

Topics for the Jung Königswinter Conference 2010

Great Britain and Germany: Different perspectives on an uncertain future?

The economic future

The last decades have brought to Germany and Great Britain unprecedented prosperity, constant pay rise, energy-intensive consumption, mere limitless economic growth, unimaginable technological evolutions. The 21st century though might mark an end to this comfortable situation and confronts us with the limits of economic growth. The overall credo is that we are living beyond our means (ecological, economic, societal challenges etc.). The current level of prosperity is at risk in light of economic stagnation and limited resources, both in terms of manpower and commodities.

- How can our both countries and the west as such safeguard its wealth and how can the individual secure its high living standard?
- Do the British and German socio-economic models indicate different perceptions of fairness and of how to respond to the financial and economic crisis? Does this preclude the formation of a united socio-economic project in Europe?
- Does the financial crisis accelerate the adoption of economic reforms that have been demanded for a long time in order to cope with the enormous debt burden of our governments? Should we therefore consider the crisis as a chance for change and do we need to redefine profit seeking? Will it be necessary to cut back the social welfare state which has long exceeded the original objective?

The political future

The year 2010 will be decisive for the political approach to the European Union both of Germany and Great Britain.

- Will Member States accept a transfer of representation to the Union's High Representative, in order to create a common voice of the EU – one counterpart for all Presidents and Prime Ministers of the world?
- Which political approach can be expected by a Conservative government of the UK or a weakened Labour government? The far reaching political integration of the EU is contrary to the traditional objective of the British government to support economic integration but not a political and to see rather an enlarged EU than a further integrated Union. Germany on the other hand has ever taken the opposing stance, supporting integration more than enlargement.

Would it not be necessary for both countries to extend bilateral diplomatic lobbying to join forces to realize the overall joint objective – a raise of the EU's profile as world player on an equal footing with the US and China? Or will we see a return to national foreign policies and the vehement defense of e.g. the British seat in the UN Security Council?

- Are we prepared to carry the burdens to defend our interests abroad, i.e. in Afghanistan and beyond? Looking at the local conflicts across the globe, when is it right for the EU and Member States themselves to interfere politically or militarily? What role does Europe want its militaries to play? Is there such a thing as a Good War?

The societal future

- The new decade will be marked by an ever more dependence on knowledge and access to information. A knowledge-based society is said to be the pre-condition to transform Europe into the most-developed economic region in the world and to enhance Europe's competitive advantage compared to e.g. the US, China and India. Can we look at this future with confidence or with apprehension?
- Does our educational system prepare us well for future professional challenges? How do the internet and the rapid technological development of new means of communication affect our learning capacity?
- Are we at risk that the new medias and rapid access to information will determine who will be a member of society and who is left out? Will the internet bring a transformation of personal relationships? Can we expect a change in the perception of privacy and data protection as citizens are exchanging personal information and private details apparently careless and willingly on the internet?
- With the 24-hour news cycle, polling-focused governments and shrinking budgets, are we losing transformative leaders and big policy concepts and rather moving towards constant incrementalism? Is this a good or bad thing?

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