

Dear Members and Friends,

In early 2023 I wrote “2022: What a year!”
Now I again find myself writing “2024: What a year!”

I could go on at length about worrying geopolitical developments. But I suspect you have all had enough of that.

I could write reams about elections, both past and pending. But, after UK, France, Austria, Japan, USA, and now Germany, I suspect you have all had enough of that, too.

I could also describe in detail the weak to awful performance of most European economies, with the intriguing exceptions of Greece and Spain. But that would be too depressing.

Allow me instead briefly to “armchair philosophise”. My impression is that we Europeans, emerging from our cocoon of 70 years of peace and prosperity, have so far hardly adjusted to the new realities in the world around us. In recent years we have been too introspective, sometimes even narcissistic, focusing unduly on issues around the individual while other states have been thinking more about the real current and future challenges. We have also been rather backward-looking, harping back to earlier, supposedly easier and nicer times.

Much will have to change. I hope that further technological developments, in AI and e.g. energy and construction/engineering, will make the process a bit easier for us. I also hope that we can find new ways to generate the massive funding needed to address security, climate change, biodiversity loss and crumbling infrastructure, as well as pressing health, education and social issues. Besides the changes which we can actively embrace, there will no doubt be further change imposed on us by Donald Trump with his new administration, and China, Russia and the Global South.

Fingers crossed that the forthcoming new government here in Germany will be up to the task of managing change – or at least better at it than the failed “Ampelkoalition”. Let’s hope that the political crisis in France, and now Austria too, can be resolved before long. Let’s also hope that the new regime in UK doesn’t run out of steam before it has really started. What we all need is from our respective governments is genuine leadership. And vision. And a willingness to take calculated risks. And the ability to take tough decisions in a timely manner.

Now for the DBG. Overall 2024 was again quite a good year. Berlin held three Königswinter conferences. Note that there was no Economic Conference in 2024; nor will one take place in 2025, the background being that this subject is already well covered by our sister organisation, the British Chamber of Commerce Germany.

The Königswinter Conference schedule for 2025 is as follows:

the Main Conference will be held in May in Berlin; the Young Conference in late October/early November in Berlin; timing and location of the Defence Conference are yet to be fixed.

Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft Rhein Main e. V.

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Königswinter remains a (arguably “the”) key component of our offering at the DBG overall. I think it is vital for our Group not only to continue holding interactive physical conferences with high-powered participants BUT ALSO to disseminate Königswinter knowledge, insights and impact beyond the select physical audience.

Berlin again had a busy schedule of physical and online events. The DBG Group “Netzwerktreffen” was held online on 18.12.24.

2024 was a fair year for DBG Rhein-Main. Most of our events were again hybrid and many of our in-person speakers also gave talks at DBG Rhein-Neckar (Heidelberg) the following day. Attendance was mixed: sometimes active both physically and online; but on other occasions very disappointing, especially in terms of in-person participation. We need to be able to continue attracting quality speakers, so I hope we can find ways to improve physical attendance going forward.

Event highlights for me personally in 2024 were “Shakespeare Lied & Lyrik”, a joint effort with the Romantik-Museum in April; Nigel Longley’s talk on the Henley Royal Regatta in September, followed by an improvised picnic in the garden at FRG Germania; and Andreas Sturm’s whiskey-fired performance ““Born to be Wild (-e)!” in late November.

Michael Gehrig has once more compiled an entertaining programme for 2025. (Many thanks again, dear Michael!) We will kick off on 29.01.25 with a guided tour at the Historisches Museum, followed by a get-together at “Maaschanz” Bistro.

While membership at DBG R-M remained reasonably stable in 2024, the future trend could turn negative given our aging demographic profile. Our financial position coming into 2025 continues to be sound, although a large proportion of our funds is restricted to use in connection with the Dagmar Westberg-Universitätspreis (By the way, the 2024 prize will be awarded in Q1 2025.)

Now I must return to the topic of change. At DBG R-M there will be some significant changes from mid-year in the composition of our Board and, consequently, in the way we organise ourselves. We will also need to tighten cost control and streamline administration. This will inter alia, regrettably, entail discontinuing correspondence by post.

Against this background, dear Members and Friends, we will need your support more than ever. Please help us find new (especially younger!) members, including candidates for the Board. And, if you are not yet a member, please now think seriously about becoming one!

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Let me finish with extracts from “Change” by Erin Hanson, a young Australian poet. The change in question is more personal than what I was writing about above; but I find the poem rather charming and inspirational.

I once heard someone say,
If you don't change you do not grow.
Then I waved the thought away,
For who were they to think they know,

I'd always stayed the same,
A heart that thrived within the cold,
And I had no desire to change,
At least that's what I had been told,

For a day afraid to turn to night,
Will miss the silver moon,
And a flower that refuses to change,
Will never get to bloom,

I had thought I was a thorn bush,
Only good for snagging clothes,
But if you do not dare to change,
You'll never find out you're a rose.

Thank you very much once again for your ongoing support.

I wish you all a happy, healthy, enjoyable and fulfilling 2025!

Nick Jefcoat
Chairman
DBG R-M
07.01.2025

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