Forcing ahead
A call for European leadership in times of turmoil

BY THEODOR SOMMER

If you look back on the events of the past year, a phrase comes to mind: the world has become unstable. The international order established after World War II is breaking down, and 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 shifting into confrontation. US-China tensions have become the main source of geopolitical rivalry; the two great powers will dominate the near future, regardless of who is in the White House next January.

The European Union will have to adjust to the shifting geopolitical equilibrium. 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 to some size, and its aggressive challenger aspiring to world leadership. Several states are testing Europe's unity: China with Xinjiang's Silk Road Initiative and the US ‘spokesman of the right’ China with Xinjiang's Silk Road Initiative and the US ‘spokesman of the right’...
There are Russians who see the two countries as a salvation, and there are Russians who see them as a curse. The family of Alexander Litvinenko, Russia’s foremost opposition leader and former克格勃 officer, was treated at Berlin’s Charité hospital after his murder. He was poisoned with polonium, a radioactive poison from Russia. According to the Russian government and media, he was subjected to the same laws as anyone else. There is no question that Russia is a barrier to German-Russia relations, not due to Berlin, but rather to this government. Nothing’s going to change. The state is not a warning to the style of Russian leaders that has also succeeded in poisoning the country’s relationship to Germany. The list of unresolved attacks on opposition figures, critical journalists and NGO representatives in Russia is long one.

In the middle of Berlin’s Little Tiergarten, not far from the German chancellery, a Chechen named Zelimkhan Khangoshvili was murdered in 2001, and the federal prosecutor general directed investigations into “Russian state officials” as possible perpetrators.

The German federal government has been working to close the ranks of the EU vis-à-vis Russia. Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. That is a form of Russian government or an interest in an American-Chinese antagonism. Russia is engaged in persistent efforts to force countries and companies to toe the American line. It is a principle of extraterritorial sanctions. It is a principle of a worldwide agreement in the climate.

It is a widely held belief that the Russian and German governments do not talk to one another. Countless visits between leaders of the two countries have left no impression that a diplomatic view of this difficulty defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. They talk regularly on the phone with President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. In that case, they speak more frequently with their Russian counterparts than with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

This significant contrast defines and underscores the differences between the two powers, which stand to move considerably if Blame were to return to force in Berlin. How can these two countries remain in discussions under such conditions?

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