beijing and Moscow, Berlin should double down on efforts to enable the European Union to defend its values, its interests and its sovereignty in the world.

As EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell has repeatedly argued: “In a competitive environment, Europeans need to relearn the language of power.” But the EU will not be able to speak the language of power as long as Germany does not.

Although the Europeans should stick to their instincts

and try to forge rules-based solutions within multilateral institutions, they should do so from a position of cohesive strength and based on reciprocity, recognizing that other actors may not wish to share our rules-based approach. Collectively, Europe, at least in theory, has the power and the capability to make its voice heard and ensure that it does not fall victim to 21st-century power politics. As Benjamin Franklin once said: “We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”

If today holds an historic mission for Germany, it is this: Keeping the EU together and enabling it to become a stronger foreign policy actor in the world.

Ambassador **Wolfgang Ischinger** is Chairman of the Munich Security Conference and Senior Professor for Security Policy and Diplomatic Practice at the Hertie School in Berlin.

Also from the MSC

The timing of Germany’s EU Council presidency could not be more significant: The COVID-19 pandemic has created what is probably the single most serious challenge to the survival of the EU as we know it.

In a special Munich Security Brief, we call for Germany to become Europe’s “enabling power,” that is, a country that fosters, facilitates and spurs on European progress rather than slow-walking it into the future. To this end, we argue that Germans now must embrace and implement the “European imperative.” Whatever Germany does in the months ahead, it should evaluate its actions according to two criteria: first, whether they enhance the EU’s ability to recover economically and politically; and second, whether they enable the EU to become a more credible international actor able to protect its values, interests and sovereignty in an increasingly harsh security environment.

*The Enabling Power. Germany’s European Imperative* is available online in English and German at: **www.securityconference.org**





At the top of the agenda: cranking up the economy, tackling climate change, countering the rise of illiberal democracies

BY PETRA PINZLER

We are facing “the greatest challenge in the history of Europe.” When Angela Merkel uttered these words in the Bundestag only a few days before Germany assumed the presidency of the EU Council, the chancellor was not referring to the climate crisis. Nor was she talking about the massive and ever-increasing destruction of the environment or the ongoing extinction of countless species of plants, fish and insects. Merkel was speaking, of course, about the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past several weeks, the pandemic appears to have eclipsed the significance of all other political problems, no matter how pressing they may be. Yet, anyone who thinks that environmental protection will have to be put on the backburner – as has happened so often in the past – may actually be wrong this time. In the coming six months, it’s quite possible that the exact opposite will happen, for a number of different reasons. If all goes well, under the German presidency of the Council, the EU may just be able to achieve more for the protection of the environment and especially of the climate than in any previous year.

The EU Council presidency does not usually involve any significant degree of power in terms of shaping policy and launching initiatives. The basic task of the government holding the temporary presidency is to run the business for six months and – when faced with any controversial issues – find fruitful compromises together with the heads of the other member states, the EU Commission and EU Parliament. In order to achieve this delicate balance, the government holding the presidency must often pigeonhole its own ambitious goals.

The fact that things might be different this time – that is, that Germany’s EU Council presidency could become something truly

special and actually achieve a great deal in the realm of environmental protection, of all things – is due to a series of both fortunate and unfortunate coincidences.

The first coincidence is that the economic crisis into which all European member states have slipped as a result of the pandemic is exceptionally deep. Some regions are even on the verge of collapse. If the EU wants to get back on track as quickly as possible, it will have to engage in more than just routine administration during the coming months. It is going to need big programs, big ideas and big money.

The second coincidence is that Ursula von der Leyen, the German Christian Democrat who heads the European Commission, has made one thing clear from the very beginning: She wants to use the EU to prove that environmental protection and economic prosperity are not mutually exclusive and that industrial nations can indeed be restructured to become carbon neutral. In fact, at the very start of her presidency, she announced that one of her priorities would be the European Green Deal, which comprises an extensive spending program and ambitious climate legislation.

The third coincidence is that the head of government now at the helm of the EU Council is Angela Merkel, a politician who began her international career 25 years ago as Germany’s environment minister at the very first climate conference in Berlin. Since then, Merkel has been among those international leaders who have repeatedly and decisively worked to promote a global climate policy. As her chancellorship is set to end in 2021, Germany’s EU Council presidency will be her final opportunity to forge something big and lasting on the international stage. Her reputation as the “climate chancellor,” and thus a great deal of her legacy, will depend on her accomplishments and achievements in the coming months.

Both Merkel and von der Leyen are aware that most of the programs created to offset the economic effects of the pandemic will only make sense if they also serve to combat climate change. If funds were used only to prop up the old and polluting economic structure, the state of emergency caused by COVID-19 would be immediately followed by a climate catastrophe.

Merkel has thus referred to her EU job as a “double task,” which is to say that “the responses to the economic and social consequences of the pandemic” cannot include

by the EU in the context of the Paris Climate Agreement are comparatively good: By 2030, the EU will reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by at least 40 percent as compared to 1990. Given the pace at which the climate is changing, this is far too slow. If the EU wants to show that it is taking the climate threat (and its own promises) seriously, it must show more ambition.

Merkel still has this ambition. At the height of Europe’s experience of the pandemic in late April, she announced that EU climate targets would need to be ratcheted

of electricity from renewable energies, such as wind, hydro and solar.

Stricter climate protection would have very real consequences outside of the EU, as well, with many international climate negotiators predicting that bold European policy decisions relating to the environment would send a clear signal to other countries. China, for example, might then ramp up its own efforts to become green.

Still, ambitious goals are only a small part of climate policy. The Merkel-von der Leyen duo is also pushing for the implementation of the Green Deal. This involves more support from Brussels for the restructuring of the EU economy along environmentally friendly lines and the assessment of all programs and projects in terms of their climate impact.

makers insist that ecological criteria and environmental protection play a greater role in determining this flow, it will not make things any easier.

Not everyone shares the idea that funding for economic growth should automatically go hand in hand with funding for climate protection. For example, the German chancellor is having a difficult time at the moment, even among her own supporters in the European People’s Party (EPP); these Christian Democrats in the European Parliament don’t think much of the Green Deal and are eager to make all programs contingent upon positive developments in the economy.

“We have to stabilize industry first before we can lead it towards a climate-neutral future,” says EPP parliamentary leader Manfred Weber. He argues that the priority should be to first assess the state of the European economy and determine how many of the new climate regulations it could sustain: “Only then will we be able to think about a new set of rules regarding climate protection.” Weber would like to postpone environmental protection to some point in the future. He knows that he has the support of many Eastern Europeans as well as allies in Southern Europe, where the idea of linking funds from EU programs to strict conditions is also unpopular.

In announcing her plan for Germany’s EU Council presidency, Chancellor Merkel said: “With each summit, each negotiation, each conflict, each debate, [Europe] has also gained substance and [...] mutual understanding. All this was in truth not always easy. There were some bitter conflicts.” But they were overcome. Merkel hopes that this will once again be the case.

**Petra Pinzler** is a Berlin-based correspondent for the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, with a focus on politics and economics.

## Both Merkel and von der Leyen are aware that most of the programs created to offset the economic effects of the pandemic will only make sense if they also serve to combat climate change

“a return to traditional ways of working and conducting business.” The current COVID-19 aid programs encompass the double aim of saving the EU economy and simultaneously transforming it into a green economy. This requires giving the EU an eco-innovation boost.

There is certainly reason to be skeptical. In the past, a number of grand declarations and visions of environmental revitalization issued by new EU Council presidencies quickly withered and wilted, simply because they failed to find majority support for their lofty plans.

The result has been a mixed bag. The EU has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 23 percent since 1990, putting it far ahead of the pack of Western industrialized countries. Even the goals promised

up. She now envisions a reduction of 50 to 55 percent rather than 40 percent. In addition, a climate law is set to make the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 a binding commitment. For environmental activists, this is still far too little; they are calling for at least a 65 percent reduction. But even Merkel’s lower target would have a very quick and tangible impact. It might result in CO<sub>2</sub> certificates becoming more expensive, which would make CO<sub>2</sub>-intensive practices less lucrative.

There would also have to be stricter requirements for diesel and gas engines. Furthermore, member states would have to provide stronger support for housing and energy efficiency in general. And they would have to start generating a significantly larger degree

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eager to show the EU’s strength and demonstrate just how impressive Europe could be as a unit, especially vis-à-vis the US, China and Russia.

By now, Ursula von der Leyen has become the “Corona president,” despite the detailed negotiations that still must take place on the terms of funding distribution. If she manages to keep her eye on the prize and remain a master bargainer with the EU states and European Parliament, it will secure her place “next to Angela Merkel in the history books,” says Guntram Wolf, head of Bruegel, a Brussels-based economic think tank. The Brussels-born von der Leyen – a self-proclaimed “European by heart” – has reached the zenith of her career. “If things go well, Merkel and von der Leyen will go down as politicians who gave the EU a

major push towards integration as a united group,” wrote the *Zürcher Tagesanzeiger*.

But it’s not just the European Commission that is undergoing an enormous power surge as a result of its responsibility to administer the trillions of euros set to be pumped into the EU member states. The reconstruction fund is also heralding a paradigm shift in fiscal policy that many consider to be a big bang in the development of Germany’s EU policy.

Some are calling it a “180 degree turn” and a “break with taboo.” In fact, the €750 billion package will be financed, for the first time ever, by a joint borrowing scheme managed by the European Commission – something that had been a “no go” in the EU treaty until now. “Angela Merkel is finally doing the thing that people have been expecting Germany to do

for years, namely to accept a community of debt,” enthused Jean Quatremer, the veteran Brussels correspondent for the left-liberal French daily *Libération*.

At the annual meeting of the elite group of French Keynesians known as the “Cercle des économistes” in Aix-En-Provence in early July, one participant described the “sacred tone” in which the macroeconomists spoke of the debt union as a wheel of history that would not be able to be turned back. Angela Merkel, on the other hand, sees it as a one-time financial move justified by the COVID-19 crisis and the potential disintegration of the EU. Von der Leyen herself attributed the abrupt shift to the fact that everyone had had “a glimpse into the abyss.”

Yet another novelty is the consent being given to the European Commission to procure its own funds

on a much larger scale than before. This would mean that the Commission would be less dependent on allocations from member states, thus receiving a big push in the direction of an EU central government. Among the models up for discussion are an EU-wide digital tax, a CO<sub>2</sub> tax and a tax on plastics. In order to be able to implement all of the plans being set up to prepare for the coming years of recession, the European Commission has already had to revise its working plans for the current year.

Behind the scenes in Brussels, policymakers are discussing how much of the Green Deal can be saved in the face of massive layoffs in Europe’s industries. Manfred Weber, head of the conservative EPP faction in the European Parliament, has cast doubt on the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction goals included in the climate package, stating that he

wants to have the economic impact assessed before his group decides whether or not to accept them. Now, the submission of the package and the analysis have been postponed until the fall of 2020.

Many of the legal projects designed to foster digitalization in Europe are also on ice, such as the analysis of the security impact of AI and the expansion of a joint EU research space. New and important guidelines for an EU capital market union and an EU money-laundering directive are still expected this year. A number of other issues are waiting to be solved, including the rule-of-law conflict in Poland and Hungary, the EU’s relationship with Turkey and China, the admission of new member countries from the Western Balkans and the EU’s policy towards Africa. Proposals for a common EU asylum law are now expected from the Commission

in the fall, and the clock is ticking on a Brexit trade deal with the United Kingdom by the end of 2020.

There is one major project where all EU institutions are in full agreement: the Conference on the Future of Europe. After a delayed start in May, it is now scheduled to begin in the third quarter of 2020. For two years, EU institutions, member states, regions and civil society will discuss the future shape of the EU. The search is now underway for a leading personality to guide the process. One of the candidates is EPP head Manfred Weber, who lost out to von der Leyen in the battle to lead the European Commission.

**Sylvia Schreiber** has been an EU correspondent for *Der Spiegel*, *Handelsblatt* and for German public television.



# Breakup therapy

Brexit has roared back onto the political agenda: Can Merkel lead Europe and the United Kingdom to an amicable divorce?

BY DEREK SCALLY

Anyone who grows up with conflict, as I did looking in on 1980s Northern Ireland from Dublin, learns not to trust calm.

The push for peace in Northern Ireland ahead of the 1998 Belfast Agreement was marred, and almost derailed, by the ghosts of 3,500 dead over the previous 30 years – and fears over unpredictable hardliners.

So, too, on Brexit: the common will for success in the transition process is overshadowed by decades of traumatic EU-UK misunderstandings and the real prospect of failure stemming from the determined Brexiteers’ transformation of British domestic politics. Their successful push for the UK to back an EU departure in 2016 opened a whole collection of Pandora’s Boxes, raising a series of political and economic questions that, four years on, remain largely unanswered.

Above all, the vote delivered a body blow to two decades of cautious peace in Northern Ireland which, like Scotland, voted to stay in the EU, but had their wish trumped by the weighted will of English and Welsh leave voters. Maintaining peace post-Brexit hinges on securing economic certainty.

The anti-climax of the UK’s technical and legal departure from the EU on January 31 started another clock ticking: an 11-month transition period during which, barring another extension, the never-ending story of Brexit will reach its latest – and apparently final – climax.

But the world has changed since the Brexit process began: global attention, and political capacity, has been swallowed up by efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic – and to battle its worst health and economic effects.

Tackling the pandemic fallout and securing a new seven-year EU budget are the two priorities for Germany as it assumes the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Just as Berlin took over the EU reins for six months on July 1, how-

ever, Brexit roared back onto the political agenda. Several sets of talks in recent weeks – high-level political and technical negotiations – have yielded, as usual, underwhelming and almost non-existent progress. With the transition period trickling away and attention elsewhere, the specter of a disorderly Brexit is fast approaching.

No trade deal and no extension of the transition period – as the UK insists – mean that the UK’s third-country relationship with the EU is downgraded to minimum WTO trade arrangements.

Hardline Brexiteers insist this will be an adequate foundation for a new, “global Britain,” with an eye toward new opportunities in a re-ordered post-pandemic global economy.

Pessimists predict a no-deal Brexit will bring economic chaos, above all in the UK, with a particular blow dealt to the closely integrated “all-Ireland economy.”

There are four major building sites in Brexit talks at present: the so-called level playing field, fisheries, police and judicial questions, and governance.

On governance, the UK remains allergic to anything that would bind itself in perpetuity to EU regulations and the European Court of

Justice; this is seen as an affront to their newly won independence. But Brussels is anxious to avoid the UK undercutting EU standards and regulations.

The UK rejects the concept of far-reaching, binding “level playing field” commitments, though its negotiators say they will agree to maintain current employment, environmental and consumer standards.

Instead, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government insists that being free of the EU gives it a free hand to subsidize indigenous industry if it wishes, and this must be reflected in any agreement. In other words, it is clinging to the ability to decide policy for itself without being told off for doing so by Brussels or the CJEU.

A key obstacle to a compromise is that London has yet to spell out its own state aid regime, leaving the EU unable to evaluate how a system of parallel state aid regimes would work.

A refusal by London to recognize the Luxembourg court’s jurisdiction and oversight could spill over into other areas of cooperation. It would call into question UK police and security service access to crime and prosecution databases: finger-

prints, license plates and criminal records. That, in turn, could end EU access to UK intelligence resources.

In anticipation of such stand-offs in transition talks, the EU insisted that arrangements for Northern Ireland would not be a negotiating chip in trade talks. They pushed for London to agree to a special protocol to that effect in its EU withdrawal package.

The Northern Ireland protocol aims to avoid the introduction of a hard border on the island of Ireland, but not everyone in Dublin is confident London will honor its commitment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not helped matters either. For weeks, talks that would otherwise have taken place in person were shifted online, which severely limited the possibility of informal asides between rounds.

As veterans of the complex and, charged 1998 Good Friday peace talks remember, using breaks to take nuanced and unofficial soundings in the corridors is as crucial as any meeting-room talks for making possible the seemingly impossible.

The Brexit talks have, in the home stretch, gained in the

person of an experienced crisis broker.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is coming to the end of her political career after 15 crisis-racked years in power, snatching success from the jaws of defeat in banking, currency and refugee crises.

Fate has presented a final – and perhaps the greatest – test of the “Merkel method.” Faced with a seemingly intractable problem, the trained physicist likes to break it down into a series of smaller challenges. With an eye for detail, she solves the individual components and then attempts to reassemble them into one, hopefully resolved whole.

She is not directly involved in Brexit talks, which are led by the European Commission. But if – as is likely – the talks come down to another late-night session in Brussels, the German chancellor is the person you want in the room.

The UK favors a series of pragmatic agreements, in particular on the many outstanding issues; the EU wants Brexit regulated by one, far-reaching treaty that anticipates future problems with resolution mechanisms, in order



Deal breaker: On the heels of the stalled talks between London and Brussels in June, the EU and the UK ruled out an extension of the transition period beyond 2020.

# Reconstruction first, then morality

Hungary and Poland can expect leniency in their dispute with the EU over values and the rule of law

BY ERIC BONSE

Where do you stand on the subject of democracy and the rule of law? This was a popular question during the run-up to the European elections in May 2019, and none of the top candidates was able to avoid it. Politicians everywhere, including in Germany, were calling on the EU to rein in Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński. Even French President Emmanuel Macron vigorously encouraged German Chancellor Angela Merkel to take up a position against the “anti-liberals” and “authoritarians” in Eastern Europe.

Today, one year later, Orbán and Kaczyński haven’t budged an inch, especially after Polish President Andrzej Duda was narrowly reelected on July 12. Duda is a close political ally of Kaczyński.

The battle over democracy and the rule of law, which former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker once fought with notable verve, has clearly lost momentum under his successor, Ursula von der Leyen. The CDU politician let herself be nominated with votes from Orbán and Kaczyński and has been handling the Eastern Europeans with kid gloves ever since. The German presidency of the EU Council is unlikely to change that.

On the agenda for the coming six months, Hungary and Poland are not mentioned at all – in spite of the ongoing investigations into breaches of EU values and the rule of law by governments in Warsaw and Budapest. Germany’s government has expressed its commitment to defending the shared values of the EU: “We will [...] work inten-

sively to strengthen fundamental values and particularly to promote a common, cooperative and constructive approach to dealing with the issue of the rule of law,” read the official statement.

However, this handling is by no means a priority of the German presidency of the EU Council. The announcement was but one of many, and was even issued *after* similar statements focusing on agriculture and consumer protection. In addition, the Berlin government avoids pillorying any country in particular. In fact, the new idea is to encourage not just Poland and Hungary, but all 27 EU states to engage in a “political rule-of-law dialogue on an equal footing,” as the government draft put it. In other words, all members will be encouraged to put themselves to the test.

Even the linking of EU financial aid to the promotion of democracy and the rule of law – something Berlin has been requesting for ages – is suddenly no longer very important. Germany is indeed still supporting the corresponding proposal issued by the European Commission, but Merkel is clearly reluctant to campaign for the proposal on a grand scale. A quick passage of the new EU budget has the utmost priority, and no one wants to jeopardize this much-needed agreement by digging into the pockets of Hungary or Poland.

Even the theme of asylum law reform and fair burden-sharing among member states as part of offi-

cial refugee policy no longer enjoys priority status. Back in 2015, when Hungary and Poland dug in their heels and refused to accept asylum seekers, Merkel continued to fight bravely for a “European solution.” Five years later, Merkel is eager to pass the hot potato on to someone else, which means it’s now the European Commission’s turn to have a go at the subject.

The chancellor has indeed burned her fingers a few too many times in Eastern Europe, and she is unwilling to risk a reemergence of the issue during Germany’s half-year as EU Council president. But Merkel

Tusk was not able to prevail against the directive from Berlin. The former EU Council president from Poland had called for Fidesz to be expelled, but without support from the CDU, nothing can move forward in the EPP.

But it’s not just the conservatives who are having a hard time with Eastern Europe; the Social Democrats are also struggling over which path to take. For example, for some time, Social Democratic colleagues in Brussels and Berlin resisted taking action against corruption in Romania, which has a Social Democratic government. Only after weeks of

## Back in 2015, when Hungary and Poland refused asylum seekers, Merkel fought bravely for a European solution

is not the only one doing her best to avoid trouble; the acting CDU chairwoman Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer is also pursuing a policy of appeasement. In the dispute over Fidesz in Hungary, she spoke out against excluding the party from the conservative European People’s Party (EPP). In other words, Orbán’s supporters in European Parliament are allowed to stay.

This decision has weakened the liberal and only moderately conservative Eastern Europeans in the EPP. Even EPP President Donald

squabbling was the Romanian PSD suspended. That was more than a year ago, and things have gotten noticeably quiet with regard to Romania in the meantime. There is also little talk of Poland and Hungary these days in Brussels.

The EU has more important things to do in the COVID-19 era than to discipline its problem children in Eastern Europe. In fact, the EU has been forced to recognize that it actually has very few weapons – and blunt ones at that – to combat nepotism, the dismantling

of democracy and the erasure of the rule of law on the continent. This fact was on display in particularly vivid color in the cases brought against Poland and Hungary, accusing them of breaching EU values and the rule of law; both cases have been completely ineffective at achieving anything close to the desired result.

In theory, the so-called Article-7 investigations could lead to the withdrawal of a country’s voting rights on the EU Council – a move referred to as “the nuclear option.” It means that the member state would lose the ability to participate in decision-making in the most important EU body. In practice, however, it is highly unlikely that this could ever happen, seeing as such far-reaching decisions must receive unanimous consent, and Poland and Hungary clearly have each other’s back in the matter.

For this reason, the Article-7 procedure has never moved beyond a non-binding hearing. And even this delicate diplomatic exercise proved to be counterproductive. The procedure looked like “an instrument used by the West to blackmail the East,” admitted State Minister for Europe Michael Roth (SPD) after an unproductive meeting. Although “this is by no means the case,” he noted, it nevertheless showed very clearly the limits of Article 7.

Even the new instrument devised by Roth and the Belgian EU Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders harbors no promise for resounding success; the “Fundamental Values

to avoid an endless cycle of claims and counterclaims.

As the curtain rose on the Germany’s EU Council presidency, Merkel warned that all EU members must prepare for the possibility that talks with Britain on their post-Brexit relationship could fail.

“I will keep pushing for a good solution, but the EU and Germany, too, must and should prepare for the case that an agreement is not reached,” said Merkel in an address to the Bundestag.

She is well aware that success – or failure – to agree on an orderly departure from the EU will color her legacy. But the consequences for the UK are even more grave, she warned in a newspaper interview, and the UK would “have to live with the consequences” of a no-deal outcome.

What for her was a logical statement of fact was seized on by hardline Brexiteers, citing her words as apparent proof of European ill will towards the United Kingdom.

As the fourth anniversary of the Brexit vote came and went, the Brexiteer narrative is already gearing up to frame any failure of talks – and a subsequent UK economic meltdown – as a final act of revenge by the bloc it left after 47 years. But not all UK voters are likely to swallow that narrative. In fact, on Brexit, a majority seems to be suffering buyer’s remorse.

The European Social Survey (ESS), a pan-European poll carried out every two years, suggested that nearly 57 percent of UK voters would now vote to remain in the EU, up seven points since 2018, while the Leave camp has shrunk to 35 percent. Four years in, both sides admit “serious divergences” remain in EU-UK divorce talks, and senior officials will sacrifice their summer vacation to get a deal over the line. Things may still seem calm on Brexit, but the calm is not to be trusted.

**Derek Scally** is the Berlin correspondent for *The Irish Times*.

Check-up” is designed to complement existing mechanisms and build bridges between East and West. All 27 EU countries will be asked to take the test – not just Poland, Hungary and Romania, but Germany as well.

However, until then, all 27 heads of state and government will be invited to join Merkel at the negotiating table to discuss the new EU budget and post-pandemic economic reconstruction. Only after that – at least according to the finely chiseled dramaturgy that is Germany’s current presidency of the EU Council – will the discussion turn to fundamental values, democracy and the rule of law.

This begs the general question as to whether an attempt is being made to garner support for the controversial reconstruction plan in return for silence regarding the violations of the rule of law in Hungary and Poland. Franziska Brantner, European affairs spokesperson for the Greens in the Bundestag, warns against such an approach: “I fear that any financial sanctions against countries that breach the rule of law will ultimately turn out to be less severe than the European Commission had originally planned.”

One could also express the dilemma in more drastic terms: first comes food, then comes morality. In the era of COVID-19, this famous Bertolt Brecht dictum applies now more than ever. And this means that Eastern European states can count on leniency in the coming months.

**Eric Bonse** is a political scientist and journalist. He works as an EU correspondent in Brussels.





# A rocky road ahead

Europe joins the voices now talking tough to Beijing

BY THEO SOMMER

For almost a decade, China's relentless rise has been feeding fears that, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, Beijing was steadily tip-toeing to world domination. The most remarkable economic transformation in the history of mankind went hand in hand with China's burgeoning ambition to regain the position it lost in the early nineteenth century as the center of the world, with the Middle Kingdom ruling "all under heaven."

China has emerged as a formidable challenge to the West. Many observers have long since started worrying about the prospect that the country's blatant authoritarianism seemed destined to wipe out the liberal international order and deliver the deathblow to democracy as the world's guiding paradigm. By relentlessly propagandizing its mastery of the COVID-19 crisis and by taking aggressive action in its lee, Beijing squandered much of the respect the regime had earned for its resoluteness – that is, after its initial attempt to obfuscate the outbreak. Throwing its weight around "loud and proud" as the world became ever more distracted by the virus was widely seen as provocative behavior.

Thus, not only has China's growth streak been interrupted by the pandemic, the much more important fact is that its reputation, reliability and trustworthiness have been tarnished by the brazenness of its "Wolf Warrior" diplomats, its bullying of trade partners such as Australia and the denigration of countries that criticize its policies, such as Sweden. Everywhere, views have been hardening about China's rejection of economic reciprocity, its continued insistence on coercive technology transfer, its industrial acquisition designs, its overt and covert influencing campaigns, and its military actions and ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Violent skirmishes with India in the Himalayas, military maneuvers in the South China Sea and near Taiwan and the crackdown on Hong Kong have heightened Western unease. All over the globe, governments are rethinking their China policies with greater or lesser degrees of anxiety and concern.

The relationship between China and the United States is a special case. It was very much a roller coaster before Donald Trump moved into the Oval Office, but it has become a central point of contention ever since he took over. "China is not our friend," he wrote back in 2011. "China is stealing our jobs, sending a wrecking ball through our manufacturing industry and ripping off our tech-

nology and military capabilities at Mach speed."

From the beginning of his term, Trump was eyeing an economic showdown. In order to reduce the US trade deficit (\$419.2 billion in 2018, \$345.6 billion in 2019), he imposed punitive tariffs on China's import goods. "Trade wars are good and easy to win," was his conviction. He took in stride China's geopolitical comportment, its human rights deficiencies and its military expansion in the South China Sea, as long as its trade surplus was on the decline. In this vein, after almost two years of trade warfare, Washington and Beijing concluded a Phase One Deal about their commercial relations on Jan. 15, 2020.

That deal is now on the brink of collapse. The ink had hardly dried when Trump blamed the Chinese for "sending the Plague to us" in one of his countless infamous tweets. "We went through the worst attack we've ever had on our country," he told reporters. "This is worse than Pearl Harbor, this is worse than the World Trade Center. There's never been an attack like this. And it should have never happened. Could've been stopped at the source. Could've been stopped in China. And it wasn't." He insinuated that the Chinese knowingly let the virus loose on the world out of a Wuhan lab. For this reason he not only threatened a total rupture of their trade relations – "economic decoupling is still on the table" – but also hinted at the intention to stop servicing the \$1.2 trillion of US debt to China.

A Phase Two Deal settling the fundamental issues seems no longer in the offing. The US president has decided to scapegoat China for the devastating effects of the deadly pandemic on his country: the worst economic crisis since 1929, with an unemployment rate greater than 11 percent, over 3.8 million infections and more than 142,000 people killed. Hostility to China has become the central message in his campaign for reelection. While this may be ascribed to his political calculations (and his volatile temper), there is more to it than just that. It's been official policy for over two years now.

The National Security Strategy, published in December 2017, named China a "revisionist power" that wanted to shape a world antithetical to US values and interests: "China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor as its preeminent power."

The view that the People's Republic is a strategic adversary has since been vented by Vice President Mike Pence and, more recently and more stridently, by

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in formulations tantamount to a declaration of Cold War. This January in London, Pompeo declared the Chinese Communist Party "the central threat of our times;" in The Hague in June, he asserted that "China wants to be the dominant economic and military power in the world, spreading its authoritarian vision for society and its corrupt practices worldwide."

As tensions between the United States and China have grown, Europe's approach to China has also taken a hardline turn. The Europeans are not seeking confrontation with Beijing, but they also want a level playing field, reciprocity of market access and equal investment opportunities. And at this point they are sick and tired of Chinese procrastination. They hear Xi Jinping's endlessly repeated promises, but now they want to see his deeds. While they will continue to press for the rectification of China's more questionable industrial and regulatory policies, they have also been taking an increasingly critical view of Xi Jinping's exercise of hard power domestically as well as internationally.

In a paper published in March 2019, the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs were still describing China in a very differentiated way. They called it a cooperation partner with whom the EU closely aligned its objectives; a negotiation partner with whom the EU has to find a balance of interests; an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership; and, finally, a "systemic rival" promoting alternative models of governance. The authors recommended that "the EU should robustly seek more balanced and reciprocal conditions governing the economic relationship."

The call for a more robust EU strategy vis-à-vis China in the political bailiwick as well has since become a dominant theme both of the new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, her Foreign Affairs Representative Josep Borrell and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who assumed the EU Council's presidency on July 1 for the next six months. For September, Merkel had originally scheduled an EU-China summit in Leipzig to resolve a number of stalled policy issues, but the pandemic has put paid to her plan. In its place, a six-hour video conference held on June 22 between the EU top leaders and, in successive calls, with Premier Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping revealed that the two parties were far apart. They could not even agree on a joint final communiqué.

The EU leaders made no bones about the lack of "trust, transparency and reciprocity" in their relations with China. Therefore, they talked tough to Beijing regarding

a long list of topics, ranging from slow progress towards an investment treaty, unfair rules for market access, dumping prices and state subsidies to China's unambitious climate change targets, its delaying tactics concerning WTO reform and its continuous cyberattacks on European computing systems. Von der Leyen also pointed the finger at Beijing's disinformation campaign over the course of the pandemic and warned of "very negative consequences" should the regime go ahead with the national security law for Hong Kong.

Spurning dialogue with China is not an option for the EU. It will continue to explore avenues of cooperation in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, securing a speedy economic recovery and mitigating climate change, but its stance will no doubt get tougher. The Europeans will defend their own values, assure their interests and try to preempt Beijing from imposing its rules, norms and standards on the rest of the world. They don't want another Cold War. Yet Henry Kissinger rightly reminds them: "The reality

of rivalry must not be ignored." They will thus heed the somber warning of Kevin Rudd, the former Australian prime minister, current president of the Asia Society Policy Institute and one of the world's leading China experts: "Global geopolitical risk is now back with a vengeance. We should all fasten our seatbelts for a rocky road ahead."

Theo Sommer  
is Executive Editor of  
The German Times.



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# Trumpelstiltskin

The dreadful prospect of four more years of US ineptitude



BY JULIANE SCHÄUBLE

Donald Trump wants one thing above all others: unconditional victory. Everything he does revolves around the consideration of whether the move will benefit him personally.

He pulled off a surprising win in 2016. As the 45th US president, he has since busied himself with smashing the legacy of his predecessor, Barack Obama, and setting the course for his reelection on Nov. 3, 2020.

The fact that his prospects for success are not as he had envisioned them – in large part due to the COVID-19 pandemic – has fostered rumors in the US that Trump may bow out of the race before November, especially if his poll ratings continue to plummet. While this eventuality seems improbable, the scenario says a lot about its central player; like an angry child, Trump, so goes the thinking, could simply break the game to bits if he feels he’s going to lose.

But what would Trump want to accomplish in a second term? A cursory analysis yields the following answer: not a whole lot. Indeed, a late-June interview the president granted to Sean Hannity on Fox News reveals as much. His rambling, entirely substance-free answer to the question of his priorities for a potential second term cited only the importance of the word “experience” and that before taking office he had been to Washington, D.C., a mere 17 times. But now he knows everyone and has “great people in the administration,” so he wouldn’t make any more mistakes like hiring “an idiot like John Bolton,” who wanted only to “drop bombs on everybody.”

Most others, especially politicians, possess more power of imagination when it comes to the future. In an interview in mid-June, Bolton, Trump’s newest former national security advisor, declared that the world should expect the worst in the event that Trump wins a second term – in particular that the US actually pulls out of NATO and that Trump throws into question alliances with “far away” partners such as Japan, South Korea and Australia.

Many experts share the assessment that the US under Trump II would further retreat from the responsibilities on the global political stage that it had once embraced and dominated. The recent news that the president is seeking to withdraw 9,500 troops from Germany is in line with this prospect.

Many of his followers support his claim that America has shouldered other countries’ concerns too much and for too long while neglecting its own problems. Trump’s promise to change this dynamic – to bring US soldiers home and force other countries to contribute more to the burdens of the West, and thus to “make America great again” – was critical to his electoral victory in 2016.

What will he offer voters, beyond himself for four more years, in the run-up to November? That will be interesting, particularly for undecided voters – as well as for the rest of the world.

Will he, for example, continue to denounce existing trade agreements with promises of making better “deals” for Americans? He hasn’t made much progress in this regard over the first three and a half years of his presidency. Negotiations with the Europeans are on ice, and the little progress Trump had achieved in talks with China has been negated by his aggressive rhetoric concerning the pandemic.

His administration’s major foreign policy initiatives – carried out with little or no regard to the international community – also appear unsatisfactory. The Middle East “peace plan,” touted as “the deal of the century,” is hardly ever mentioned, except that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu now wants to officially annex large swaths of Palestinian territory, which is almost certain to lead to the declaration of another intifada.

Trump’s approach to North Korea paints a similar picture. Nothing productive has resulted from the administration’s 2018 gambit of the first-ever summit between the leaders of North Korea and the US. In fact, Pyongyang has now resumed testing nuclear missiles and is threatening to march soldiers into the neutral zone along its border with South Korea.

As Trump is not known for having patience or staying power in difficult matters, he now only rarely speaks of this problem. He has long since moved on.

“America First” was and is his doctrine – this is almost certain not to change. All foreign policy decisions are a product of this approach, at least in theory, yet the results of his foreign policy are seldom to the benefit of the US. In fact, the opposite is more often true.

American farmers are suffering under Trump’s trade disputes with China and the Europeans, and it’s certainly fair to doubt whether America’s interests are better served by withdrawing from the world. Although Trump is not



Where the US creates voids through its abdication and disinterest, they are quickly filled by other great powers such as Russia and China



the first US president to call for a more equitable sharing of burdens among Western allies, he does so with uncommon brutality while publicly threatening to further retreat from international institutions and responsibilities if America’s partners to do not behave as he expects them to. The idea of compromise is abhorrent to him – if he doesn’t get what he wants, he storms off the playing field.

In matters of arms control, his decisions are particularly incendiary. On May 22, the US terminated the Treaty on Open Skies. Shortly thereafter, US media outlets reported that the government in Washington was contemplating the resumption of nuclear testing. Numerous experts assumed that the US would also decline to extend the New START treaty with Russia, which limits the nuclear weapons potential of the two countries and is due to expire in February 2021. While it may be true that countries like China are not bound by such treaties, it is irrational even to refrain from improving or expanding existing treaties, to say nothing of terminating them, and thus relinquishing all access to information on an adversary’s nuclear arsenal.

This action resembles the administration’s announcement that the US would cease its involvement with the World Health Organization (WHO) – in the middle of a global pandemic unrivaled by anything a pathogen has caused since 1918. While the WHO has been far from perfect in its handling of the current crisis, who would argue that the virus wreaking havoc across the world is best contained through the unilateral, uncoordinated approach of dozens of various countries?

Yet Trump is apparently working from the assumption that the economic and military superpower he presides over will succeed by dint of extreme egoism alone, that alliances, compromises and mutual trust-building measures only limit and thus weaken his country, and that America’s security can best be guaranteed by going it alone.

What may sound strategic is perhaps nothing more than grandiose self-delusion. Where the US creates voids through its abdication and disinterest, they are quickly filled by other great powers such as Russia and China. When the US executes a hasty retreat, it succeeds in creating blind spots vis-à-vis newly emerging dangers. And when it disregards or even undermines the tool of diplomacy by disparaging it as an instrument of the weak, it does so to the detriment of even its closest partners, and ultimately itself. Countries like Russia and China are waiting with

open arms, with hopes of cozying up to America’s alienated allies.

Time and again, this US government, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo leading the way, has waged a “maximum pressure” campaign to steer stubborn countries onto what it sees as the right track. What this policy has thus far achieved is negligible. In terms of the Iran nuclear deal, for example, the Europeans argue that America’s unilateral 2018 withdrawal from the treaty, as imperfect as it was, has made Tehran’s nuclear activities more difficult to control.

A favorite argument of Trump and his administration over the past three years has been that previous approaches to problems have not borne fruit, so why not try something completely different – be it in matters of trade, the Middle East, Syria, Afghanistan or relations with North Korea. Trump relishes his role as “disrupter in chief,” as the one who swoops in from outside to practice politics in a way that no one before him ever has.

In an astounding display of hubris, he has ignored and continues to ignore advice from experts, turning instead to loyalists. Since taking office, the US government has seen an exodus of experienced diplomats, security professionals and now economic experts – the likes of which the country has never suffered. During the COVID-19 crisis, the economy-obsessed president is increasingly covering his ears when his highly regarded science experts, above all the renowned immunologist and infectious diseases specialist Anthony Fauci, deliver bad news. Yet whenever the second-in-command, Mike Pence, praises his president’s “phenomenal results,” Trump lends his unwavering attention. It’s not only his country that must grapple with the results of this ignorance; that task falls to the entire world.

It would appear that Trump simply does not want to understand that the problems, as a general rule, are more complex and cannot be solved with the wave of a hand, that geopolitics requires strategy, not ideology, that wars (Afghanistan, Syria) do not simply end when troops are withdrawn and his eyes stray elsewhere. Trump has shown nothing but disdain for a rules-based international order that allows as many human beings as possible to prosper and makes the world a more peaceful and fairer place.

Juliane Schäuble is the US correspondent for the Berlin daily newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*.



BY GEMMA PÖRZGEN

The COVID-19 crisis is affecting all areas of our lives and, much like a concave mirror, exposing a number of unresolved problems and unacknowledged grievances in astonishing ways. This is precisely what happened in the case of Russia's recent nationwide vote on 200 constitutional amendments, which took place over several days and ended on July 1.

When the election commission announced that 78 percent of eligible voters had voted in favor of the constitutional reforms, leaders in the Kremlin hailed the results as a "triumph" for President Vladimir Putin. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also praised the vote, arguing that the high level of approval for the new constitution was evidence of the people's great belief and confidence in Putin.

In fact, however, the Russian Duma had already waded through the so-called constitutional reforms long before the people were even asked to vote on it. The slogan "Our constitution, our future, our decision," which formed part of the advertising campaign promoting the referendum, was never anything more than an empty promise.

The Russian election monitoring organization Golos reported several election violations. From the very beginning, they argued, there had been no legal framework for the referendum, and there were also many cases of multiple ballots being cast as well as violations of electoral secrecy. The FDP foreign affairs expert Michael Georg Link, deputy chairman of the German-Russian parliamentary group in the Bundestag, pointed out that international election observers from the OSCE and the Council of Europe had not even been invited to monitor the vote.

The Russian election researcher Sergey Shpilkin spoke of the larg-

est degree of election fraud in the history of the Russian Federation. In an interview with the online news outlet Meduza, he claimed to have counted a total of more than 22 million suspicious votes. And, in fact, polling stations had been set up in companies and factories, where colleagues and superiors monitored the voting. The election commission had announced the results of the vote even before polling stations in some regions had closed. Pandemic-related social distancing requirements were given as the reason why the voting was held outside in certain areas – in some cases, with ballot boxes being placed on camping tables, park benches and even in the trunk of a car. The Russian internet was full of mobile-phone videos showing scenes that caused many viewers to shake their heads in disbelief.

The head of the central election commission, Ella Pamfilova, denied that any voting took place on park benches or in the trunks of cars. Other officials at the election commission did not see a problem with this kind of open-air voting, pointing to regulations in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic and claiming that all criticism was merely an attempt to discredit the entire referendum.

When Pamfilova was appointed head of the election commission four years ago, she was supposed to represent a fresh start for the office and work to improve its battered image. The former Duma MP and human rights commissioner had long been considered a credible advocate for reform in Russia, even among circles critical of the Kremlin. She had also been highly regarded in the context of the German-Russian relationship and a welcome guest at forums such as the Petersburg Dialogue. The fact that she is now whitewashing the results of this highly questionable



# Confidence man

The latest constitutional referendum in Russia has laid bare the Kremlin's true intentions and priorities

election will no doubt serve to further damage her reputation.

This latest referendum does not bode well for future balloting. Some observers have already described the vote as a test run for the Duma elections in 2021.

The old constitution would have brought Putin's presidency to an end three years later, in 2024. Now, however, the new law enables him to hold the presidency for two further terms. This means that Putin could remain president until 2036 – at which point he would be 84 years old.

While many in Russia continue to see Putin as a guarantor of a certain level of stability, the number of people who are becoming increasingly critical of his never-ending presidency has grown in recent years. Surveys conducted by Moscow's prestigious Levada Center have been showing declining approval ratings for some time. Especially among young and well-educated people in large cities, there is an increasing sense of a lack of prospects in the face of this forever Putin. Yet the influence of the opposition in Russia has thus far remained limited, chiefly due to infighting among the different camps.

At the moment, there is little evidence that enough people desire change, especially as the challenges of everyday life have grown for many during the pandemic. Given the job loss and the increasing economic crisis, the average Russian has more pressing problems than big politics. Perhaps this is why hardly more than 300 people attended the July 1 protest at the Pushkin Memorial in Moscow, and even fewer showed up in St. Petersburg.

Gemma Pörzgen is a Berlin-based journalist specializing in Eastern Europe.

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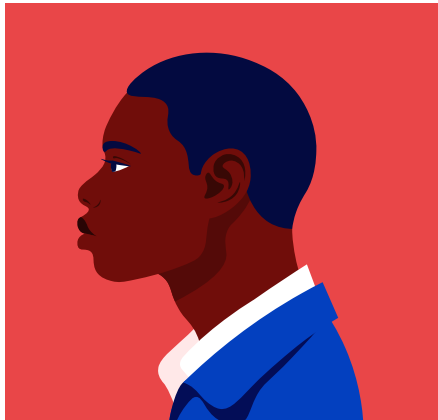
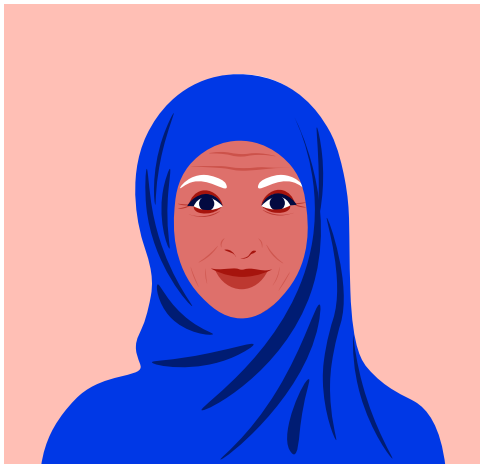
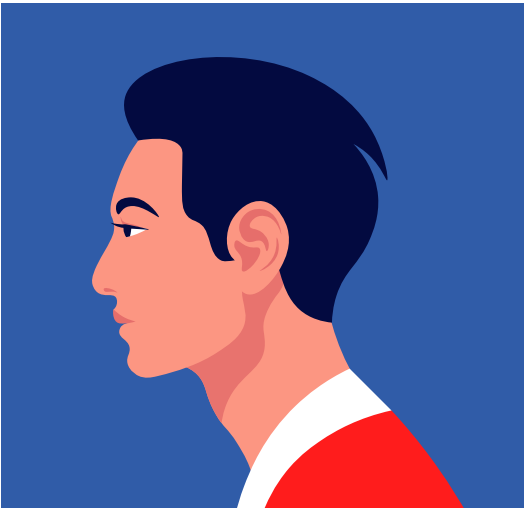
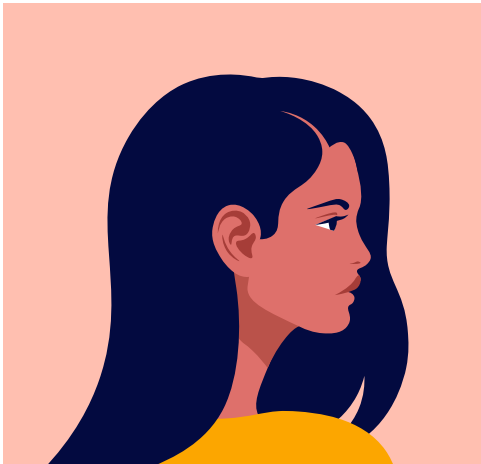
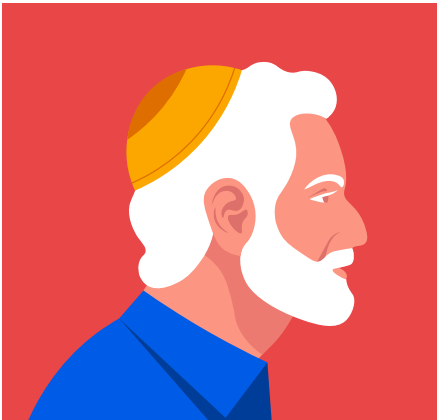
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# DISCRIMINATING MINDS

## three perspectives on racism

### Ism v. ism

BY AGNES MONKA

For weeks now, a veritable mudslinging has taken place among intellectuals, journalists and historians in the feuilleton section of German newspapers. The controversy covers all the themes it takes to get Germans hot under the collar: freedom of speech, the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and Israel, along with apartheid, racism and colonialism. How did it come to this?

The key figure in the debate is the Cameroonian-born political scientist, historian and philosopher Achille Mbembe. He was invited to be the keynote speaker at the 2020 Ruhrtriennale, a leading arts festival in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), where he was to give a lecture on his longstanding research into colonial history.

On March 23, however, Lorenz Deutsch, cultural policy spokesperson for the Free Democrats (FDP) state parliamentary group in NRW, wrote an open letter to the artistic director of the Ruhrtriennale, Stefanie Carp, urging her to disinvite Mbembe. He pointed to clear agreements that had been made two years prior with regard to invitations extended to BDS activists; BDS stands for boycott, divestment and sanctions and is an international movement aimed at influencing Israeli policy relating to the occupied territories. Deutsch noted that Carp had invited Young Fathers – a hip-hop band known for its support of the BDS campaign – to attend the festival in 2018; after coming under pressure from the federal government and other artists, however, she subsequently disinvited the band.

What does all of this have to do with Achille Mbembe? According to Deutsch, Mbembe had signed a call for an academic boycott of Israel. He also argued that parts of Mbembe's essay "The Society of Enmity" were so problematic that he was simply not tenable as a keynote speaker.

Deutsch quoted a passage in which Mbembe writes that the Israeli occupation is a "fanatical policy of destruction aimed at transforming the life of Palestinians into a heap of ruins or a pile of garbage destined for cleansing." Mbembe writes further in the same essay: "In South Africa, the mounds of ruins never did reach such a scale," and "the apartheid system in South Africa and the destruction of Jews in Europe – the latter, though, in an extreme fashion and within a quite different setting – constituted two emblematic manifestations of this fantasy of separation."

According to Deutsch, by drawing this comparison, Mbembe is relativizing the Holocaust while also placing today's Jews in a position similar to that of the Nazis. He therefore urged Carp to consider rescinding the invitation.

A few days later, the debate was joined by Felix Klein, the federal government's Commissioner

for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Anti-Semitism. Not only did he charge Mbembe with relativizing the Holocaust, he also accused him of calling into question Israel's right to exist, albeit without providing any further evidence of his claim. Klein, too, called for Mbembe to be disinvited to the festival. NRW's minister of culture then convened a special meeting of the Ruhrtriennale supervisory board at which Carp was made to answer for her decision to issue the invitation. Mbembe, the renowned philosopher and colonialism expert, was now officially being branded an anti-Semite thanks to the involvement of Klein.

Soon thereafter, the subject became an even hotter media topic, although the focus was no longer on the comparison of apartheid and the Holocaust – a comparison that, incidentally, historians of the Holocaust have not considered problematic for decades.

In the feuilleton section of Germany's major papers, one side argued that Mbembe was indeed speaking from a "different setting." In this sense, a comparison could not be seen as a relativization and was certainly not cause to restrict Mbembe's freedom of speech in this way. The other side, however, continued to find evidence of Mbembe's problematic view of Israel. For example, in the foreword to a collection of essays titled *Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy*, he writes: "And since all they [Israel] are willing to offer is a fight to the finish, since what they are willing to do is to go all the way – carnage, destruction, incremental extermination – the time has come for global isolation."

This was followed by further open letters and expressions of solidarity from Jewish researchers who called on Felix Klein to step down. On May 8, Mbembe took to Facebook to argue that Lorenz Deutsch had not wanted to see a "negro" at the Ruhrtriennale and had therefore made him into an "anti-Semitic negro," so as to be able to disinvite him.

In mid-May, the next open letter appeared, this time signed by 700 African intellectuals, writers and artists – at least that was the claim. Upon closer inspection of the list of names, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* determined that many of the signatories were neither intellectuals nor Africans. The letter lost even more clout by beginning with the fully unsubstantiated claim that the people calling for Mbembe to be disinvited were representatives of an extreme right-wing lobby in Germany. Writing in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Mbembe argued that although he respected German taboos, they were not the taboos of all other people in the world. He asked for an apology from Klein, who then refused to give him one.

Coming to the defense of both sides were a number of academics, journalists and researchers, with varying degrees of foam at the mouth. Others tried to mediate, but they could not

prevent what soon escalated into a fruitless exchange of blows in the papers, for example between an upset Alan Posen, who called for the end of public funding for events that promoted the hatred of Israel, and a stunned Stephan Detjen, who denounced the state's interference in fundamental human rights.

What got lost along the way was the fact that the Ruhrtriennale had long since been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why has this debate raged on so long and with such vehemence? Because debates over the Holocaust automatically touch the core of what it means to be German. Indeed, the Federal Republic defines itself as a post-Holocaust society, or in the words of former Federal President Joachim Gauck: "There is no German identity without Auschwitz."

Still, even if everyone feels personally addressed by the debate, does that automatically mean we should all chime in? No. The thing that makes this debate interesting is not the many open letters – all inevitably written in superlatives – nor the many calls for the greatest number of heads to roll on all sides. The most interesting aspect is that it has taken one single incident to prompt the realization that Germans – in all of the additional contexts that have opened up in the wake of the debate – are very far from a social consensus without actually knowing it.

And this is likely the reason why any ultimate resolution of the matter is still far away. Indeed, everyone seems to have their own interpretation of why the Mbembe case constitutes a scandal, whether it's a relativization of the Holocaust, an attack on Israel, support for BDS, the disinvitation and defamation of an African colonial researcher or an infringement on the freedom of speech and art. These are all sensitive issues that encourage those involved to immediately take up irreconcilable stances, to declare every objection unforgivable and to brand every opponent an incorrigible racist, an anti-Semite or a self-proclaimed "guardian of public morals."

Yet another thing that has gone unnoticed is the fact that the Munich's Center for Holocaust Studies and the Hugo Valentin Centre in Uppsala, Sweden, are organizing a conference set to take place in Munich in November 2020. This gathering intends to bring together researchers in the fields of colonialism, genocide and the Holocaust to engage in the very things that were rendered impossible in the debate over Mbembe, namely an unimpeded discourse in the spirit of goodwill and a series of mutual encounters based on the desire to learn from and with each other.

Agnes Monka works for the Berlin-based public broadcaster rbb and as a freelance journalist.

### Racism is a two-way street

BY NAÏLA CHIKHI

I was still a child when I eye-witnessed racist behavior for the first time. It was in Algeria, the country of my birth. A "white" schoolmate of mine was harassing another schoolmate because of the darker color of his skin. I was also confronted with anti-Semitism in my childhood. I myself experienced discrimination several years later during my first semester at university in Paris, when a lecturer of mine suggested that I should have become a cleaning woman instead of studying for a degree.

And, of course, I've encountered racism in Germany. Racism is everywhere, all over the world. It can be directed by mainstream society against "foreigners" in general, against minorities in general as well as against specific minorities. The spectrum ranges from brutal murders and targeted killings to what we call everyday racism.

For example, more than a few Germans "without a migration background" find it impressive when bicultural children speak Spanish or English in addition to German, only to get up in arms when Turkish or Lebanese children switch to their native language in lieu of German. And xenophobia is still on display at state institutions. When I taught German as a foreign or second language, students of mine would often report being treated in a derogatory and aggressive manner by public officials as well as suffering racial profiling during police checks.

But there's also racism by minorities against mainstream society as well as against other minorities. It's not uncommon that marriages or even friendships are forbidden not only between migrants and Germans, but also between Turks and Kurds, or Moroccans and African-Germans, or Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, or Muslims and atheists.

This humiliating and contemptible treatment of "the other" is finding ever-stronger purchase in schoolyards. Mobbing at schools based on religious affiliation, ideology, sex, origin or skin color is nothing less than a portent of anti-Semitism, sexism and racism. While mobbing was initially more noticeable among children from majority segments of society, it has now become more common among children with migration backgrounds.

As children often emulate their parents and others in their surroundings, it begs the question: Have some migrants become xenophobes themselves? Or are all people more or less racist?

When migrants leave their countries of origin, they need support and orientation in the countries where they settle. For decades, both France and Germany have resisted being

seen as immigration countries and have thus neglected their integration policies. Left to their own devices, Gastarbeiter, or guest workers, build lives for themselves between factories and the Banlieue (suburbs) and import the norms and values of their home countries. The result is the propagation of communities not all that different from ghettos.

Within many of these communities, the lack of integration assistance reinforces a general dismissal of the culture of their host country. To fill the void, the well-trodden reactionary, patriarchal – read: religious – structures so widespread in many of their home countries take hold. The goal here has not been to foster integration, but rather to establish a parallel society defined by the norms of the cultures from which the newcomers came, cultures that are often diametrically opposed to the democratic societies of Germany and France.

In recent years, self-proclaimed representation have placed these communities under their guardianship. Over time, their identitarian and communitarian policies have created a spatial, social and spiritual schism. As a result, society has been divided between the "we" and the "they."

The divisive identitarian approach is not unique to these self-proclaimed representatives. It is also found in right-wing extremist groups that work with rigidly authoritarian community structures and racist bogeymen. And by force: arson, violent attacks, intimidation and death threats are just some of their unlawful tactics. Their resentment and hate are directed at "Mediterranean" migrants and Jewish compatriots.

If diversity leads to division and racist violence, it is all the more important to approach racism proactively, objectively and assertively as a universal phenomenon.

After the brutal murder of George Floyd, the racism debate reignited across the globe. This is a good thing. However, as a woman with a migration background, I find the current discussion surrounding "white privilege" both ethnocentric and misleading. "Being white" once again dominates the discourse as human rights violations are displaced from center stage. This is the approach of several no-doubt well-intentioned anti-racist activists. But their proponents should be aware that they are once again reducing individuals to the color of their skin.

The idea here is to target the unjust system, not the people it represents. The goal should be to combat the causes and instruments that prevent the equitable and respectful coexistence of fellow humans.

Only in 2005 did the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) introduce an integration course for newcomers to the

country. From that point on, the Federal Republic – after a 50-year delay – no longer focused entirely on the economic integration of migrants, but on their linguistic and cultural integration as well. In coordination with other instruments, this should help dismantle the institutional disadvantages faced by migrants.

The economic and linguistic integration of migrants is indispensable. But in order to become responsible citizens within mainstream society, they must come to terms with the state's liberal democratic system of norms and find their bearings in relation to the enlightenment and the advantages of a humanist secular democracy.

The participation of political-religious groups in the integration activities of the state and in efforts to eliminate discrimination will be counterproductive. They are in fact the very people who constructed barriers of communitarianism and multiculturalism. Integration will never succeed if the anonymity of community is thrust upon migrants.

The French philosopher and author Henri Peña-Ruiz recently wrote: "To effectively fight racism, there are two invaluable maxims. The first is to remain vigilant as to the singularity of the human species. The second is to reject any abstract stratification of human groups, independent of whether this may derive from assertions related to nature or culture. An individual should never be drowned in a feeling of affiliation, nor should an ethnicity be judged through a global lens."

This underscores that a relativistic approach to culture has the further disadvantage of discouraging migrants from questioning and debating their community's norms that may violate certain human rights. This results in the deprivation of a migrant's opportunity to develop into a responsible citizen, which in itself is a form of racism.

Freedom and participation must be learned. The 100 training sessions comprising the BAMF integration courses cannot suffice to convey these skills, but at least they're a start. The path to self-determination is a lifelong learning process in which individuals recognize that they have rights but also obligations – and that these responsibilities should not be considered discriminatory in themselves. Individuals also learn that a modern, pluralistic society is built upon democratic and equitable consensus. Only a society comprising strongly emancipated individuals can demolish the walls that partition it.

Naïla Chikhi, born in 1980 in Algiers, is a cultural scientist who works as an independent advisor and consultant in the fields of integration and women's issues.

### Redefining "us"

BY MARK TERKESSIDIS

After watching thousands of young Germans take to the streets in solidarity with US protestors demonstrating against the violent death of George Floyd, it looked as if some people in Germany were coming to understand – for the first time – that racism might also be a problem "over here." For decades, racial discrimination was seen as something that plagued the United States, not Germany. Post-war West German society thought its significant efforts to actively address its Nazi past rendered itself immune to racism. In a similar vein, many communist East Germans saw the concept of anti-racism as a constitutive *raison d'état*. Even after reunification, a majority of Germans were at most willing to admit to the existence of "xenophobia," but not to racism as such.

Mainstream opinion in Germany saw racism as a concept expressed by right-wing extremists, if at all. It was not considered an appropriate term to describe the negative daily experiences suffered by individuals of non-German backgrounds. Reports of these kinds of discrimination – which included such things as ongoing inequity when applying for a job, difficulties trying to rent an apartment and "ethnic profiling" during police checks – were often met with a shrug of the shoulders.

In today's Germany, however, the focus of attention is on the role played by the police, much like in the US after the death of George Floyd. And it's not the first time. Most recently, there has been an ongoing scandal surrounding the shoddy police investigation into a series of murders carried out by the extreme right-wing terror cell known as the National Socialist Underground or NSU. For years, the police steered its detective work in the wrong direction, thereby rendering the actual victims of the terror – eight people of Turkish descent and one of Greek origin – as perpetrators. The police seemed to think at the time that any murder taking place in the context of Germany's "foreign communities" was most likely linked to drug trafficking, debt-collection violence or some other form of organized crime.

When it was revealed that a far-right extremist group was responsible for the terror, subsequent investigative reports came to the sobering conclusion that the police force itself was plagued by routine misperceptions and subsequent action that assumed a self-evident link between criminal behavior and "individuals with a migration background."

But what were the implications of these revelations? It became clear that it wasn't a question of individual members of the police force having extremist positions or engaging in misconduct; it was the routines and practices of the police force itself that were having a discriminatory effect.

A similar investigation into race-related police failures was carried out in 1993 after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager, in the United Kingdom. Six years later, in 1999, a commission headed by former High Court judge William MacPherson concluded its examination of the handling of the murder with a clear verdict: The problem plaguing the British police force was one of "institutional racism." This public inquiry was a milestone, as it showed that the issue was not racist behavior in the form of individual misconduct or isolated exceptions to the rule; the commission found that racism was deeply engrained in the institutional structure of the police force.

Most representative surveys undertaken since the 1990s indicate that a majority of Germans have "prejudices." The issue here, too, is not one of individual error; it is something that can be referred to as "racist knowledge," that is, a form of societal knowledge generally widespread and often reinforced across politics and the media. Whether consciously or unconsciously, this racist knowledge legitimizes the differences and inequalities between "us" and "them" – even though democratic principles forbid discrimination of this kind. Article 3 of Germany's Basic Law states that "No person shall be favored or disfavored because of sex, parentage, race, language, homeland and origin, faith or religious or political opinions." In reality, however, German society is characterized by a job-market "underclass," by discrimination in the realms of education and health and by the unequal treatment of and significantly higher risks of poverty for individuals with foreign backgrounds.

The Martinique-born psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon once wrote that a society was either racist or not; racism, he argued, was not accidental. Indeed, racism has played a significant role in the history of modernity. The initial contact made by Europeans overseas laid the very foundation for an anti-dialogical principle: When Columbus first set foot on land in the Caribbean, he did not seek dialogue with local inhabitants – he chose instead to read out a statement in Spanish declaring ownership of the land.

In this case, the "others" were simultaneously included and excluded. Without having been asked, they had suddenly come

under the domain of the Spanish crown. They were not even considered full subjects; they were merely individuals who now had to be educated in the "correct" religion and forced to engage in a "right-minded" form of labor. If they chose not to accept their new status, they would be designated as "barbarians" and face terrible consequences.

Even back then, this kind of violence did not go unchallenged, and there were fierce discussions on the legality of slavery in the 16th century. Unfortunately, when slavery was widely abolished in the 19th century, colonialism simply replaced it as the "better" and supposedly more humane alternative. Subsequently, during the process of decolonization, migration to rich Western countries began, thereby ushering in a new round of exclusion by inclusion. To this day, individuals in Germany who were recruited to work in factories in the 20th century are referred to as *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers.

The problem is always seen as being "the others." People often consider "them" to be lazy, aggressive, loud, not yet mature and unwilling or even unable to integrate. In 2018, in the aftermath of anti-immigration riots in the town of Chemnitz, Germany's minister of the interior stated matter-of-factly that migration was "the mother of all problems."

Today, we in the West generally live in societies where racist divisions between "us" and "them" are no longer rooted in direct violence. Yet our markets, legal systems, cultural achievements and knowledge are still shaped to a certain degree by racism.

One encouraging aspect of the West is that it also created a tool with which to combat its own racist past and present, namely democracy. In heterogeneous democratic societies, different memories must be taken into account, different starting points must be considered and discrimination must be prevented. Democracy is not a zero-sum game, and the actions we are seeing today – the anti-racism protests, the toppling of racist monuments and the debates surrounding the renaming of buildings – can only help deepen democratic rights and give a fresh new meaning to the term "us."

Mark Terkessidis is an author and researcher focusing on race and migration. Based in Cologne and Berlin, his most recent work is *Wessen Erinnerung zählt? Koloniale Vergangenheit und Rassismus heute* (Whose memory counts? Colonial past and racism today). Hoffmann und Campe, 2019



BY JOHANNES LEITHÄUSER

US President Donald Trump’s idea of withdrawing a significant number of US troops from Germany is neither new nor a surprise. The White House issued the same threat once before, just ahead of the NATO summit in July 2018. At the time, the reasons given for the potential transfer of US forces were Germany’s inadequate contribution to NATO’s defense capability and its intention of acquiring more natural gas from Russia via the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

As is again the case, Poland was entertaining hopes that it would directly benefit if the US were to move troops out of Germany. For years, the national-conservative Polish government had been badgering Trump with requests that he consider stationing a complete American division (roughly 10,000 soldiers) on Polish soil. In 2019, during a visit to Washington, Polish President Andrzej Duda even suggested that the new base could bear the name “Fort Trump.” Poland also signaled its intention to contribute up to €1 billion to the cost of stationing troops in the country.

At the time, however, even this investment – which would have been sizable for Poland – sparked no enthusiasm in Washington. One year ago, Duda was forced to make do with a US promise that one-tenth of the requested troops would be sent to his country.

The circumstances that prompted Trump to issue his threat two years ago have changed little since then, except that Germany’s NATO quota has actually gone up from 1.2 percent to roughly 1.4 percent of GDP in the current year. This number might even grow to 1.6 percent in the wake of the economic slump caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

But there may be other reasons why the US president still wants

to follow through on his intentions. Among these is his apparent anger at the sober indifference German Chancellor Angela Merkel has shown in greeting his political ventures (including her most recent refusal to attend an in-person G7 summit in Washington due to the pandemic). Or it might be Trump’s recollection

that extends way back to the early days of the Cold War. US forces there have modern infrastructure at their disposal and are critical to America’s global military operations.

The US air base at Ramstein, for example, plays a pivotal role in drone missions and supply flights to destinations in the Middle

the United States. The number of combat troops as a share of the 34,500 US soldiers stationed in Germany is relatively small.

Local politicians in the structurally weak region of Upper Palatinate remain confident that their US garrisons will be unaffected by Trump’s withdrawal plans. The possible removal of troops from

it would find the move regrettable, while also pointing out that it has yet to be informed of any precise details. However, other members of the major political parties – especially the opposition parties – are expressing very different hopes and concerns. The left-wing Die Linke has said that it supports the withdrawal,

a shift of large numbers of US troops to Poland would jeopardize the agreements NATO made with Moscow more than two decades ago as part of the NATO-Russia Founding Act. At that time, NATO agreed to forego a permanent stationing of “substantial” troops in those Eastern European states that had just become members of the Alliance.

Although the Founding Act did not precisely define the term “substantial,” NATO military planners nevertheless suspect that permanently stationing a military unit the size of a brigade (roughly 3,000 soldiers) would violate the spirit of the agreement. Until recently, it was clear that the Pentagon shared this opinion. Although the US – together with NATO and not least with the German Bundeswehr – has indeed strengthened its military presence in Eastern Europe over the past several years, it has thus far always rotated troops to avoid permanently stationing them there.

Policymakers in Berlin are also paying close attention to the resistance to Trump’s withdrawal plans currently emerging from Washington. On the one hand, the Pentagon seems to be making preparations to somehow substantiate the president’s blanket statement regarding a withdrawal of 9,500 soldiers. On the other hand, the voices of congressmen and senators from political camps that consider the withdrawal plan to be strategically damaging are becoming increasingly louder. Republican senators Lindsey Graham and Marco Rubio have even threatened to cut US military appropriations so that there would simply be no funds available for the troop withdrawal.

Johannes Leithäuser is a politics editor for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.



# Homecoming game

German policymakers are unruffled by Trump’s plan to withdraw some 9,500 US troops from Germany

Safe travels: Airborne operations at Ramstein Air Base in southwestern Germany

of his election promise to “bring the boys home” from missions abroad.

It should be noted, however, that American military bases in Germany cannot be compared to field camps in other countries in which the US operates, such as Iraq or Afghanistan. US troops in Germany are stationed mostly in the southern states of Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, and they have a long history at those sites – one

East. And for years now, the US military hospital in the nearby town of Landstuhl has treated badly injured soldiers flown there directly from theaters of war in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.

Stuttgart is home to the headquarters of the US European Command (EUCOM) and the US Africa Command (AFRICOM). At a US base near Grafenwöhr, Bavaria, the 2nd US Cavalry Regiment has one of the most modern training areas outside of

the region around Stuttgart would cause a bearable level of stress. In fact, residents of the affluent neighboring town of Böblingen have regularly complained about the noise caused by the Army Rangers and Navy Seals training in the area. They would no doubt be delighted if the clamor came to an end.

The political reaction in Germany to Trump’s withdrawal plans is two-fold. In its official statements, Berlin has stated that

and the new SPD parliamentary leader Rolf Mützenich sees it as an opportunity to usher in “a sustainable reorientation of security policy in Europe.” Mützenich and the Greens have campaigned for years for a withdrawal of tactical US nuclear weapons from Germany.

Members of Merkel’s CDU/CSU, on the other hand, have their own concerns. Germany’s Minister of Defense, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, stated publicly that

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BY FRANK HOFMANN

EU officials worked meticulously on the development of the climate crisis package, even though the official language of the program was noticeably stilted: “A major element of the new development model will be to decouple future economic prosperity from environmental pollution.”

The idea was to help the economy, all the while guided by a clear goal. In order to achieve this goal, however, the Commission in Brussels needed money, its own money, raised on the capital market – in other words, joint public debt. But until now, the raising of public debt had been a process reserved solely for EU member states.

The above description could easily apply to the recent internal papers issued by the European Commission regarding the management of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. But the quote is drawn from a different era; it is almost 30 years old and can be found in the white paper of then Commission President Jacques Delors under the title: “Growth, Competitiveness, Employment – The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century.” In the early 1990s, Delors – a friend of then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl and a man once referred to as “Mister Europe“ – was eager to get out of the economic crisis by means of European credit for investment in Europe’s infrastructure and environment-friendly technologies.

But the West German government rejected Delors’ plan, with Kohl’s coalition government in Bonn arguing that “reduced state intervention at the national level must not be offset by increased subsidies from the community.” Soon thereafter, however, the Federal Republic of Germany would introduce the largest package of subsidies in its history – as a means of financing German reunification. The country’s *Sonderkonjunktur*, a state-financed path to economic development, soon led them head over heels into debt. Germany had become “the sick man of Europe.”

Three decades later, the current plan is to allow the European Commission to take on €750 billion in debt to confront the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Spain and Italy. The EU budget will be liable for the debt and also responsible for servicing and settling it. The plan from European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has been given the name “Next Generation EU” and is designed to send out a clear sign of solidarity. €500 billion will go to the member states, €250 billion

of which will be in the form of repayable loans, the rest as a non-repayable grant. Italy will benefit from a lower interest rate, as Brussels has a higher credit rating than Rome.

As part of this redevelopment project, Ursula von der Leyen’s Commission intends to set up programs to finance projects in northern Italy and other needy regions in Europe. A sum of €9.4 billion has been earmarked for EU4Health – a health program designed to help member states overcome the pandemic. This money could flow directly to hospitals.

Does this mean that funds from the capital market bonds issued by the European Commission will go straight to its target recipients with no detours?

For supporters of European integration and the path towards a “United States of Europe,” this would be something to celebrate. It might even be “a Hamilton moment for Europe,” as German Finance Minister and Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) put it, recalling the first US Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, who bundled the country’s fiscal responsibilities at the federal level in 1790 as a means of generating common revenue. This would be much in the vein of Jacques Delors, the great champion of Europe and a social democrat like Scholz.

Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) recently brought this grand idea down a notch, but even he, who always opposed joint European debt, speculated in an interview with *Der Spiegel* that this could be a moment in which Europe – as it has done so often in the history of its integration – would perhaps pull closer together in the face of adversity.

Perhaps. If it weren’t for all those tricky details involved in the battle between national sovereignty, European solidarity and community spirit – plus the current EU Lisbon Treaty. After the constitutional treaty of Europe failed in Dutch and French referendums, the treaty served to reinforce the EU as a community of nation states as opposed to an integrated community.

In actual fact, thanks to its so-called Cohesion Fund, the European Commission has for years

the citizens of Europe through direct democracy, i.e. European Parliament, will forgo the use of its sharpest sword, at least partially.

But does this approach to dealing with the effects of the pandemic actually represent an historical moment and evidence of EU integration in the wake of so many difficult years of bickering over Brexit and the euro debt crisis?

Speaking to *The German Times*, the Austrian politician Othmar Karas – a vice president of Euro-

means of the co-decision procedure, with the full say of European parliament,” says Karas. So it’s the right to contribute to the decision-making, but not the right to actually vote.

The question still remains as to how exactly the funds will be allocated in the coming years. A well-established procedure already exists for funds from previous EU budgets that are jointly controlled by European Parliament and the European Commission: projects are proposed by the regions and member states, funding is applied for in accordance with pre-defined funding rates, and the allocation of these funds is managed by EU officials in Brussels. Cities, municipalities, regions, national governments and even the private sector participate in these projects by contributing additional funds.

One thing that remains unclear is who exactly is supposed to pay for this post-COVID-19 reconstruction. A strengthening of the current system would be in the interest of EU member governments, in particular those in the north. Especially when it comes to Italy, the “frugal four” – Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden – have repeatedly accused the country of siphoning away the EU’s money into the dark channels of the Mafia.

The path out of the crisis now being taken bears all the signs of a European compromise borne out of great need. It was paved by French President Emmanuel Macron together with Chancellor Angela Merkel. Macron brought into play the idea of European Commission bonds. Merkel realized the terrible consequences of continuing her negative line in the context of the

greatest challenge “since World War II,” as she described it.

“Luckily, Chancellor Angela Merkel noticed in time what was at stake,” economist Nouriel Roubini told *Der Spiegel* in mid-June. “It was not possible for Berlin to be against EU budget growth and the ECB playing a greater role, and at the same time be surprised when everything goes down the drain,” said Roubini. “At that point, Europe would be dead.”

So the European Union will now have two budgets. The first will be managed by European Parliament, and the second – the COVID-19 budget – will be handled by the European Commission, which will pump money into the capital markets. According to the plan, the Commission will soon start to collect its own taxes to be able to service the debt resulting from the COVID-19 budget. It is not yet known whether it will be a digital tax or a financial transaction tax, but it will most definitely be something.

In the coming six months of Germany’s presidency of the EU Council, the facts that the European Commission is actually going into debt to combat the crash caused by the pandemic and that the European Union has pulled together at all during this crisis will no doubt be repeatedly celebrated as major steps forward for the European idea.

**Frank Hofmann** is a journalist and historian specializing in Europe, the US, human rights and international relations. He has worked as a correspondent in Brussels, Paris, Kiev and the Balkans.

# EUreka!

Is the COVID-19 crisis the Hamilton moment that will push the EU towards more integration?

The path out of the crisis now being taken bears all the signs of a European compromise borne out of great need

had funds at its disposal with which it can finance projects in nation states directly on site, such as social organizations in Padua or a bridge in Catalonia. Many infrastructure projects bear the EU flag upon completion, often with a small note indicating that the EU fund has co-financed the project.

In the case of the COVID-19 crisis, however, the European Commission and Council have chosen a different path. The EU Council alone will make decisions regarding these programs. This is not the case with the existing cohesion fund, where decisions are made by European Parliament. In other words, the only EU body legitimized by

pean Parliament, one of the most influential conservatives in Brussels and a figure instrumental in handling the euro debt crisis – said: “We need the ‘Next Generation EU’ program and a long-term, future-oriented EU budget in order to ensure social and economic reconstruction across Europe after the COVID-19 crisis. It is a joint political project for the reorganization of Europe – comparable to the internal market and the euro.”

In order to ensure that the large sum of money pumped into the system is given a modicum of democratic legitimacy, “all EU programs through which ‘Next Generation EU’ funding will flow will be decided upon by

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BY HELENE BUBROWSKI

Infection numbers are sinking in Germany. Life has somewhat returned to normal. The economy is recovering. Yet gratification over the fairly mild course of the pandemic is being tempered by fears of a second wave, which could wreak havoc if it were to descend upon the Federal Republic as early as this autumn. A full return to normalcy will only be possible once a vaccine against the virus has been developed. And this applies not just to Germany – immunization is vital for the entire population of the world.

The race for a vaccine has been underway for some time. But the contest is not just about big business – it represents nothing less than an international struggle for technological dominance.

Around 180 research teams from across the globe are working on developing a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine. And the first results are in:

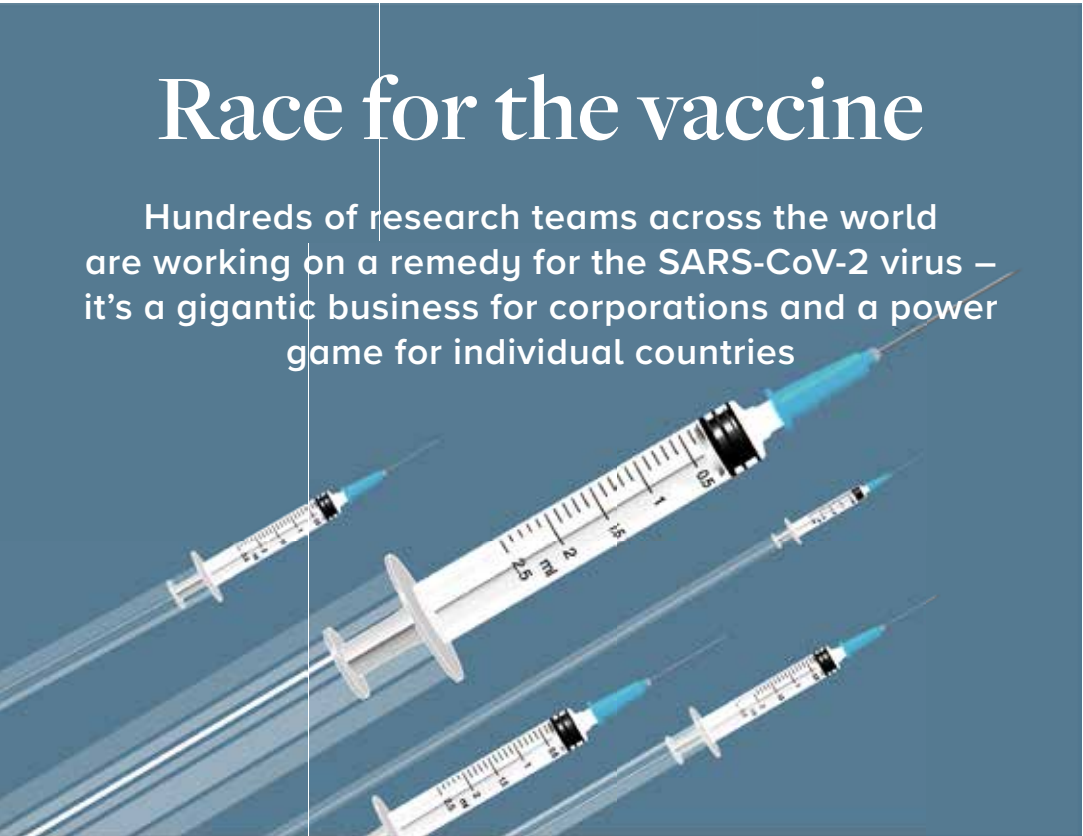
The US biotech company Moderna will begin its third and last phase of clinical trials before the end of the summer.

The French pharmaceutical firm Sanofi expects to receive certification for a vaccine for the first half of 2021.

University of Oxford researchers have begun their second phase of human trials.

At the end of April, the Mainz-based BioNTech was the first German pharmaceutical manufacturer to receive approval to test a viral agent on human volunteers. If the vaccine is granted certification, the company will work with the US corporation Pfizer to produce up to 100 million doses of the vaccine by the end of the year. This is an ambitious goal, but this amount would not even be enough to treat one-quarter of all Americans.

“Vaccines, tests and medicines must be available, affordable and accessible worldwide,” Chancellor



# Race for the vaccine

Hundreds of research teams across the world are working on a remedy for the SARS-CoV-2 virus – it’s a gigantic business for corporations and a power game for individual countries

Angela Merkel recently urged at a donor conference that yielded €6.15 billion to fight the pandemic. Microsoft founder Bill Gates called for COVID-19 immunization to be classified as a “global public good.” Even Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed at the annual meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO) that China would make the vaccine available to poorer countries, as well, if a research team from his country succeeds in becoming the first to make a breakthrough in development.

“The world is united against the coronavirus, and the world will win,” said President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. Yet despite these lofty words, the global threat posed by the pandemic may not suffice to foster true solidarity among the countries of the world. The distribution battle is already underway.

Weeks ago, it was reported that President Donald Trump’s government had offered the Tübingen-based firm Curevac money in

exchange for the exclusive rights to the vaccine. Curevac declined.

The Trump administration tried the same with Sanofi, whose research project had received funding from Washington. Sanofi initially appeared to be persuaded, but after sharp criticism, the company announced that the vaccine would become available to all regions of the world simultaneously.

Things work differently in the US, where, according to media reports, pharmaceutical companies only receive funding in return for supplying the US population first.

The highly anticipated COVID-19 vaccine has become a power factor in the showdown between countries across the globe. In Beijing, the results of efforts to develop a vaccine are mentioned in the same breath as the new mobile communication standard, 5G. According the foreign ministry in Beijing, China is leading the world in the race for a vaccine. For China, it all comes down to

demonstrating superiority in its duel with the US.

The impetus for supplying personal protection equipment (PPE) to Italy at the start of the crisis was apparently not altruism on the part of China. Rome paid for the help and Beijing exploited the move for propaganda purposes. These experiences leave no reason to assume that China will selflessly share the results of its research with the global community.

Germany’s federal government recently allocated €750 million to fund a national program for the development and production of a vaccine. There have thus far been no efforts to tie the funding to the stipulation that Germany benefit from the research results before all other countries.

The European Union has now announced the formation of an international coalition to draw up preliminary agreements with developers and manufacturers of the vaccine. Yet the risk still remains that Germany and

Europe will host numerous donor conferences to amass the majority of the funding required for the development of a vaccine, while other countries will simply end up reaping most of the benefits.

It was recently revealed that the federal government invested €300 million in Curevac, enough to acquire 23 percent of its shares. Contrary to contingent offers from the US government, exclusive promises or rights for the German population were not on the table.

At issue, however, was a signal that a key element of Berlin’s industrial strategy is to prevent the cession of German health-sector companies to foreign investors. Still, the pharmaceutical company BioNTech recently received €220 million in new investments, including from the Temasek investment fund, which is owned by the city-state of Singapore.

Investment is a wager on the future. The company that makes the first breakthrough can count on huge profits, as it will be able to apply for the patent for the COVID-19 vaccine. Intellectual property is legally protected throughout the world – whoever makes a discovery will be sure to see considerable financial gain.

But French President Emmanuel Macron is seeking to prevent companies from profiting from the misery of the pandemic. He is urging manufacturers to shield the vaccine from the dictates of the market and make it available at cost price.

A company could actually refrain from registering at the patent office, with the result that the vaccine would directly enter the public domain, where it could be used by everyone. For economic reasons, however, it is highly improbable that a company would forgo the profits, even if such a decision would burnish a company’s public image, which could in turn reap financial reward. Furthermore, such a move can bring

legal problems for corporations that neglect their fiduciary obligations to provide maximum profit to their shareholders.

Germany recently approved a special provision that empowers the federal ministry of health to use an innovation “in the interest of public welfare.” The consequence would be that vaccine would be freely accessible despite the awarding of a patent.

Moreover, patent protection can be limited by the issuance of compulsory licenses, if such a measure is found to be in the public interest. In other words, the protection of the lives and health of citizens is prioritized over the reaping of the full profits from an innovation.

It is disputable whether a risk to public health always justifies a compulsory license. Critics argue that incentive for research could diminish if discoveries and innovations no longer yield financial reward.

The debate over compulsory licenses was conducted with particular intensity in relation to AIDS medication. Only after sharp criticism from developing countries did it become feasible to alter the treaty on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, which resulted in the TRIPS Agreement.

Yet in the case of a compulsory license, innovators still receive “commensurate remuneration,” the value of which depends on certain factors such as the economic performance of the country requesting the license. This means that the US, Japan and Germany would have to pay more than African countries to have access to the vaccine. Pharmaceutical companies are thus going to need a dose of idealism before giving it their all in the race for the vaccine.

Helene Bubrowski is a political editor for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

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Dancing with tears in their eyes: The legendary club Kater Holzig had to close its doors in 2014.

BY MARUSHA

The Berlin Wall came tumbling down in 1989, yet was not torn apart and pulverized in its entirety. Large sections of the Wall were sawed into pieces, painted and transformed into art. The global symbol for division, espionage, permanent surveillance, constraint, dogma, captivity and death was symbolically liberated through art. Countless segments of the Wall still stand today all across the world as monuments to (very) recent history.

Since time immemorial, Berlin has been a refuge for artists from all corners of the creative world. The soul of Berlin has seen much come and go as it progresses ever forward, never idle, always in motion, even when this motion can seem rather casual and arrive somewhat late.

But suddenly something extraordinary was on the move.

Just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when half of East Berlin had emptied out, a kind of positive anarchy prevailed across the city. The East German government was in a state of shock, of agony. Nothing was really clear amid all the political chaos. Many apartments and some entire buildings lay empty. Ownership claims had not been resolved or former owners were nowhere to be found. Students in search of housing and newcomers to Berlin proceeded to occupy apartments and buildings in the eastern half of the city, as well as in the west.

The three years after 1989 were the most thrilling phase of German reunification. And this was also true for the music and dance scene. Anywhere and at any time, DJs and non-professional organizations hosted spontaneous parties and entertained a whole generation of young people with electronic music.

Techno!

These parties and DJs rang the ears of revelers in former Stasi buildings, in the Haus des Lehrers, at the Congress Center, in the small flower shop in the vast

Ahornblatt dining complex, at the EX!T, in former Russian restaurants like Café Moskau and in the Cosmos cinema. Everything was happening in and around Frankfurter Allee, right at Alexanderplatz.

One of Berlin's most legendary techno clubs was Tresor, which opened in 1991 in the vault beneath the former Wertheim department store dating back to 1929. The place was moist and smelled like rusty metal. The music was straight underground techno, loud and electronic. The air reeked of the vanilla scented additive used in fog machines; under the flashing of strobe lights, ravers danced to the hardest beats in the city.

When descending the stairs into the basement of Tresor, to the rusted safe deposit boxes of the former bank, you could no longer see the person right in front of you. But Tresor was no catwalk; it was not a place to see and be seen – people came there to dance. Whether or not you could see something through the fog was not as essential as the fat beats coming from the speakers. The dictum in Berlin was: first comes the sound system, then comes the rest of the club.

Planet, on Köpenicker Straße, directly on the river, was a Tresor rival as one of the most established and sought-after clubs in the city. There was always a line of people waiting to get in. And they were all natives. Berlin's tourist boom had yet to begin.

Every day, during the day, was a party in the warren of old tunnels under Potsdamer Platz. The entrance to the club led through a hatch in the ground and down a chicken ladder. This had once

been the busiest traffic intersection in Europe. But after World War II and during the GDR, it became a death strip riddled with mines. Now it was all being partied away at top volume, as if the remains of the East German regime were being pulverized by shock waves of musical force.

Many of the first parties and clubs were insider tips. You literally needed a secret code to gain entrance. There were telephone numbers you could call to get the lowdown on where and when to find the unadvertised locations and parties. You never knew where you would ultimately end up. It was pure thrill, true magic. A little research and every day you discovered new treasures of Berlin. It was an intense, spontaneous and liberating quest for the best and most extraordinary sounds of the city.

With no mandatory closing times, parties would rage on from Saturday night to Tuesday noon, or longer. Now and then someone would sweep through and clear out any lingerers, but then it would all carry on as before.

It was the candor and ingenuousness of and toward each and every participant, regardless of origin, profession or class, that made the techno music scene what it was. Everyone could behave as they wanted – everyone was unique and contributed to the colorful mosaic of the Berlin party set.

As this subculture developed, predominantly in the eastern half of Berlin, no one could have foreseen that techno music, above all, would spell the beginning of a pervasive culture that would pump real money into the city of Berlin's empty coffers – not

only by way of the Love Parade, which took place once a year and helped Berlin become a magnet for travelers.

Unfortunately, however, event organizers and the municipal government ran the Love Parade into a wall after 16 years – it has failed to take place in Berlin ever since. A few years after leaving Berlin, the Love Parade, then in Duisburg, was the site of a horrific tragedy resulting in 21 deaths, after which there would

be no more Love Parades. All that remains is the legend and the mourning. Nonetheless, Berlin is still the place to be for techno and is famous the world over for its clubs and electronic music scene.

Around ten years ago, investors, with hopes of making gobs of money, declared Berlin to be their favorite city. They bought up building after building with the goal of creating a vast landscape of top-notch luxury housing, and renovated blocks of apartments to transform them into pricey condominiums. Properties and buildings that housed clubs were



Last hurrah: Marusha during the final night of the mystical techno club Tresor in 2005

Since I have lived in Berlin, most clubs have been forced to change locations several times due to a new landlord or lease termination. Compared to many other large German cities, Berlin has been relatively successful in preserving its club subculture. But this success seems to be running dry. Many clubs have been forced to close or are now in danger of needing to.

What is a city like Berlin without a colorful nightlife, without cabarets, bars, musicians and back-lot artists? What is Berlin without after-hours parties,

without dance and music culture, without its smorgasbord of clubs and underground shops, without places where a vast array of cultures and people can meet, have fun, exchange ideas, evolve and learn from one another?

But it's not just the investors who are to blame for the advent of this tragedy. Let's not forget all the residents' complaints of inadequate sound insulation, or the commercial rent increases, as clubs are legally considered to be places of entertainment, and are thus equated with casinos, porn cinemas and brothels.

Politicians from various parties have filed motions to classify clubs as cultural sites, like operas, theaters and concert halls. This would relieve the budgets of many club operators, bolster the reputation of the club scene and award clubs the status of premium artistic enterprises. But even such a law would not rescue the clubs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has badly exacerbated an already dire situation. Clubs and bars in Berlin are vanishing into thin air. Clubs and DJs are producing DJ livestreams to raise money to save clubs. These efforts can at best serve as a stop-gap. Most clubs will not be able to survive the silence of live artists, many of whom have resorted to welfare assistance, as they are not permitted to work and can no longer make ends meet.

And the policy touted to rescue Berlin's club scene? The concepts developed by an established club commission must be implemented swiftly. Neglect and procrastination are the biggest mistakes the city could make. Once the scene is gone, it won't come back.

I hope the party's not over.

Marusha is a German electronic music DJ, television presenter, music producer and actress. She lives and works in Berlin.

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