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Forging ahead

A call for European leadership in times of turmoil

BY THEO SOMMER

No one looking back on the past decade can do so with satisfaction, let alone complacency. The world has become unstable. The international order created after World War II is breaking down; the global institutions established as part of that order are frail and ineffective. The COVID-19 pandemic has turned previously existing fault lines into frontlines. Troubles are piling up everywhere. In many places, cooperation is morphing into confrontation. US-China tensions have become the main axis of global politics; the rivalry between the two great powers will dominate the near future, regardless who is in the White House next January.

The European Union will have to adjust to the shifting geopolitical dispensation. No longer can it bank on the United States to provide global guidance and military protection. And it has to recognize that China, its primary economic partner, has grown into an assertive, some would say, aggressive challenger aspiring to world leadership.

Several states are testing Europe's unity: China with Xi Jinping's Silk Road Initiative and the "17+1" cooperation scheme in Eastern Europe and the Balkans; Russia with Vladimir Putin's assault on Ukraine and his attempt to destabilize the Brussels community – a target shared by US President Donald Trump; and Turkey with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman imperialism.

At the same time, the Europeans see a plethora of threats and crises coming ever closer. The Syrian civil war has swept millions of refugees west. Rising tensions over Ankara's predatory hunt for undersea oil and gas in the Mediterranean conjure up the dire specter of a war between the two NATO members Turkey and Greece.

Together with 1,100 German soldiers, central African forces and 15,000 UN Blue Helmets, 5,000 French troops are battling in Mali against Islamist terrorism. The recent coup – at the hands of Malian forces trained by the French and Germans – sent ripples across the Sahel and beyond.

In the Far East, China's onslaught on the freedoms of Hong Kong and its saber rattling over Taiwan could, like Washington's elevation of the People's Republic to an adversarial rogue state, set off an explosion in the South China Sea – a waterway of utmost importance to EU commerce.

Europe can no longer bank on the United States to provide global guidance and military protection

Another flash point touching Europe's interest is Libya, riven by internal conflict, in which the UN-recognized government in Tripoli is supported by Turkey, while Russian mercenaries assist General Khalifa Haftar's regime in the east. French President Emmanuel Macron is trying to protect Total's oil interest in the desert country. He is also pushing the Lebanese toward meaningful reforms of their collapsed political system.

Nearer to home, the fraudulent elections in Belarus triggered a popular uprising against the callous tyranny of Alexander Lukashenko. Its violent suppression by OMON police and the possibility that Russian troops might join the crackdown confronted the EU with another sticky problem, this one at its very border.

Given the darkening horizons, it is hardly surprising that calls for making Europe capable of global politics, *weltpolitiktfähig* in German, have been raised ever more insistently. Ursula von der Leyen, before assuming the presidency of the European Commission, put it quite bluntly: "Soft power alone won't suffice today if we Europeans want to assert ourselves in the world. Europe must also learn the language of power."

Macron chimed in: "We must use the grammar of today, a grammar of the language of sovereignty"; he wants to "revive Europe as a political and strategic power." Many others agree that only in a united Europe can our several nations be strong.

Learning the language of power, von der Leyen explained, "for one thing means building up our muscles, where hitherto we were able to rely on others, for example in security policy. Furthermore, it means using the existing power more purposefully where European interests are concerned."

What has become of all these striking statements? Regrettably, they have not moved beyond mere sound bites.

Optimists speak of Europe's geopolitical awakening in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Europe is stirring, they say, recalling Jean Monet's dictum: "Europe will be forged in crises." In the EU's €750 billion ($885 billion) economic recovery program, they see a "Hamiltonian moment" – a point in history when joint debt policy becomes the first chapter of a federal playbook. The deal allows the EU to borrow, tax and spend like an actual state.

It is indeed an important innovation enabling a strong economic convalescence and a more prosperous future. It does not, however, spell more unity among the 27 member states in foreign and security policy. The much touted strategic autonomy of the European Union remains hobbled by widely varying national stances on most foreign issues. There is no agreement on how to deal with Russia, China, Turkey, Africa or even the US. And the principle of unanimity regularly prevents joint action.

As long as the unanimity rule prevails and any small state can veto collective action, Europe will not be taken seriously in global politics. To be respected, it must speak with one voice – as it does in trade politics.

Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is not alone in calling for the abandonment of the unanimity principle and the introduction of qualified majority voting. "It would be better," he argues, "to adopt a strong and substantial position by a majority rather

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Éminence grise

Putin has not yet chosen a course vis-à-vis Belarus, but all signs point to his continued support for Lukashenko

BY GEMMA PÖRZGEN

After the disputed presidential election in Belarus on Aug. 9, Vladimir Putin was one of the first to congratulate Alexander Lukashenko on his landslide win. Yet the Russian president was cautious at first, pursuing more of a wait-and-see approach as to which position the Kremlin should take.

"Putin congratulated Lukashenko on his victory, but the tone of his remarks was cool and formal," noted the Moscow-based sociologist Lev Gudkov. Even Vladimir Zhirinovsky, chair of the right-wing nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, spoke of "election fraud," and Aleksey Pushkov, chair of the Duma Foreign Affairs Committee, called it a lost election rather than a victory. Coverage of the protests in Belarus was surprisingly fair and was even debated in Russian state media.

Leaders in Moscow were most certainly surprised that the anti-Lukashenko protests continued peacefully for weeks rather than coming to a quick conclusion. Even as the nation's security forces used violence in a ruthless attempt to quell the protests, the demonstrations spread across the entire country. Results included strikes at large state-operated companies and a genuinely popular people's movement against Lukashenko.

This clearly made an impression in Moscow, too, especially since the protests involved no anti-Russian sentiments, in contrast to the situation in Ukraine during the Maidan Uprising of 2014. Indeed, the Belarus opposition took great pains to ensure that the protest did not assume an anti-Russian character.

And yet Lukashenko remains in place as head of state in Belarus. He seems to be waiting out the protests while wearing them down through violent actions by the police. It seems that he can continue to count on the support of his security forces. His centralized power apparatus is showing no tangible cracks, and only a few high-ranking functionaries have withdrawn their allegiance.

Moscow is keeping a close eye on the situation. "Having Lukashenko remain in power is the best option for Putin," argues the Belarusian political scientist Yauheni Preiherman from the Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations. He is convinced that "Putin is the kingmaker of the Belarusian political crisis."

Russia's president appears to be keeping all of his options open. While Lukashenko refuses to take any phone calls from European politicians such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, Putin has picked up the phone and signaled his readiness for dialogue. Among the solutions being considered are talks within the framework of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and a constitutional process in Belarus.

At the same time, however, Putin also announced in late August that he had organized a standby security force that could intervene in Belarus if the situation got out of control. Most experts nevertheless consider military intervention by Moscow to be highly unlikely. For the Kremlin, such a move would involve an incalculable risk of triggering a wave of anti-Russian resentment in Belarus. An invasion would not be welcome.

The foreign policy damage would also be significant and further isolate the Russian leadership on the international stage. Furthermore, an invasion of Belarus wouldn't earn Putin any points among his own people.

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In contrast to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 – a move that was supported by a majority of people in Russia – surveys conducted by the Moscow-based Levada Center showed that only 13 percent of respondents were in favor of incorporating Belarus. "Most of the people surveyed think the relationship with Belarus should stay the way it is."

The threat of a Russian invasion is presumably being used more as a diversionary tactic in Moscow's effort to stabilize Lukashenko in less obvious ways and thereby further increase his dependence on the Kremlin. If successful, this approach would make the existing union between Belarus and Russia much stronger – a relationship that has so far been more of an administrative agreement than an actual union of states. In the past several years, Lukashenko has pursued a seesaw policy of resisting Moscow's insistence on closer ties between the two states while intermittently offering his services to the EU. But now that Lukashenko has been discredited as an election fraudster, the only thing he has left to secure his political survival is his close relationship to Russia.

In this regard, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's visit to Minsk on Sept. 3 was instructive. The official reason for the visit was to discuss the billions of rubles of debt owed to Russia by Belarus and to conclude an agreement about energy supplies. In the context of Mishustin' visit, Lukashenko shuffled around a number of high-level security officials.

Ivan Tertel was named the new head of the Belarusian secret service (KGB), replacing Valery Vakulchik. London-based political scientist Mark Galeotti sees Vakulchik's repeated resistance to interference by Moscow as the reason for his ousting. Galeotti also argues that the switch at the top spot of the secret service was carried out under pressure from Moscow, noting that Tertel likely has a better relationship to the Russian secret service (FSB).

These moves are an indication that the Kremlin is committed to strengthening cooperation on different levels. On one level, Moscow supports Lukashenko's power apparatus by deploying Russian "consultants" at various key contact points. The impact of this tactic is already felt in Belarusian media; after a number of journalists and technicians were fired, Russian colleagues took over their duties. In the meantime, these "Russian aides" have no doubt been installed in many other fields. Most recently, after hosting Lukashenko for talks at his residence in Sochi on Sept. 14, Putin made an announcement pledging a loan of $1.5 billion to Belarus in response to Lukashenko's plea that "a friend is in trouble, and I say that sincerely." Whether Russian aid remains purely monetary is an open question.

The situation in Belarus can change on a daily basis and the country's future is difficult to predict. If the peaceful protests were to suddenly turn violent, a change in Moscow's cautious policy is quite possible. People in Minsk are highly concerned that paid provocateurs might actually instigate such a turn of events in the near future.

Gemma Pörzgen
is a Berlin-based journalist specializing in Eastern Europe. She is also editor-in-chief of the magazine *Ost-West. Europäische Perspektiven* (East-West. European Perspectives).

Backroom bravado

As both big-tent German parties gear up for the post-Merkel era, the candidate carousel is in full swing

BY LUTZ LICHTENBERGER

Her era will have to come to an end eventually. Angela Merkel has been German chancellor since 2005; you would have to look long and hard to find another politician holding a country's top political position for so long, autocracies and banana republics excluded. But Merkel has unequivocally stated she will not run for office again in fall 2021, one year from now, in the Bundestag elections.

Her announcement in late 2018 and her subsequent resignation as chair of her party, the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), during a time when her approval ratings were on a precipitous downturn, did not make her a proverbial lame duck; it brought her a confined yet unequivocal new lease on power. In fact, it gave Merkel room to operate free of the common ills that often face democratic politicians with an overly cautious eye on reelection. She no longer has to try to please every constituency. A physicist by training, Merkel's rather uncharismatic, somber, almost scientific style of governing, allowing her to dissect a problem with surgical accuracy, has served her best. Big ideas, sweeping visions and grand oratory are not her cup of tea.

Merkel's largely deft handling of the COVID-19 pandemic – both the death rate and the economic downturn have been limited compared to other states in the European Union and overseas – has boosted her party's poll numbers to as high as 40 percent, a level not seen since 2013, when she won reelection in a landslide.

The biggest question in political circles these days is who will be tapped by her party to be its candidate for chancellor – and to have a very good chance of becoming Merkel's successor in office.

The CDU has already begun its version of what the US calls the "invisible primary," whereby candidates sort out their chances in backrooms (that is, when it was still permitted to meet face-to-face in enclosed spaces), garner support among important regional party officials, position themselves with sensible policy proposals and present themselves as either Merkel loyalists or purveyors of new ideas.

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer was the early front runner. The 58-year-old had been serving as minister president of the small southwestern state of Saarland until Merkel tapped her to become the CDU's general secretary, an influential post often doubling as stepping-stone to higher office. When Merkel resigned from her party post one year later, AKK, as she is often called, narrowly won the intra-party contest, besting two candidates who explicitly wanted to change Merkel's course, both symbolically and in terms of policy.

The biggest question in German political circles is who will be tapped by Merkel's party to be its candidate for chancellor

AKK won by adhering to Merkel's legacy while carefully staking out her own political territory. And yet, due to sinking approval ratings, rhetorical missteps and regional electoral losses, a frustrated Kramp-Karrenbauer stepped down in February just before the pandemic claimed all headlines and attention.

The party's poll numbers immediately went back up due to the German version of the "rally 'round the flag" effect that typically rewards the party in power in a time of crisis – that is, when the party is actually reacting to said crisis in an adequate and competent manner.

Even more than in previous years, the race for the party chairmanship is being considered a preliminary selection of the next chancellor. While it is common that the party chair secures his or her nomination for the general election, there is no automatic mechanism guaranteeing it – as recent events have shown.

Armin Laschet, minister president of Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia, Friedrich Merz, a long-time aspirant for the chancellery who's been biding his time and harboring his grudges since being outmaneuvered by Merkel 20 years ago, and Norbert Röttgen, the eloquent foreign policy expert, more respected than admired, have all thrown their hats into the ring.

On March 1, Laschet would have been a better's best choice; he had government experience, enjoyed broad appeal with his folksy and joyful demeanor and was the right man to cross every aisle.

But over the summer, his erratic and wavering handling of the pandemic – seen as too lenient, too eager to "reopen" – shone a different light on the leader. Fairly or not, he is now considered rather unsteady, indecisive and a bit of a panderer to the COVID-19-denying crowd.

Enter Markus Söder. The minister president of Bavaria, Germany's second-biggest state, and head of the CDU's sister-party, the Christian Social Union, has long been defined as the opposite of Laschet: too ambitious, calculating, combative.

In early 2018, Söder, for all intents and purposes, succeeded in forcing out his predecessor, Horst Seehofer. It was the culmination of a years-long bare-knuckles intramural struggle that eventually got him his self-proclaimed dream post.

Half a year later, Söder narrowly won reelection in Bavaria, not an outright rebuke of his claim to power, but a warning shot. Söder changed several of his right-leaning stances, got on better terms with Merkel, with whom he had often clashed, took on environmental and social issues, and refrained from dressing up in a colorful comic costume for Carnival, an old habit he now considered unbecoming for a statesman of his bearings.

When the virus struck in March, Söder pushed ahead in his newfound role. Restrictions were harsher in Bavaria; Söder was often the first to implement them, thereby forcing his colleagues' hand in other states to follow his lead – and never forgetting to take vocal credit for all he had done. Söder quickly became the Andrew Cuomo to Laschet's Ron DeSantis, the governors of New York and Florida whose pandemic policies were a study in contrast.

It did not take long for speculations to surface in Berlin as to whether Söder was priming for a joint nomination by the CDU and the CSU for the chancellorship in 2021.

Laschet could eke out a win in the race for the leadership of the Christian Democrats against Merz and Röttgen – with their once-promising runs now mere afterthoughts – and still not get the nomination at the party's convention in December. Söder still has to declare his candidacy. Most likely he will delay his declaration for as long as possible while gauging his chances. As is befitting the era of the pandemic we are living through, all bets are off concerning the future.

The Social Democrats (SPD), the coalition partner of the CDU/CSU, has had its own turbulent leadership rumblings.

After its first female party chair, Andrea Nahles, resigned in anger over intra-party bickering in June 2019, the SPD held its first-ever election for the party's top post in which all party members, not just several hundred delegates, were eligible; it was more akin to a US-style primary.

Candidates were encouraged to run on two-person tickets each comprising a woman and a man. In a surprise outcome in the final round, Saskia Esken and Norbert Walter-Borjans defeated Klara Geywitz and Olaf Scholz. Scholz, minister of finance and vice chancellor in Merkel's cabinet, is seen as being uncharismatic yet experienced, competent and reliable – the quintessential establishment candidate.

Esken, on the other hand, was a left-leaning, largely unknown backbencher in the Bundestag. She had chosen as her running mate the 70-year old Walter-Borjans, who only barely had a bigger national profile. Their headline-grabbling selling point was the stated goal of ending the grand coalition with the Christian Democrats. The mood in the party had become more leftish in late 2019, and Esken's and Walter-Borjan's often young supporters were considerably more adept at turning out the vote, thus securing their victory.

However, a little more than half a year later, on Aug. 10, the party empire struck back. The SPD's all-powerful steering committee, having already nixed a premature end to the coalition, was especially dissatisfied with Esken's unorthodox and loose style, and in a truly topsy-turvy move nominated Scholz, the loser of the primary, to stand as the candidate for chancellor next fall. Esken and Walter-Borjans had to publicly approve what has to be considered an all-out repudiation of their political viability.

Current polling suggests that the Social Democrats will receive 16 percent of the vote. Scholz would have to beat out the Greens, currently polling one to two points ahead, for second place and then hope to form a coalition with them and the Left Party. It is a narrow path to victory.

The CDU and CSU, currently at 37 percent, will most likely court the Greens to form an unprecedented partnership.

The eco-friendly Greens have moved closer to the center, positioning the party as the sensible choice for traditional bleeding-heart liberals and the affluent cosmopolitan latte-drinking progressives. The leadership duo of Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck project just enough surface charisma to brush over the unresolved policy conflicts that come with being open for both a center-right and a center-left coalition. The Greens are in an enviable position, as both the Union and the SPD desperately want to end the grand coalition that has governed Germany for 13 of the past 17 years. And after nearly joining the government in 2013 and 2017, they won't pass up the chance this time.

And yet, the establishment forces in both big-tent parties know they must steel themselves for the possibility that a continuation of their grand coalition may prove the best move forward at this time next year. Merkel's patented moderating style just might come in handy for her successor.

PICTURE ALLIANCE

Close pre-Corona, rivals now: Armin Laschet (left) and Markus Söder

Lutz Lichtenberger
is senior editor at *The German Times*.

PICTURE ALLIANCE/RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY PRESS O/TASS/DPA

Two men walk into a room and bring all their politics with them: German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov

Getting to "*da*"

German-Russian relations are poisoned, but common interests persist

BY MICHAEL THUMANN

There are Russians who see German hospitals as a salvation, and there are Russians who see them as a curse. The family of Alexei Navalny, Russia's foremost opposition leader, arranged for him to be treated at Berlin's Charité hospital after being subject to an apparent poison attack in August. The Russian government and its media empire have cast doubt upon the findings and diagnoses of his German doctors. The Navalny case is a burden to German-Russian relations, not due to Navalny, but rather to his government

Navalny's struggle against the toxins is not unrelated to the style of Russian leadership that has also succeeded in poisoning the country's relationship to Germany. The list of unsolved attacks on opposition figures, critical journalists and NGO representatives in Russia is a long one:

- Five years ago, the prominent former vice-premier and liberal politician Boris Nemtsov was shot dead just outside the walls of the Kremlin.

- In the middle of Berlin's Little Tiergarten, not far from the German chancellery, a Chechen named Zelimkhan Khangoshvili was murdered in 2019, and the federal prosecutor general is investigating circles of "Russian state officials" as possible instigators.

- The German federal government holds Russian services responsible for the cyberattacks on the Bundestag, chancellery and foreign ministry.

The Russian government contests the accusations and refuses to cooperate in the investigations. In the case of Alexei Navalny, German doctors and investigators concluded that he had been drugged with a nerve agent formerly produced in the Soviet Union. The Russian government and the doctors in Omsk have since disputed the German findings and presented numerous alternative potential causes of Navalny's condition. Behind the competing accounts lies a deeper divide.

Germany and Russia live under diametrically oppositional systems. Germany functions by the rule of law, a system in which the government and all authorities are subjected to the same laws and to the same degree as its citizens. Russia is an authoritarian state that exploits the law and its monopoly on the use of force to dominate its citizens.

This significant contrast defines and encumbers relations between the two powers, which stand to worsen considerably if Russia were to intervene with force in Belarus. How can these two countries remain in discussions under such conditions?

It is a widely held misbelief that the Russian and German governments do not talk to one another. Countless visits between leaders of the two countries belie this notion of a diplomatic vacuum; it is often Germany that seeks out Russia. Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas were already in Moscow during this difficult year defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. They talk regularly on the phone with President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In fact, they speak more frequently with their Russian counterparts than Helmut Kohl once did with his friend Boris Yeltsin, and more often than Chancellor Gerhard Schröder used to call Putin two decades ago. But today, Russia and Germany converse in an entirely different way.

When Heiko Maas traveled to Moscow on Aug. 11, he spoke with Lavrov about a number of topics: the murder in Berlin, the cyberattacks on the German government, Ukraine, Syria, Belarus, Iran. In response to Maas' request for assistance in the investigation of the attack in Berlin, the Russian foreign minister responded with newly concocted counter-accusations. In the Little Tiergarten case, he argued, the Germans are obliged to show evidence that Russian state officials were involved; and as for the cyberattacks, Russia has been hacked dozens of times this year "from the German segment of the internet." It was the first time that the Russians have raised such an accusation, and it sounded a whole lot like a tit-for-tat response.

This exchange provides a good summary of today's German-Russian dialogue. A reproach is levied, the accused is unresponsive to the concerns of the accuser, the accused invents accusations to distract from his failings, and trust is nowhere in sight. This, of course, stems from the contrast between rule by law and rule by force, as is on full display in the Navalny case.

But it also stems from the historical reversal of the roles of Russia and Germany in Europe – the second significant contrast between the two countries. After World War II, the Soviet Union was effectively a conservative power seeking to maintain all that it had conquered or controlled. At that time, the Federal Republic of Germany was revisionist in that, although as of 1970 it accepted Germany's external borders, it did not formally accept the internal partition of the country. Today, Germany seeks to preserve the order established in 1990 along with the Charter of Paris, while Russia is engaged in persistent revolt against this order.

Moscow sees the conflicts in Ukraine and recently in Belarus as a geopolitical struggle over the new order. Putin often ties Russian revisionism to the suggestion that it would be desirable to establish a new order in the form of arrangements and agreements between the great powers à la Yalta 1945.

The Germans, however, counter by looking to replicate a different conference from that same year, the one in San Francisco where the UN Charter was drafted. Great power agreements vs. multilateralism – this is the third great contrast in vision between Moscow and Berlin.

Many observers talk of a new Cold War with Russia, but this is a misconception. Another Cold War is as unlikely as the establishment of new Western and Eastern blocs. The world is no longer dominated by two superpowers whose ideologies collide while each establishes a sphere of influence according to its own agenda. We live amid an unstructured conflict of global and regional powers. The world is mired in a period of chaos and disorder that lacks clear orientation.

This discombobulated state of affairs paradoxically harbors the opportunity for a future German-Russian discourse that comprises more than just accusations and counter-accusations. After all, Russia and Germany – and Eurasia and Europe – will need to find their bearings between the colliding giants of China and the US.

Beyond Europe, Berlin and Moscow share several further goals. Both would like to continue the nuclear deal with Iran that the US government broke and exited in 2018. At the end of August, Moscow and Berlin united in the UN Security Council to reject the dubious US request to trigger the snap-back mechanism of the Iran sanctions. Both Germany and Russia have no interest in an American-Chinese antagonism leading to a new "You're with us or against us" dichotomy.

And both also reject the principle of extraterritorial sanctions. For Russia and Germany, the US government's attempt to use sanctions to force countries and companies to toe the American line is an attack on their sovereignty. Accordingly, they both are resisting the ever-new rounds of US sanctions concerning the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

These US sanctions have forced Berlin and Moscow into a community of action. Even if many German politicians are questioning Nord Stream 2 in the wake of the attack on Navalny, neither Berlin nor Moscow is prepared to entirely abandon the natural gas relationship they have been cultivating for more than 50 years. Furthermore, Germany and Russia share a common interest in several disarmament treaties that US President Donald Trump is obliterating or that his country is abandoning. The Treaty on Open Skies is the latest agreement from which Trump is seeking to pull out. Germany and Russia want to preserve it.

There are ample topics on which Berlin and Moscow can converse and on which they share similar viewpoints. The German and Russian governments could expand upon these overlappings, in the UN Security Council, in the OSCE as well as on a bilateral basis.

But this is scarcely possible if Russia pushes the three structural differences between Moscow and Berlin to their breaking point: contempt for law vs. respect for law, revisionism vs. preservation, and great power agreements vs. multilateralism. If Russian government agencies bring their hunt for opposition leaders to the streets of Berlin or promote cyberattacks on the German government, it becomes very difficult to tackle global problems in cooperation with Moscow. And if the Russian government continues its attempt to create divisions within the EU, the German government will have to pursue the opposite strategy: to close the ranks of the EU vis-à-vis Moscow, including the use of sanctions.

Unfortunately, in recent history, these kinds of adversarial tiffs have occurred far too often. If nothing else, German-Russian relations are a story of willfully missed opportunities.

Michael Thumann
is a foreign policy correspondent for *Die Zeit.*

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ARD MEDIATHEK

TIMES PAST, TIMES PRESENT: In 1975 Theo Sommer (left) spoke about Germany's role vis-à-vis the two superpowers on *International Frühschoppen*, a German TV roundtable.

"Not too long ago, most of us assumed it was inevitable that Cold War tensions would erupt and result in a major nuclear explosion. But this was an unfounded assumption. And now, of course, we must admit that there is no utopian situation in which we can eschew the normal forms of behavior engaged in by the superpowers, such as rivalry, competition, conflicts of interests, attempts to double-cross one another and even take each other for a ride. This kind of behavior will never stop, and we in Europe can do little to change this. Instead, for ourselves – and for the sake of peace in general – it is much more important that the superpowers restrain themselves and that we try in pragmatic ways and via pragmatic common understandings to make peace more secure here in Europe, to quote Willy Brandt. This is the key task for the immediate future."

than unanimously adopting a weak position with little substance." His stance is shared by many others, including German Chancellor Angel Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. But so far, no one has taken any concrete initiative.

At any rate, it is hard to see that such an initiative would be assured of success. More likely than not, the EU will remain condemned to make indignant statements about territorial encroachments, human rights violations and meddling in its internal affairs by foreign powers, calling them deeply concerning, deplorable and unacceptable, but basically limiting itself to lamentations and ineffective sanctions.

In these times of turmoil, that's not enough. To be taken seriously in the world, the EU will have to forge a foreign and security policy all of a piece. If necessary, a core Europe should forge ahead, as it did when creating the eurozone and the borderless Schengen area, where no one is excluded, but the unwilling cannot put spokes into the wheel of the willing.

What could or should be the guidelines for a European foreign policy? The following ten are a start:

1. Hold up our own interests and values. To quote Joe Biden: "Hang tough, but keep talking."
2. Build bridges, not walls. Help defuse tensions and stave off confrontations.
3. Foster diplomacy, confidence building and compromise.
4. Press for new arms control and disarmament accords.
5. Redefine security beyond the realm of the military.
6. Take the lead in reforming flawed international institutions and revamp multilateralism.
7. Assist the prevention of another Great Depression à la 1929 as well as another global financial crisis à la 2007–2008.
8. Make the world safer against future pandemics like COVID-19.
9. Lay out the elementary principles of a worldwide agreement on migration and asylum.
10. Set an example for policies to avert climate change.

One should not assume with complacency that the world will breeze through the crises to come. Leaders had better heed the warnings of the historian Margaret MacMillan: "How the world copes will depend on the strength of its institutions and, at crucial moments, on leadership. Weak and indecisive leaders may allow bad situations to get worse, as they did in 1914. Determined and ruthless ones can create wars, as they did in 1939. Wise and brave ones may guide the world through the storms."

Let us hope that the European Union can find and furnish enough such wise and brave leaders to shepherd us out of these harrowing times.

Theo Sommer
is the executive editor of *The German Times.*

PICTURE ALLIANCE/AP PHOTO/ CAROLYN KASTER/DPA PICTURE-ALLIANCE GMBH/OBS

Hope: Kamala Harris and Joe Biden

IF

Pondering a possible Biden-Harris administration

BY JULIANE SCHÄUBLE

In most corners of the world, hopes are running high that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will win the upcoming US election and thus bring to a close this current dark chapter. These hopes, however, rest on less-than-sound footing, and for several reasons. The unrest in American cities, the possibility of a vaccine being introduced in advance of the election, a rebound in the US economy and, last but not least, Biden's personal performance as the oldest presidential candidate in US history pose a number of imponderables. The polling gurus lost much of their credibility after having erroneously forecast Hillary Clinton's electoral victory four years ago.

November 2020 will mark 51 years since Joe Biden won office for the first time. In 1969, the 27-year-old was elected to the New Castle County Council in the state of Delaware. Two years later, he won one of his state's two seats in the US Senate. How much of a fresh start can be expected from someone who's practiced politics for over a half century?

In terms of foreign policy, the answer is simple. Should Biden and Harris win, the need for innovation will be minimal; a simple rollback of their predecessors' poor decisions and an official end to the "America First" policy would suffice. Immediately upon taking office on Jan. 20, 2021, they would begin re-integrating the US into the international community by returning to commitments, for example, with treaties on climate protection (Paris) and arms control ("Open Skies"). As the COVID-19 pandemic will certainly still be among us, they would be sure to rejoin the World Health Organization. They would also be sure to demonstrate the end of Trumpism and underscore the importance of alliances by traveling to their country's bewildered allies in Europe and working to restore the trans-Atlantic relationship.

Just as Biden will seek to "heal" and reunite his country, he will also seek to straighten out relations with US allies. This would involve, for starters, a radical shift in diplomatic tone. One can assume that a Biden administration will select its ambassadors using a different set of criteria than applied by the Trump administration. For example, Berlin and Brussels could expect to be negotiating with emissaries possessing intimate knowledge of Germany and Europe, and who empathize with European interests. This alone would make a tremendous difference.

However, according to what we know now – and foreign policy rarely plays a significant role in elections – Biden will not necessarily reverse all of Trump's decisions on the international stage. He is unlikely to move the US embassy back to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem, and whether he rejoins the Iran nuclear deal – a bone of contention even in his own party – is an open question. And no one should expect the US to drop the demand that the Europeans, and particularly Germany, raise their defense expenditures. Barack Obama and his Vice President Biden, already applied considerable pressure on this issue almost a decade ago. And as Americans are weary of war, they will not approve of more intensive international ventures.

At any rate, domestic problems like those Obama faced in 2009 at the beginning of his presidency, when the US was mired in financial crisis, are likely to command all of a new government's attention from day one. Addressing the pandemic and its severe economic ramifications will be the mega-issue of a Biden-Harris administration. In contrast to Trump, Biden will place emphasis on international coordination in this regard. A travel ban for Europeans without previous discussion with US allies will not happen under Biden. And his team would sooner address a looming global crisis over food supplies – not in conflict with other countries, but rather with their cooperation.

However, the economic situation is likely to force a Biden administration to do its utmost to assure that the US will regain its footing. "Build Back Better" is the official campaign slogan, but "Buy American" might be a more honest one. It would be naïve to think that under Biden and Harris, Washington would never turn to protectionist measures. For proof, one need look no further than the Democrats' economic platform, which was formulated in cooperation with the party's assertive left wing: "For too long, the global trading system has failed to keep its promises to American workers. Too many corporations have rushed to outsource jobs, and too many countries have broken their promises to be honest and transparent partners." The pandemic has laid bare the risks of being overdependent on global supply chains. Moreover, Biden is making the campaign pledge of investing $400 billion in the purchase of goods produced in the US before concluding any new trade agreements. A Biden administration will also heed and react to trade balance differentials.

But the general tone of US diplomacy will sound rather different than it does now. Over the past three-plus years, tensions in trans-Atlantic trade disputes have heightened, as each move by one side is usually followed by an escalated reaction of the other. One should hope that in new trade disputes, the World Trade Organization will once again become more deeply involved. The Democrats also perceive the need for reforming this WTO, even if their plans remain rather vague.

How much of a fresh start can be expected from someone who's practiced politics for over a half century?

The future composition of Congress will be crucial in determining how much leeway, allegiance and support Biden and Harris would enjoy. Obama and Biden did not, for example, succeed in getting the Paris Climate Agreement through Congress. And with the Iran nuclear deal, the dismal outlook for success prevented the Obama government from even seeking congressional approval. It will be vital for Biden – and for an improved foreign policy – to see the Democrats gain a majority in the Senate; and as of now, the odds of such an outcome are none too shabby.

During Trump's tenure, dealings with China have become a major issue, and the pandemic has only exacerbated this trend. It is widely believed in Washington that Beijing has indulged in malicious behavior, which has led the Trump administration to resort to harsh rhetoric vis-à-vis Beijing. But Biden would also pursue a foreign policy critical of China. In his campaign, he has continually attacked the incumbent for being soft on China.

Biden has already revealed that he would not immediately lift punitive tariffs against China. It is also likely that his administration would do more to emphasize human rights issues in China, which will increase pressure on Germany and Europe to side more clearly with the Americans. From the US perspective, Europeans have consistently acted too hesitantly in the face of Chinese provocations, and placed too much emphasis on their own economic interests. This might pose a threat to trans-Atlantic relations, even once Trump is out of office.

The same goes for relations with Russia. A Biden administration would not only seek trans-Atlantic collaboration, it would demand a closing of ranks. One persistent dispute, however, could soon finally be settled: The poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has prompted the German government to openly consider terminating support for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

One reassuring factor for Europeans is that Biden's most significant foreign policy advisors already played a role in the Obama-Biden administration. Tony Blinken served for a time as Biden's national security advisor in the White House, as did Jake Sullivan, who played a leading role in forging the Iran deal. Although Susan Rice was not ultimately chosen as Biden's running mate, she brings a great deal of experience from her tenure as Obama's national security advisor and ambassador to the UN. Samantha Power, Obama's second UN ambassador, is under consideration as a potential secretary of state. Europe expert Julie Smith, who served for a time as Vice President Biden's deputy national security advisor and was recently called back to Washington from her fellowship at Berlin's Bosch Academy, will play a role in a possible Biden-Harris administration, perhaps as the ambassador to NATO or the UN. ■

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

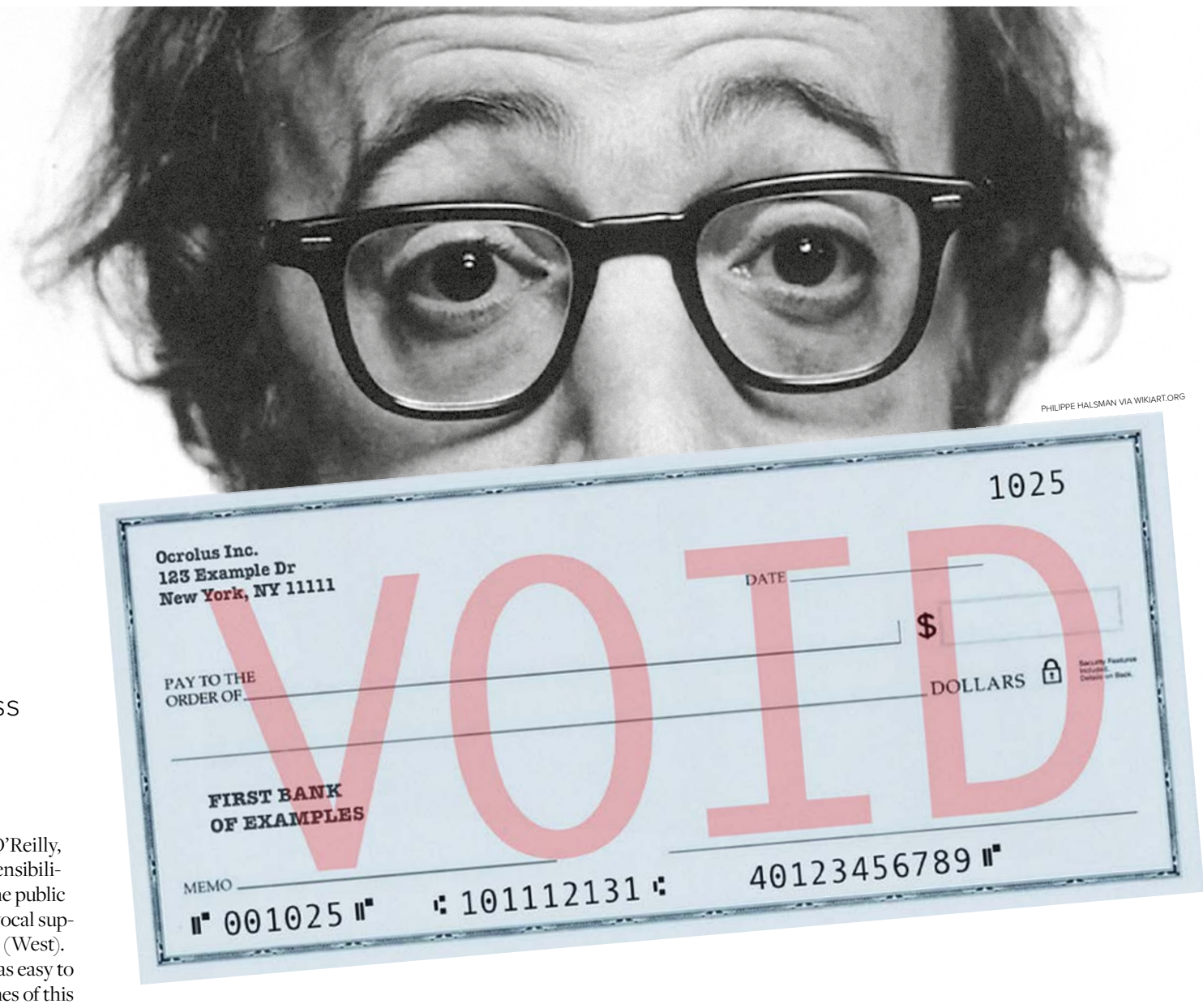
CORRECTION: In the print version of the July edition of *The German Times*, an article by Naïla Chikhi contained two editorial errors. The corrected sentences read as follows:

"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."

"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."

Read the updated version of the article here:

www.german-times.com/discriminating-minds-three-perspectives-on-racism-part-ii/



PHILIPPE HALSMAN VIA WIKIART.ORG

Transaction canceled

Although values and moral priorities are changing rapidly, it's still business as usual for free-market capitalism

BY JONATHAN LUTES

There's a new buzzterm in Western politics, culture and media, and it should come to no one's surprise that it's also a trigger for both sides of the ever-hardening left-right ideological divide. "Cancel culture" – or sometimes "call-out culture" – is a new term for the ancient phenomenon of ostracizing a person or group for behavior that a certain number of others (not always a majority of others) find to be beyond the pale. The fact that this old practice has been given a fresh name is a reflection of today's political polarization and the heightened sensitivities of those at either extreme – as well as the fact that the internet and the collective social media allow for new ideas, or really new spins on old ideas, to spread like wildfire. And these same venues give near-immediacy to the cancellation of a person or group that runs afoul of a critical mass of media socializers. But how is cancel culture reflected in the free markets of advanced capitalist systems? And, in particular, if wealth and profit continue to be determined by the natural forces of supply and demand, then what are people on the right still complaining about?

It's safe to say everyone reading this knows – and probably admires or once admired – at least one personality famous in Germany and around the world who to a greater or less degree has been cancelled: Michael Jackson, Kevin Spacey, Mel Gibson, Harvey Weinstein, Bill O'Reilly, Tucker Carlson, J.K. Rowling, Woody Allen, Bill Cosby and Kanye West, just to name ten of the dozens that could make this sentence even longer. Sometimes people are canceled for crimes for which they've been convicted (Weinstein, Cosby), alleged crimes for which they were acquitted (Jackson), alleged crimes for which they were never indicted (O'Reilly, Allen), offending the sensibilities of broad swaths of the public (Carlson) or for being a vocal supporter of Donald Trump (West).

Judging by history, it was easy to predict how the battle lines of this issue would be drawn between the right and left. The right tends to attack cancel culture as yet another liberal plot to quash free speech and force the whole world to embrace their moralizing politically correct agenda. And the left is less repelled by cancel culture, as it has long been willing to accept a certain curtailment of free speech in the furtherance of its stated goals of tolerance and inclusivity.

But the issue is more complicated than this rough configuration describes. An important distinction between the general arguments on either side of the debate is that the left's take is in line with its past political philosophy, while the right has abandoned some of its bedrock ideas in its demonization of cancelation.

The Merriam-Webster website states that to cancel someone is "to stop supporting them or their work. This means no longer reading what they write, listening to or watching what they create, or enjoying what they produce." Implicit in this definition is that the cancelee is being deprived of making money from the sales of the product or intellectual property that made him or her famous enough to be vulnerable to cancelation in the first place. And if we agree on this description of what it means to cancel someone, we should note that to cancel is "to stop supporting" the offender, not to legally ban their work or fine them. This reveals the contradiction, or even double standard, committed by the right in its dismissal of cancel culture, and the left in its embrace.

In the West, a hallmark of the right, at least before Trump, is its love of free and unencumbered commerce, which includes a distaste for regulations, a hatred of tariffs and scorn for anyone or anything that may inhibit Adam Smith's "invisible hand" of the market. In its loyalty to the bottom line and its love of unemotional equations to maximize profit, shouldn't the right respect a movie producer for reading the news of Kevin Spacey's alleged sexual assaults and his ties to sex-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and deciding that box office returns would take a heavy hit if his face were on movie posters? Think of Mr. Spacey as a brand, which represents high-quality acting, a mantle of grade-A industry awards as well as charm – if not its smooth underbelly – but now also a reputation for indulging in activities that will repulse over half of the movie-going public. A Hollywood executive's calculation suddenly changes; maximizing ticket sales now means opting for a lesser-known actor without a seedy past. But before we shed too many tears for the star of *American Beauty* and *House of Cards*, we should remember that his career is hardly over; yet his value has diminished, and – for now – the films for which he's hired will target a smaller, more niche viewership more likely to overlook his past transgressions. So, although he is one of the poster boys for cancel culture, his cancelation is likely to be far from thorough.

Judging by history, it was easy to predict how the battle lines of cancel culture would be drawn

A more salient example, considering his job as an opinion leader at Fox News and thus his role as an arbiter of such things as cancel culture, is Tucker Carlson. Mr. Carlson can lay claim to hosting the most-watched prime-time program in US cable news history. His brand of toxic right-wing partisanship is well suited for his network, as evidenced by the more than 4 million viewers that watch him every weeknight. But beginning in 2018 and intensifying this summer, Carlson's racist, sexist, nationalist and generally below-the-belt rhetoric has caused his more mainstream advertisers like Disney and T-Mobile to flee his show for fear of their brands being associated with his belligerence and negativity. According to media watchdog Media Matters, to date he has lost more than 70 sponsors, yet the ratings he maintains, which has kept the show's ad revenue afloat, makes it an easy choice for his network to retain him and pay him over $5 million a year.

When three years ago it became public that Carlson's elder predecessor Bill O'Reilly had been involved in five sexual harassment lawsuits – settled out of court by Fox News for a whopping $82 million – his prime-time opinion show lost half its advertisers in one week and was summarily canceled. It seems here that the calculus of ratings through the roof yet absurd legal payouts and a salary five times that of Carlson just didn't add up. But the broader point is that as much as the right complains about what it sees as the moralizing, politically correct censors on the left, for the most part, cancel culture in the marketplace follows the same rules as a free market always has, but now with some new criteria for value assessment and market worth.

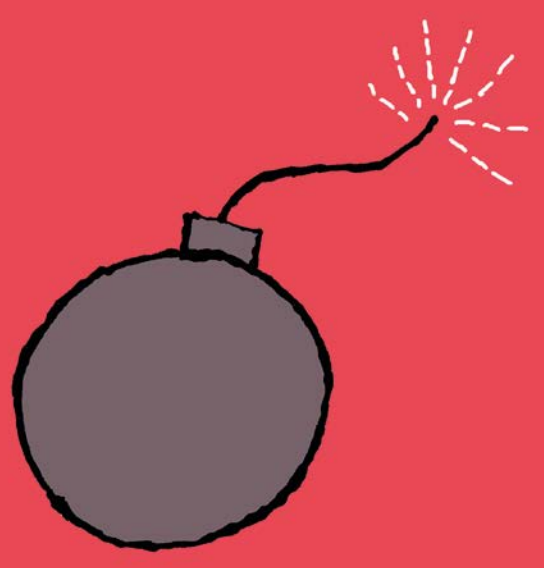
The left's response to cancel culture has been a mix of *Schadenfreude*, introspection and cannibalism. The former points to a certain delight in seeing a powerful person get their comeuppance, especially when that person is mouthpiece or a symbol of the right. But when the cancelee is someone not usually associated with the right, such as Cosby, Weinstein or Allen, introspection ensues as to how they could have produced, in these cases, art that was so sympathetic, especially to the left. And then the purported moral puritans on the far left are eager to further politicize the cause and carry it to an extreme that then alienates much of the moderate left, such as when US Senator Al Franken – a former comedian – was pressured by his colleagues to resign before a Senate ethics panel could complete its announced investigation into sexual misconduct allegations. While most of the Democrats in the US Senate can hardly be called far-left, they evidently can't risk alienating the far left, and with a confessed sexual molester – boaster, even – as US president, the opportunity for the Democrats to create the impression of starker moral contrast with their opposing party was too attractive to pass up.

No matter one's political affiliation or how one feels about the growing number of deposed celebrities, the consistency of the left's response – albeit sometimes taken to the extreme – and the inconsistency on the right may be further proof, at least in the US but in similar ways in Europe as well, of the populist dismantling of the fundamental principles of conservatism.

In a less polarized political environment, true believers in free-market capitalism could perhaps see their contradiction in complaining of the disenfranchisement of canceled celebrities and the curtailment of those celebrities' free speech. After all, their speech is still free, it's just that fewer people want to hear it, and while they're still welcome to produce their goods, they'll just have to accept that those goods will fetch a lower price than they once did. But the hyper-polarization of today leaves no room for nuance. If you believe in unbridled speech and unbridled profit, it may prove too daunting a task to strap a bridle on your speech, even if doing so would be more profitable.

Jonathan Lutes
is a US journalist living and working in Berlin.

PICTURE ALLIANCE/DIEKLEINERT



Rem(a)inders

The uncanny presence of World War II munitions in everyday German life

BY J. J. HAGEDORN

If someone found a one-thousand-pound unexploded bomb in downtown Manhattan or along the banks of the Potomac in Washington, there's no doubt it would make international headlines. News outlets would race to cover the evacuation process, and journalists would park their mobile-broadcast vans on site, hoping to get the first footage of a possible detonation.

In Germany, however, such discoveries are made on an almost daily basis – often in major cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne – with nothing more than a passing note in the local newspaper. Of course, the bombs and other munitions being unearthed from the German depths are nothing new, literally. Almost all of them are leftovers from World War II, when the Allies dropped roughly 2.7 million tons of airborne ordnance on Europe – half of that on Germany – in their endeavor to rid the continent of fascism. Experts estimate that as many as 10 percent of those bombs, shells and grenades failed to explode, however, which is why they continue to pop up, forcing each new generation of Germans to confront a terrifying era in their history.

Or not. If truth be told, the presence of these leftover weapons is so ubiquitous that most Germans and longtime residents are usually nonplussed when news of a *Munitionsfund* – munitions find – makes its way into their lives. In fact, headlines such as "Passerby finds WWII bomb on the banks of the Rhine" are not uncommon in the back pages of newspapers. In August 2018, for example, in the town of Mönchengladbach in North Rhine-Westphalia, a man who had found a metal cylinder while gardening in his backyard simply placed the object in a cardboard box, put it in his car and drove it to the local fire station. Needless to say, the firefighters were less than pleased when he showed up with what turned out to be an unexploded British-made bomb.

These pieces of unexploded ordnance, which are referred to in Germany as *Blindgänger* – blind walkers, or military lingo for duds – started wreaking havoc throughout the country almost immediately after World War II ended. And they haven't let up since. It's precisely because duds never stopped posing the risk of detonation that each new generation of Germans has long since gotten used to stumbling upon them, often in the middle of their most populated cities.

For example, on the evening of Friday, April 13, 2018, parents at an elementary school in Mitte, a cosmopolitan district in downtown Berlin, received the following email from the principal: "Dear Parents," it read, "We would like to inform you that munitions were found on [the school's] construction site this morning. The annex wing and some rooms in the main building were closed. The police cordoned off a large area around the school. Your children were cared for during this time. After an hour, the danger had passed and everyone was permitted to return to their classrooms." The principal signed off her email with the words "Have a relaxing weekend!" and "Hope to see you all tomorrow at our annual spring courtyard cleanup!"

For foreign tourists, visitors from abroad and especially non-German helicopter parents, such a blasé approach to unexploded ordnance can be jaw-dropping or, at best, difficult to comprehend. When Berlin boasts of being a family-friendly city where history echoes on every street corner and each step holds new and exciting discoveries, one doesn't expect this to involve a historical legacy that could actually blow up. And having to add the potential of exploding Nazi-era munitions to the list of concerns for their children's safety is a lot to ask of the average couple raising a family in the nation's capital.

But it's not just in hot spots like downtown Berlin that these uncanny remnants of World War II continue to pop up. Just last month, on Aug. 9, two children swimming in Gorinsee Lake, a popular summer-weekend destination 40 minutes by car from the Brandenburg Gate, noticed a strange object in the water that later turned out to be a World War II hand grenade. The police were called in and over 100 bathers ordered to leave the lake immediately. Only three hours later, after the *Kampfmittelbeseitigungsdienst* – a delightful German compound word for the combat weapon removal service – had given the all-clear, were bathers allowed to return to their summer merrymaking.

How might we explain the relative composure of Germans and longtime residents vis-à-vis these explosive reminders of times past? Again, the short answer is very simple: they're used to them. Much like a snow day in Canada or a bushfire-related closing in Australia, each new generation of kids in Germany is introduced to the idea that there are bombs and grenades that need to be removed by teams of specialists; and in order for that work to be done properly, everyone needs to leave the area for a bit. In other words, as long as their parents are chill, no child is going to question how it's possible that someone just found a 75-year-old bomb in the very spot where they'd been playing volleyball and practicing handstands for the past six years.

Unfortunately, things do not always turn out for the best when it comes to these combustible messengers from below. On Aug. 10 of this year, only one day after the summer bathers at Gorinsee were interrupted in their revelry, a 21-year-old police officer in the Munich district of Freimann was seriously injured by a phosphorous World War II bomb that exploded as he approached to extinguish what passersby had told him was a fire; the phosphorous had reacted and detonated, causing the officer to suffer massive burns on his arms, legs and head. In fact, every once in a while, these munitions actually claim lives in Germany. Back in 2010, in the city of Göttingen, three highly trained experts were killed after a bomb they were in the process of defusing detonated unexpectedly.

No matter how much people have gotten used to it, unexploded artillery is still a very serious business in Germany. The country has a massive system in place to scan the earth below and, when something is found, to deal with the menace as quickly, safely and efficiently as possible. To get an idea of the scale of the operation involved after a large *Munitionsfund* in a populated area, we need only look at what happened this past June when a British bomb was found at the bottom of the Havel River in downtown Potsdam.

After examining the 250-kg blind walker, demolition experts determined that it was too dangerous to attempt to defuse it under water or remove it to be exploded elsewhere; the bomb was going to have to be blown up right where it was. The result was the largest ever evacuation in the history of Potsdam.

Among the buildings that had to be evacuated were Potsdam Central Station, several state ministries, the state parliament, the state chancellery as well as a number of museums. Roughly 13,000 people were also forced out of their apartments, and the residents of three nursing homes had to be evacuated to emergency shelters. And let's not forget that this took place in the middle of a global pandemic. The evacuation of the seniors, for example, had to be carried out in shifts, with each nursing home assigned its own alternative accommodation so as to avoid contact. After a number of delays, including a heavy thunderstorm and several people attempting to sneak back into the restricted area set up by police, the bomb was finally detonated with only minor damage to surrounding trees.

If we see the ground underneath cities like Potsdam and Berlin as a palimpsest embodying the country's rich yet also terrifying social, architectural and political history, these unexploded bombs are one of its deepest, most revealing layers. Unlike the elegant *Stolpersteine*, those golden cobblestones found throughout the country that ask passersby to reflect for a moment on the residents taken from their homes and murdered in concentration camps, these munitions – when they appear – scream up from the ground below and aggressively demand attention. Unfortunately for both the elegant and the not-so-elegant reminders, many people have long stopped noticing.

J. J. Hagedorn
is an author living in Berlin.

Mandatory Musk

Tesla is building its European Gigafactory in Brandenburg at such a breakneck speed that local infrastructure can hardly keep up

BY INA MATTHES

PICTURE ALLIANCE/SOEREN STACHE/DPA ZENTRALBILD

Operation Warp Speed: Elon Musk drove into town this summer.

Elon Musk is standing on the construction site of his European Gigafactory. Behind him in the distance, a dense arrangement of concrete pillars rises up from the ground. A traditional German "topping-out" garland swings in the wind as it hangs from a building crane. "Deutschland rocks!" exclaims Musk.

This is the first time the Tesla boss has visited his forthcoming Gigafactory in Grünheide, located just across the city limits of Berlin in the state of Brandenburg, near the Polish border. A group of journalists and fans have been waiting for him for hours, and now he's finally there. He's wearing a big smile along with a dark suit and a white shirt. You might even say Musk looks approachable. "Grünheide is great," he says.

To be completely truthful, the South-African-Canadian-American entrepreneur has most likely been to Grünheide at least once before. Rumor has it that he'd already surveyed the area but had done so incognito. And then, finally, at a gala in the German capital in November 2019, he announced his intention to build the first Europe-based Gigafactory "near Berlin."

There was nothing to see back then except a dense pine forest. The chosen land is a wooded area between the Berlin Autobahn "ring" and a stretch of a regional railway line. In 2001, BMW had shown interest in building a factory there, but the Bavarians ended up choosing big-city Leipzig over this small town in Brandenburg, which is surrounded by forests and home to roughly 8,500 inhabitants.

What might have seemed like a setback for the community and the whole region at the time, has turned out to be a stroke of luck. When the billionaire Musk came calling, Brandenburg was able to pull 300 hectares of well-situated land out of its hat. Brandenburg's Governor Dietmar Woidke (SPD) has called the project "the largest industrial investment in eastern Germany since 1990."

When the billionaire Musk came calling, Brandenburg was able to pull 300 hectares of well-situated land out of its hat.

It's not surprising that many Brandenburgers expect the US automaker to generate well-paying industrial jobs. While the logistics sector in the greater Berlin area is definitely booming, those jobs are considered only moderately well-paid. Plus, there's the fact that many well-compensated jobs in the mining sector in southern Brandenburg are set to disappear along with Germany's exit from brown coal. Starting in July 2021, it is expected that 12,000 people will eventually work at the Tesla factory manufacturing 500,000 Model Ys each year.

The Gigafactory construction site is not only the biggest in Brandenburg, it is also being built at a speed that outpaces all others. Musk announced his investment in November 2019. In January 2020, the plans were made public, and at the end of February 2020, 90 hectares of forest were cut down over the course of six days by lumberers from Germany, Finland and Ukraine. Since then, the factory has been growing rapidly thanks to the use of pre-fabricated concrete building parts. Musk's ultimate goal is to outpace the construction of his Gigafactory in Shanghai by 11 months.

Even a year ago, very few people would have believed that German bureaucracy – notorious for its meticulousness and maddening snail's pace – would go along with and thus facilitate such a breakneck speed. Don't forget, Brandenburg is the federal state where the capital region's new international airport (BER) is only now nearing completion – roughly nine years after it was supposed to open, 15 years after construction began and 29 years after planning began. (see page 23)

But Elon Musk is not only fast, he's also a notorious risk-taker. To date, the entrepreneur still does not have a final permission slip from the state of Brandenburg. Tesla is building in a step-by-step manner with only temporary approval from the state. The final go-ahead is expected to come in the fall. If the approval goes through, it will mean the factory has the official green light for completion. But this green light also means that residents can start taking legal action against the factory.

On the other hand, if the final approval fails to come through, Tesla will have to take down everything it built to date. This is, however, a highly unlikely scenario, and many politicians continue to stress enthusiastically that they see the factory as being right on track.

Others see it differently. Roughly 400 petitions against the project have been submitted by citizens or associations to the Brandenburg State Office of the Environment. Most of them revolve around concerns regarding the environment, deforestation and the area's water balance.

Among the opponents of the factory is a citizens' initiative from Grünheide. In early September, when Musk was expected at the construction site, this group of locals stood at the entrance driveway holding signs that read: "Stop the careless exploitation of nature and groundwater immediately."

Some sections of the site are indeed located in a drinking water protection zone. "It's the wrong site for this factory," said Steffen Schorcht, spokesman for the initiative. From the point of view of Schorcht and other critics, the needs of the factory will endanger the supply of water to the local population over the long term. According to current plans, Tesla will use about as much water as a city of 40,000 inhabitants. But planners also want the factory to be able to expand even further, thereby attracting even more companies. And then there are the problems caused by climate change, for example that groundwater reservoirs have been replenishing more slowly due to droughts in the past two years.

Still, defenders of the factory claim that Tesla moving into the neighborhood will do nothing more than exacerbate problems that have long since plagued the region. At least that's the way Grünheide resident Martin Hildebrandt sees it. Back in January, when 200 people took to the streets for the first time to protest against the factory, he spontaneously organized an anti-demonstration. Hildebrandt said he wanted to show that the majority of Grünheide residents were not against Musk moving in.

Tesla advocates hope that money will flow into the region soon after the carmaker starts producing its vehicles. There is also a significant amount of pressure being applied to resolve urgent infrastructure problems. For example, skyrocketing rents in Berlin and low building-interest rates have been attracting capital-city residents to the outskirts for years now, and the Tesla factory is expected to draw another 10,000 people to the region. With kindergartens and schools simply nonexistent, and with infrastructure like trains and highways used to capacity, across-the-board improvements, particularly with regard to the rail network, will prove essential.

Tesla intends to transport its vehicles and other materials primarily by train. The idea is also to have employees reach the factory directly by rail. However, the expansion of the train network is proving to be a tough nut to crack, and Tesla has now shifted its position and will rely initially on trucks when production starts. Roughly 460 trucks are expected to make the trip every day.

It should come as no surprise if this approach exacerbates the existing transport problems. Municipalities and rural districts are working together with the state of Brandenburg to come up with concepts for the fast and effective development of infrastructure. Unfortunately, the pace of infrastructural expansion is lagging behind the speed at which the factory is being built. And furthermore, many problems are going to have to be solved simultaneously. Municipal politicians insist that the factory's ultimate acceptance depends on whether it is considered to be a success by the people. What must be prevented at all costs is any deterioration in the quality of life in the region.

Tesla has announced that it wants to be involved in solving this problem and others. And, so far, the Americans have proved themselves to be capable of learning – when the protests against excessive water consumption started getting louder, Tesla cut its water use by one-third. The idea now is to recycle even more water, with the Gigafactory in Grünheide set to become "the most environmentally friendly factory in the world." At least that's what Musk announced during his most recent visit. But then again, he also invited everyone to the factory's opening party – in the summer of 2021.

Ina Matthes
is a business and science editor at the *Märkische Oderzeitung* in Frankfurt (Oder).

Divergent paths

Comparing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

BY HOLGER SCHMIEDING

Rarely do the results of political choices become so visible so fast. After COVID-19 turned from a China-centered tragedy into a global threat some six months ago, all advanced economies faced a similar set of challenges. But they reacted differently. Countries such as the US and the UK, whose overconfident leaders put too much trust in their own political instincts, paid a heavy price for their choices. Conversely, countries like Denmark, Germany and South Korea, which were ready to learn fast from others' experiences and act upon scientific advice, fared less poorly.

A comparison between the US, the UK and the eurozone brings out the differences. Fate was not initially kind to the eurozone. Italy, Spain and France, in late February, were the first countries in the advanced world to be hit badly by the virus. But once they realized the scale of the problem, they – and virtually all their neighbors within the eurozone – reacted swiftly and decisively. They severely restricted the freedom of their citizens to move about and shut down major parts of their economies from mid-March onwards. As a result, the first wave of the pandemic began to subside a few weeks later. Once infection numbers had fallen significantly, eurozone member countries gradually eased their restrictions from late April or early May onwards, allowing their economies to recover.

Having just left the European Union on Jan. 31, the UK tried to do it differently. For eight crucial days in mid-March, the government hesitated to follow the continental example. This allowed the virus to spread exponentially in the UK for longer. Because of a rate of infections and excess deaths from COVID-19 that was much higher than in the eurozone, and in Germany in particular, the UK then had to maintain its harsh lockdown for considerably longer. As the chart shows, consumer activity as measured by how often people visit shops and recreational facilities recovered much more slowly in the UK. As a result, the UK economy contracted by 22.5 percent in the first half of 2020. Although the virus had hit major parts of the eurozone first, it got away more lightly with a 14.8 percent drop in GDP.

Relative good fortune

In the age of COVID-19, weakness can become a strength. The pandemic has wreaked less damage in Germany's former East than in its former West. The Institute for Economic Research (IFO) estimates a 6.7 percent decrease in GDP for Germany as a whole, while the eastern states are expected to suffer "only" a 5.9-percent drop.

"Eastern Germany's economy is fundamentally more fragmented than its counterpart in the West," reasoned Marco Wanderwitz (CDU), the parliamentary state secretary for the new federal states, on Sept. 8 at the Federal Econonic Ministry's first East German Growth Day in Berlin. It is less dependent on international supply chains and foreign markets, he noted. The former East Germany is also home to fewer industry clusters and international firms than the former West, and none of the 30 German companies traded on the DAX is headquartered in the former East.

Unfortunately, the US failed to learn the lessons from Europe. Apart from the Greater New York region and a few other states, the Trump administration reacted late, more hesitantly and often more erratically. For the most part, lockdowns in the US were less strict than in Europe and consumers were more reluctant to accept wearing masks and social distancing. At first, this seemed to grant the US an economic advantage. Its GDP fell by a mere cumulative 10.5 percent in the first half of 2020. But as the virus continued to make its way through the US, economic activity rebounded more slowly than in the eurozone in mid-2020 (see chart). Tens of millions lost their jobs; over 6.8 million COVID-19 cases caused more than 200,000 deaths.

One country within the EU tried to strike a different balance between risks to its citizens' lives and risks to their livelihoods. Acting upon local scientific advice, Sweden kept schools, restaurants and some other parts of the service economy open, even during the worst phase of the pandemic, while they were shut almost elsewhere else in Europe. Evidence to date suggests that the Swedish experiment has largely failed. Infection and death rates in Sweden are much higher than in Denmark and Finland, two neighboring countries that had imposed much more stringent lockdowns. Nonetheless, the Swedish economy contracted by 8.2 percent in the first half of 2020, roughly in line with the loss in GDP suffered by Denmark (9.2 percent) and Finland (6.3 percent). Sweden has now largely ditched its special approach in favor of policies more similar to those pursued elsewhere in Europe.

Germany's response to the crisis has been far from perfect. On all relevant counts ranging from the loss of human lives to the depth of economic recession, Japan has been more successful. Nonetheless, Germany has so far mastered the challenge better than other major economies on either side of the Atlantic. Most importantly, as of mid-September its rate of COVID-19-related death of 115 per one million inhabitants remains far below those in the US (601), the UK (613), France (474) and Italy (589).

To some extent, Germany was lucky. Many of those who brought the virus into the country were healthy adults returning from skiing holidays in northern Italy or Austria. As the virus thus began

to spread in Germany with fewer serious medical complications than in the hotspots of northern Italy, eastern France and Spain, the Federal Republic had precious extra time to protect its most vulnerable.

But in the way that fortune often favors the well-prepared, three special traits of the German economic and political system played a major role in its comparatively successful fight against the virus and the ensuing recession, which in Germany, with a GDP decline of 11.9 percent in the first half of 2020, was less pronounced than in the eurozone as a whole.

First, Germany's political system, with its 16 powerful states and the lack of one domineering metropolis, is less centralized than that of most other countries. The need for constant dialogue between different layers of government helped keep the discourse half-rational. Germany's system strikes a balance between dispute and consensus as well as one between compulsory rules for the entire country and the freedom for each of the 16 states to react to circumstances flexibly. The states can learn from one another while the federal government and public opinion can exert pressure on the states to adopt the measures that seem to work elsewhere. To a certain degree, the competition between the two most prominent state governors – North Rhine-Westphalia's Armin Laschet and Bavaria's Markus Söder – for the pole position to succeed Angela Merkel as German chancellor in the September 2021 election has heightened their resolve to get the COVID-19 response right and, if need be, learn fast from successes and failures elsewhere.

In France and the UK, the desire of the center to control it all complicated and delayed the initial response. For example, if regional authorities in eastern France had been able to react swiftly without having to wait for instructions from Paris, they could have contained the country's first serious regional outbreak in Mulhouse Alsace earlier and with less damage.

In contrast to the US-style deadlock between two houses of parliament, Germany is blessed with a tradition of seeking a cross-party consensus on key issues of national interest. In addition, the calm leadership of Merkel, a scientist by training, compares rather favorably to the more erratic behavior of President Donald Trump in the US and Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the UK.

Second, Germany has more experience than most other advanced countries in dealing with economic shocks. Specializing in the export of highly cyclical goods such as cars and machine tools, Germany is usually more affected by the ups and downs of the global business cycle than other economies. Over the decades, frequent bouts of strong exchange rates, which temporarily undermined the competitive position of Germany's export industries, have added to the shocks. In response, Germany has developed and honed tools to shield its workers and consumers as much as possible from such gyrations. As a result, Germany's labor market as well as the income and spending of its consumers are usually more stable over the business cycle than in other countries, even when German GDP fluctuates widely.

The best-known of these tools is *Kurzarbeitergeld*, a scheme that subsidizes temporary periods of underemployment on the job. This measure allows workers whose employers can offer them no or only limited work to worry less about losing their jobs. The system helped Germany to weather the financial crisis of 2008–2009 remarkably well, with only minor losses in employment and no significant decline in private consumption.

In response to the lockdowns, other countries have now rushed to adopt similar systems. By and large, they have served their purpose. But these systems often worked less smoothly than in Germany, where companies and labor offices have learned from decades of experience how to calibrate and administer them.

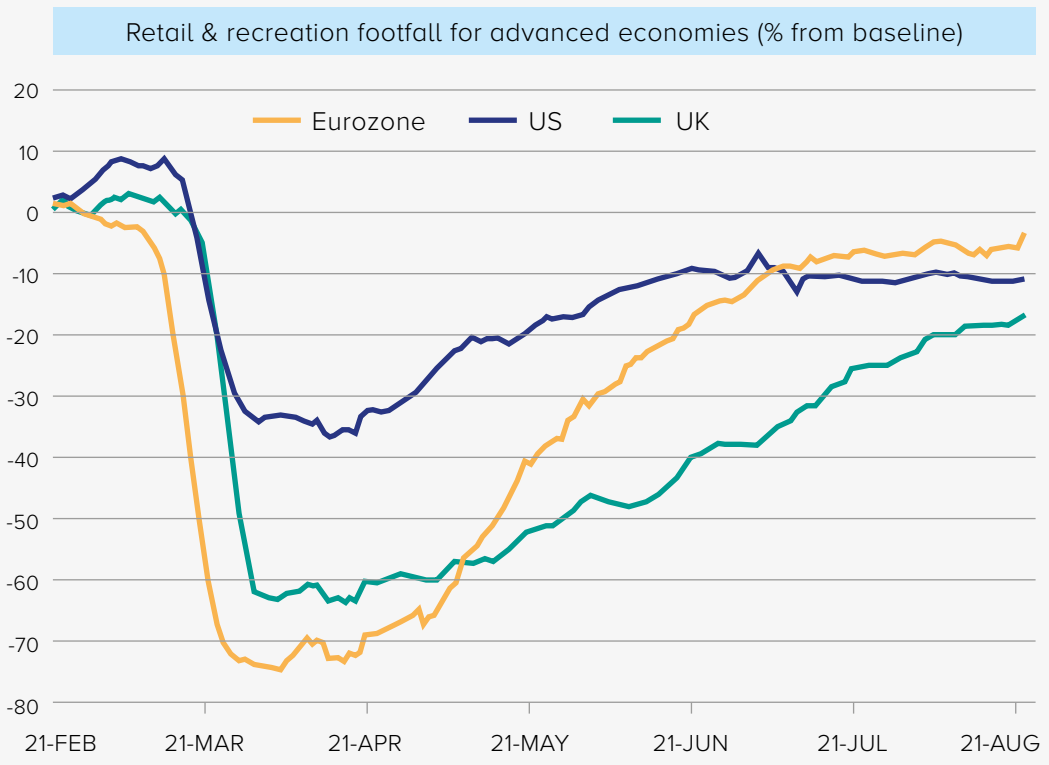
Third, having deliberately saved for a rainy day with small fiscal surpluses during recent boom years, Germany could afford to open the fiscal taps fast and generously when the hailstorm of the pandemic set in. This helped Germany to cushion the shock better than most other economies in Europe. In addition, Germany's strong fiscal position enabled it to back the idea of a big €750 billion EU recovery program, which will support the fiscal responses to the pandemic in the more afflicted countries of Europe over the next four years.

The final verdict on the relative performance of countries is still outstanding. Following a renewed surge in infections in the US in June and July, most European countries are now experiencing a renewed rise in cases as well. Increased travel activity over the summer holiday season, a desire to party again and generally less cautious behavior are all contributing factors. However, with the exception of Spain, infection rates in Europe remain well below those the US. And once again, Germany seems to be less affected than most other advanced economies.

Fortunately, the rates of increase in medical complications and deaths remain far smaller than they were in March and April on both sides of the Atlantic. Societies have learned how to protect the vulnerable and treat the infected. Targeted and regional restrictions will be needed and potential super-spreader events such as big boozy parties and mass entertainment events will likely have to be curtailed for many months to come. However, it seems unlikely that new harsh and nationwide lockdowns will be required. Unless countries respond poorly to the current rise in infections, the recovery from the unprecedented plunge in economic activity in March and April will most likely continue, even if the pace of the rebound looks set to flatten somewhat this autumn.

Holger Schmieding is chief economist at Berenberg, a private bank. He writes frequently for German business newspapers such as *Capital* and *Handelsblatt*.

US, eurozone, UK: three different COVID-19 responses



- Eurozone: reacted early, recovered early.
- UK: reacted a little later – and paid a high price for eight days of prevarication. More human suffering, lockdowns had to last longer, delayed rebound
- US: reacted by less – outside Greater New York – and paid a steep price in terms of excess mortality.
- With higher infection numbers than in Europe, US rebound less pronounced.
- Key risk: current rise in infections in Europe – no major impact on data yet.

Daily data. Seven day moving average. Source: Google. Values are the percentage change compared to the baseline, which is the median value from the 5-week period Jan 3 – Feb 6, 2020 for the same day of the week. Weighted footfall changes for Retail & Recreation and Grocery & Pharmacy 2:1.

Source: Berenberg

Power forward

The art of the green new deal: Green hydrogen can replace oil, gas and coal while buffering the fluctuating yields from wind turbines and solar facilities

BY RALPH DIERMANN

Natural gas and oil are a shout-out from a distant past. Several hundred millions of years passed before dead biomass at the bottom of primordial oceans formed the energy sources that run today's motors, comprise our industrial products and heat our homes.

But things have since considerably accelerated, as gas and oil can now also be created artificially, from hydrogen and carbon combined in a refinery to create various combustibles and fuels. This process is called power-to-X. Its allure derives from the fact that the natural gas, gasoline, diesel fuel, kerosene and heating oil it creates is climate-neutral when produced using green hydrogen. Green? The label may list hydrogen that stems from an electrolyzer powered with green electricity. The facility uses the current to split water into its component parts, hydrogen and oxygen.

Electrolysis is one of the key technologies for climate protection. Green hydrogen – pure or processed into synthetic combustibles or fuels – will be a crucial element in making industry and motorized traffic climate-neutral, especially where it is not possible to use a direct source of green electricity, such as with air traffic, shipping, heavy transport and in many industrial processes. In the future, hydrogen will be deployed in gas power stations as well. The plants are indispensable in buffering the fluctuating yields of wind turbines and photovoltaic facilities.

When researchers at the Fraunhofer Institute for Wind Energy and Energy System Technology (IWES) and the Center for Solar Energy and Hydrogen Research Baden-Württemberg (ZSW) developed the power-to-X concept ten years ago, they had a different goal in mind; they wanted to create a certain type of energy storage device. The electrolyzers, according to the thinking of the scientists, should above all be used when more wind energy is produced than is immediately necessary or the grid can accommodate. When fed into the existing gas grid, gas power stations can then produce energy from the hydrogen later upon demand. Power-to-X thus contributes to the integration of weather-dependent wind energy and photovoltaics into the power system.

Numerous pilot projects at companies and research institutes are currently experimenting with how hydrogen concepts can be put into practice. For example, in the region of North Frisia in northern Germany, the renewable energies project planner GP Joule is partnering with others to install – in the immediate vicinity to several wind turbines – five electrolyzers that will produce hydrogen for two gas stations in the region. In order to stimulate demand, the project corporation will purchase two fuel cell busses and make them available to the local regional transport system for its various vehicles. The heat lost during electrolysis is fed into a local heat grid supplying local homes and municipal properties.

In the steel industry, the climate-protection potential of power-to-X is enormous. "Whether it's the production of the basic chemicals ethene and methanol, the manufacturing of ammonia for fertilizer, or the glass and metal industry – the only path for industry to substitute fossil fuels with climate-neutral alternatives leads to green hydrogen," explains Michael Sterner, professor for energy storage and energy systems at the Regensburg University of Applied Sciences (OTH).

In the steel industry, the climate-protection potential of power-to-X is enormous

According to the German Technical and Scientific Association for Gas and Water (DVGW), Germany has some three-dozen electrolyzers in operation. Together they account for an output of around 30 megawatts. They can realize just about as much electricity as ten modern wind turbines on land can deliver while operating at full capacity. Therefore, to achieve Germany's climate goals, the installed capacity must grow markedly and fast. "In the next few years, we need double-digit annual growth in megawatt range, and then triple-digit growth by 2025. By the end of the decade, range must expand by at least a gigawatt each year," explains Christopher Hebling, director of hydrogen technologies at the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems (ISE).

Such growth can only be achieved if hydrogen production quickly becomes an attractive business model, which is hardly the case as of today.

The systems currently installed are far from profitable; they're much too expensive. This is mainly due to the fact that electrolyzers are still largely manufactured by hand. Scaling up production would result in a significant drop in prices. A similar effect would be seen for facilities that could use hydrogen, such as fuel cells, for transport; these, too, are still much too expensive for commercial operations.

The hydrogen production market is thus vulnerable to the classic chicken-and-the-egg problem common to young markets – costs are high because investors are scarce, and investors are scarce because costs are high. For this reason, the German cabinet presented a national hydrogen strategy this past summer. Its goal is to establish a domestic market to make hydrogen competitive, with measures that include reforming the system of taxes, duties and costs related to energy carriers and establishing a range of promotional initiatives. The Federal Republic is seeking to provide €7 billion for ramping up hydrogen technologies in Germany, which would account for the installation of up to five gigawatts of electrolysis capacity by 2030. An additional five gigawatts would be installed by 2035.

However, this would fall far short of covering the future need for hydrogen. Imports must be heavily relied upon to satisfy demand. The national hydrogen strategy thus envisions close cooperation with countries that have high potential for generating green hydrogen – for example, in Scandinavia and Southern Europe. The German government is also seeking to collaborate with countries in North Africa.

The goal is to create planning certainty for future suppliers, consumers and investors on the domestic front and abroad. Another important factor is the energy partnerships Germany has already forged with a number of countries, including in Africa. A total of €2 billion is earmarked for international cooperation.

If the vast majority of production must take place outside of the country, why should Germany invest in the effort to establish such infrastructure at a multi-gigawatt scale? Because technology is required to integrate wind turbines and photovoltaic plants into the power system, says Fraunhofer's Hebling. "The electrolyzers are a critically important instrument for grid regulation."

If renewable energies are expanded as widely as planned, it will often be the case that much more electricity is made available than the grid can take accommodate. Electrolyzers prevent wind turbines and solar plants from needing to curtail their output, as was foreseen by the researchers developing the concept ten years hence. In the words of Hebling: "We need both: power-to-X plants with multi-gigawatt capacity in Germany, and an influx of large amounts hydrogen-based energy carriers from abroad."

Ralph Diermann
is a freelance journalist specializing in energy topics. He frequently writes for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

Illuminated meadows

Germany's formerly communist regions still lag behind in achieving the standard of living seen in the West

BY STEPHAN KAUFMANN

In the beginning, there was a promise: "Through our joint efforts," said Chancellor Helmut Kohl in summer 1990, "we will soon succeed in transforming the former states of the GDR into blooming landscapes where it is worthwhile to live and work."

The GDR's Ministry of Economics was also cautiously optimistic at the time; according to its own assessment, 40 percent of all East German enterprises would be capable of generating a profit. Unfortunately, this number turned out to be vastly exaggerated. Reunification was followed by countless bankruptcies, with millions of easterners losing their jobs. Instead of "blooming landscapes," the result was "beleuchtete Wiesen" – illuminated meadows, as the East Germans called commercial areas developed in the hope that investors would snap them up, but which remained empty and deserted. Hundreds of billions of euros have been pumped into the East since reunification, yet the gap with the West remains. And it's not getting any smaller.

Of course, Germany is not the only country with regional differences. In Italy, for example, the wealthy north stands in contrast to the poor south. In the UK, it's the other way around, with the wealth concentrated mainly in the south. All industrial nations have isolated areas that fall short, and usually people get used to the differences. In Germany, however, even 30 years after the fall of the Wall, the East-West divide remains a troublesome political issue. And let's not forget: According to Germany's constitution, the government is obliged to create "equal living conditions" throughout the country.

Despite all efforts to do so, that goal has not been achieved. According to the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW), between 2015 and 2017, individuals working full-time in the western states earned a gross average of €3,070/month, whereas in the East they earned only €2,320/month. Workers in the West earned an average of €17.40/hour, but only €13.10/hour in the East. The risk of poverty is also greater in the East: while roughly one-fifth of all employed individuals in the West work for minimum wages, that number is almost 40 percent in the East.

The disparity between eastern and western Germany becomes even more evident when looking at individual administrative districts: On average, a private household in Germany is able to spend €23,300 on goods and services. According to the union-affiliated Institute of Economic and Social Research (WSI), that number rises to almost €35,000 in Germany's richest district, Starnberg, near Munich. In contrast, households in eastern German cities, such as Halle and Frankfurt an der Oder, have less than half that amount available to them. "Income levels there are thus compatible with those in Italy," note the WSI economists. People who earn less are also less able to accumulate wealth, so it's no surprise that an adult in the West has an average net wealth of €120,000, which is more than twice the eastern German average of €55,000.

What are the drivers of these persistent differences? One root cause can be found in the weak contextual factors shaping the former East Germany's transition 30 years ago. Plopped down into the unknown realm of market-economy competition, most of the GDR's socialist businesses were simply overwhelmed by the task of making a profit in terms of hard currency rather than producing concrete, jeans and chemicals simply to meet a quota. In addition to outdated production facilities, they also contended with rapidly growing wages and an exchange rate of 1:1 between eastern and western marks, which meant a currency appreciation equivalent to 700 percent.

After reunification, less than 10 percent of companies operated at a profit. Most of the "new companies were not up to the standards of the Western market," explains the DIW.

These problems were compounded by weak overall economic development in the first few years of the new millennium, which drove the unemployment rate to 11 percent in the West and above 20 percent in the East.

After reunification, less than 10 percent of companies operated at a profit

Since that time, there has been a relatively steady upward trend in both East and West. And yet, still today, productivity at companies in the East is lower than in the West. Measured in terms of economic output per employed individual, eastern Germans still achieve only 82 percent of the level achieved in the West. The Halle Institute for Economic Research (IWH) recently observed that "no eastern state even comes close to Saarland, the state with the lowest productivity in western Germany."

One reason for this is the fragmented nature of the eastern German economy. Companies in the West are generally larger – and larger companies are usually more productive. In the East, roughly 8 percent of employed people work in companies with more than 250 employees; in the West, that share is 23 percent.

"What the 'new' German states lack are large companies that have strategic business functions, primarily in research and development," argues the IWH. There are hardly any corporate headquarters in the East. In 2016, only 36 of the top 500 German companies had headquarters in the former GDR.

Moreover, the West has more high-wage sectors, such as heavy industry. "The proportion of sectors in which above-average wages are paid is lower in eastern Germany than in western Germany," explains the IWH. In addition, whereas the success of western German companies is based to a considerable degree on exports to the rest of the world, eastern German companies produce to a greater degree for domestic markets.

Eastern Germany has a more rural character than the West. The share of the population living in rural regions is 71 percent in the East and between 20 and 30 percent in the West. Roughly 50 percent of those employed in the East work in urban areas; in western Germany, that share is more like three-quarters.

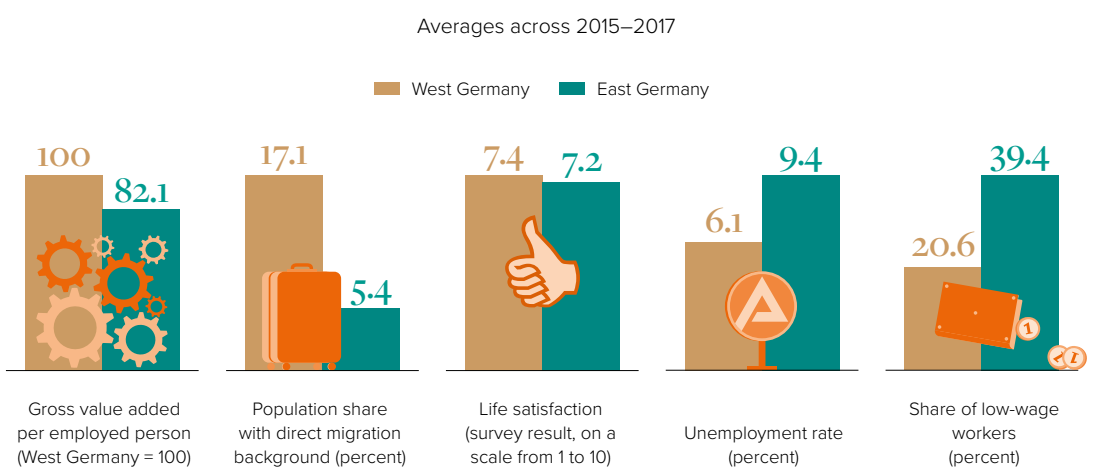
Interestingly, there is still a part of the East-West divide that remains a mystery, even to economic experts. Joachim Ragnitz from the Ifo Institute for Economic Research argues that earnings in the East might never quite catch up to those in the West. "The idea of creating an economic balance between East and West at any price is neither a sensible goal nor can it realistically be achieved using the usual economic policy instruments," Ragnitz claims. "Eastern Germany is not a laggard western Germany; it has fundamentally different problems."

The DIW's Peter Krause sees a much more serious political and social problem elsewhere: in the realm of social inequality. According to Krause, the key issue is not between East and West, but between rich and poor. "There is no doubt that tremendous progress has been made in terms of harmonizing the two sides' standards of living since reunification," says Krause. He notes, however, that in the past 30 years, income inequality and the risk of poverty have also risen in both parts of the country.

Stephan Kaufmann
is a business journalist and author based in Berlin

LIVING CONDITIONS IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY

CONSIDERABLE ALIGNMENT IN TERMS OF LIFE SATISFACTION, YET SUSTAINED SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES



Sources: Gross value added: Working group on National Accounting by the German States (East Germany includes Berlin); All other indicators: SOEPv34 (West Germany includes West Berlin)

INCOME AND WAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY

	West Germany				East Germany			
	1990–1994	1990–1994	1995–2009	2010–2017	2015–2017	1990–1994	1995–2009	2010–2017
Gross income								
Arithmetic mean (euros per month)	2,845	3,021	2,984	3,050	1,684	2,272	2,306	2,388
Median (euros per month)	2,620	2,754	2,653	2,700	1,527	2,081	2,047	2,100
Median (full-time, euros per month)	2,701	2,953	2,991	3,069	1,547	2,110	2,239	2,321
Gini coefficient	0.30	0.34	0.37	0.37	0.23	0.29	0.33	0.33
Low incomes (percent)	19.9	26.3	30.5	30.9	54.3	39.7	44.4	44.6
Hourly wages								
Arithmetic mean (euros per hour)	18.0	19.0	18.9	19.4	9.4	13.6	14.2	14.8
Median (euros per hour)	15.7	16.9	16.5	16.9	8.5	12.1	12.4	12.8
Median (full-time, euros per hour)	15,3	16,9	17,0	17,4	8,3	11,7	12,5	13,1
Gini coefficient	0.28	0.29	0.30	0.30	0.23	0.28	0.30	0.29
Low wages (percent)	10.4	16.0	20.5	20.6	57.5	37.0	39.8	39.4

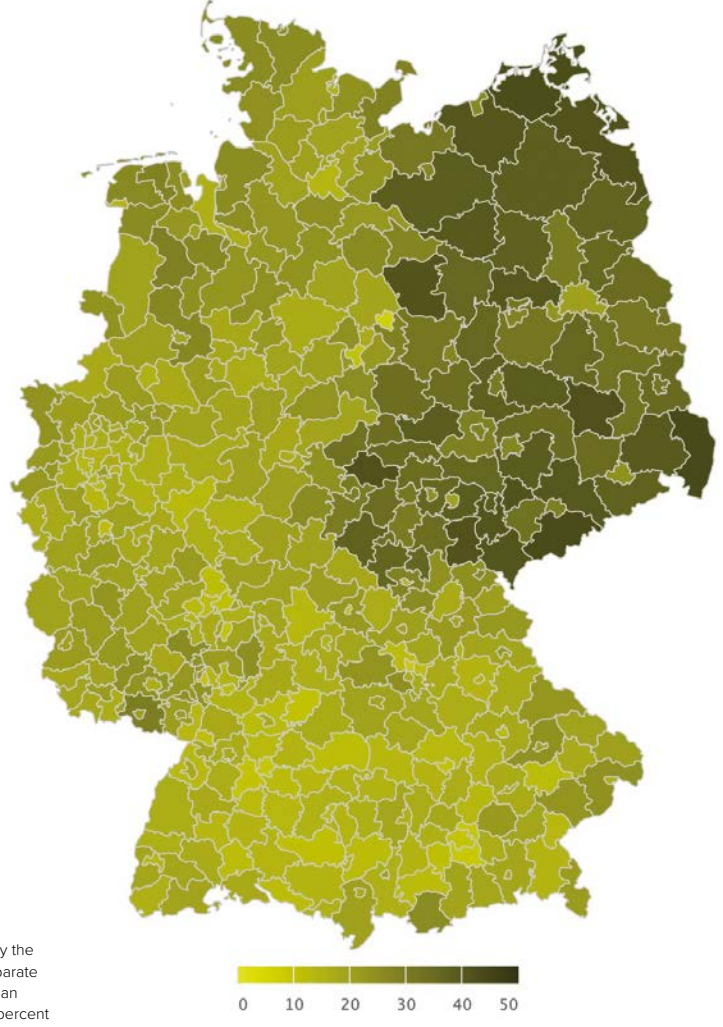
1 Ages 25 to 64 at the time of survey.
2 Low incomes in all of Germany: ≤ 66 percent of the median income of all full-time employees (≥ 30 hours/week).
3 Low wages in all of Germany: ≤ 66 percent of the median wage of all full-time employees (≥ 30 hours/week).

Notes: East Germany includes East Berlin. Incomes and wages adjusted to 2017 prices, separate figures for East and West Germany through 1997. Calculation of hourly wages: Gross monthly income (imputed) / (time worked x 13/3). Time worked: "contractual hours worked," if working time account or compensation terms exists or if overtime is used up, in part, without pay; "actual hours worked," if overtime is paid or not compensated.
Source: German Institute for Economic Research, based on SOEPv34

STRATIFICATION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOMES IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY IN PERCENT

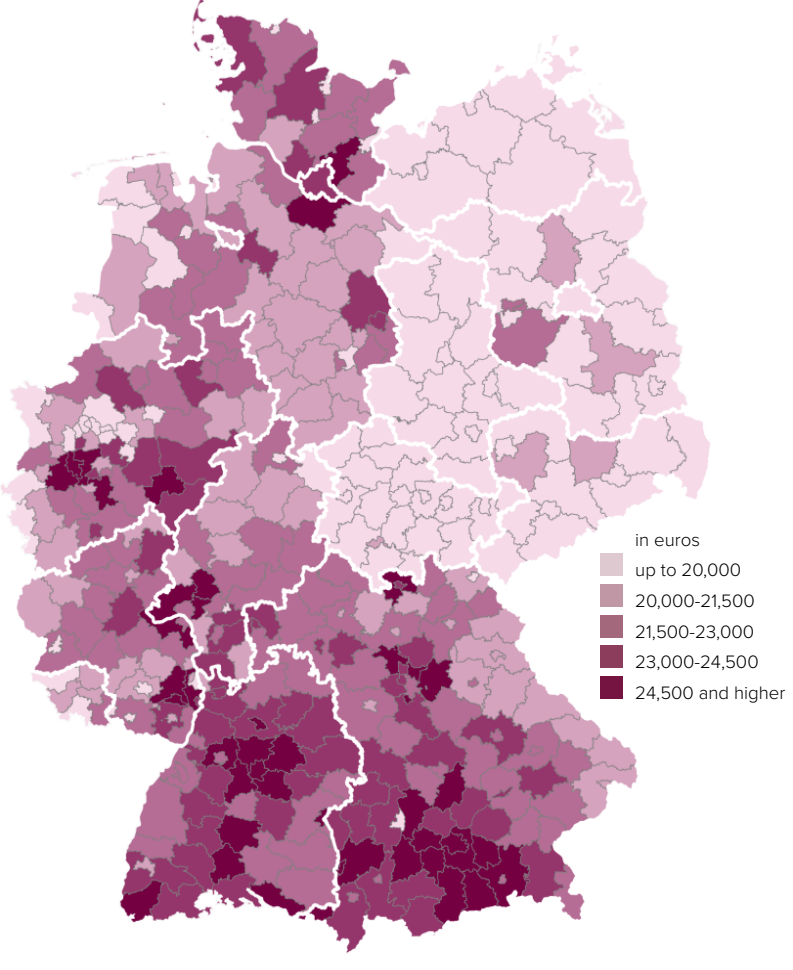
Notes: East Germany includes East Berlin. Household incomes of the previous year (identified by the survey year), equivalence-weighted (revised OECD scale), adjusted for price (at 2017 prices, separate figures for East and West Germany through 1997. Higher incomes: over 150 percent of the German median. Mid-range incomes: 75–150 percent of the German median. Lower incomes: under 75 percent of the German median. Poverty rate: under 60 percent of the German median.
Source: German Institute for Economic Research, based on SOEPv34.

FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES IN THE LOW-WAGE SECTOR ON DEC. 31. 2019



Basis: Federal low-wage threshold (€2,267/month)
Source: BKG, BTDrs 19/21734

DISPOSABLE PER CAPITA INCOME FOR PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS, 2016



Disposable income per inhabitant, in euros

Source: Statistic departments of the federation and the federal states (regional database)
Notes: Disposable income for private households includes private non-profit organizations per inhabitant (according to the expenditure concept)

Now it's our turn, right?

Thirty years after reunification, some Germans feel that the country is as divided as ever. In truth, the East is just finally asserting itself

BY MARTIN MACHOWECZ

Over the past several years, there's one question that has dumbfounded western Germans as they gaze eastward: How is it possible that the whole "growing together" thing hasn't worked out, even more than 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Or, rather: Why are Germany's eastern states – the ones that once formed the GDR – still so different?

In 2020, the fact that much continues to distinguish East from West is hard to deny. A glance at election results shows that the increasingly radical right-wing extremist AfD party receives three times as many votes in the East as in the West. The leftist Linke party is also much stronger in the East than in the West. Yet people's attitudes in the East toward politicians, parties, institutions and capitalism are different and, generally, far more critical. Should we just accept that the East will never become more like the West?

No. This is precisely the wrong approach to the issue. For several years now, many eastern Germans have been asking themselves why on earth they should become more like the West. They have grown more accepting of their history and have even developed an air of serenity with regard to it, their nature and their origins. Their newfound approach effectively says: "We might indeed be the smaller and less developed part of this country, but we're most certainly not the worst part of it."

If we look a little bit closer, we see that it's this growing self-confidence on the part of eastern Germans that may actually lead to a more placid coexistence of the two Germanies. With a little bit of luck, Germany's future strength might just lie precisely in the differences between the country's two sides. After all, doesn't meeting eye-to-eye involve a healthy dose of confidence on both sides?

When musing on the fact that eastern Germans are different from western Germans, we must first and foremost consider that life in the East is quite different from life in the West – in both good and bad ways.

Let's start with the good. At the moment, eastern German cities generally look better than their western German counterparts, having blossomed over the 30 years since the fall of the Wall. Rents are lower and there are free and open spaces everywhere. Many eastern Germans would argue that eastern Germany is the more vibrant and attractive part of the country today.

But – and this is where things get difficult – it's also the poorer part of Germany.

To this day, there are significant income gaps between East and West (see chart on page 10). In recent months, one particularly unsavory example was revealed, when employees at Bautzner, a long-standing mustard manufacturer in the East, went on strike. Just like the famous Löwensenf, which is made in Düsseldorf, Bautzner belongs to the Develey Group. But employees living in Bautzen doing the same job – that is, making mustard for Develey – were being paid annually between €8,000 and €12,000 less than employees with the same mother company living in Düsseldorf. This phenomenon can be seen in almost all industries and at most large companies.

The Federal Republic will have to become more eastern in the coming years

There is hardly any private wealth in the East today, and not one DAX company is based in the former GDR. Most of the apartments in major eastern German cities belong to investors from western Germany and the rest of the world; eastern Germans who own valuable real estate are an exception. According to a 2019 study by the German Institute for Economic Research, on average, eastern Germans don't even possess half as much wealth as western Germans.

Fundamental differences also persist with regard to the distribution of power. Germany has 106 universities and, at last count, only two university presidents are from the East. There are practically no eastern German court presidents – not even in the East itself – and a negligible number of eastern German chief physicians. Apart from Chancellor Angela Merkel herself, there is only one other eastern German in the federal cabinet. The heads of most major federal departments are western Germans, and Germany's army, the Bundeswehr, is headed up almost exclusively by western Germans. These facts bring us closer to the core of the East-West conflict, which remains fueled by a fundamental misunderstanding.

Over the past few years, many western Germans have continued to argue that they invested endless amounts of money in the East, opening up branches and production facilities in the East and pumping billions into infrastructure and city landscapes. But no matter how much the West invested, they have argued, eastern Germans remain unsatisfied, ungrateful and have even begun voting en masse for populist parties!

Of course, the whole situation looks much different from an eastern perspective. The fact is that four million young and well-educated eastern Germans moved to the West after 1990. The sweat and toil of these young people contributed to western Germany's increasing prosperity in the post-reunification period. Ulrich Blum, the former president of the Halle Institute for Economic Research, once did the calculation and concluded that eastern Germans largely paid for unification themselves, precisely by enabling this immense gain in highly productive workers for the West and by completely opening up eastern Germany as a new market for West German companies.

At the same time, eastern Germans began noticing a trend: despite our skills and strengths, our new bosses are reticent to share power with us, we don't have any access to wealth or property, and our political influence is limited, even if Angela Merkel – one of us – became chancellor and is now a major figure in global politics.

Taking all of these factors into account allows us to interpret support for the AfD as aggressive resistance to the political framework. While it's far from true that all AfD voters in the East are racists, right-wing extremists and unemployed persons, a party that is able to attract almost one-third of the electorate is obviously resonating among a broad swathe of the population. Over the past several years, the AfD has managed to give eastern Germans one feeling in particular: If you vote for us, you'll finally get the attention you deserve!

And, unfortunately, all other political parties must now admit that the AfD has kept this promise. Eastern Germany has never held as many cards in its hand as since the rise of the AfD and the values it embodies. Minister presidents from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania to Saxony suddenly possess a form of political capital they can leverage. In other words, they can now threaten their colleagues from the CDU and SPD: If you don't change anything, the AfD in our states will become even stronger!

This explains why Germany's exit from the production of brown coal is now proceeding entirely in line with conditions set by the East. As all open-pit mines and power plants are shut down in the coming decades, roughly €17 billion will flow into the Lausitz region alone as compensation. Why? Because the economy there is entirely dependent on coal – and because it is also one of the regions with the highest share of AfD voters.

In the past 30 years, eastern Germans have done everything they could to attract attention to their concerns – and now, the AfD has delivered precisely this attention. If the other political parties seek to take the wind out of the AfD sails, the only way to succeed is to shine the spotlight more prominently on the East, to give eastern Germans a stronger sense of being heard and even to give them power. But anyone hoping to empower the East must be ready and willing to actually share power.

To this day, Germany's Federal Court of Justice, which is based in Karlsruhe, has resisted relocating a large number of its judges to Leipzig, as was originally intended in the Unification Treaty. Moreover, Germany's public broadcasters have refused to relocate key positions – such as editors-in-chief – to the eastern states.

Yet, in spite of all that has happened in recent years, there are still a number of good – actually, very good – developments to speak of. Eastern Germans no longer simply accept their situation as fate as they hide out from the developments around them. And, eschewing the Western slur for Easterners' "non-stop moaning" or *jammern*, they no longer moan and complain. They're getting more involved, mixing things up a bit, questioning a number of fundamental "truths." There is no doubt that the Federal Republic will have to become more eastern in the coming years. And if western Germans are smart enough to recognize the opportunities that arise when two sides meet on truly equal footing, there's no doubt that the 40th anniversary of German reunification will provide great cause for celebration.

Martin Machowecz
was born in Meißen in 1988 and grew up in eastern Germany. He studied political science in Leipzig and now heads the Leipzig office of the weekly German newspaper *Die Zeit,* as well as the editorial team of *Zeit im Osten.*

EASTERN GERMANY IS EAST

A wound neglected

Understanding eastern Germany's shift to the right requires revisiting the moment its path forward was set

BY WOLFGANG ENGLER

Eastern and western Germany continue to drift apart in political terms, despite economic achievements (i.e., growth, employment, wages, pensions, etc.) in the former states of the GDR. While voters in the West are increasingly going green, voters in the East are leaning toward blue: the right-wing terrorist group NSU was based in the eastern city of Jena, the anti-immigration movement Pegida with its militant marches and unabashedly racist slogans has its origins in Dresden and Leipzig, the right-wing AfD party has enjoyed one electoral success after another, often winning more than 20 percent of the vote in the five so-called "new" federal states (comprising the former GDR territory). Concerns are growing as to how long this situation will continue and whether it might even take a turn for the worse. What's going on in the East?

The prevailing and essentially western German narrative blames the GDR for the malaise, attributing it to the knock-on effects of the second German dictatorship.

After 1945, the argument goes, unlike the citizens of West Germany, people in the East stumbled from one totalitarian regime into the next within a short period of time. Both outwardly and inwardly, they adapted to the customs and norms of a largely "closed society," developing a collective habitus that bore unmistakably authoritarian characteristics.

After the upheavals of 1989, the argument continues, eastern Germans were unexpectedly thrown into an "open society," a shock to the system that prompted them to cling to their mental legacy as a means of coping and surviving. By doing so, however, they prevented their own inner arrival in the West, their integration into the "liberal democratic basic order." Their aversion to new things, foreign things and foreign people, their phobias, their latent and occasionally manifest racism – all of these, so the story goes, are expressions of the fact that eastern Germans continue to schlep around the heavy baggage that they acquired during the GDR and have refused to discard ever since.

The question arises as to why this toxic legacy was not disposed of over the course of the past three decades of joint eastern and western German history, or if not entirely removed, then at least worn down a bit. This question is aimed directly at the ability of the new, post-1989 German society to win over eastern Germans and gain their support. The idea of avoiding this chapter in history by simply skipping over it as if it weren't worth a closer look – and instead stubbornly continuing to blame the GDR as the sole cause of the malaise will only exacerbate the discord.

To be sure, up until 1989, East Germans lived in an ethnically and culturally homogenous society. Its precipitation into economic globalization as well as cultural and religious diversity was often unsettling, and it led to defensive reactions that escalated for the first time in the early 1990s. The fact that it was mostly adolescents and young adults at the forefront of these xenophobic attacks points indeed to the GDR as the source of the behavior.

However, as time leaves that era ever further behind us, the more problematic this ascription of blame to the GDR becomes. The average age of eastern Germans today is well below 50; most have lived the majority of their lives in a post-Wall world. Some of the people taking their conservative and right-wing extremist sentiments to the streets have actually lived their entire lives in the new Germany.

Anyone who insists on attributing the behavior and attitude of eastern Germans solely to the legacy of the GDR makes a threefold mistake. First, they would be infantilizing eastern Germans by declaring their experiences since 1989 to be irrelevant, as if their living conditions *after* the GDR have left no psychological traces whatsoever. Second, they would be guilty of a one-dimensional interpretation of the GDR's heritage, labeling it as a handicap and burden rather than as a legacy in all of its contradictions. And, finally, they would be justifying the mistakes and injustices that were part and parcel of the upheavals after 1990, which threw countless people either temporarily or permanently off track. The notorious disregard for post-Wall history, especially when looking for the root causes of the "susceptibility" of eastern Germans to right-wing ideas, does enormous harm to the process of unification.

To this day, the stories told by most of the eastern Germans who experienced the initial years after

Eternal underdogs

Many eastern Germans have a love-hate relationship to reunification; our author is one of them

BY SABINE RENNEFANZ

Non-German friends of mine like to think we Germans celebrate German Unity Day by throwing a big party. I personally don't know anyone who actually celebrates the national holiday on Oct. 3. It's just a day off work, a day to relax, take a mini vacation, do some gardening or binge-watch TV.

Still, I was invited to a German Unity Day party once. It was organized by the German Embassy in London. I remember the snow-white villa in the affluent district of Belgravia, the red carpet draped over the stairs and the room full of pinstripe suits. Although most of the men in attendance were simply the office heads of German savings banks in London, they dressed as if they were English bankers. I watched the West Germans celebrate German unity. I watched them celebrate themselves.

I can still see the ambassador, a tall, good-natured man from Swabia, sashaying across the thick carpet as the Filipino house servants dressed in livery brought freshly tapped German beer, sausages and meatballs to the guests. The famous German singer Marius Müller-Westernhagen sat in the corner nibbling on a sausage. That evening, I met only one other woman from the former East Germany; she worked as the embassy's deputy spokesperson, and together we walked around that West German party as if we were strangers.

The preamble to Germany's constitution states that Germans achieved their unity and freedom in "free self-determination." This is the official story of what happened; the story that gets written in books. And it's not wrong per se. But it's also not the whole story.

There's a famous photo that was taken at the first German Unity Day celebrations on the steps of the Reichstag in Berlin in 1990. It features an entire generation of West German politicians: to the very left, we see the then-social democrat Oskar Lafontaine, former Chancellor Willy Brandt, the then-Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Hannelore Kohl, Helmut Kohl and then-Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker. Next to them, small and thin at the edge of the photo, stands Lothar de Maizière, the last head of government of the GDR. The image speaks volumes on the unequal balance of power that prevailed at the time of German reunification. It also says a lot about the root cause of the problems and misunderstandings that continue to this day.

"Taking leave of a social and political system doesn't mean letting go of personal memories," wrote Hans-Dieter Schütt in his book *Glücklich beschädigt* (Happily damaged). To this day, many people in the East feel as if they've lived two lives; the life they actually remember living and the life they were told they'd lived by the harsh verdict of history. According to Schütt, East Germans were asked to decide whether they'd been supporters of the system – thereby subjecting themselves to doubts about the nature of their character – or whether they were willing to admit that all of the passion and hard work they'd put into the system had been in vain. Schütt wrote this in 2009.

Perhaps one thing that has changed since then is that this two-sided experience has led to the emergence of an eastern German identity. As Moritz von Uslar observed in his 2019 book *Nochmal Deutschboden* (Deutschboden again), people flipped that feeling of inferiority – of being left-behind, second-class citizens – and transformed it into the very opposite: "The fun that an eastern German gets from being able to tell those arrogant western Germans to their faces that nobody wants to have anything to do with their pretty democracy, their turbo capitalism and their Western values – that fun is just getting started."

When the photo mentioned above was taken, de Maizière could not have had any idea of this nascent anger. In 1990, he had been given the task of presiding over the dissolution of the GDR. In the space of six months, his job was to dissolve a state that had existed for 40 years. It was "a farewell without tears," he said in a speech at Berlin's Schauspielhaus on Oct. 2, 1990.

"That wasn't entirely true," de Maizière admitted in a recent interview with the *Berliner Zeitung*. Whereas West Germans were able to go on living as they always had, he argued, East Germans were shaken to their core in a way unlike any time since World War II. "I always thought the process of reunifying the infrastructure and the economy was going to be difficult, and that psychological reunification would be easier. In the end, the opposite was true."

The eastern German curriculum vitae will always be seen as a deviation from the norm, the one that needs to be explained

We East Germans don't celebrate on Oct. 3. We work, we scream and shout, we beg for attention. Oct. 3 is one of those rare moments when all of Germany turns to look at the East – when, for a change, people are actually interested in what we have to say. It's a time when former government heads, civil rights activists and other contemporary eyewitnesses are asked to give interviews or contribute essays. Books are penned in anticipation of the big day, plays are written and we all take a quick look back at the GDR before it turns and sinks again into oblivion.

On every other day, the West-dominated media are only interested in the East when election time rolls around, at which point they send special teams to Saxony to find out exactly what's going wrong there again, and especially why the "Ostler" – the easterners – are so bent on voting for the wrong party. Years ago, the big "East" theme was the Stasi, the former GDR's security apparatus; but today, it's the right-wing political party known as the AfD. This is the case despite the fact that the West is home to all of the AfD's top functionaries and the western states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg deliver the party large numbers of votes. This is not a complaint, not a sociological finding. It's just an observation.

The SPD politician Wolfgang Thierse once suggested that people from eastern and western Germany should tell each other their stories; this was his idea of how the two sides could be encouraged to grow closer. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressed a similar sentiment last year when he offered that people should "listen to each other." However, coming 30 years after the fact, the latter request is possibly just too late. Plus, it's quite clear that eastern Germans are the only ones telling their stories. Eastern Germans feel a constant pressure to justify and explain themselves, to elucidate the issues driving their behavior. In reality, however, when they do this, they're actually bowing down and subjecting themselves to western Germans. The eastern German curriculum vitae will always be seen as a deviation from the norm, the one that needs to be explained, the special path.

I, too, spent the past several years doing a lot of explaining. And now I find myself increasingly wondering whether this was the right thing to do or whether my work only reinforced a cliché. This is why I don't think much of those online initiatives launched by younger eastern Germans, such as "Wir sind der Osten" (We are the East), even though they're obviously well intentioned. In short, they want to show that the East has more to offer than just neo-Nazis. Yet, in doing so, they take up a position in an established hierarchy that's existed ever since tall and portly Helmut Kohl pushed small and thin Lothar de Maizière to the outer edge of the picture – here top dog, there bottom dog.

On a warm night this past summer, a show called "The crazy '80s in Germany" was broadcast on the public TV channel ARD. The show was all about music and pop culture in the 1980s; unfortunately, the GDR wasn't mentioned once. At a subsequent editorial meeting, I expressed my astonishment that an omission such as this could happen 30 years after German reunification, and I recommended that we ask the broadcaster how this came to pass. In response, a colleague of mine noted: "The show was probably produced by WDR [West German Broadcasting]. For them, the East is very far away. That's just the way it is." Another colleague explained: "Sabine, the show was about the eighties. You weren't German back then."

And here's another anecdote for good measure: a friend of mine wanted to write her doctoral thesis about the selling-off of GDR publishing houses but was not able to find a university in Germany willing to supervise her work. So she went to the US and completed her doctorate there. Her book was published in English first, and when she applied for positions in Germany from the US, she immediately got a job.

All our explaining and storytelling has done little to change the fundamental structures. Eastern Germans continue to earn less and acquire less wealth than their western compatriots. No large corporation has its headquarters in the East, and only recently have we seen one (!) eastern German rector at a university in eastern Germany. While it's true that our chancellor grew up in East Germany, there are hardly any eastern Germans in top political positions. In fact, more than half of the state secretaries in eastern German ministries come from former West German states; that figure rises to three-quarters when it comes to the heads of political departments. There are even more Americans than eastern Germans on the boards of Dax-listed companies. Is it any wonder that 57 percent of eastern Germans surveyed in 2019 said they felt like second-class citizens?

My son is almost six years old and enjoys asking big questions in the evening just before he goes to bed: What's the biggest threat to mankind? Is there a medicine that works against COVID-19? Why does everybody have to die? Sometimes we just talk about the day we had. One day, I told him about my meeting with de Maizière. What's the GDR, Mama? I told him about the country that disappeared overnight and how everything changed for me back then: the money, the language, the school, the rules. I was still a child myself at the time.

My son listened intently as I told my story. "But why did you guys put up with all that?" he asked. It was hard to explain that I wanted those Western clothes, I wanted to travel, I wanted that Western music; but I didn't want Kohl's federal republic. Next generation, it's your turn now.

Sabine Rennefanz
is politics editor at the *Berliner Zeitung* and the author of several books, including *Eisenkinder. Der stille Wut der Wende-generation* (Iron kids: The quiet rage of East Germany's 'Wende' generation, Luchterhand, 2013).

Into the future with one foot in the past: Why so many eastern Germans feel at odds with the West thirty years after reunification

the fall of the Wall still revolve around the historically unprecedented economic laceration that occurred immediately after they joined the Federal Republic. In large swaths of the country, life atrophied and social cohesion dissolved. The familiar foundations of social interaction crumbled, leaving many with a sense of having been left behind, of being lost in oblivion.

Those who still wanted to make something of their lives looked for ways to leave, which is precisely what millions of eastern Germans have done since the early 1990s. Individuals who kept their jobs or found new ones considered themselves lucky and – as a result of this privilege – often in non-unionized workplaces. Everyone else faced the threat of precarious employment, the trap of ongoing training measures as a substitute for employment or unemployment – hence the great metamorphosis from *citizen* to employment-agency *client*, a monumental insult.

The experience of former East Germans is similar to that of hundreds of millions elsewhere, most of whom never lived in a dictatorship, but were subject to the same structural upheaval, stretched out over time. In the US rust belt and in the traditional industrial regions of England and France, for example, the same profound economic and social transformation occurred and produced the same results: a mass alienation of citizens from democratic institutions, procedures and processes along with the attendant rise of nationalist, vulgar and populist tendencies and parties.

Basic democratic rights, ties to the West, the social market economy – these were the pillars upon which the Federal Republic of Germany was built and flourished. The democratic framework of West Germany stood on a firm foundation that proved sustainable. Things continued to improve, and the longer the economic upturn lasted, the more people became convinced that they had done well for themselves on the whole. As a result, people were happy to live within the political and legal framework of the new polity.

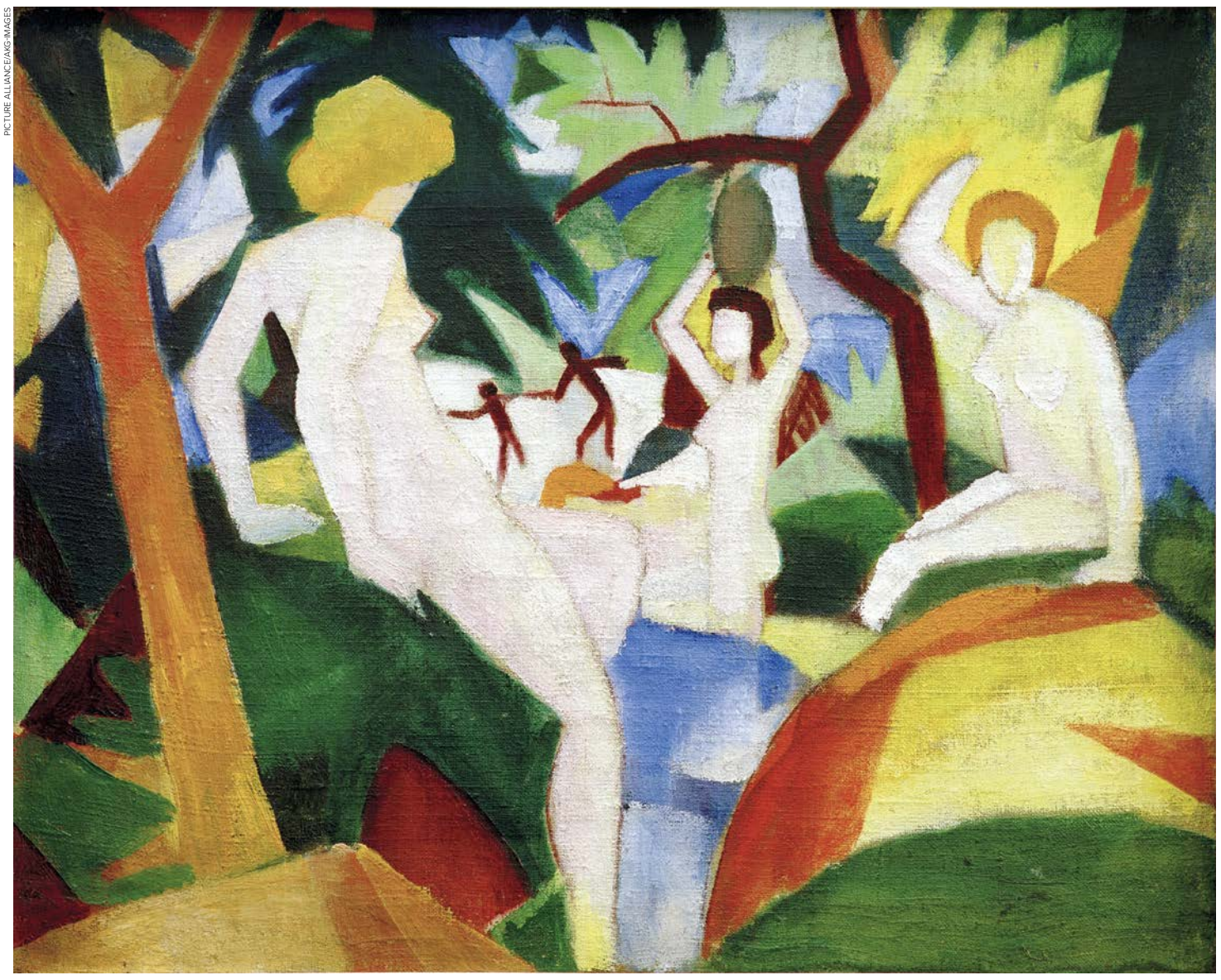
The German-German unification process after 1990 turned this sequence on its head in the East. Democracy had been fought for from the bottom up; reunification had been approved of by a majority of Germans and pushed forward against all objections and second thoughts. Yet, no sooner had the primary goal been achieved – guaranteed basic rights and elementary freedoms for all – that millions of eastern Germans lost their economic and social footing. A gain in political and legal self-determination often went hand-in-hand with a loss of socioeconomic self-determination. The terrain upon which people had been moving started giving way, and this is precisely what undermined any identification they might have had with the framework in which they were now being asked to move.

The refugee crisis of 2015 caused this well of discontent to overflow. "Everything has been decided and implemented over our heads," people cried. "Treuhand policies, Hartz laws, bank bailouts, open borders for migrants. Enough! It's our turn to speak." And, lo and behold, a stream of politicians, journalists and scientists suddenly made their way to the East – the place they'd disregarded for so long – to find out what was going wrong. In light of the growing attention they were getting, those who until then had been ignored mused: "We obviously did something right this time. This is exactly why we protested so radically. We wanted to make people aware of our situation, of the misery that reigns here."

The lesson we should take from this process is simple to understand. The top priorities of a social transformation as radical and all-encompassing as that which took hold in eastern Germany after 1990 are to foster and fortify the strength and resources of the people. And this clearly does not reflect the eastern German experience after the Wall came down. The rapid socioeconomic demobilization of eastern Germans was a disaster that should not have been allowed to happen. The long-term consequences of that failure are now affecting the entire country.

A public debate about these failings, without reservations or assignment of blame, is of utmost importance if we are to keep things from spiraling out of control.

Wolfgang Engler
is a cultural sociologist. He was rector of the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin from 2005 to 2017.



PICTURE ALLIANCE/AKG-IMAGES

Birthday suits: August Macke's 1913 *Badende Frauen* (bathing women).

& Zee Germans their bare bottoms

This is going to be a little awkward, but just why do Germans so frequently strip off their clothes in public?

BY KILLIAN LANNISTER

This summer, two German news stories made global headlines. One was an animalistic crime story, an attempted robbery; the other was a tale of protest, aimed at the increasing commercialization of world soccer. They had one thing in common – their protagonists were naked.

In the first week of August, a nude sunbather at Teufelssee lake in southwest Berlin was the target of an attempted "snout and run" when a wild boar snatched his bag and made a dash for the nearby forest with her two piglets in tow. As the bag contained his laptop, the man gave chase in his birthday suit to the amusement and applause of other bathers. Adele Landauer, a Berlin-based life coach, took some photos, posted them on Instagram with the naked boar-chaser's permission and blew up the internet.

Around a week later, two soccer teams in the town of Oer-Erkenschwick in the western German state of North Rhine-Westphalia decided to stage a protest against the dominance of money in the beautiful game by playing a Sunday match completely naked. Well, almost – they did wear soccer shoes and color-coded socks to separate the teams. The players' numbers were hand-painted on their backs.

Artist Gerrit Starczewski organized the game. "With my nude actions, I also want to set an example for diversity and naturalness and against the dependence and influence of social media and false ideals of beauty," Starczewski said.

Both the shaggy-boar story and the freeballing footballers serve to reinforce a commonly held belief about Germans: that they like to get naked in public. What the rest of the world calls nudism or naturism, the Germans call *Nacktkultur* (naked culture) or, more often, *Freikörperkultur* (free body culture) – FKK for short.

The culture – some would say cult – of FKK is practiced at special "textile-free" beaches, lakes, naturist resorts and camping sites and even in specially designated sections of downtown parks in major cities. The English Garden in Munich and the Tiergarten in Berlin are two of the most famous parks in Germany with nude areas. On summer days, naked sun worshippers can be found spread out on the grass, often to the shock of unsuspecting tourists from more sartorially retentive nations.

The modern German nudist movement was the first worldwide, with the first *Freikörperkultur* club founded in the city of Essen in 1898, marking the start of an increased acceptance of public nudity in Germany.

The FKK movement is based on an attitude toward life where the naked body is not a source of shame. It promotes concepts of physical fitness and vigorous health. The German naturists aimed to de-eroticize the naked body, which they did not regard as sexually provocative in itself. They believed that civilization had taught us to look upon nudity as sexual. But the idea of getting your kit off to liberate yourself was still somewhat revolutionary in the late nineteenth century.

No matter how much people have gotten used to it, unexploded artillery is still a very serious business in Germany

From the 1920s onwards, the FKK movement became well established in Germany and gained prominence for its utopian ideals. The first nude beach in Germany was established in 1920 on the North Sea resort island of Sylt. The movement became politicized by radical socialists who believed that not having any clothes on would lead to the dissolution of society's rigid class-based structures. It also became associated with pacifism. So when the Nazis came along, they banned it, of course.

In March 1933, Prussian interior minister Hermann Göring, later to become the head of Hitler's Luftwaffe, passed laws limiting mixed-sex nudism. Although the Nazis approved of the fresh air and exercise aspect of FKK, Göring opined that it "should be disapproved of as a cultural error. Among women, the nudity kills natural modesty; it takes from men their respect for women."

Following the defeat of the Nazis, FKK persisted in both halves of divided Germany, but it was particularly widespread in communist East Germany, where being able to get naked at the beach or on the shore of a lake was as good a way as any to escape the restrictions of an otherwise repressive and economically limited state.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and Germany was reunited a year later, attitudes to FKK became something of a signifier of former East and former West German *Weltanschauungen*. Many East Germans were unhappy when some formerly "textile-free" beaches became "textile-only" to accommodate what they saw as the more prudish attitudes of bourgeois West Germans.

Former East German politician Gregor Gysi says the relaxed East German way of dealing with nudity was lost after reunification. Harking back to the aims of the nineteenth-century FKK adherents to desexualize the human body, Gysi blames the "pornographic gaze" of Westerners after reunification for destroying the pleasure of nude bathing. "FKK culture has a long tradition in Germany," Gysi says. "Partly, it also had ties to the workers' movement. In East Germany, FKK beaches on the Baltic Sea were the norm."

Intra-German cultural clashes aside, the frequency of nudist beaches on the Baltic Sea also led to some international misunderstandings. After Germany's neighbor Poland joined the European Union, it became easier to walk along the shared coastline from one country's beaches to the other's. But nudism was a cause of occasional tensions between the mostly Catholic and often socially conservative Poles, on the one hand, and the more liberal Germans on the other.

Around one-third of Germans admit to having been naked in public, according to a 2014 survey by travel firm Expedia, which dubbed Germany the world's most tolerant country when it comes to nudity. Still, with regional and municipal bans on public nudity becoming more frequent, some advocates of nudist culture fear FKK could be on its way out. Only 45,000 Germans are members of organized FKK clubs today, according to Kurt Fischer, president of the German FKK Association. But he says another seven million can be considered *Nacktkultur* aficionados, happy to regularly strip down at the beach or the lake or the park.

Yet the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has one upside for FKK fans. Many can now go naked at work – as long as they're in home office.

Killian Lannister is a freelance journalist based in Berlin.

Traveling coach

Why are German coaches the most successful in European soccer?

BY THOMAS KISTNER

One way to look at the 2019–2020 UEFA Champions League season – which recently came to an end with Bayern Munich winning the final 1:0 against Paris Saint-Germain – is to see it as a battle among German coaches in which Hansi Flick ultimately triumphed over Thomas Tuchel and Julian Nagelsmann. Yet another German coach, Jürgen Klopp, had won the Champions League with his FC Liverpool team the previous season, but this time it was these three German coaches vying for the title, with Nagelsmann and his RB Leipzig eventually bowing out in the semifinals.

Does this mean that German coaches are now the measure of all things? Indeed, they headed up three of the final four teams, which is something the Champions League had never seen before. And we can safely assume that their success stories will launch a new trend in the soccer world. But is it really true that Germans reign supreme in the coaching universe?

What is most certainly true is that we're seeing a number of key success factors otherwise uncommon in the brutal, hire-and-fire business of professional soccer. Both of the coaches in the Champions League final benefited from these factors, and so, too, did Klopp and Nagelsmann. They were able to combine state-of-the-art sports-science know-how with two rather anachronistic elements: having the time to develop and exercising patience in the pursuit of championship titles.

"Which coach is better?" is the classic dilemma on the business side of sports. But when applied to these successful German coaches, it becomes clear that the question misses the mark. Is it the swashbuckling, ex-professional soccer player-turned-coach who knows the locker room inside out? Or is it the laptop-type coach, who never played in the big arenas and prefers the bookish approach of acquiring his knowledge in the academic realm at a string of sports universities?

However you look at it, present-day soccer lies firmly in the hands of the latter species of coach. Neither Tuchel nor Klopp nor Nagelsmann were master soccer players. And even though Flick was indeed a top professional in his day, he was also one of the few who realigned his approach to the game and underwent intensive academic training after ending his own playing career. This made it possible for Flick to acquire a new and authentic perspective on the game and develop his own ideas. These qualities put him in the same camp as Tuchel and Klopp, while also distinguishing him from old teammates and big-time German stars such as Lothar Matthäus, Stefan Effenberg and Mario Basler, who failed as coaches with their unimaginative old-school approach. There's no place for former players like these in today's modern high-tech soccer. However, their skills and reputations are enough for them to work as television experts.

Before qualifying for the final, Champions League-winner Hansi Flick was already a world champion. For almost a decade, he had been able to develop at his own pace at the side of German national coach Joachim Löw. And then, in 2014, with the World Cup victory in Brazil, he was also able to distinguish himself as a quiet and calm mastermind next to the lion at the helm.

In his first five years in the Bundesliga, Thomas Tuchel – like Klopp before him – enjoyed a honeymoon period in the comfortable soccer biotope that is FSV Mainz. After a fairly successful two-year stint with Dortmund, where he ultimately clashed with the club's leadership, he made the leap to Paris, where he could not immediately meet the high demands of the Qatari sheikhs who own the club, but was still allowed to remain on board. Jürgen Klopp enjoyed a similar route: seven years in Mainz, seven in Dortmund and now five at FC Liverpool.

Nagelsmann, too, is a typical German biotope coach. After nine years in Hoffenheim, his time as coach of RB Leipzig now appears entirely dependent on how long it takes for an English or Spanish club to swoop in and snap him up. Or perhaps it will be a club in Italy, which is exactly where it looked like his mentor, Ralf Rangnick – the primogenitor of the new concept coaches – was headed in early August. The only reason Rangnick didn't end up at AC Milan was that the team's graying stars – led by Zlatan Ibrahimović – suddenly started a winning streak. These oldies were exactly the players Rangnick would have taken out of service to make room for the future. But Milan won a few games, which meant that these supposedly over-the-hill players and their unassuming coach, Stefano Pioli, could hold on to their jobs. In other words, a temporary surge in performance destroyed the plans that Milan had been making since the fall of 2019 and had involved some major changes and ambitious goals. This is a common occurrence in professional soccer.

The problem is that too little work is done at the conceptual level. Today's decision-makers tend to follow their guts and react to events on a day-by-day basis. In such a setting – at clubs where ideas and visions are lacking – there is no chance for sustainable success, especially when those teams are dominated by sympathies, aversions, the influence of aging stars and the pressures of strong fan groups.

Conversely, if a coach is given time and enjoys the trust of his bosses, even through rough patches, that coach can achieve things the stop-and-go trainers can only dream of. Such coaches can shape their teams according to their own ideas and mold players of their own choice into a community. This creates an enormous advantage. But it still in no way guarantees titles at the international level. We can see this clearly in the fate of former wunderkind Pep Guardiola, whose Manchester City super-team embarrassed itself against Olympique Lyon – ranked seventh in France – in the Champions League quarterfinals.

The truth of the matter is that the heroes of the latest Champions League season benefited from the chaotic conditions caused by COVID-19. "Basically, the Germans were a little lucky," noted Jürgen Klopp. "Amid all the chaos with schedules, theirs was best-suited to the Champions League." In Klopp's opinion, the two finalists were not really the best teams in Europe; he argued that any number of clubs in England could beat FC Bayern. Klopp was also right when he said: "I'm not entirely convinced that this is some big statement on the state of soccer in Germany and France." Of course, Klopp knows that it's not.

The soccer being played in Germany and France is by no means the best in the world. On the contrary, there is no real competition for these teams in their leagues. Bayern and PSG are utterly dominant; they have no legitimate challengers in the Bundesliga or Ligue 1. Opposing teams never pull out all the stops to try to win against them; their only aim is to avoid a blowout. This state of affairs allowed Bayern and PSG to bank their energy and save those few percentiles of freshness that can make all the difference – at least in a tournament format like this year's special knockout round, which called for four games in only two weeks.

Yet another factor this season was that all the major European teams – from defending champion Liverpool to Real Madrid, winners in '15, '16, and '17 – were eliminated early on. The semifinals featured only teams from Germany and France: Bayern, PSG, the third-place Bundesliga team RB Leipzig and the oh-so-average team from Lyon. Under normal circumstances, if the latter two teams had played home and away games in intimidating stadiums full of chanting fans, probably neither would have made it as far as it did. But in this year's compressed blitz of a tournament, it paid off that they were able to save their energy in their entirely one-sided leagues. It was precisely that energy that those well-known clubs from much more balanced and competitive leagues in Spain and England lacked in the end.

Being a German coach is not a sign of quality in and of itself, but it helps if you're the head coach of a top team in Germany.

PICTURE ALLIANCE / AP IMAGES

Jürgen Klopp Coach of Liverpool FC

PICTURE ALLIANCE/ATP

Thomas Tuchel Coach of Paris Saint Germain FC

PICTURE ALLIANCE / JENS NIERING

Hansi Flick Coach of Bayern Munich FC

FRANK HOERMANN/SVEN SIMON

Julian Nagelsmann Coach of RB Leipzig

GRASS: SHUTTERSTOCK.DE/ ROBERT KNESCHKE

Thomas Kistner is a sports editor at *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and one of the world's most renowned investigative journalists in the fields of sports politics and organized crime in sports.

Catchers in the Rye

Save the Children was founded over 100 years ago to help starving children; unfortunately, it's just as necessary today as it was back then

SAVE THE CHILDREN

José David Ríos grew up in war-torn southwestern Columbia, where FARC rebels and paramilitary troops fought for years. He was not even nine years old when he was caught in the crossfire of a gunfight, getting hit in his legs and arms. The now 17-year-old found help in a youth program by Save the Children Columbia.

BY PETER ZEHNER

When adults behave like children, the first victims are often children themselves. In these ugly times, it would do us good to recall that we have the power to make the world a better place. We can reject the Hobbesian notion that "man is wolf to man," and instead seek to be good Samaritans. We can acknowledge the fact that hate only breeds hate, that violence only breeds violence, and focus on the fact that people are capable of altruism rather than egoism, of forgiveness rather than revenge. In short, we could remember that we should all look beyond our own dogmatic, small-minded interests, and maybe even learn to love our enemies and accept that we are all brothers and sisters.

One such insightful person was Eglantyne Jebb. In April 1919, just after the end of World War I, Jebb was shown a photo of a starving Austrian child; the two-year-old girl's head wobbled atop her dangerously gaunt body; she weighed hardly five kilograms. Jebb saw the United Kingdom's blockade of supplies to Germany and Austria as the cause of the child's hunger, and the photo was soon featured on a leaflet she started handing out, which also included the sentence: "Our blockade has caused this – millions of children are starving to death." She was subsequently fined by a judge, who charged her with distributing illegal political propaganda.

On May 19, 1919, Jebb joined with her sister, Dorothy Buxton, to organize a Fight the Famine Council at the Royal Albert Hall in London. She was now officially collecting money for starving children in Austria and Germany, that is, precisely for those countries the British had just defeated on the battlefield at great human and monetary expense. Jebb's actions were an affront to many British citizens, and the two women were branded the "traitor sisters." In her own defense, however, Jebb argued: "Surely it is impossible for us as normal human beings to watch children starve to death without making an effort to save them?" She and her sister insisted on helping as many children as possible, no matter their religion or country of origin.

The fund set up by Eglantyne Jebb soon led to the founding of the aid organization Save the Children. That organization is now celebrating its 100th anniversary with a book titled *I am alive. How children survived the wars of a century,* a worthwhile read offering insights into a number of sometimes harrowing and simultaneously encouraging life stories.

"Every child should have the opportunity to realize their dreams and develop their talents in a peaceful world," writes Susanna Krüger, chairwoman of Save the Children Germany. Krüger expresses her grief for the estimated 415 million children today – a shocking and disturbing statistic – who are not able to experience a carefree childhood for the simple fact that they live in war zones or conflict regions.

The book introduces us to 11 individuals who endured hardship in their childhoods, and each essay is accompanied by a commentary from a prominent sponsor of the organization. For example, violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and German TV anchorman Ingo Zamperoni provide gentle commentaries on the young heroes – with Soyinka contributing a poem. European Commissioner Margrethe Vestager and former UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon also contribute essays alongside the 11 life stories from the past 10 decades. The eleventh story focuses on a baby, Rajiya, and is designed to represent the most recent present and the organization's hope for a more peaceful future to come.

In one case, we are introduced to a Syrian family with nine children, all of whom have suffered varying degrees of trauma and live in a camp in Lebanon with more than one million other individuals who have fled the Assad regime or the Islamists – or both. One girl from that family, when asked what she would want if she could have anything, replies with one word "magic," arguing that it allows a person to get what they wish for. When asked what she would do with this powerful instrument, she answers: "Turn a cat into a mouse."

In another case, we hear stories and see images of children whose faces reflect a "murderous orgy of the most hideous kind" that took place in Rwanda in the 1990s. These are children with no parents, children who somehow survived on their own in this Central African country and to this day do not know if their parents are alive or dead.

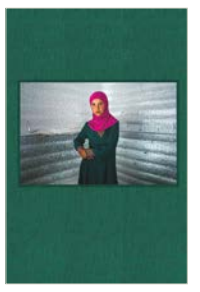
We also read about the war of independence in Biafra, a Nigerian region with an abundance of oil but too little to eat due to a blockade that has caused mass starvation and malnourishment among millions of children.

There is also a report on Afghans who fled to Pakistan after the Russians bombed their villages, suspecting that they were home to Mujahideen, the US-backed Islamic rebels who were fighting against the communist regime in Kabul.

We also read about a young girl who was trained to be a soldier by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as a 12-year-old. Later, while in exile in Canada, she would hide under the bed whenever she heard fireworks.

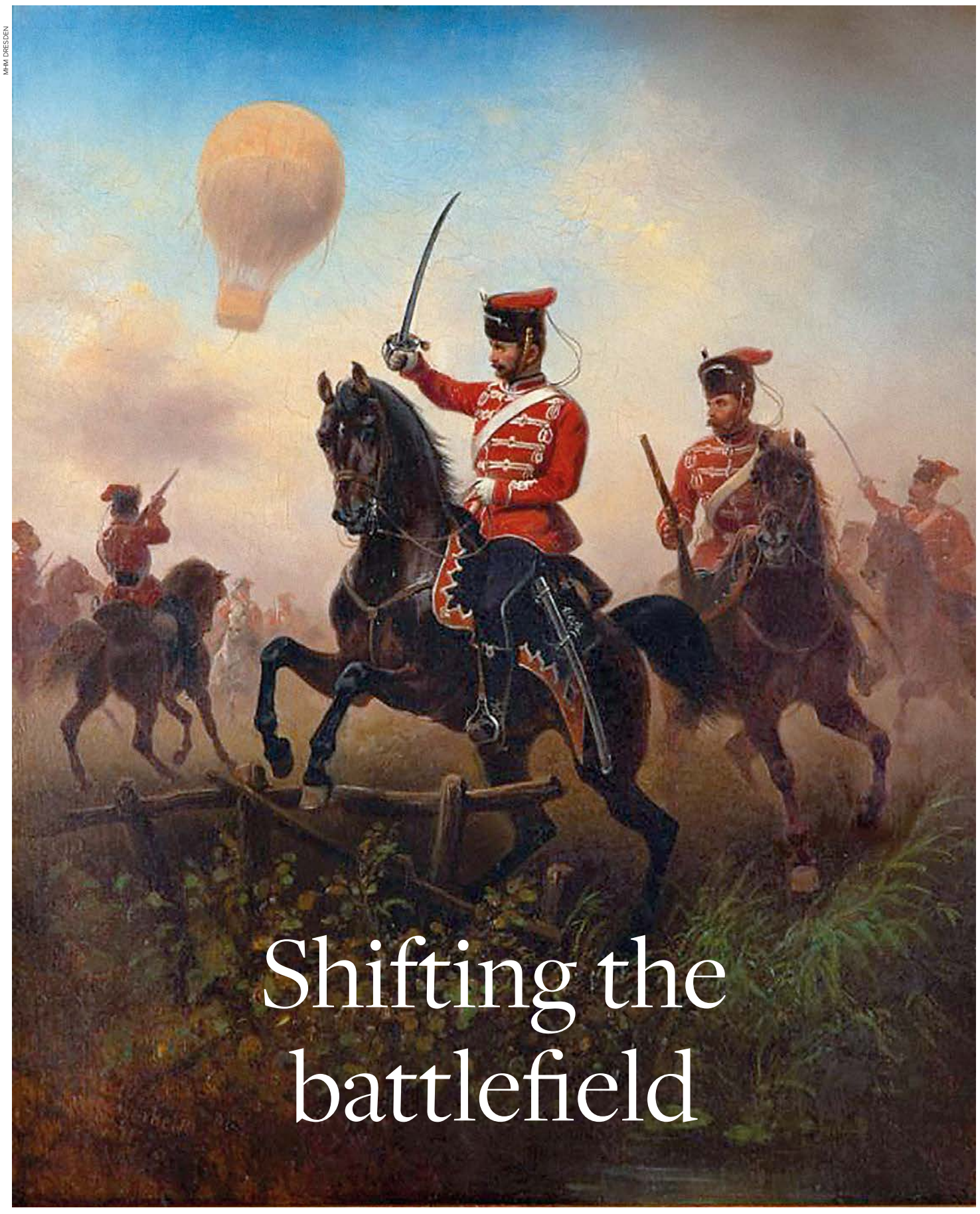
In each story, children are among the victims of conflicts in their home countries, from the Basque uprising against Franco to the Rohingya in Bangladesh.

There's still a lot of learning to be done if we want to make a better world. In one vignette, a wise and elderly German gentleman, who was helped at the age of seven by Save the Children and who is now more than 100 years old, stands on the seventh-floor balcony of his seniors residence and looks across the street at a village of container homes. When the news broke that refugees were going to be moving in there, many of his neighbors were skeptical, but his response was more generous: "Let them come first. Let's wait and see how it goes. After all, they're people in need." After reflecting for a moment, he adds: "I think people in Germany could live more quietly and contentedly."



I am alive. How children survived the wars of a century will be published in English and German on Nov. 25.

Peter Zehner
is a freelance journalist living in Berlin.



MHM DRESDEN

Proto-drone: Prussian hussars chasing a French tethered balloon. Painting by Wilhelm Alexander Meyerheim, 1871

Shifting the battlefield

A new exhibition shows how the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 led to the unification of Germany and presaged the mechanized murder of 20th-century warfare

BY KLAUS GRIMBERG

Two years after the end of the Franco-Prussian War, the painter Anton von Werner completed his epic battlefield portrait of Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff. High on his steed atop a hill, the field marshal is depicted looking across the valley where, in the distance, he can behold Paris, the seat of the French government. As Moltke surveys the terrain, his soldiers are erecting a telegraph line for swift communication with his comrades. Moltke is thus pictured as a field marshal whose strategic prowess rests not only on a mastery of the classical art of war, but also on the deployment of the newest technology.

This historical painting distils one of the essential characteristics of this war: a remarkable juxtaposition of traditional and industrialized warfare. Drum meets drumfire – just as before, a drummer would set the pace of the infantry's marching advance, but with increasing frequency attacks would stall in the face of the destructive power of modern cannon fire like that from the feared *mitrailleuse*. Fierce cavalry charges – often a decisive battle maneuver in former wars – failed under the heavy losses accrued from enemy barrages. The pitched battles and colorful uniforms of the various regiments recalled the cabinet wars of a century hence. But the operations of the generals and their armies were becoming more dynamic and more aggressive while suffering ever-heavier losses. The "engagement" of forces in 1870–71 was already heralding the mechanized killing later to define World War I.

Exactly 150 years after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, the Bundeswehr Museum of Military History in Dresden is venturing an exceedingly complex presentation of a conflict that ended with the proclamation of the German Emperor in the Versailles Hall of Mirrors, in the official consummation of the founding of the German state.

The curators see the war as not isolated in this context, but rather as the conclusion of a historical development that had already been set in motion with the aborted process of nation building following the German revolutions of 1848–49. With the Second Schleswig War of 1864 and the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, Prussian Minister of Foreign Affairs Otto von Bismarck had paved the way to a German unification "from above" under Prussia's leadership. It was not inevitable that these preceding wars led to the war against France, but when this option arose, Bismarck knew how to exploit it.

In its understanding of the context of the Franco-Prussian War, the Dresden exhibit is adopting a perspective widely shared among historians.

But what makes the exhibit so engaging are the many nuances that provide concise illustration of the war's daily routines and its aftermath. In terms of both weapons' technology and logistics, the industrialization of warfare was now secure in its inexorable march forward. The precisely targeted transport of military units via railroad and the swift communication made possible by telegraph were decisive factors. Supplies for the front were manufactured with efficiency and high levels of standardization in armament factories, and this applied not only to guns and artillery, but also to the apparel and equipment of soldiers.

Early on, the war was felt acutely on the home front as well. Despite the initially decisive victory at the Battle of Sedan on Sept. 2, 1870, fighting dragged on for months as part of the subsequent siege of Paris. Correspondents from various daily newspapers stationed at theaters of war wired their reports to their editorial offices and kept their readers up-to-date on the progress of the fighting. And the military leadership eagerly sent official dispatches with patriotic news of victories to the German states, which were then posted in public squares. In this respect, the war cast its shadow into the modern age in terms of media coverage as well; the people were kept informed almost in real time and propagandists honed their skills in the art of spiritual warfare, especially in defaming the adversary.

The increased publicity also led to the nascent Red Cross movement experiencing a significant boost in interest and participation. The voluntary care of the sick and wounded from all warring parties became a widespread reality for the first time during the Franco-Prussian War. Doctors and caregivers were protected under the banner of neutrality; and on the home front, women from the nobility and bourgeoisie contributed to the training of nurses and the amassing of care packages for soldiers containing food and clean clothes as well as bandages and medications. In looking after wounded soldiers and providing the best care possible, the war was now no longer waged solely on the battlefield, but also in sickbays and nursing facilities. Death and the plight of the wounded became lodged in the consciousness of broad strata of the population, and to an increasing degree this promoted a sense of national sentiment and belonging.

Time and again, the Franco-Prussian War highlights the uneasy coexistence of an old and new era. Of particular fascination are the works of contemporary battlefield painters depicting the tethered balloons intended, during the months-long siege of the Paris, to help the city's defenders establish communication with unoccupied parts of the country. On the ground are horse-mounted Hussars in pursuit of the new flying objects, which are attempting to launch by way of carabiners. It's hard to imagine a more glaring collision of the traditional with the modern.

Krieg. Macht. Nation. (War. Power. Nation.) Bundeswehr Museum of Military History in Dresden, through Jan. 31. Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission: €5/€3, and free up to age 18; www.mhmbw.de

Klaus Grimberg is a freelance journalist based in Berlin.

BPK-BILDAGENTUR (6), VG-BILDKUNST

Good luck: Bruno Taut's Horseshoe Estate, 1930

Bright lights, big city: Potsdamer Platz in 1930

Greater Berlin

100 years ago, Berlin's mayor Adolf Wermuth created the modern metropolis

BY PETER H. KOEPF

PICTURE ALLIANCE/ULLSTEIN BILD

The *good* Adolf: Adolf Wermuth, mayor of Berlin from 1912–1925

Many streets in Germany bear the names of individuals who served the common good in one way or the other. In Berlin, this honor is often bestowed upon people whose names are unfamiliar to the broader public and whose merit and deeds are equally unknown. Yet there are also plenty of individuals who have had a huge impact on the city but go entirely neglected when it comes to street names. One such individual is Adolf Wermuth, who has only one street in Berlin named after him. Wermuthweg is a small concrete-slab lane sandwiched between high-rise apartment buildings in Neukölln, far removed from Berlin's city hall known as the Rotes Rathaus, where this man accomplished a most impressive feat.

Adolf Wermuth was responsible for paving the way to Berlin becoming a modern metropolis. How did he do it? Roughly one hundred years ago, as Berlin's mayor, he enacted legislation that merged dozens of surrounding districts, cities and Brandenburg municipalities together with the core city districts of Berlin. On Oct. 1, 1920, although he was not affiliated with any specific party himself, Wermuth was able to push through the legislation by drawing on the support of left-wing parties in the parliament, while the centrist parties and the National People's Party voted against it.

There was plenty of resistance to the plan from other forces as well. Brandenburg did not take kindly to the loss of land and taxpayers, and the rich municipality of Charlottenburg expressed very little interest in sharing its wealth with the poor Berliners at the city's historical core. But Wermuth was able to win them all over. The result was an overnight increase of 1.9 million "new" people added to the already 1.9 million inhabitants of Berlin. The city's surface area increased from 67 to roughly 878 square kilometers. Only Los Angeles was greater in area at the time, and only New York and London had larger populations. The city's original six districts now became 20, and Berlin would soon be the largest industrial city in Europe, with its own airports and Autobahn. Having quickly become a modern and liberal cultural metropolis, the city was now called Greater Berlin.

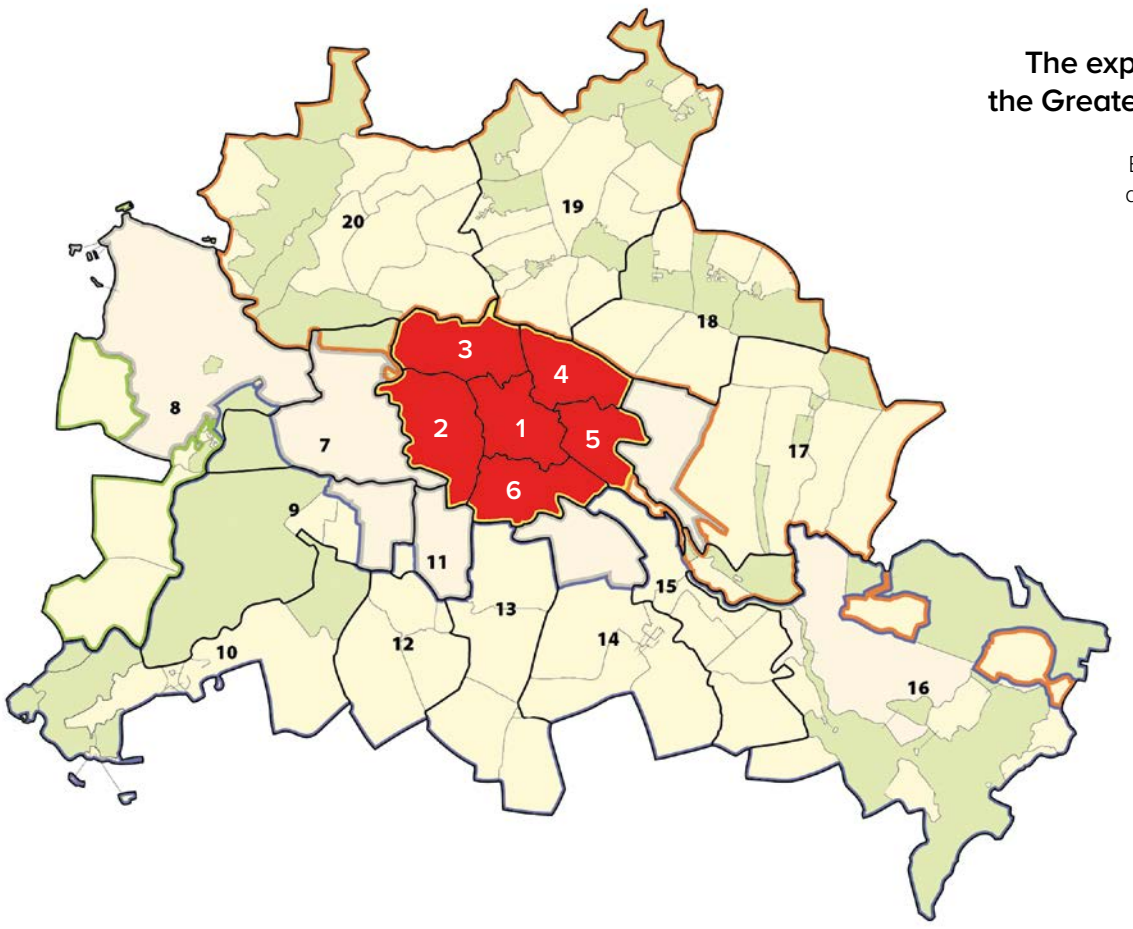
Once the legislation passed, policymakers could start regulating what had, until then, been a state of municipal anarchy in which "one community digs up the water of the other," as described by Alexander Dominicus, the mayor of Schöneberg. In Greater Berlin, it became possible to plan and build joint electrical grids, water systems and transport networks while also addressing social problems such as housing shortages and food supplies.

Thirteen years later, however, another Adolf came to power with a desire to make the proud city even bigger: Adolf Hitler harbored dreams of creating his "Germania," the capital of the world. Instead, however, his vision resulted in Berlin being reduced to rubble and ashes. Most of what had been built since 1920 was destroyed, and the city's inhabitants lived in precarious conditions, facing deprivation and even starvation. Hitler and his cronies disappeared, and the streets that had been renamed for them were renamed once more. Hundreds of thousands of people had also disappeared, and factories and banks turned their back on the divided city that was now cut off from the rest of the world.

Today, 30 years after Germany's reunification, Berlin has almost as many inhabitants as it did 100 years ago. Adolf Wermuth has been laid to rest in peace in a cemetery in a northern Berlin neighborhood and even has an honorary grave maintained by the city of Berlin. However, officials still haven't found an appropriate street to name after him. In the district of Mitte, there are stipulations that an equitable number of streets be named after women and that no two streets should have the same name. But sometimes these rules are ignored – visitors to the city should know that when they hop in a taxi for Goethestraße in Weißensee, they just may end up in Charlottenburg.

Peter H. Koepf
is editor-in-chief of
The German Times.

Yep, that's a department store: Karstadt in Neukölln, 1929



The expansion of Berlin via the Greater Berlin Act of 1920

Berlin's new administrative districts post-consolidation

1 Mitte
2 Tiergarten
3 Wedding
4 Prenzlauer Tor
5 Friedrichshain
6 Hallesches Tor
7 Charlottenburg
8 Spandau
9 Wilmersdorf
10 Zehlendorf
11 Schöneberg
12 Steglitz
13 Tempelhof
14 Neukölln
15 Treptow
16 Köpenick
17 Lichtenberg
18 Weißensee
19 Pankow
20 Reinickendorf

Legendary: Erich Mendelsohn's Mossehaus in 1923

Big screen: Universum movie theater, 1928

Big stage: Scala Theater in 1929

JENS ZIEHE/PHOTOGRAPHIE

Early modern Torah shield, from the new exhibition

Am I the Messiah?

With its new director and new permanent exhibition, Jewish Museum Berlin is opening a new chapter in its sometimes-turbulent history

BY AGNES MONKA

There's an almost palpable sense of relief in the air at the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) these days. After a year plagued by a series of crises, including accusations of anti-Semitism and hostility toward Israel lobbed at the museum and the affiliated Blumenthal Academy, the unanimous appointment of Hetty Berg and the museum's new permanent exhibition have been met with a positive response from all sides.

Berg, who was born and raised in the Netherlands, possesses all the qualities she needs to assert herself in the difficult position of JMB director. Unlike her predecessor, Peter Schäfer, Berg is Jewish. After Schäfer left in June 2019, the Central Council of Jews in Germany made it a prerequisite that the next director be Jewish. Berg is also a highly experienced manager, an engaging broker, knows how to raise funds and has excellent connections to the various Jewish communities and to Israel.

Berg worked for more than 30 years in Amsterdam, initially at the Jewish Museum, and in her position as chief curator and manager, she played a key role in developing the city's Jewish cultural quarter. It is precisely this experience with navigating political issues, alongside the support from the Jewish community, that her predecessor lacked.

In summer 2019, Schäfer was forced from his post after a number of clumsy maneuvers, but specifically because of the backlash that erupted after an employee in the museum's press department posted an uncommented link on Twitter to an article supporting the pro-Palestinian movement known as Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). In the past, Schäfer had also drawn the ire of the Central Council, many Jewish communities and even Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Unlike other Jewish museums in Germany, a crisis associated with the JMB must be negotiated on a larger political stage for the simple fact that the museum is not a municipal institution, but rather a federal foundation. Three quarters of its budget is made up of federal funds, and members of the board of trustees are appointed by Germany's president.

In 2019, many critical voices had accused the JMB of losing its uniquely Jewish perspective, arguing also that neither the museum nor the academy was the right forum in which to discuss the Middle East conflict with Palestinian representatives. In the eyes of these critics, the open house that Peter Schäfer had sought to create had become a house of arbitrariness where every voice – whether for or against Israel – was given equal consideration.

It's no wonder, then, that Berg decided to make it clear from the very beginning that she had no interest in engaging in a dialog with BDS supporters. "I reject the BDS movement and have already stated publically that I will not be inviting any BDS activists [to the museum]. BDS calls not only for a boycott of Israel, but also a boycott against the participation of Israeli artists and scientists in the public discourse around the world."

When Berg arrived at the museum, it had also been weakened by lasting vacancies in a number of top positions there. For example, program director Léontine Meijer-van Mensch had understandably thrown in the towel after having been given hardly any say in the redesign of the permanent exhibition while being limited to organizing only the Children's Museum. Also in 2019, as the organizer of conferences such as "Living with Islamophobia," academy head Yasemin Shoomann left after being accused of neglecting the specifically Jewish perspective.

It is now up to Berg to provide answers to some of the big questions facing the museum: Who will be represented in what way at the museum? Whom exactly does the museum seek to address? The museum's new permanent exhibition has been open to the public since mid-August. Like the previous permanent exhibition, it was designed by Cilly Kugelmann, and invites visitors to engage with the Jewish faith in a lighter way through a wealth of exhibit pieces, including films, touchscreens, table models, comics and games.

At one station, visitors can determine whether they're the Messiah by answering 15 questions. Everyday objects such as piggy banks, self-made hammocks, pincushions and family photos are exhibited on an equal footing with oil paintings and silverware; this generates an associative approach to telling stories. Music stations and small separate rooms provide the opportunity for visitors to slow down the pace, rest and reflect. The exhibition also explores the themes of homosexuality and women, including a presentation of the first female rabbis in Europe after the war.

The exhibition takes a straightforward but highly aesthetic approach to solving the tricky question of an appropriate representation of Judaism and Jewish life; at several points throughout the museum, visitors can watch films in which people of the Jewish faith tell stories, express their opinions and discuss different subjects. How strictly do Jews have to abide by the Talmud? To what extent do Jews feel pressure to adjust to German society? Are same-sex marriages compatible with Judaism? What is the meaning of the Shabbat? What exactly are the rules for keeping Kosher?

One key theme Berg focused on while she was still in Amsterdam was Jewish life in Europe since 1945. While the Holocaust comprises a large and important chapter in the exhibition, it's not presented as the historical event toward which German-Jewish history moves. The final space in the permanent exhibition explores the beginning of the Jewish community after World War II, the influx of Russian Jews since the 1990s and the debate over circumcision that took place in Germany in 2012. The exhibition concludes with a video installation called Mesubin, in which a wide array of people of the Jewish faith tell stories: children, men, women, Karneval fans, Israelis living in Germany, Holocaust survivors, people of color, LGBTQ individuals and rabbis with and without beards.

The idea of inviting a wider range of Jews to describe their diverse experiences and tell stories – that is, to speak for themselves, rather than being spoken about – is likely to become the key to the success of the museum under Berg. She has expressed her desire to foster closer contacts to the Jewish community in the future and to create stronger ties to the city of Berlin, for example to James Simon, one of the most influential and generous patrons of the Wilhelminian era, and to notable women like the author and salonnière Henriette Herz.

Berg has stated that she envisions JMB holding an exhibition exploring the subject of "Judaism and Sexuality." And as soon as the COVID-19-related rules allow, the children's section known as ANOHA will open. In the coming years, the museum will most likely focus on developing its accessibility, diversity and visual clarity – politics, yes, but not short-term everyday politics; Israel, yes, but not the conflict in the Middle East.

Agnes Monka
is a journalist at the German public broadcaster Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (rbb). She specializes in subjects relating to Jewish life in Germany.

White knight

How Berlin businessman Jörg Woltmann came to own one of the oldest luxury brands in the world

There are certain things in life we should probably refrain from doing, but we do them anyway. Almost 15 years ago and under constant advisement to let it rest, Jörg Woltmann remained undeterred in pursuing his business idea: "It has to be saved." And so Woltmann, a banker by trade, paid €13.5 million and invested a further €30 million to rescue one of Berlin's most historical cultural assets, the Royal Porcelain Manufactory, or KPM. Founded in 1763 by Frederick the Great and, until 1918, owned by seven different kings and kaisers, the KPM was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy in 2006, when Woltmann made his move. It wasn't just a "sense of patriotism" that prompted the purchase, Woltmann was also entirely convinced "that I could do it." It turned out he was right, and in 2007, he was named Berlin Entrepreneur of the Year for his efforts. Several years later, in 2015, he was also honored with the Order of Merit of the State of Berlin.

KPM

Jörg Woltmann

Every morning since, Woltmann has taken care of business at the premises of the KPM manufactory on the edge of the Tiergarten, with afternoons reserved for his other business interests. Amid the wood-clad walls and English antiques in his office, a portrait of Frederick the Great – "Old Fritz" – tracks his every move, as he explains his original motivation for buying the manufactory. His goal was to preserve a storied tradition and safeguard the fine art of craftsmanship and time-honored design, he says. But Woltmann also sought to preserve collective memory and foster a common experience, which is why he also built an interactive exhibition space next to the production facilities along with a hands-on, do-it-yourself manufactory.

Woltmann's greatest wish is that people rediscover the pleasure of a well-set table, maybe even that young people will recognize the value of handcrafted products and perhaps understand why a Kurland cup and saucer from KPM are more expensive than a mug from IKEA. It takes almost three weeks and a process involving roughly 29 steps and 25 different workers to make the Kurland, and each cup and saucer undergoes 10 quality controls before earning the seal of quality – the royal stamp.

But this penchant for tradition doesn't mean KPM isn't open to the latest trends. In fact, they now offer a Kurland coffee-to-go mug and other portable beverage cups in various designs; one of their best-sellers is a porcelain Currywurst dish that mimics the distinctly shaped cardboard used to serve Berlin's most famous street food. Of course, the KPM dish sets itself apart not only because it is made of "white gold" – it also bears the cobalt blue scepter from Brandenburg's electoral coat of arms.

A KPM icon for the ages: a plate from the Kurland line, available since 1790.

Brandenburg gait

Culture-starved Berliners and visitors looking for a break from COVID-19 have a number of excellent destinations in surrounding Brandenburg

BY JAN KEPP

As Berlin's erstwhile vibrant art and theater scene continues its coronavirus-induced slumber, urban dwellers are increasingly being forced to get their cultural kicks in the countryside. Especially on those warm late-summer days, there's nothing better than trading in the hot city life for a refreshingly cool lake, a shady spot under the trees and a delicious drink with a breathtaking view. And just imagine if you could do all those things and at the same time enjoy an invigorating stroll through a landscaped garden where art and nature have entered into a harmonious symbiosis. Well, that's just what awaits you at the Schlossgut Schwante Sculpture Park, less than one hour by car northwest of Berlin.

The current iteration of the stately manor known as Schlossgut Schwante was built in the 18th century. And the first thing visitors will notice as they make their way along the tree-lined cobblestone driveway is a small manor pond in the distance. Amid the reeds on the opposite side of the pond, there's a glowing neon sign that reads "Everything is going to be alright." It's a welcome gesture that resonates with confidence and encouragement. Indeed, the pandemic too shall soon pass. And until then, we might as well make the best of the current situation.

This is exactly what Loretta Würtenberger and Daniel Tümpel have been doing in the year since they became owners of the mansion. Together, they run a company called Fine Art Partners, which provides interim financing to art dealers looking to make expensive acquisitions. Their "Institute for Artists' Estates" also handles the estates of artists or collectors, and especially heirs in need of guidance or advice. These business activities mean that the couple is closely connected to the art world, which is where they came up with the idea to open their new residence up to art works created by artists they know. The mansion itself remains a private retreat for the family of six, but they've transformed the park around the home into a parcours of sculptures that invites visitors on an enjoyable stroll through their midst.

The tour begins with a clear statement: Ai Weiwei welcomes the art-loving pedestrians with a work called the "Flag for Human Rights," which he created in 2018 to mark the 70th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. When the wind blows, one can make out a footprint on the flag's blue background – a marking designed to represent people and worldwide migration. The flag is an appeal to us all to respect and uphold the inalienable rights of every individual in the world facing persecution and fleeing wars. It is the only artwork that belongs to the couple's private collection, and it was especially important to Würtenberger to have this flag at the entrance: "There are too many 'Reichsdeutsche' flags waving in Brandenburg," she says.

JAN KEPP

Silver surfer: Tony Cragg's *Elliptical Column*

All of the other artists whose work is on display were invited by the "lords of the manor" to contribute a piece over the course of the summer. These include well-known names such as Tony Cragg, whose "Elliptical Column" twirls up and out of an uncut meadow into the blue sky and shines in the sunlight. Dan Graham contributed his "Play Pen for Play Pals," a glass pavilion that invites visitors to re-discover space and the environment in a brand new way.

Stalwarts such as Hans Arp and Ulrich Rückriem are also represented with abstract works, as are a series of artists who are less well-known among wider audiences. For example, the Japanese artist Toshihiko Mitsuya planted his "Aluminum Garden," a shiny silver bed of flowers and blossoms that looks as if it was harvested into reality from a magical world. And Polish artist Monika Sosnowska set up her twisted steel staircase called "Stairs" – a kind of relic of a road to nowhere where the beginning and the end meet in an eerie way – between trees and bushes.

Like a meandering golf-course driveway, the spacious lawn winds its way along uncut grass, meadow orchards and patches of trees. After each curve in the path, visitors are offered new views and perspectives of the sculptures, which are carefully placed so as not to steal attention from each other. The entire area is a great place to linger, especially with the manor house in the background, a light breeze in the trees and here and there a lone pony grazing away on the grass. The glow of the late summer sun, that fresh countryside air and a quick coffee before you go – Corona indeed feels very far away.

It should be noted that the two minds behind the Schlossgut Schwante Sculpture Park came up with their art-in-nature idea before the pandemic hit. The priority for Würtenberger and Tümpel was to provide the art works with a new and unusual space in which to unfold and develop – a space that would allow them to achieve a completely different appearance than in a conventional museum. Not only have the initiators achieved their goal, they have also created a site that helps urban dwellers overcome the symptoms of cultural withdrawal that have emerged over the past several months. When it's time to leave, it's good to take one last look back at the lake at "Everything is going to be alright" shining from the shadow of the reeds. An afternoon in Schwante certainly helps us believe it's true.

Schlossgut Schwante Sculpture Park. Open to the public until Oct. 31, Fri & Sun 11am-6pm, Sat 11am-8pm; Tickets €12; www.schlossgut-schwante.de

Jan Kepp
is a freelance journalist living in Berlin.

UNKNOWN POSTCARD

A down town: Bad Belzig in the 1980s

ROGER MELIS

Woman in the mirror: Roger Melis' portrait of Eva-Maria Hagen (1967)

MUSEUM BARBARINI

French-Italian-German: Claude Monet's *Villas at Bordighera* (1884) in Potsdam

Destruction and reconstruction

This year's annual cultural festival known as Kulturland Brandenburg is commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II under the title "War and Peace." Six municipalities in the state of Brandenburg have set up open-air exhibitions that allow visitors to experience and understand the destruction of historic old towns during the war. Visitors are also shown how entire buildings – and sometimes entire streets – were left to become ruins during the GDR's "economy of scarcity." It was not until after 1990 that most municipalities began to redevelop and refurbish old town centers, many of which would soon become real gems. Destroyed – Preserved – Recovered is the title of the self-guided walking tours offered in the towns of Altlandsberg, Brandenburg an der Havel, Bad Belzig, Beeskow, Doberlug/Kirchhain and Wusterhausen/Dosse. Visitors can explore the historical town centers on their own, with each exhibition telling its unique story of loss, decay, preservation and reconstruction using town models, photos and accounts from historical witnesses.

Destroyed – Preserved – Recovered: Self-guided Tours of Old Town Centers. Six municipalities in Brandenburg, until Dec. 31; www.kulturland-brandenburg.de

Urban open-air museum

No other city in eastern Germany gives visitors the opportunity to experience socialist urban planning in such an up-close and personal way as Eisenhüttenstadt near the Polish border. In 1950, the GDR government ordered the construction of a steelworks and an adjacent residential area to be built in the architectural style of Socialist Classicism. In 1953, the "planned city" was built next to the steelworks as Stalinstadt, only to be renamed Eisenhüttenstadt in 1961. Today, the former "model city" feels more like an urban open-air museum. The Documentation Center for Everyday Culture in the GDR recently moved into the former crèche once affiliated with the industrial factory, or *Kombinat* . This is where a comprehensive selection of photographer Roger Melis' work will be on display starting in November. Melis was able to capture the everyday lives and realities of people in the GDR with his melancholic, dense, subtle and symbolic photographs. Just like Eisenhüttenstadt itself, Melis' photographs of a "silent country" document the life of a state that has long since ceased to exist.

Roger Melis – In a Silent Country – Three Decades of Photographs of the GDR. Eisenhüttenstadt, until Feb. 7, 2021; www.alltagskultur-ddr.de

Prussia and impressionism

What Eisenhüttenstadt is to socialism, Potsdam is to Prussia. Visitors to the city can explore the various epochs of Prussian history and architecture much like on a gigantic excavation site. After World War II, the Old Market (Alter Markt) – which had previously marked the historical center around the city palace (Stadtschloss) and St. Nicholas Church (Nikolaikirche), and which Frederick the Great had redesigned in the style of a Roman Piazza in the mid-19th century – had almost disappeared. One of the most imposing structures on the square was Palast Barberini, which was rebuilt in its original dimensions and with its original historical façade as late as between 2013 and 2016 by the art patron Hasso Plattner. Since its reopening, this new building has housed the Museum Barberini, which quickly became a crowd magnet. Starting in September 2020, the museum will boast a new attraction: the collection of Impressionist art works belonging to the museum's founder will be on display for the first time, including paintings by Monet, Renoir and Signac, among others.

Impressionism. The Hasso Plattner Collection. Museum Barberini Potsdam, from Sept. 7; www.museum-barberini.com.

PICTURE ALLIANCE/GESSLER-FOTOPRESS

A new home: A model of Berlin's forthcoming Exile Museum, and environs

Out of exile

The final design for a new Berlin museum spotlighting expatriates forced to flee Nazi Germany has been chosen

BY NIKOLAUS BERNAU

If at all, most non-Berliners are familiar with the Anhalter Bahnhof train station from reading the works of Walter Benjamin, Paul Celan and Erich Kästner. And Berliners themselves most likely assume that the small yet monumental portal next to the soccer field near Askanischer Platz in Kreuzberg is some kind of decorative addendum to the park rather than a remnant of what once was a major railroad terminal.

This state of affairs is sure to change in the next couple of years, as construction progresses on the new Exile Museum to be located behind the free-standing portico. The museum will commemorate the experience of individuals forced to flee Germany and all the areas eventually occupied by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945, people who would go on to build new lives in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Austria, the US, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Africa, China and other countries.

The architectural competition held to find a winning design for the museum recently came to a close with top honors going to the Danish architectural firm of Dorte Mandrup. Second prize went to a striking design from the New York-based office of Diller Scofidio + Renfro, whose proposed structure stands out for its efficient, highly flexible floor plans and large glass cubes; they were also the only designers to incorporate an ecological agenda into their design.

Though grand and forward-looking, Diller Scofidio + Renfro's design fails to evoke reflection and meditation as a memorial. Instead, it is a cheerful structure that chooses to focus on the positive experience of the US as a country that became home to many exiles. But the organizers behind the Exile Museum in Germany obviously also want their new building to exude a sense of contemplative dignity that acknowledges the great loss that came with exile and flight.

Third prize went to the Berlin-based office of Bruno Fioretti Marquez, whose submission drew on the same sparse, ascetic monumentality used so often since the 1960s in so-called memorial architecture. Their design made use of the portico as an actual portal again, that is, as a means through which to enter into a massive brick building and solemn entrance hall, which stands in sharp contrast to the otherwise open floor plan that can accommodate almost any spatial size and shape.

In their winning design, the team at Dorte Mandrup opted for the middle ground between a meditative "building of remembrance" and an open museum. The portico is indeed staged as a stand-alone memorial, with the new building receding behind it in a wide circle segment, thereby opening up a small square space between old and new. Each ground-floor façade comprises one hyper-wide and gradually curved arch that bears the weight of a massive brick wall and a horizontal grid of narrow window slits.

The impression made by the interior, however, will be neither bulky nor heavy, but rather dynamic and fluid, thanks to the interaction of the curved brick floor with the counter-directional sloping lines of the arched window walls.

This design scheme dovetails with the building's dual functions. The district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg has made the valuable urban property available to the museum on the condition that the much-used sports fields on the grounds of the former train station will remain in full operation and that the facilities adjunct to the fields will be housed in the base of the museum. The current design does not foresee any direct access from the sports fields to the café, even though it is meant to be the interface between the museum and the external world; but this can be easily changed.

Unfortunately, we cannot yet determine whether the plans submitted by the other architects invited to take part in the competition offered any better solutions; the organizers behind the Exile Museum have assumed the bad habit of first presenting only the three top competition winners. This means that the designs submitted by other contenders, which include Francis Kéré Architecture (Berlin), Nieto Sobejano Architectos (Madrid/Berlin), SANAA (Tokyo), Sauerbruch Hutton (Berlin), Staab Architekten (Berlin), URBANA (Dhaka) and Zhang Ke standardarchitecture (Beijing), won't be made public until later in the fall. It should be noted that along with the winners, these firms participated largely for the honor of doing so. Indeed, the €27 million construction budget is hardly a promise of hefty profit.

In fact, the museum is the product of a citizens' initiative, and despite the project's big-name patrons, which include Joachim Gauck, the former president of Germany, and Herta Müller, recipient of the 2009 Nobel Prize for Literature, neither the Berlin Senate nor the federal government have jumped on board so far. The individual who made it all happen is the owner of the Villa Grisebach auction house, Bernd Schulz, who sold off a number of objects from his private art collection to gather the €6 million necessary to get the project underway.

This genesis is especially shocking when weighed against the substantial amount of government funds being pumped into the Flucht Vertreibung Versöhnung (Escape, Expulsion, Reconciliation) documentation center scheduled for construction across the street. This facility on Askanischer Platz will focus on the fate of the 12 million German-speaking people who were forced to leave their homes in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945. But the fact remains that their expulsion is directly rooted in the flight that began in 1933, when the Nazis seized the reigns of the government. Germany has lacked a museum devoted to this narrative, in spite of an outstanding array of collections addressing the matter. The Exile Museum will fill this void.

And yet, the museum's focus on individuals, such as the Mann family, Walter Gropius, Willy Brandt and Marlene Dietrich, blurs the fact that the vast majority of exiles were by no means great politicians, engineers, writers and actors. This exclusionary approach is conveyed in the museum's founding documents, which further neglect the research findings that more than 90 percent of art historians and architects, for example, were not permitted to carry out their profession. Exile has always been much more a matter of reinventing one's own life or the failure to do so, rather than something heroic. This sort of exile, and certainly not an inner exile, can be depicted only if the museum weaves sociological and historical methods into its approach.

Even more problematic is the exclusive focus on the German-language exile of the 1930s and 1940s. An exceptional 1997 exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin already showed that it's simply not possible to separate German exile from European exile. To clearly demonstrate that the trauma of escaping the Nazis is not limited to Germans per se, the Exile Museum must also highlight the experiences of Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Estonians, Bulgarians, Lithuanians, Romanians and Latvians, but above all Russians. Indeed, countless individuals of various nationalities escaped from Russian and Chinese emperors, from Mussolini and Franco, Stalin and Mao, from the socialist regimes of the post-war era, from African and South American dictatorships. Together, they embody the massive historical gray zone that is exile. After all, while the GDR – some of whose founders were returning exiles themselves – gave Chilean exiles a home, they simultaneously drove hundreds of thousands of their own citizens into exile.

Nikolaus Bernau
is a journalist, critic and historian specializing in architecture and the history of museums.

BERRRRRR

After more than 20 years of planning and construction, it looks like Berlin's new BER airport will finally go online in October

DPA-ZENTRALBILD/BRITTA PEDERSEN

The grass is always greener at another airport construction site: the new BER, almost done

BY HANNES KOCH

In Berlin, no one is surprised when they have to get up at five in the morning and head to the department of motor vehicles in order to register a car before noon. Or when they notice that a construction site blocking part of a major road has been devoid of even a single worker for months. Or when it takes days to get a particular city administrative employee on the telephone. Sloppiness is as much a part of the city's character as its caustic wit.

After 14 years of construction, Berlin's new airport is now set to open at the end of October 2020. Its completion has already taken three times as long as originally planned. The total cost of the airport is approaching a figure 10 times that of the initial budget and could reach €10 billion. In Berlin's parliament, the second committee of inquiry has already been working for years to clarify the "causes and consequences of the delays and cost overruns."

YouTube offers viewers a chance to watch the press conference held on May 8, 2012. This was the day authorities canceled the opening of the airport, which was due to take place only three weeks later. Ever since, Berliners have had to field countless questions from foreign visitors as to whether the half-finished terminal should rather be demolished than completed , as it was already old enough to be torn down and replaced.

Back on that 8th of May, Berlin's mayor at the time, the Social Democrat Klaus Wowereit managed, above the laughter of the journalists on hand, to call the airport building a "success story" – despite the fact that the CEO and the technical manager of the airport had just acknowledged that they could not get a grip on the main terminal's smoke extraction system. Ventilation in the massive building, later called "the monster," was simply not functioning as it should. "The second half of August at the latest," was the new launch time announced by Matthias Platzeck, the minister president of Brandenburg, the federal state that completely surrounds the German capital.

His schedule was slightly off. Instead of three months, the delay would last another eight years.

While people in many parts of the world complain about ignorant government administrations, there's something special about the nonchalance of the Berlin bureaucracy. Its inefficiency, incompetence and lack of political accountability are legendary. The underlying cause can in large part be found in the recent history of the city that was divided until just over 30 years ago. For decades, the municipal administration and public officials in West Berlin were co-financed by the Federal Republic so that the market economy on that "island" surrounded by socialist East Germany could survive. Politicians and administrators in West Berlin knew that they could get away with a lot without being abandoned by West Germany. The major political parties from that time, the CDU and SPD, have yet to fully rid themselves of this devil-may-care mentality.

The litany of scandals plaguing the airport named after former Chancellor Willy Brandt began with the 1996 decision of where to build it. Two suitable locations in sparsely populated Brandenburg, around 60 kilometers south of Berlin, were discarded in favor of the former GDR airport of Schönefeld, directly at the city limits. Hundreds of thousands of residents will stand to suffer under the persistent roar of jet engines. While there will be a flying ban from 11pm to 6am, the noise problem will only worsen as the city grows around the airport.

In the second phase, the federal government and the state governments of Berlin and Brandenburg decided that the airport company, which is owned in parts by these three administrations, would plan the new construction itself. The politicians had concerns of being bamboozled by construction corporations like Hochtief and hoped to be able to accomplish the project in-house with a lower price tag than with a private general contractor. Although the airport company had ably operated Berlin's three old airports – Tempelhof, Tegel and Schönefeld – the planning and steering of a new multibillion-euro airport complex was beyond its capabilities. "This was a case of utter hubris," says Harald Moritz, a Green Party politician who sits on the inquiry committee. "Commissioning an external planning entity would have been the right move."

The misery was set in motion. The airport company lacked competent employees. Policy was consistently being diluted with new wishes. Planning would head in one direction, only to turn quickly in the other. Moritz describes the fallout: "In some cases there were tender processes for construction contracts before planning had even concluded." And then there were insufficient controls on the part of the supervisory board and perhaps even attempts to conceal mistakes.

Mayor Wowereit, who also acted as head of the supervisory body, was busy with many other tasks and failed to adequately attend to the colossal construction project. So the invitations to the inaugural ceremony were already printed when the company abruptly canceled the party. Officially, Wowereit was flabbergasted, but he should have seen the disaster coming.

The directors of the airport company were fired, as well as the architecture firm responsible for planning: Gerkan, Marg and Partners. People more or less stopped visiting the construction site. Wowereit's political career ended in 2014 – the airport story had ruined his reputation.

For several years thereafter, not much happened. A few more advertised opening dates were quashed. A series of alternating managers and engineers attempted to provide an overall picture of the failing project and to find an approach to resurrecting it. Cable ducts were severed once more and new conduit track was laid. The monstrously vast smoke extraction system was divided in to several separate segments.

At the beginning of 2017, the airport proprietors appointed Engelbert Lütke Daldrup as the new CEO of the airport company. "He tightened the reins organizationally," says Moritz. An external firm specializing in project management stepped in. The permit authorities have now certified the airport's viability. And there's a new opening date: Saturday, Oct. 31, 2020. Presumably everything will proceed on schedule.

If Lütke Daldrup does eventually succeed, he will also be salvaging Germany's reputation as a nation of engineers. But many observers have their doubts. What if the Germans can't manage to get a normal-sized international airport up and running? What should we then expect of the quality of the machinery and automobiles that they sell all over the world?

If Berlin's airport story ultimately has a happy ending, let it be proof that state intervention in the economy is not necessarily a bad thing. Of course, it depends upon who is intervening and how. In any case, public enterprise should heed the basic tenets of business management. Good governance is the buzzterm here, and that includes competence, rational project management, controls and responsibility.

The fact that such a thing is fundamentally possible, even in Berlin, was on display at the end of March. Within a few days, Berlin's state-owned Investitionsbank distributed hundreds of millions of euros of aid money to tens of thousands of firms that were temporarily forced to close up shop due to COVID-19. Public service functioned more or less flawlessly and with astounding efficiency – a good sign for a modern federal capital, with a new airport to boot.

Hannes Koch
is a journalist and author living in Berlin. He is the cofounder of the press agency "die korrespondenten" and recipient of the 2018 Theodor Wolff Prize.

A dinosaur is born

BY LORENZ MAROLDT

I still have my paper invitation to the BER opening gala scheduled for spring 2012. "Don't forget!" it reads, front and center, in striking red letters with an exclamation mark. And also, just in case the message wasn't clear enough: "Berlin Brandenburg Airport is opening soon." Don't forget! Soon! And, of course, BER was going to be "the most modern airport in Europe," indeed, "a cathedral of air traffic" – in atheist Berlin, no less. The cancellation letter arrived ten days before the planned wingding, and was signed: "With friendly …." I guess they'd already run out of time for any actual "greetings."

More as a gag, I began to count and then tweet out the days that had passed since the non-opening. Never would I have thought that the number would surpass 3,000. This probably makes me the only Berliner who's worked so continually and reliably on the completion of BER over the years.

How does one go about *not* completing an airport on time?

Well, it starts with hiring a chief engineer who isn't in fact an engineer. The man behind the never-operational fire protection system was a mere architectural draftsman. The management team had mixed him up with someone else and he didn't want to make a fuss.

But mishaps like these are understandable. After all, the management team simply didn't have the time to worry about such trifles as building an airport. One former boss placed high priority on continuing his guest professorship at a technical university during the hottest phase of the project; the topic of the seminar was "airport management." Also in the middle of this phase, the chief of technology pressed on with writing his doctoral thesis, under the title: "Optimization approaches for the process-oriented implementation of complex building measures using new information and communications systems." After finishing, he was never heard from again.

At any rate, the non-opening of BER was welcomed energetically by some as a new chapter in the very unique folklore of Berlin: "What are you waiting for? A job at BER? You're better off landing with us," ran an ad for new staff at Lidl supermarket chain. Mitteldeutsche Airport Holding, the company that runs airports in Leipzig, Halle and Dresden, scoffed: "Better a 2-hour drive than a 13-year wait." And even publications by the Berlin airport company are captioned with: "Be the first!"

We Berliners are best at laughing at ourselves. In November 2017, Berlin's official airport chaplain wrote the following in *BER aktuell*, a regional airport magazine: "Seconds elapse, then minutes, then hours. One day expires and a new day begins. […] For 2,000 years we Christians have awaited the return of Jesus Christ. […] This passing of time has instilled in us more patience."

For years, BER's online customer ratings have hovered around 3.9 stars out of 5. User comments are testament to popular approval: "Very little fly-over noise," "No long lines," "Climate-neutral." The only negative comments are those bemoaning the fact that most businesses are closed. But one dental clinic was undeterred in opening up shop: "Wir haben BEReits eröffnet!" – in English: "We're already open!" – was their ad slogan in the airport magazine, and their particular specialty: "An experienced team offers even anxious patients a very pleasant atmosphere."

The past eight years have led me to expect the eventual opening of BER to play out as follows: The airport chief stumbles over a wayward cable, causing the cork of the bottle of Dom Perignon he was carrying to fire off and strike a sloppily fastened column in the terminal. The roof then starts to sway and a ceiling tile falls loose from its broken screw anchors and plops down on the celebratory cream cake shaped like a mountain of suitcases. As the testing engineer from the district of Dahme-Spreewald wipes the splattered cake from his eyes, a beaver panics and scrambles through security, setting off a screeching alarm. Then the Schoenefeld Rifle Club marches in and the sprinkler system starts to spray eau de Cologne over the guests while the song "Help!" by the Beatles screams out over the loudspeakers. The airport TV screens start showing a video loop of Mayor Klaus Wowereit at the 2012 press conference claiming "BER is and remains a success story." A wild horse then gallops out of the airport stables and down the runway in an attempt to take flight, while the airport chaplain mutters a cry of "hosanna" and recites a passage – penned by ex-airport-chief Hartmut Mehdorn – from the Old Testament's BER-Genesis: "We're getting readier and readier." Finally, a rattling belch erupts from out of the fire protection system and pink fumes rise from the ground, engulfing the flight lane in fog.

If you find this to be a gross exaggeration, then you have no idea what's actually gone down at the construction site over the past several years. And by the way, during the trial period this summer, with hundreds of extras posing as travelers, the power went out.

Lorenz Maroldt
is editor-in-chief of the Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel*.