

## **DBG Rhein-Main e.V. AGM/MV on 29.10.2025: Chairman's Report**

### Reflections on Geopolitical Developments in 2024

Looking back on 2024, I am struck by how swiftly global events continue to reshape our sense of stability and cooperation. The terrible conflict in Ukraine remains a defining challenge for Europe, testing both our resilience and our capacity for unity. At the same time, renewed tensions in the Middle East and the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific remind us that geopolitical change is constant and often unpredictable.

Yet amidst these uncertainties, I take some encouragement from the sense of renewed purpose in the face of shared fate among the majority of European countries. Despite the challenges of Trump 2.0 (of which more below), Germany and the United Kingdom, together with other European partners, have demonstrated that shared values and open dialogue remain powerful anchors in turbulent times. These developments remind us why organisations such as the Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft matter: to foster understanding, to encourage exchange, and to build the human connections that underpin peace and cooperation.

Donald J Trump was sworn in for a second term as US President on 20.01.25. His incredible pre-election claim of ending the war in Ukraine within 24 hours of taking office has not come to fruition. That said, he has made a major contribution to the ceasefire in the Middle East, although the peace process there is at an early stage and still fragile.

Trump verbalised his MAGA ambitions in 2024; they have become very real in the meantime. Since „Liberation Day“ on 02.04.25 he has used America's political and economic clout (backed up by the USD and the Federal Reserve) to impose painful tariffs on almost all other countries, thereby effectively changing the world (trade) order. Markets have remained surprisingly resilient so far, but we probably haven't seen the end of it yet.

In Trump's shadow US tech multinationals have extended their domination and certain US tech bosses are making alarming noises about further curtailing, or even replacing, liberal democracy. US tech has seen some competition from China but, sadly, very little so far from Europe.

In Europe we remain in Zeitenwende mode, although speedier progress towards security, economic sovereignty and prosperity would be welcome. Longer term, I continue to wonder if we are sailing back to calmer waters or to even stormier seas. In any case, I remain in hope that AI, used with care, and other technological advances will help us overcome some of the many problems confronting us.

### British Politics

On 04.07.24 the Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer achieved a „landslide victory“ in the UK General Election. Under the first past the post system Labour won 411 seats in Parliament, easily beating the Conservatives, who won only 121 seats. In terms of votes cast, however, Labour won no more than 33.7%, suggesting that it could have trouble effecting its policies without pushback from the British public. Indeed, the government has in the meantime also suffered opposition from within, Labour backbenchers forcing the Cabinet to “U turn” on several key economic and structural motions in early 2025. It has become questionable whether Starmer has really succeeded in unifying his party. Although the Tories remain in demoralised disarray since their election debacle, Labour faces a growing threat from the Right through Reform UK and from the Centre-Left through the Liberal Democrats and the Greens.

### Brexit

Throughout 2024 Brexit remained a toxic issue in British political circles. Neither of the leading parties was prepared to say anything negative about it for fear of alienating older voters. In fact, despite growing clamour for easier UK-EU transit arrangements, especially for schoolchildren and students, Starmer felt obliged in 2024 to confirm that there would be no return to free UK access for EU citizens. Into 2025, however, the Prime Minister has felt more comfortable in moving back towards the EU. And the Kensington Treaty, signed by the governments of the UK and Germany on 17.07.25, is a significant step, although its declarations of intent in security, energy and trade need to be followed up by real action. In addition, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer (i.e. British Finance Minister), Rachel Reeves, admitted last week that Brexit had caused much more damage to the UK economy than previously thought. Recent UK polls suggest that, if another referendum were held today, over 50% would vote for "Return" (as in "Remain" in 2016). However, there still seems to be a hardcore of about 30% who would still vote for "Stay out" (as in "Leave" in 2016).

### Royal Family

And now a few words about the British Royal Family. After two years of considerable change, 2024 was quieter but marked by challenging health issues. In February and March respectively King Charles III and the Princess of Wales, Catherine (Kate), were diagnosed with cancer. Queen Camilla suffered from pneumonia in the early months of the year and Princess Anne had a nasty horse-riding accident. Prince Andrew was found to be in contact with an alleged Chinese spy. The Epstein affair, which caused Prince Andrew to exit public life in late 2019, has blown up again in the current year.

Now moving on to DBG matters....

### Königswinter conferences

Defence (12<sup>th</sup>) 15-16.04.24 in London, "War in Europe: how should the democracies respond?"

Young (64<sup>th</sup>) 24-28.07.24 in Berlin, „What sort of democracy are we striving for?"

Main (74<sup>th</sup>) 29-30.10.24 in London, "Securing our way of life in an uncertain and changing world."

### Netzwerktreffen Berlin

The 2024 Netzwerktreffen was again held via Zoom, on 18.12.2024. As usual, this was a useful forum for sharing ideas among the various "chapters" of the DBG, with a view to securing a successful future for the whole group. The 2025 Netzwerktreffen will also be held online, but, by popular demand, the plan is to switch back to physical meetings in Berlin, the next in Q4 2026.

### Cooperation with other societies & clubs:

In 2024 we again cooperated actively with e.g. the BCCG, the Oxbridge Stammtisch, the Young Königswinter Alumni, and the British German Association in London. We also continued to support the International Stammtisch and Newcomers Network.

We maintained our dialogue with the Goethe-Universität in connection with the Dagmar Westberg-Universitätspreis. We are, however, yet to see any real progress in terms of fostering better cooperation with universities in the UK, or on holding joint events on Campus Westend. Your Board will work on this going forward.

### Membership

Counting partner memberships as „2“, we remained at the level of slightly under 200 Members in 2024. However, the trend this year remains one of slow decline, for demographic and other reasons. This is a cause for concern which we need to address seriously. We will certainly need your ongoing support, and, more specifically, your help in encouraging other people in your respective circles (especially youngsters) to join the DBG Rhein-Main.

### The Future

In H2 2024 Michael Gehrig and I spent much time thinking about, and preparing for, the future “after Dr. von Maltzan & Michael Gehrig”, both of whom had decided to step down from the Board in mid-2025. Both had made huge contributions to the DBG over several decades, nationally as well as in Frankfurt Rhein-Main. Given their long experience of the DBG and its workings, it was clear that they could not be simply replaced, allowing everything to go on as before. So Michael Gehrig and I looked into various ways forward, including closer cooperation with our Geschäftsstelle Forvis Mazars and even a merger with a similar institution. Finally, in early 2025, we opted for a stronger and younger Board with better female representation and for a clearer division of responsibilities within the Board. We propose, for your approval under “TOP 8, Wahl des neuen Vorstands” a bit later, the following key moves:

- Daniel Arndt to step up from Member and Kassenprüfer to Managing Director (Geschäftsführer)
- Dr. Annette Groh to step up from Member to Board Member and Deputy Chairperson (Stellvertretende Vorsitzende)
- Klaus Kassing and Dr. Petruta Tatulescu to join as new Board Members.

Board Member and Treasurer (Schatzmeister) Hendrik Schmidt has kindly agreed to assume additional responsibility for the duties of Sylvia Schweikl, who is no longer available to support the DBG R-M in matters of accounting and charitable status.

As you all know, for many years Michael Gehrig, with help from Nichola Hayton MBE, Chairperson at DBG Rhein-Neckar in Heidelberg, and occasional support from other DBG R-M Board Members, has played a vital role in securing a flow of interesting (and inexpensive!) speakers for our monthly events. We have created a new Events Committee to take on this role from now on. The Committee will hold its first full meeting in the next few weeks, and meet regularly thereafter to ensure a full and entertaining events programme for 2026 and beyond.

Your new Board will focus on signing up additional Institutional or Corporate Members, on winning new (especially younger!) Individual Members, on developing new event formats, and on cooperating more closely with companies with German-British interests as well as with other institutions, societies and clubs similar to the DBG R-M.

### Events

Before moving on to the “Bericht des Schatzmeisters” let’s take a quick look at our regular physical events:

- in 2024. My personal highlights were: Nigel Longley’s talk on the Henley Royal Regatta in early Sept at “Germania”, followed by a guided tour of the rowing club and an informal picnic in its gardens and the excellent performance “Born to be Wild(-e)” by Andreas Sturm at the FPC in Nov. Additionally, we had access to the online programmes offered by DBG Berlin and

some other DBG chapters, and cooperated with the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung on the quarterly online series “Are you OK, UK?”.

- and in H1 2025. Particularly noteworthy were our joint events with the Frankfurter PresseClub for John Kampfner’s presentation of his book “In search of Berlin”, and with Europa-Union Frankfurt for the talk by Sir Nick Harvey, Chief Executive, European Movement UK, on “The Security System in Europe during Trump 2.0”

Thank you for listening. I have said it before and I will say it again: you, dear Members, are the life blood of the DBG R-M. I sincerely hope that you will continue to support us. Please also do whatever you can to help us attract new (especially younger) members. And please feel free to send us your ideas on new speakers, new event formats and possible improvements of any kind to the DBG R-M. You are vital for our future!

**Nick Jefcoat**  
**Chairman**  
**Frankfurt am Main**  
**27.10.25**

(The following section is actually for TOP 10 of the Tagesordnung)

Dagmar Westberg-Universitätspreis.

The 2023 prize was presented to James Rawlings on 21.03.24 for his outstanding for his Master’s thesis: “British Heritage in JD Wetherspoon. A Construction of Englishness”. The 2024 prize was awarded to Jessi Seidel for her Master’s dissertation “Beyond the Limit of the Human: Literature and Posthuman Others in the Early Twenty-First Century”. The prize was presented to Jessi at the Frankfurter PresseClub in February 2025. Jessi will address us on her dissertation subject in Q1 2026. We also hope to award the 2025 prize on that occasion.