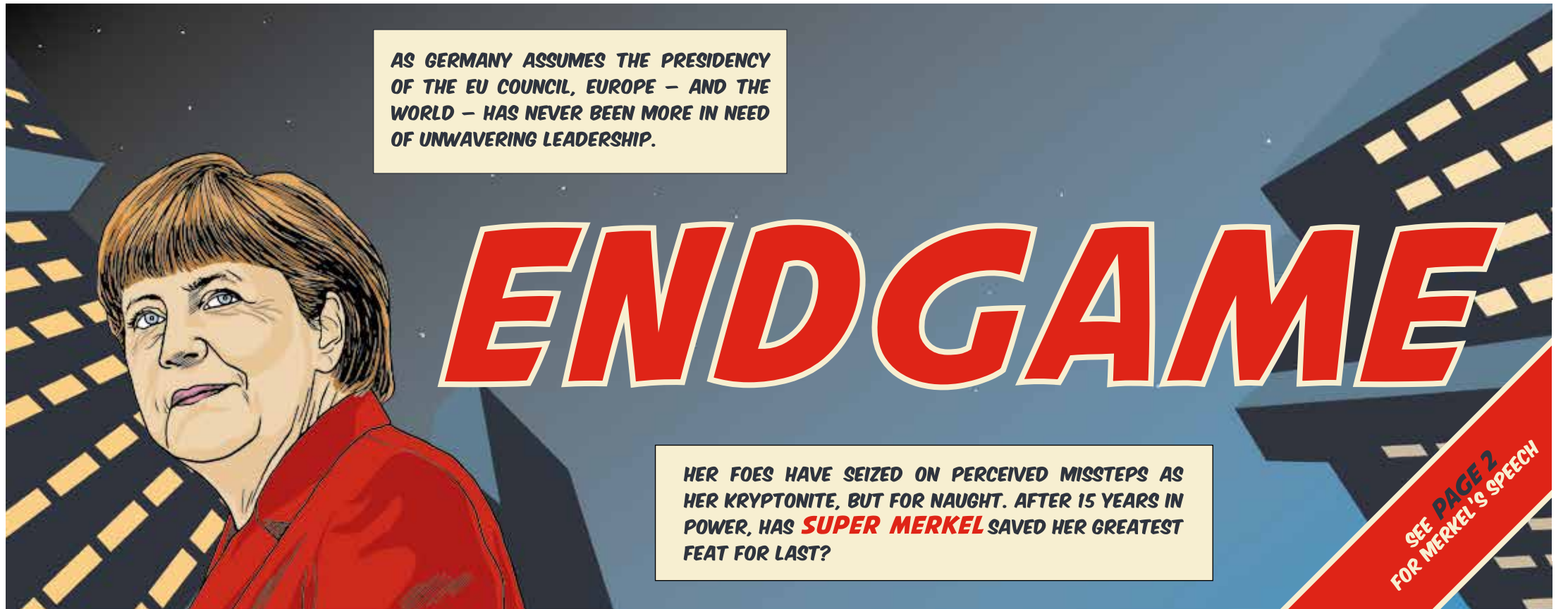


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AS GERMANY ASSUMES THE PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL, EUROPE – AND THE WORLD – HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IN NEED OF UNWAVERING LEADERSHIP.

## END GAME

HER FOES HAVE SEIZED ON PERCEIVED MISSTEPS AS HER KRYPTONITE, BUT FOR NAUGHT. AFTER 15 YEARS IN POWER, HAS **SUPER MERKEL** SAVED HER GREATEST FEAT FOR LAST?

SEE PAGE 2 FOR MERKEL'S SPEECH

### IN THIS ISSUE

**FASTER THAN A SPEEDING CLIMATE CRISIS**  
THE EU KNOWS THAT ITS POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMIC RECOVERY IS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL. PETRA PINZLER SKETCHES OUT WHAT'S AT STAKE.  
PAGE 3

**MORE POWERFUL THAN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS**  
PRESIDENTS XI, TRUMP AND PUTIN ARE GEARING UP TO ALTER AND/OR CIRCUMVENT CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS ON THEIR POWER. THEO SOMMER ON CHINA, JULIANE SCHÄUBLE ON THE US AND GEMMA PÖRZGEN ON RUSSIA DETAIL THE AUTOCRATIC STATE OF PLAY.  
PAGES 5-7

**ABLE TO DROP FAT BEATS IN A SINGLE BOUND**  
BERLIN IS RENOWNED FOR ITS LEGENDARY CLUB SCENE. AT LEAST IT USED TO BE. FAMED DJANE MARUSHA ON THE TWILIGHT OF THE CITY'S NIGHTLIFE AS IT BATTLES SKYROCKETING RENTS AND COVID-19.  
PAGE 14

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## Commission possible

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

BY SYLVIA SCHREIBER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

continued on page 3

### A HERCULEAN TASK

BY PUBLISHER  
DETLEF PRINZ

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

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



financial framework, ambitious progress on EU climate policy and the sustainable reinforcement of our continent's digital sovereignty – not to mention addressing the never-ending conflict in the Middle East and the ongoing crisis with Iran – shows how critical German Chancellor Angela Merkel's political experience will be in the coming months, just as her much vaunted ability to distinguish between what's important and what's urgent will be indispensable in holding the European Union together by means of an appeal to both our larger and smaller member states. This is a herculean task.

Nevertheless, I am personally convinced that if there is anyone in Europe up to the job of tying up the EU's many loose ends into one cohesive whole and giving our continent the boost it so urgently needs, that person is Angela Merkel. We should all wish her the best of luck, as Germans – and as Europeans.

BY WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

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

With the European Union at the brink, all eyes have turned

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

This does not mean that Germany should assume the role of

hegemon in the European Union or that it could or should actually lead alone. It means that, without German leadership, there is not much hope for the EU to successfully cope with the challenges it is facing. Germany assuming a forward-looking leadership position, while not alone sufficient for Europe's economic recovery and the development of a truly common European foreign and security policy, is one necessary condition.

For Germany, there is no more vital national interest than the

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

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

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

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

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

continued on page 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

trans-Atlantic alliance, is fending more for itself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Publishing House**  
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continued from page 1

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

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

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

Although the Europeans should stick to their instincts

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

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

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

### Also from the MSC

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

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

*The Enabling Power. Germany's European Imperative* is available online in English and German at: [www.securityconference.org](http://www.securityconference.org)