



CONSERVATIVE EUROPEAN FORUM

THE BRITISH-GERMAN RELATIONSHIP:  
WHERE WE ARE, AND, MORE  
IMPORTANTLY WHERE WE SHOULD BE,  
FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

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## Executive Summary

The basic argument made in this paper is that for political, security, economic, scientific, cultural and historical reasons, the bilateral British-German relationship is too important to both countries to be allowed to disintegrate and it follows, therefore, that this will not happen. The question is how best to move forward.

It is suggested here that building on the strong unquestioned security ties between the UK and the Federal Republic, our 'essential ally' in the words of the UK Foreign Secretary, and on the strong and enduring trading relationship (Germany is the UK's largest single European trading partner), progress can also be made in many varied fields, not least political and cultural ones.

If both nations, reasonably motivated by mutual self-interest, move on from ideological debate to focus on compromise and pragmatism, taking small steps as they go, there is every reason to believe a strong strategic bilateral relationship can be constructed that is different, but in its own terms as good as the previous one (which was necessarily embedded in joint EU membership), where trusting each other along the journey becomes its hallmark.

Based on close foreign and security policy cooperation and shared values and priorities on all other key issues from climate change to policy towards Russia, China and the Indo-Pacific, there is every reason to be optimistic about the medium and long term future of the bilateral relationship. It is the responsibility of Conservatives to contribute pro-actively to this outcome.

## The British-German Relationship: Where we are, and, more importantly, where we should be, five years from now

### Introduction

The subject of this short paper, the future of British-German relations over the next five years, involves one making predictions (always dangerous) and an assessment of very many different areas of interaction between the UK, too numerous, of course, to analyse here in any depth. That said, the basic argument is that for political, security, economic, scientific, cultural and historical reasons, the relationship is too important to both countries to be allowed to disintegrate and it follows, therefore, that this will not happen. The question now, in the summer of 2021, is how best to move forward.

As is discussed below, Brexit dealt the bilateral relationship a blow, one which must be properly understood if we are to rebuild trust and 'build back better', but it does not follow that it is impossible to do this, and establish a new strong and resilient bilateral relationship with Germany. If both nations, reasonably motivated by mutual self-interest, move on from ideological debate to focus on compromise and pragmatism, taking small steps as they go, there is every reason to believe a strong strategic bilateral relationship can be constructed that is

different, but in its own terms as good as the previous one (which was necessarily embedded in joint EU membership), where trusting each other along the journey becomes its hallmark.

Achieving this complicated but positive outcome is primarily a high policy remit, and an analysis of how high policy seems to be shaped at present must be the starting point for any discussion of future ways forward. Given the importance of the Brexit process, some attention must also be given to how that may impact the relationship in the future, especially in respect of the strong economic interactions that were a significant feature of the pre-Brexit era which brought prosperity to both nations. The paper offers some thoughts (from a long-time UK-Germany watcher) about how the relationship might best be advanced over the next five years or so, picking up particularly on the need to build confidence between the two nations, now following different paths, and with an emphasis on security policy, which the UK government has, wisely, chosen as a major post-Brexit offer to Germany, one which Germany will surely take up.

## High Policy

If we start from where we are today, it would be fair to say achieving this strategic goal is not without its challenges. As Thomas Kielinger, the wisest German commentator in the UK, notes: 'We are at a cross-roads and neither the UK nor Germany has much interest in the other right now'.

But as we look towards 2025 and beyond, there is, as we shall see, a reasonable cause for some optimism, where our common security and defence interests, alongside trade and scientific collaboration, can become the new bedrock for the relationship. Working fully here may then also be the key that unlocks the gate to a better UK-EU relationship.

Indeed, six months after the formal start of Brexit, is not too soon to see how some optimism about the future can be justified.

This is certainly the view of no less an authority than Lord Frost, the UK's Brexit minister. In a keynote address to this year's Koenigswinter Conference (a venerable, respected and high-level British-German get-together), he made it clear that the UK government was committed to establishing a new relationship with the Federal Republic to be based on 'friendly cooperation, wherever that is possible' and that he felt entitled to claim 'our relations are, I think, good'.

Whilst it might be fair to say this does not sound as if it were a very ambitious high policy aim (or is yet, in any way, a parallel to the very close 40 year EEC/EU relationship between the UK and Germany) Lord Frost also pointed not

just to a myriad of connections between the two countries but the description of Germany in the 'Integrated Review of Security and Defence' as an 'essential ally' of the UK 'with which we have deep economic ties and a growing foreign policy partnership, as members of the E3 and bilaterally'.<sup>[1]</sup> This important Review, discussed further below, is intended to be the basic blueprint for Britain's high policy stance in Europe and the world for the next generation, and is one of the most significant framework documents produced by the Johnson government.

Frost noted that the Integrated Review mentioned Germany seven times (which he considered significant), that UK and German universities currently were working on 1800 shared projects, that there were 1,400 UK firms in Germany and 2,500 German firms in the UK, and in 2020, that the Federal Republic was the only country in the world to have received visits from the Prince of Wales, Boris Johnson, Dominic Raab and Rishi Sunak (plainly seen as bestowing much favour on Germany).

For Lord Frost the point of the bilateral relationship was currently no more than 'friendly cooperation, wherever possible', but he was positive about the opportunities, and less concerned with the 'bumpy' challenges of the present.

What counts, however, is to set Lord Frost's comments alongside other, even stronger, evidence which indicates a desire by both governments to move well beyond 'friendly cooperation, wherever possible'.

## The Chequers Meeting 2 July 2021: An 'Essential Ally' and Germany's Commitment to its membership of the EU

If, at this moment in time, the bilateral relationship between the UK and Germany is, because of the Brexit process, inevitably in something of a limbo, as Lord Frost indicates, this would in fact seem not to be the intention of either government. Germany matters to the UK and the UK matters to Germany, in politics as many other fields, not least in football and the recent bilateral meeting at Chequers between Angela Merkel and Boris Johnson (on 2 July 2021) underscored this fundamental fact.

This was the last of her twenty-two official visits to the UK in her sixteen years as German Chancellor and, as she noted, her first bilateral one post-Brexit. It therefore marked the beginning of what she called 'a new chapter' in British-German relations, one which she believed would lead to a search for practical solutions, to regularise inter-governmental relations, deepen friendships and perhaps lead to a more comprehensive treaty.

For his part, the prime minister was fulsome in his praise for his guest and her longstanding 'commitment to the German-UK relationship' which had, he felt obliged to stress, 'changed beyond recognition'. She had been the first foreign leader ever invited to address the British Cabinet. He said we shared 'the same values', Germany was the UK largest bilateral trade partner, one in five Brits drove a German car, three quarters of a million Brits and Germans worked for each other's nation's companies and that 21,000 Germans were studying at UK universities. He wanted to expand youth

exchanges and also create an energy super-highway between the two nations.

Whilst both leaders mentioned areas on which there were indeed differences such as quarantine regulations and Northern Ireland, the prime minister wished to project his customary jovial outlook. He thanked Frau Merkel for letting England win the football match with Germany at the beginning of the week, (so reinforcing his reputation in Germany as a comic) and quipped that 'the Wurst was now behind us' (Frau Merkel did not seem much amused). She did however agree they had many fields of common interest, from economics, energy and also cultural exchanges, not least at student level and security issues in respect of Russia, China and cyber. The UK had left the Erasmus scheme, she added, so other means of student exchange would have to be found. At the same time, she made it clear that whilst she believed she and Johnson were 'two different people' they could work together wonderfully ('klappt wunderbar'). She cannot be sure, of course, that her successor as CDU leader, Armin Laschet, will also be Germany's next Chancellor. But Germany, Frau Merkel said, had understood that post-Brexit the relationship with the UK could only be a bilateral one, it was the nature of the thing. Germany would approach its relations with the UK on a step by step basis, she added. However, she added, Germany will always see itself as an integral part of the EU with all the obligations that follow.

This is an important, indeed key point, reiterated in the 'Joint Declaration' signed by UK Foreign Secretary Raab and German Foreign Minister Maas on 30 June 2021, as a prelude to Angela Merkel's visit. Whilst Raab described Germany as an 'essential ally' and made it clear that the Declaration was a definitive document on which both governments would rely, Maas pointed out that 'for Germany its membership of the EU is a key point of reference and it supports "the" cooperation between the UK and the EU', adding that even though this is a bilateral arrangement, Germany would 'ensure the highest possible level of transparency about it with its fellow members of the EU'.

Decoded this would appear to mean that the Federal Republic would not do anything with the UK that in any way contradicted its core loyalty to the EU. In working bilaterally with the UK, Germany would also continue to work in tandem with the EU27. If the UK wants a stronger relationship with Germany, it would follow, it must move on from its current position where as Frost puts it, relations with 'the EU institutions' (he meant 'Commission' and 'Parliament' primarily) were 'bumpy, fractious and friction filled'. In other words, with statesmanship there could be a helpful pathway to the EU via Germany, a view held by several commentators, including the highly respected Charles Grant. What might be resented in the UK as a brusque German condition of cooperation, could be seen in an entirely different light, pointing to a potential German back-channel to Brussels for the UK, and therefore better relationship with the EU, one which Frost himself says he desires. After all, the fact is that there is no 'German' foreign policy that is not also an 'EU policy'. Germany

will not pursue one policy with the UK and another with the EU.

It is also important to point out not just that the 'Joint Declaration' was precisely that, a key statement of high policy, around which the future relationship must and will be constructed (and the first post-Brexit bilateral agreement with any EU member) and that it was also mainly about foreign and security policy cooperation.<sup>[2]</sup> It set out shared UK-German priorities, as the FCDO press statement explained, on climate change, China and the Indo-Pacific, as well as 'shared values' here.

Both sides affirmed that it would 'strengthen our bilateral cooperation on foreign and security policy for years to come' and their commitment to 'the strategic unity of Europe' and 'Euro-Atlantic security. These are very major statements of intent and mean something. To deliver them, both governments agreed to establish an annual foreign minister strategic dialogue which would 'assure a high level of cooperation and coordination on all matters of foreign policy' in NATO, the G7 and the UN, along with trade and scientific research projects. The press statement published by the German Foreign Office was fuller and added key details.<sup>[3]</sup> The FCDO published the full text separately.<sup>[4]</sup>

Two things stand out about this Declaration, alongside the fact that it was made, that it now exists. The first is that the mutual security and defence issues are set against a backdrop of economic relationships, linking them to the TCA. There is therefore a strong economic aspect which will impact on the durability of all other linkages. Strong economic and trading

relationships will underscore all the other things both governments state they want to achieve. Second, the emphasis that Germany places on the EU reminds that it both sides must progress the Brexit process or that it will continue for some time to lurk unhelpfully in the background.

As Nicholas von Ondarza of the German Institute for International Affairs, the SWP has commented on Twitter the Declaration is a 'signal of trust and a positive sign for EU-UK relations' as well as the bilateral link.[\[5\]](#) Trust is certainly the X-factor here.



## Where we are right now and why we are here: Economic Issues

If a major driver of the bilateral relationship between the UK and Germany is their economic interaction and above all their trade with each other, the basis of any future economic relationship is the 'hard' Brexit Trade and Cooperation Agreement of 24 December 2020. Whilst the prime minister insisted at the time, this was a very good 'free trade' deal, with no tariffs or quotas (and, he claimed, no non-tariff barriers either, an assertion that was patently incorrect), the imposition of many economic barriers, customs declarations, borders and red tape will always make trading more complicated and more expensive.

It follows that this will make the economic relationship between the UK and Germany weaker, at any rate in the short term. This is already in evidence.<sup>[6]</sup> The question is how this can be reversed as it must be, if the strategic goals set out by the UK and German governments are to be realised.

There are those who saw the benefit of the Single Market consisting in no small part from linking the strengths of the German economy with the flexibility of the pre-2016 UK economy, developing over time an integrated market which brought prosperity to its members, in business, the professions and many other fields, not least higher education.

Germany became the second largest single export market for UK goods and services and the UK's second largest single trade partner (according to the ONS, 10.2% of all UK trade goes to Germany, worth £136bn); 10% of UK exports go to Germany although Germany is

almost certainly still the largest single exporter of goods to the UK.

Since the summer of 2016, however, German exports to the UK have steadily declined, a fall that Reuters and many others attribute to Brexit and to Covid-19. In 2015 Germany exported goods to the UK worth €89bn but this had fallen to €67bn in 2020; in the same period UK exports to Germany fell by 9.6% to €35bn.<sup>[7]</sup>

This decline, certainly in UK exports to Germany seems set to endure for many years unless easements and practical changes are made fairly soon, not least because the divergence from EU regulations which is for some the core purpose of Brexit going forward, will increasingly cut off the UK from the German and EU marketplace.<sup>[8]</sup>

In a recent report, the Resolution Foundation recently drew attention to the same early Brexit impact and concluded 'if the UK's pace of underperformance relative to Germany continues at the same pace in 2020s [to the previous decade] then it will end this decade with UK GDP per capita much closer to that of Italy than Germany.'<sup>[9]</sup>

A KPMG-British Chambers of Commerce in Germany report showed that after 100 days of Brexit 67% of members said the impact was more negative than expected (13% said it was more positive).<sup>[10]</sup> The prospects for improvement, let alone a return to 'old strengths' were deemed bleak, not least because of the rising costs and bureaucratic

obstacles (76% were affected). It concluded 'trade volumes between the UK and Germany have been in rapid decline since 2016 and a majority of companies are suffering major revenue and profit loss'. Academics at Aston University have recently suggested the UK service industry has already shrunk by £113bn since the Brexit vote.<sup>[11]</sup>

However, whilst barriers to trade are precisely that, economic success or failure is only marginally easier to predict than its political counterpart. After Covid-19, there will be dramatic growth of all economies which has nothing to do with Brexit and for many will be no better than getting back to normal. The UK's Office for Budget Responsibility believes the UK economy will grow by 3 per cent less for the foreseeable future than it did pre-Covid and possibly less than that, if those suggesting of a Brexit-caused 3 per cent lower growth than the UK would have had, had it remained in the EU.<sup>[12]</sup> Patrick Minford, a highly influential man with the ear of Johnson's government, has, however, often claimed that Brexit will put rocket-fuel into the UK economy, running down agri-food and conventional manufacturing while focusing the UK's energies and established skills in science and technology create the jobs of the future.<sup>[13]</sup>

It is possible that in the longer run, say ten years from now, Brexit may prove, contrary to many academic expert predictions, a roaring success. First, however, Brexiters will have to decide whether they want to pursue the current contradictory mix of government subsidies to key areas of the economy, such as electric cars (largely for sale to the EU) and to farmers (to compensate for the loss of CAP support), along

with 'temporary' protection, or go all out for free trade in 'world markets', not just in Australia but the Asia-Pacific and the USA, and seeing a decline in trade with the European single market. If the latter, trade with the EU and Germany is likely to continue to decline, if the former, trade may well pick up, particularly in science-led industry.

If a 'buccaneering Britain' booms, it requires no crystal ball to see that the Federal Republic, like many other stronger EU states, will want to learn from the UK experience and will themselves act to promote growth. If this does not happen then it is not unthinkable that, in five years or so, the UK will seek by-ways back into the vast European single market on its shores. Recent policies to build electric cars and vans almost wholly for the EU market may be a straw in the wind and the reports of a plan by the UK and the EU to cooperate closely on anti-trust enforcement might be another.

One prediction does seem certain to be realised is that for many British businesses, the market that is closest to them, the one with whom they have been trading so intimately over the past forty years, is one that will not disappear whatever happens. Markets have a rationale of their own. Building on existing trade with Europe, adapting and competing with Germany but also feeding into the German market and benefitting from it, will always make good sense for some UK companies.

Now would be the right time to sow the seeds for the harvest of the future, and not turn away but re-engage with the single market with a will.

This will require a constructive and pragmatic attitude towards directly negotiating with the EU on the part of the UK government as well as bridge-building to the Federal Republic. But, as Charles Grant has often emphasised in recent weeks, it presupposes a similar line being taken by the Commission towards the UK, dealing fairly and pragmatically with the UK's issues, not least over Northern Ireland. Bridges must always meet in the middle. As Annette Dittert, ZDF's highly influential chief UK commentator has said, this is the key issue ('die Kernfrage'): Germany, above all else, sees itself as a core EU member but at the moment the UK prefers to ignore the EU as a major political actor in its own right and she believes the prime minister sees it as 'the enemy'. This may be overdone but until this misconception, if that it

was it is, is laid to one side, and prejudices are overcome, progress is unlikely to take place. Yet Germany, she says, can wait.

A recent study by the SWP in Berlin (tellingly entitled 'Germany, the EU and Global Britain: So Near, yet so Far') notes that the UK government, under Johnson and Frost, has steadfastly rejected institutionalised cooperation with the EU on foreign and security policy and because of the 'UK's wish to by-pass the EU, it misses the opportunity for cooperation and increases the risk of Europeans being divided by third parties, such as Russia or China'.<sup>[14]</sup> This is a key fact of life whose normative strength will not disappear. All that is needed are voices to articulate it diplomatically.

## Future Security Relationships

The TCA is a strategic agreement, it is not the absence of one. Within it there are real opportunities for cooperation, political as well as economic, for the next five years, which can be built on. It sits alongside the Integrated Review of Security and Defence (IR), as one of the two major defining documents of the high policy of the UK post-Brexit.

In the UK media, discussion of the IR was largely centred on those parts of it that dealt with 'global Britain' and the UK's global interest as well as the fact that it seemed to pay very scant attention to the EU's role in global affairs. As Professor John Bew has pointed out, the IR was the work of many hands and some of them, perhaps, his own, was by no means content to ignore either the EU or in particular Germany (of which there are at least seven mentions in the document).<sup>[15]</sup> Bew added that 'the precondition of a global Britain is our homeland security, the UK is not packing its bags and becoming less European, we have increased and reinforced our commitment to NATO'.

Apart from describing it as the UK's 'essential ally with which we have deep economic ties and a growing foreign policy partnership as members of the E3 and bilaterally, we will continue to work together to defend our neighbourhood and our values'. On issues such as climate change, the IR affirms 'we will seek to bolster this relationship in the year ahead and look for ways to work more closely with European partners, including France and Germany'.

In respect of the EU, the IR confirms that 'our commitment to European security is unequivocal through NATO and strong bilateral relations, the UK is a European country...as a European nation we will enjoy constructive and productive relationships with our neighbours in the EU based on mutual respect for sovereignty and the UK's freedom to do things differently... we will continue to support closer practical cooperation between NATO and the EU...'

Apart from trade, then, it is plain that the UK and Germany share the same core security concerns; they are both members of NATO, G7 and G20, and the UK continues to be part of the E3, a 'loose coalition' of the UK, France and Germany but one which allows a common shaping of foreign policy, 'more strongly established and utilised...amid the strained transatlantic relationships under president Trump's tenure' as Carnegie's Erik Brattberg suggests.<sup>[16]</sup>

Whilst at present he reckons Johnson chooses to publicly emphasise the importance of NATO and has turned down any formal agreement with the EU on foreign and security policy, Brattberg's thought is that with Brexit, E3 may well gain in influence because it allows the UK to continue to play a leadership role in upholding a common European foreign and security policy without its being part of the EU's CFSP platform. Yet he admits it is still 'far from certain' that this will happen although the publication of the Integrated Review (which Brattberg could not analyse) may informally facilitate a growing role for the E3.

It is certainly possible to work 'with' EU institutions whilst eschewing British membership of them and the Integrated Review implies throughout that 'our European homeland' is more secure when the major Western powers are in alignment.

This is the context in which the UK's 'unequivocal commitment to European security', as expressed in the Review, takes on concrete form and why there are multiple references to 'Euro-Atlantic allies', to the UK being 'a European country' and affirms that as a 'European nation we will enjoy constructive and productive relationships with our neighbours in the EU based on mutual respect for sovereignty and the UK's freedom to do things differently'. If, as Brattberg and others suggest, Germany and France would upgrade the importance of the E3, this might, in time, strengthen the foreign policy and security linkages between the UK and the EU more generally.

In short, precisely because the UK, Germany and France share a strong and common interest in safeguarding independent eastern European nations (and resisting Putin's pressure on them, and his clear aim of reconstituting the borders of the USSR wherever he possibly can) that the IR offers a way forward to collaboration with Germany and France in the future. It was the E3 that joined with the USA in condemning Putin for the Salisbury Novichok attack in March 2018 (at that time Theresa May was of course prime minister) and the E3 that worked with John Bolton, at that time the US national security advisor, to successfully constrain some of Trump's wilder schemes.

The Review also underlines the UK's wish for 'continued collaboration between researchers and scientists through Horizon Europe, EURATOM research and training programmes and the COPERNICUS, the EU's earth observation programme. This is the hope of those whose professions and associations like the Koengiswinter conference have relied on, and are attached to, a strong and healthy British-German relationship. When the UK joined the EEC, the UK's diplomats and its cultural outreach institutions, in particular the British Council, worked overtime to strengthen the high policy relationship. Its work now is much diminished (its website leads on his English language courses, of politics there is no mention except its deadpan offer of advice on 'artist mobility after the EU exit').<sup>[17]</sup>

The UK and Germany, close partners in NATO, share deep, common defence and security concerns and this aspect of the bilateral relationship, includes the sharing of high-level intelligence between UK and German security and secret agencies. Here, too, there is a positive indication of the importance of cooperation to both nations and a clear indication that this will continue as before because neither side can afford for it not to do so. More than once, leading members of both the UK and German security community could be heard affirming that existing bilateral relationships (always the chief medium for sharing secret intelligence) would remain strong, come what may. Of course, a catalogue of key security relationships with the EU has been jettisoned in pursuit of the hard Brexit the Johnson government chose, beginning with the UK's departure from Europol, the European Arrest Warrant and other arrangements which

oblige EU members to automatically assist each other in the fight against terrorism, serious organised crime and sex trafficking, and so on. Yet once again, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a way will be found to re-

discovering that working closely together is one of the best ways of securing the common European homeland from terrorism and extremism from a variety of sources, domestic as well as non-European in origin.

## The Politics of Future Bilateral Cooperation

What is likely to make the difference between success and failure will be the ability of both sides to exploit the opportunities that do exist to work together and as far as possible seek to institutionalise them in formal and informal networks, committees and think-tanks. These should bring together political leaders, of course, but also their parties, and leading media and academic commentators. It will be important for British participants in them to respect the German and indeed European desire to institutionalise relationships and activities wherever possible, and eschew ad hocery. British political 'influencers' must understand that they need the German political class on their side, which is not where it is at present. On the German (and EU side) it will be vital that they make concessions to the realities of UK politics. Initial 'bumpiness' (as Lord Frost put it) or fairly bitter differences (which seems a more accurate description), such as appearing to press the UK too hard, too soon, should give way to more pragmatic solutions to the myriad problems that will occur and have already occurred, not least over Northern Ireland.

The UK has to understand that Brexit did not simply change, fundamentally, the definition of the UK's national interest, one which prior to the EU Referendum of 2016, had largely mirrored the national interest of Germany, allowing the UK-German governmental relationship to flourish as never before in modern times. It was also a sea-change in the bilateral relationship with Germany not least because the Brexit vote was a rejection by 52% of voters of the EU as a political entity as well as its integrationist ideals and benefits, a faith in

which, as both the Declaration and Frau Merkel herself, regard as fundamental to Germany's understanding of itself as a modern, democratic Western nation.

Its political, economic and social integration into the EEC/EU in the 1950s was a definitive act of state. It let West Germany regain a position of international trust after the carnage and genocide it had caused before 1945. In 2016 both the UK and Germany understood that Brexit meant the UK had 'divorced' the EU. But perhaps less obviously, it also implied the UK had 'divorced' Germany. It hurt the Germans economically but also, and deeply in a political sense. The UK had rejected the Germans' own view of themselves.

Polling shows that are present Germans are increasingly irritated and disappointed by UK politics because of Brexit. A 2020 poll in Der Spiegel found that in 2016 70% of Germans regretted Brexit; by January 2020 this number had not declined but whilst 36% said the TCA was adequate, 35% said it not hard enough on the UK. [\[18\]](#) It would be wishful thinking to imagine this has not impacted on consumer attitudes and will not affect UK exports to Germany, or to a downgrading of the 'Made in Britain' brand. A Data Praxis and YouGov poll in April 2021 showed that only 14% of Germans regarded the UK as an 'ally that shares our interests and values' (34% saw the UK as a 'necessary partner' and 20% as a 'rival'). [\[19\]](#) However, none of this has to be like this and with thought given to how bridges between both nations can best be rebuilt, public opinion

in both countries could come to support a new, different but close partnership.

Whatever the realities of today, life goes on after divorce; and tomorrow the necessities of working together on issues of common concern, delivering security to the European homeland both nations share, and seeing where economic growth can be of mutual benefit, will produce a new, if different relationship which, once it has stabilised, can be a source of future strength. This task is one for the political classes of both nations to make happen.

Once again, there are signs that this is no pipe dream. Of course the German political class needs to be reassured that beneath the rhetoric of Brexit it has partners in the UK who will support the traditional, common sense and pragmatic approach to relations with Germany. Here in particular it is necessary to eschew the line taken by some established British voices, prominent in the British-German field for many years, and carefully heeded by German media (for example, Gisela Stuart, Sir Paul Lever, Sir Christopher Meyer) who focus more on their dislike of the EU than on the need for the sort of the relationship to which the UK government insists it is committed. Talk of the EU being run according to 'German rules' and 'German-led' is in the process of becoming way past its sell-by date.<sup>[20]</sup> The appointment of leading Brexiter and Cabinet adviser, Baroness Gisela Stuart as chair of Wilton Park was perhaps also a sting to some involved in the relatively small world of British-German relations (Wilton Park was established after 1945 with the specific aim of rebuilding the British-German relationship).

These are things noted by the German political class, and resented, especially the canard that the EU exists simply to increase German economic and political clout in Europe when its purpose and its effect is to dilute both of these things (not always to Germany's advantage, it has to be said, as was seen over the fiasco following Frau Merkel's demand that the EU be in charge of Covid-19 vaccine procurement rather than Germany using its considerable wealth to do as the UK had done, and procure its own supplies). But the tensions and frictions surrounding the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines will, like the virus itself, either disappear or be managed.

Importantly, however, prominent German voices argue the precise reverse of their Brexit supporting British counterparts. A former senior diplomat, Wolfgang Ischinger, head of the influential Munich Security Conference, tweeted recently 'We should treat the UK with extreme generosity. We should offer the UK to participate in all deliberations about foreign, security policy and defence issues. We want the UK to go with us, not away from us...'. By 'we' he means 'Germany and the EU', a highly significant conjunction. But will it happen? More recently on 27 June he Tweeted to this author: 'I insist the UK is a friendly neighbour and a good ally. The problem the UK has with the EU is essentially a Tory problem, it will disappear over time, hopefully in less than five years. Strategic patience and good will is required'. Klaus Welle, the highly respected anglophile Secretary General of the European Parliament has said that he believes Britain and Germany are in fact 'natural partners' and can see how one or other of the European Parliament's outreach committees might become a forum



for a structured exchange of views by UK-EU parliamentarians, alongside existing links between political parties in the UK and Germany.

Andreas Michaelis, the current German Ambassador in London, is another optimist about the UK and the future ('it is great to be living and working again in the country I fell in love with as a student; the UK and Germany are firm friends and allies, and will remain so') his bright attitude is not wholly shared by his opposite number in Berlin as a mere glance at the two embassy websites shows.[\[21\]](#) Michaelis repeatedly Tweets comments like 'the UK would an ideal partner for a deep alliance with Germany' (reported by Patrick Wintour under the headline 'France, Italy and Germany vie for post-Brexit deals with the UK').[\[22\]](#)

Over a five-year period we can realistically expect things to change. The all-mighty UK print media, in particular, still have anger to spend, but will one day realise that the EU is a fact of political life, that it is highly unlikely to disappear so much be lived with. Equally, Germany must continue with its new-found determination to accept a bilateral relationship rather than a multilateral, mediated through the EU.

There are things the UK will not do to resurrect the strong British-German relationship of the

past. It will certainly not rejoin the EU. However, parliamentarians and opinion formers, members of the political classes of both nations, can work now to get things moving, whether in terms of political cooperation between like-minded parties, the Conservatives and the CDU and CSU, even with the European Parliament and the EPP grouping there. New structures and arrangements for exchanging views as well as new research must be embarked upon, pointing to areas for future close cooperation.

After all, is in the interests of our own national security and that of Europe, both in terms of defence and in the fight against terrorism and serious organised crime, a stated strategic UK high policy goal, that a flourishing bilateral relationship be given some rocket-fuel of its own, as soon as possible.

Since 1900 our relationship with Germany has mattered more to us than any other bilateral relationship we have had. Twice, in 1914 and then again in 1939, that relationship collapsed. 1.3m British citizens and 2.7m Germans were killed in the First World War and 450,000 British citizens and 6.9-7.4m Germans lost their lives during the Second World War, along with many millions of others. All were dead because the UK and Germany were at war. As our paths diverge, this is one stark fact we must never, ever forget.

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