

The German Times

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Young people are spurring on the transformation of the world.

Read about how reason, resolve and new recipes can make for a more perfect tomorrow.

IN THIS ISSUE

They set out to help refugees in danger of dying on the open sea – and were misled, blocked and even arrested. Peter H. Koepf tells the story of a group of German men and women, their self-funded rescue boat in the Mediterranean and their struggle with Italian authorities (pages 20–21).

Germany is reeling from the assassination of a government official by a neo-Nazi with close ties to a right-wing network (page 4). The national debate on democratic socialism was initiated not by an old Bernie but by a young Kevin, and its underpinnings speak to fundamental questions about the world economy (page 9). Meanwhile, the economic order is being shaken by China's forays into the former Soviet republics (page 16) and the US president's erratic trade policies (page 11).

Have some fun probing the peculiar relationship between Germans and their dogs in the latest chapter of our series about the Krauts and their peculiarities: "Zee Germans" (page 18).

In *The Berlin Times* section (pages 22–24), read about the capital's attempts to alleviate the homelessness problem, nifty vegan food trends and a fierce debate about the political undertones of Charlottenburg's Walter-Benjamin-Platz.

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Saving the bond

The trans-Atlantic relationship must start again from scratch

BY THEO SOMMER

We will be back" – that was the comforting message Joe Biden had for the Europeans just four months ago. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, the former US vice president and current Democratic front-runner in the incipient 2020 electoral campaign, sought to reassure US allies that after Donald Trump, the trans-Atlantic estrangement caused by his America First policies would quickly be overcome, and the previous consensus re-established as a matter of course. "The America I see does not want to turn our back on the world or our allies. Don't have any doubt about that."

Since Munich, the doubts have grown, and the hope fed by Biden has vanished in many European quarters. At best, many experts feel that one can expect a new administration to rescind the tariffs on steel and aluminum, and to rejoin the Paris climate accord and the nuclear deal with Iran. But the old narrative will be hard to revitalize.

Trump has certainly done his best to create this impression. His foreign policy centers no longer on the pursuit of broader interests and ideas. In fact, it increasingly boils down to tariff tiffs. Sylvie Kaufmann of the French daily *Le Monde* put it in a nutshell: "The former New York real estate king is spreading fear and horror no longer with the number of nuclear warheads, but with a frightening arsenal of economic sanctions and tariffs."

World War II was decided by huge tank battles. Potential future wars between great powers will likely be conducted in cyberspace; already they are planting digital mines in each other's power grids. For the time being, the US president is engaged in a rampant trade and tariff war. His battlefield is the global commercial system.

Small wonder that the term "weaponization of trade" dominates the international discussion these days. "Weapons of mass disruption" *The Economist* titled a cover story a few weeks ago. It was illustrated by a bomb tipped with Trump's face roaring

downward. Four terms were stenciled on its side: TARIFFS, TECH BLACKLISTS, FINANCIAL ISOLATION, SANCTIONS.

These are the weapons Trump employs without distinguishing between friend and foe. Whoever makes a surplus trading with the United States is automatically an adversary. And Trump uses tariff and tech sanctions indiscriminately not only to achieve trade concessions, but also to put through political outcomes. As 88 percent of world trade is transacted in dollars, he has enormous leverage. The results, however, are minimal. Fred Kempe of the Atlantic Council has pointed out the unfortunate truth "that tariffs are insufficient at best and counterproductive at worst in achieving non-trade outcomes." And Trump's weaponization of trade can't but rile up America's friends and allies.

Yet it is not only the bullying from Washington and the president's nationalist, protectionist and populist instincts that worry the Europeans. The realization is dawning on them that even after the end of the Trump presidency – which might not come before January 2025 – things won't be the same again. The US is decoupling from its 70-year-old partnership with

Europe.

François Delattre, consecutively French ambassador to the United States and to the United Nations during the past ten years, who will assume the post of Secretary General at the Quai d'Orsay on July 1, wrote in a farewell article in *The New York Times*: "America's disengagement started before the current administration. I believe it is here to stay." He discerns a "Jacksonian impulse" as the dominant trend in US foreign policy – "a strange mix of unilateralism and isolationism" pursued by President Andrew Jackson in the 1830s.

In the same vein, Alain Frachon editorialized in *Le Monde* about the coming "Atlantic disalliance," posing the disquieting question: "For how long will America remain our strategic partner?" His witness is the former US diplomat Tony Corn, who argues

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Holding the center

The German chancellor refuses to become a lame duck

BY LUTZ LICHTENBERGER

In December Angela Merkel gave up her post as head of her party, the center-right Christian Democratic Union, a far more important post in German politics than, say, the Democratic or Republican National Committee chair in the US. Her governing coalition of the CDU/CSU and the Social Democrats has run its course after six years – with officially two more to go. There has been a brew of simmering unhappiness in both parties despite a mostly solid working relationship. In the EU elections in May, both suffered dramatic losses, with Merkel's party dropping below 30 percent. The CDU lost votes to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and to the center-left Greens.

Merkel has been Germany's chancellor for 14 years. Her subdued style of government has seemingly gone out of fashion in our Twitter-frenzied times.

Throughout all her years at Germany's helm, the physicist by training has stuck to her patented mode of quiet negotiation, piecemeal policy engineering and clinical compromise.

Merkel is pleasantly free of both strong ideological predisposition and blistering vanity. In 2015, she put all her political capital on the line to let close to one million refugees having fled war and poverty, mostly from Syria, Iran and a handful of African countries, cross into Germany. It was a move both bold and humane – and the ripple effects it caused in German society continue to reverberate to this day. It has earned Merkel both praise and scorn internationally. The jury is still out as to Germany's success at integrating the new arrivals.

Incidentally, during the worst backlash against her policy, which spurred the rise of the AfD, Merkel changed course. Immigration restrictions were tightened again while the deportations of rejected applicants for asylum were untethered from red tape. The EU-Turkey deal of 2016, capping the number of refugees entering the European Union through Turkey, was her brainchild and only passed by dint of her deft legislative acumen. Yet a

broader perspective reveals she didn't actually abandon her initial stance, but rather counterbalanced it.

A similar pattern can be discerned in two other major storylines of her chancellorship. After the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Merkel set faster target dates for the phase-out of nuclear power and laid out ambitious plans for the so-called *Energiewende*, a green-energy transformation. Often enough, however, Germany blocked initiatives in the EU to reduce emissions, protecting the interests of the big automakers who still wanted to sell their luxurious gas-guzzlers; and the phase-out of coal was postponed to 2038.

During the EU financial crisis – the most important story of the chancellor's earlier years – she became known as "Madame Non" for her insistence on financial austerity. Repeatedly she allowed Greece to come close to having to leave the eurozone. In the end, however, Greece was bailed out with Germany absorbing a significant chunk of the cost.

Chancellor Merkel's opponents can be divided into two camps. One camp thinks that she does too much – the other blames her for not doing enough. After giving up her party post, she barely campaigned in the run-up to the EU

elections. Contrary to their expectations, the Christian Democrats lost far more votes to the liberal and eco-friendly Greens than to the AfD, whose base consists of many former CDU-voters repelled by Merkel's supposedly left-leaning course.

And yet, despite all the reports heralding the imminent end of the chancellor's reign, there is a third camp of Germans with strong and positive opinions of her: She still enjoys the highest approval rating of any politician in the country. And indeed, after each media outlet had penned her political obituary earlier in the year, Merkel soldiered on undeterred, a true dealmaker at home and on the international stage, never quite "winning," but certainly not losing either. To put it in more prosaic, Merkelian terms, she has simply continued her quest for workable solutions.

She will be missed the second she's gone.

Potential future wars between great powers will likely be conducted in cyberspace

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