

## Chairman's Report MV/AGM in respect of 2021

Dear Members,

Allow me to follow the tradition of the past few years and address you in English.

### Covid-19

First, a word on Covid-19. For most of last year, apart from the summer in many countries, the pandemic continued to be a serious global problem.

What about Covid-19 looking forward? The situation in early May 2022 in most of the western world seems to be more or less under control. Elsewhere, border controls in Australia and New Zealand have been relaxed, and Japan is expected to re-open for tourists in the near future. On the other hand, strict lockdowns are in place in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, and vaccination rates in poorer Asian countries (North Korea, for example), much of South America and most of Africa are still very low, which clearly poses a re-infection risk for the rest of the world.

May God (or the other powers that be) preserve us from another virulent outbreak in the autumn, or the emergence of a nasty new variant or, for those of us who have had the virus, from the debilitating physical and psychological effects of Long Covid!

As for the Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft Rhein-Main e.V. last year, the pandemic again effectively forced us to hold all our events online, which was a pity.

Overall, the DBG R-M has thus far emerged not only intact, but even somewhat strengthened: membership has grown slightly, our financial situation remains solid and we have a full schedule of events for 2022. We will hold our first hybrid event on 19.05.22, when Colin Munro will address us on "Scottish and Northern Irish elections – what do the results mean for the UK?". I am hoping for good physical as well as online attendance. We are planning to revert to physical events in the second half of this year, although we will continue to offer online talks as these are often convenient for speakers and audience alike, besides being cost-effective.

### Brexit

And now a word on **post-Brexit Britain**.

During 2021 UK-EU trade volumes declined substantially, although this was also, at least in part, due to Covid-19. British SMEs seem to have been particularly hard hit. That said, smaller EU exporters have apparently also been discouraged by increased border documentation and non-tariff barriers.

Although the London City remains a big, strong financial centre, further business has clearly been lost to the EU. During 2021. Amsterdam won increased market share in international equities trading; both Frankfurt and Paris further improved their position in derivatives trading; Frankfurt also attracted banking

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assets and jobs from London and is now, for the first time ever, one of the Global Top 10 Financial Centres. London is reacting in several ways, including aggressive build-out of its already substantial start-up business.

Brexit also continued negatively to impact many other areas including Education, Culture, Tourism and Sport. Britain's exit from the Erasmus Programme is still massively complicating school and university exchange activities. New visa arrangements for longer UK-EU stays are restricting cross-Channel travel by orchestras, bands, theatre groups and sports teams. Lapsed recognition of various professional qualifications is also proving problematic for, inter alia, British architects.

Throughout 2021, but especially towards the end of the year, pressure on Boris Johnson mounted, and, despite his substantial majority in Parliament, he started to wobble. First we had „Partygate“, beginning with the scandal of the 2020 Christmas Party in Downing Street (in clear breach of Covid restrictions at the time) but intensifying again more recently after it became clear that there had been multiple such parties at No. 10 Downing Street. Then there was a Tory rebellion in Westminster on 14.12.21 against BJ's proposed additional measures to combat Omicron (the measures were eventually approved, but only with very strong backing from Labour). On 15.12.21 the Tories lost to the Liberal Democrats in the North Shropshire by-election a seat which they had won with a huge majority in the last general election. To cap it all, BJ's Brexit Minister, Lord Frost, resigned from the Cabinet on 18.12.21.

While the local elections in England and Wales in mid-2021 turned out quite well for the Tories, the recent round of local elections in and around London, and in Wales and Scotland, which coincided with the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election, have been pretty disastrous for BJ and his team. In England the Liberal Democrats and Greens, as well as Labour, won significant gains from the Tories. The Scottish National Party consolidated its control north of the border, leading to renewed calls for a second vote on Scottish independence. And in Northern Ireland the nationalist Sinn Fein party for the first time beat the unionist DUP, resulting in a political stand-off: the Good Friday Agreement calls for both parties to rule jointly, but the DUP is refusing to join the government in Stormont unless the Northern Ireland Protocol (that part of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement which effectively created a trade border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK) is rescinded. That, in turn, is clearly a highly inflammatory issue between Westminster and Brussels.

All this (as well as many witty cartoons in The Guardian etc) clearly illustrates BJ's shattered authority in Westminster and shows how unpopular with the voting public he and his core team have become. There is talk of his being „toppled“ before he can do any more damage. Against that, BJ has cleverly used vigorous foreign policy on Ukraine to divert attention to from his domestic woes of galloping inflation, squeezed incomes and the eternal problem of an underfunded, overstretched National Health Service. Furthermore, there is no obvious candidate to replace him – especially since Chancellor Rishi Sunak fell into disgrace over his wife's UK tax position. Also, there is still quite a lot of time to go before the next UK general election (expected in Q4 2024). And finally, in David Cameron's wonderful words, BJ is like „a greased piglet“ which (almost) always manages to wriggle its way out of tricky situations!

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## DBG R-M Brexit Action

Your Board remained active on and around Brexit, although much less than in previous years, as Covid-19 severely impacted event schedules at all organisations and societies.

We attended numerous webinars and online discussion panels on Brexit throughout 2021. These were organised by, inter alia, Financial Times Live, The Economist, Chatham House, Wilton Park, Frankfurt Main Finance, the Bundesbank, as well as the Institute for Law & Finance and the Center for Financial Studies at the Goethe-Universität, and the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management.

## 70th Anniversary of DBG R-M

The DBG R-M was founded as the Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft, Landesgruppe Rhein-Main, in 1951. Last year we celebrated the DBG R-M's 70th Anniversary accordingly. First we held a short online event with some prominent external speakers (including a very nice recorded message from Ministerpräsident Volker Bouffier) on 24.06.21. Secondly, we hoped to arrange a physical event with wine and finger food after the summer holidays, but Covid-19 again frustrated our plans. Thankfully, however, we were able to raise our glasses to the DBG in the interval of Jo Rippier's and Mike Marklove's dramatized reading on 16.12.21, having sent a bottle of specially labelled 2020 Hochheimer Königin Viktoriaberg Riesling from Weingut Flick to all registered attendees.

Fingers crossed that a real get-together, in good weather and without risk of infection, will be possible later this year!

## Dagmar Westberg-Preis

It was important that the Dagmar Westberg-Preis be awarded in 2021, our anniversary year. And, indeed, two highly deserving winners were announced towards the end of the year: Alina Aulbur with „Matrimon(ey). From the marriage Market to Domestic Bliss in Selected Works of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth & Jane Austen“, and Ivona Bilusic with „Crossing the Boundaries of Genre and Gender in Mary Shelley's „Frankenstein““.

## DBG R-M events in 2021

- 21.01.21: "Short History of English Literature" – book presentation by Prof. Christoph Heyl
- 25.02.21: "Never Closer Union" by Prof. Vernon Bogdanor (arranged by Nichola Hayton)
- 24.03.21: „German composers in English-speaking lands" by Paul Griffiths (arranged and chaired by Dr. Jünemann)
- 22.04.21: "Cognitive Framing" by Prof. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger
- 20.05.21: "Shakespeare's tragedies and why they might be the greatest literature ever penned" by Paul Stebbings (arranged by Nichola Hayton)

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- 24.06.21: Brief online event to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the DBG Rhein-Main and its forerunner, Die Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft Landesgruppe Rhein-Main, Thereafter: a reading by Prof. Rüdiger Görner from his new novel.
- 16.09.21: "Hitler's Escape from the Bunker: Conspiracy Theories and Political Fantasies?" by Sir Richard Evans (arranged by Nichola Hayton)
- 14.10.21: "Brexit, Covid-19 and the (British) Constitution" by Hannah White, Institute for Government
- 18.11.21: "Religion in crisis?" by Prof. John Barton
- 16.12.21: „Casanova and Boswell, a dramatised reading“ by Jo Ripplier and Mike Marklove.

**In addition, DBG Berlin invited DBG R-M Members to attend, inter alia, the following online events in 2021 and early 2022:**

- 10.05.21: "Leaving the EU but not leaving Europe – what do we really mean by that?" by Paul Smith, Director of the British Council Germany
- 30.09.21: "Four Nations in a United Kingdom? The case of Wales", a discussion with Dr Marius Guderjan, Ruth Marks and Dr Ed Poole
- 08.11.21: "What is going on in the UK?", a discussion with Stefanie Bolzen, Prof Tanja Bueltmann and Sir Simon Fraser
- 02.02.22: "Elizabeth II. – Das Leben der Queen" by Thomas Kielinger, OBE
- 28.02.22: "In 50 years' time what will be seen as more remarkable? That the UK joined in 1973 or that it left in 2019?" by Gisela Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston.

#### **Other event highlights:**

Sadly, for obvious reasons, the British Honorary Consul was not able to hold the traditional Queen's Birthday Party event in June. However, receptions at his Residence were possible later in the the year, with the British Council Germany on 20.10.21, and with HM Ambassador, Jill Gillard on 09.11.21, both of which I was privileged to attend.

I also much enjoyed the guided tour of the photography exhibition "Facing Britain", which FrankfurtRheinMain GmbH organised at the Kunsthalle Darmstadt on 01.12.21.

#### **DBG R-M events so far and selected further events in 2022**

- 27.01.22: "A sovereign currency? Britain and European monetary policy in the 1980s" by Juliana Clegg, the first in our new series "Junior talks at DBG R-M"
- 24.02.22: "Die Macht der Bilder" (especially those of HM Queen Elizabeth II) by Dr Ulrike Grunewald
- 24.03.22: "Today marks the day in Great Britain that millions of neighbours became foreigners" by Daniel Trilling
- 21.04.22: "Levelling up British Cities – Brave New World or Old Wine in New Bottles?" by Andrew Carter, in cooperation with the Urban Future forum in Frankfurt

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- In the second half of 2022 we plan to hold, inter alia, two further Junior Talks and hope to welcome Sir John Kay, one of the UK's leading economists, to address us in November on "The end of greed. How individualism tears our society apart and why politics has to serve cohesion again"

Cooperation on events between DBG R-M, DBG Berlin and other DBG "chapters" is working well.

### A word of thanks

In all of the above your Managing Director, Michael Gehrig, has again played a vital role. Not only has he identified and attracted most of our speakers, but he has also organised our Zoom set-up and proved a very skilled and effective Zoom moderator. Thank you, Michael!

### Membership

In 2021 we gained a third Institutional Member alongside Mazars and AK Yarm/Kulturkreis Schwalbach: Greenhill Europe & Co. KG. Many thanks our Member, Philipp Meyer-Horn, for making this happen. Institutional Membership (corporate/profit-based) costs EUR 1,000 p.a., enables 10 named individuals from the institution concerned to attend all DBG R-M events, and offers the opportunity to work on joint events with the DBG and our network. Last year we introduced flexible arrangements for cultural institutions. We continue to look for additional institutional candidates in both categories and would appreciate any suggestions you may have.

Individual Members now total 205, membership having remained quite stable overall in 2021 and grown by 8 so far in 2022. In addition, we maintain a Members & Friends List of 605 people; we need to convert more Friends to Members, as well as to identify and interest new candidates. Your help here, too, would be highly appreciated. Allow me to repeat once again my mantra that Members are our life blood. Thank you all very much for your continued support!

### Board of Directors

- Hartwin Haas resigned from the Board w.e.f. 28.02.22. Many thanks to Hartwin, not only a longstanding Member but also an erstwhile Chairman of the Board, for his decades of support for DBG R-M and the DBG in general!
- Eva Hoßdorf will resign from the Board w.e.f. the 2021 Annual General Meeting on 16.05.22. Thanks to Eva especially for her contribution on the matter of D&O Insurance.
- While we have a new candidate in mind for the medium-term, we are confident that the remaining Board is sufficient for now.

### Königswinter Conferences

- The 61<sup>st</sup> Young Conference "A new beginning: the UK-German partnership in uncharted waters" took place online 09-14.06.21
- The 71<sup>st</sup> Main Conference "A new world, Covid and the climate agenda – How do the UK and Germany navigate" was held online 17-18.06.21

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- The 10<sup>th</sup> Defence Conference “Where Now Together? A new British & German era: Tectonic global shifts. New Threats and Old” was held in London on 16.09.21
- The 22<sup>nd</sup> Economic Conference took place this January.
- This year the Young Conference will be held in Berlin 20-24.06.22 and the Main Conference in Britain 30.06-01.07.22. The Defence Conference will take place in Germany in the second half of the year.

The Königswinter conferences were launched initially in the 1950s and are undoubtedly one of the key achievements of the Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft. We can all be proud of this. I am confident that Königswinter and the DBG can and should play an increasingly important role in German-UK relations post-Brexit.

### **DBG-Netzwerktreffen**

It was again very useful to meet and compare notes with colleagues from Berlin, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Göttingen, Heidelberg, München and elsewhere. In 2020 we had already agreed to improve cooperation by means of better communication and resource-sharing. At the online meeting on 19.01.21 we discussed the DBG's possibly expanded mission and role after Brexit, and how best to work with Social Media going forward. We held a further online meeting on 21.10.21, at which we addressed structural aspects and again focused on cooperation. An extended in-person meeting is planned for 23-24.05.22 at the offices of the Auswärtiges Amt in Berlin.

### **Cooperation with other organisations and societies**

During 2021 we maintained our cooperation with:

- Young Königswinter Alumni
- BCCG
- Oxbridge Stammtisch
- FrankRheinMain Circle
- British German Association, London: DBG Berlin arranged with BGA Chairman Peter Barnes a series of joint online events, to which DBG R-M was also invited
- Frankfurter Wirtschaftsbotschafter: Covid-19 again limited the in-person activities of this group, of which I am the member for the UK. There should be better opportunities for cooperation going forward.
- We also continued to support the International Stammtisch. On 01.11.21 I chaired an event with Prof. Mosbrugger, President of the Frankfurter Polytechnische Gesellschaft, in cooperation with the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management. Prof Mosbrugger presented briefly his institution and spoke about civic engagement in Frankfurt

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- We have intensified our cooperation with the Goethe-Universität, in connection with the Dagmar Westberg-Preis and with UK visa difficulties for students post-Brexit. We also hope to start holding joint events on the Campus
- We are in discussion on cooperation with the Goethe and Gude Clubs (also at the Goethe-Universität)
- We are about to launch similar discussions with the Frankfurter Presse Club.

All in all 2021 was a good year in a testing environment for DBG R-M. Let us hope that this will hold true for 2022, too, despite even tougher circumstances since Russia invaded Ukraine!

Yours sincerely,

Nick Jefcoat  
Chairman  
(12.05.22)

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