

Dear Members and Friends,

First the bad news:

Germany: sluggish economy, struggling industry, weak position in IT; high spirits from the easing of the Schuldenbremse and the decision to invest billions in defence/security, infrastructure and the climate have now all but dissipated. Britain: flatlining economy, crumbling national health and judicial systems, weak government forced by backbenchers to U-Turn on necessary key social service reforms; Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer seems to be transforming the UK into a “nicer” but ultimately poorer country. France: political impasse, no proper budget for 2026, huge debt burden, a strike-loving populace; in domestic politics President Macron is a lame duck (or perhaps a “canard enchaîné”?). Austria: in polls extreme right wing FPÖ is now beating centre right ÖVP and centre left SPÖ combined. Eastern European EU countries: Hungary is now joined by Czechia and Slovakia in a faction happy to enjoy EU largesse but unwilling to step up to EU commitments or to buy into key EU values. Russia: little or no interest in making peace with Ukraine. Future “special military operations” in other neighbouring countries cannot be ruled out. Hybrid warfare is already underway with e.g. Nordic countries and the UK. Putin is delighted to have been invited back by Trump onto the international high table. China: rising industrial, technological and military power, increasingly ready to flex its political muscles.

USA: with his tariff onslaught last April Trump changed the world order in international trade; with his move on Venezuela (soon maybe Colombia, too?) and his threatened annexation of Greenland he has turned his back on the system of international law and order which has been in place since 1945. A new ecopolitical era is emerging, where the USA, China and Russia play portfolio politics, each with its own sphere of influence and control of its own “backyard”, using whatever means they deem appropriate. Heaven knows what the Venezuela episode may encourage Russia and China to try next: Invade the Baltics? Take Taiwan by force? And how might Trump’s example affect the behaviour of rogue governments around the world, or, indeed, rogue individuals?

This is Munroe Doctrine 2.0 or, as Trump himself likes to call it, “Donroe Dioctrine”. There have been similar moves in the past. And the world order has in any event been changing in recent years, with the West losing influence and China, India, Russia and the Global South teaming up. But with Trump it is looking like a whole new world system.

Trump is tricky enough, but what might come after him? Frankly, I am more concerned about the prospect of current Vice President Vance taking over, supported (and arguably manipulated) by tech billionaires such as Peter Thiel, with an agenda to replace traditional Western liberal democracy with a capitalistic tech CEO oligarchy committed to running the country like a top corporate listed on the NYSE.

Now for some more positive developments:

Trump has certainly contributed to the (albeit fragile) peace process in Gaza and towards a possible ceasefire in Ukraine. Is he maturing or even becoming a little more statesman-like? His pre-election

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claim to stop the war in Ukraine within 24 hours has given way to a more sober acceptance that it might not even be possible to reach a peace agreement there at all. And in his unpredictability he is gradually becoming more predictable. After all, might is always right, America (or Donald?!) is always first, and other democratic and human values follow far behind. (Incidentally, Clausewitz would be amused it is to see how many world leaders are currently active on the international stage but domestically unloved and unsuccessful!) In Europe I am pleased that the coalition of the 35 willing, led by France and the UK, is making progress towards a possible post-war security deal for Ukraine. The EU and the UK are now cooperating more effectively on defence. Following the Kensington Treaty last year there have been further moves by the UK to return to a closer relationship with the EU, especially in trade but also in youth and culture mobility, energy and security. Last year I attended several conferences and other events where the mood was subdued, but certain beacons of hope shone brightly. The message from Verena Pausder, Chairperson of the German Start-up Association, at the 18th Deutsches Wirtschaftsforum in November was that Germany, while still way behind the USA, now has a growing number of “Unicorns” with global reach and heft. And the CEO of NEURA Robotics from Metzingen confidently stated at a Stock Exchange presentation later in the year that Germany has the wherewithal in the hugely promising area of robotics to become world leader in the next decade.

That said, in Europe consensus is often tricky and transformation tends to take ages. We probably need a major structural reform of the EU (hopefully at some stage again including the UK) if we are to make genuine progress and position Europe as a modest world power. That will require clear vision, strong leadership, willingness to take balanced risks and to make tough decisions.

And then we will have to figure out how to finance all our requirements in health, education and social spending, besides defence/security, infrastructure and the climate. Let’s hope that further technological developments will help us out in these areas.

For the DBG overall 2025 was again a successful year. Three Königswinter conferences took place: the Main Conference under the heading “Germany, the UK and the Western Alliance: Resetting Relations in a world out of joint” in May in Berlin; the Young Conference in Berlin in late October/early November with the title “With the old world order in tatters, how do we transform our societies for the better?”; and the Defence Conference in late November, also in Berlin, under the heading “A changing Security Landscape in Europe: the role of the British-German partnership”.

The Königswinter conference series remains the key achievement of the DBG and has certainly made a most important contribution to German-British relations during the past almost 80 years.

The Königswinter Conference schedule for 2025 is as follows:

the 76th Main Conference will be held in mid-June in Manchester; the 66th Young Conference in late July/early August in Berlin; the 14th Defence Conference will take place in the 2nd half of 2026, location yet to be decided.

The 2025 DBG Group “Netzwerktreffen” will be held in person in Berlin this February.

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As foreshadowed in my letter of last January, 2025 was a year of big change at DBG R-M. At mid-year our two longest-serving senior colleagues stepped down from the Board. Each had made an invaluable contribution to the DBG, in the Frankfurt Rhein-Main region and nationally. So, on behalf of the new Board of Directors: huge thanks to Dr. Bernd von Maltzan and Michael Gehrig for all they have done over several decades for our society and the DBG overall! Our four new Board Members: Dr. Annette Groh, Deputy Chairperson; Daniel Arndt, Managing Director; Klaus Kassing and Dr. Petruta Tatulescu each bring excellent qualifications and much relevant experience. After a few months as co-opted Board Members they were formally appointed at the AGM on 29.10.25. The whole new team is currently “finding its DBG R-M feet”.

2025 was generally a decent year for DBG R-M. Most of our events were again hybrid and many of our in-person speakers also gave talks at DBG Heidelberg the following day. Attendance again fluctuated between gratifying and frankly disappointing. We need to improve on this in 2026.

My event highlights in 2025: we were pleased to welcome back Adrian Goldberg, this time talking about football and the negative impact that big cash from the USA, Middle East and China is having on the UK’s Premier League. Sir Nick Harvey, Chief Executive of the European Movement UK, spoke inspiringly on the chances of the UK rejoining the EU, and early in the year, in a DBG R-M/Frankfurter PresseClub cooperation, John Kampfner gave an excellent presentation of his book “In Search of Berlin”.

Kick-off of our 2026 programme will be another guided tour of the Historisches Museum on 29.01.26, followed again by a get-together at “Maaschanz” Bistro. Not least thanks to our events partner Nichola Hayton MBE (Chairperson at the DBG in Heidelberg) we have a full programme for the year, including highlights such as talks by the eminent British historian, Sir Richard Evans, and former UK Ambassador Sir Leigh Turner, on “Diplomacy”. We also plan to arrange a summer party in celebration of DBG R-M’s 75th birthday, provisionally on 27.08.26.

We hope to award the 2025 Dagmar Westberg-Universitätspreis on 12.02.26, when 2024 prize winner Jessi Seidel will address us on her winning Master’s thesis “Beyond the Limit of the Human: Literature and Posthuman Others in the Early Twenty-First Century”.

While membership at DBG R-M again remained more or less stable in 2025, the trend is clearly challenging given our aging demographic profile and the difficulty in attracting new, especially young, members.

Entering 2026 our financial position continues to be sound, although a large proportion of our funds is restricted to use in connection with the Dagmar Westberg-Universitätspreis.

Against this background, dear Members and Friends, we continue to rely on your strong ongoing support. Thank you very much for supporting us again in 2025. This year 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 joining!

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Let me now return to an earlier topic and finish with a piece by Percy Bysshe Shelley, a British Romantic poet, musing on what can happen to autocratic, arrogant tyrants and their regimes:

“Ozymandias” (1818)

*“I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
No thing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”*

On behalf of the whole Board of Directors at DBG R-M I wish you and all your loved ones a healthy, enjoyable and successful 2026!

Nick Jefcoat
Chairman
DBG R-M
09.01.2026