

Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft Rhein-Main e.V.; Annual General Meeting/Mitgliederversammlung at 18:00 on 06.10.2026; The Chairman's Report

Dear Members,

2025 was a challenging year, especially in the outside world but also within the DBG Rhein-Main

Geopolitics

Donald Trump was inaugurated as President of the United States, for his second term in office, on 20.01.25. After his first I was hardly a supporter but I did secretly hope that his unorthodox approach might help in hitherto intractable problem areas, in particular the Middle East and Ukraine. And, indeed, in the early days Trump did contribute to the albeit fragile peace process in Gaza and made moves towards a possible ceasefire in Ukraine. But then, instead of "stopping the war within 24 hours", Trump stood by as the conflict in Ukraine raged on (and is now heading towards its fifth winter). And, given the destruction and death toll in Gaza, his idea of building a Middle Eastern Riviera there seemed highly cynical.

On 02.04.25 Trump announced "Liberation Day", introducing a broad package of 10% or higher tariffs on imports from most countries, including his closest trading and strategic partners. This led to severe tensions with China, later followed by de-escalation. It also raised big questions in Western Europe (and indeed Japan, ROK and Taiwan) over their relationship and "alliance" with the US in terms of security and defence, besides bilateral trade. It further precipitated a global stock market crash coupled with severe economic anxiety – although the world economy later proved surprisingly resilient.

In other arenas, meanwhile, Israel attacked Iran, the Assad regime in Syria fell, and we witnessed shifting alliances within Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Sustaining massive casualties but making limited progress in the "special military operation" in Ukraine, Russia strengthened its ties with North Korea and was sent 10,000 North Korean battle troops. In parallel North Korea became more assertive on the Korean peninsula. China increased its military activity in the Taiwan Strait. And there was a brief but highly risky flare-up on the border between India and Pakistan, followed fortunately by a ceasefire.

Throughout 2025 Europe was confronted by rising energy costs and security concerns. Growth was sluggish or negative in most countries. The whole continent faced ever clearer challenges in terms of economic competitiveness, industrial and technological autonomy, and resilience.

Germany

Ahead of the collapse of the Scholz coalition government Friedrich Merz was chosen as CDU Chancellor candidate in Sept 2024. He won the General Election on 23.02.25, CDU/CSU garnering 28.5% of the vote ahead of the AfD with 20.8%, and the SPD with 16.4%. Merz formed a coalition with the SPD.

Merz was elected (though, without precedent, not at the first vote) as Chancellor on 06.05.25. One of his key claims around that time was that he would halve the AfD's support. He paused the "Schuldenbremse" (a significant U-turn) and pushed through huge commitments on defence, security and infrastructure investment. He promised positive change in the nation's fortunes "soon". Instead, the German economy stagnated, suffering from Trump's tariffs, the absence of cheap and plentiful Russian oil and gas, strong competition from China and (let's face it) a basically outdated business model.

Limited recovery started to show through towards the end of 2025 and, in the meantime, Merz has announced a package of much-needed reforms. Sadly, he is not a gifted communicator and (now in

2026), has only wobbly support from his coalition partner. He has failed to take the nation with him, as demonstrated by disastrous recent election results in Sachsen-Anhalt, Berlin and, worst of all, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where the CDU will not even be represented in the regional parliament (another depressing first). Merz wants to soldier on; it will be a tough uphill struggle to persuade the country to “take its medicine.”

British Politics

Sir Keir Starmer won the July 2024 General Election with a huge majority of seats in Parliament, but with little more than 30% of the popular vote (thanks to Britain’s “first past the post” electoral system). So, the country was divided from the outset. The new Government’s initial message to the nation was that the Tories had left a terrible mess and it would take time and hard work, and some sacrifices, to get back on track. Hardly encouraging. Then came a series of U-turns, as belt-tightening reforms were blocked by left-leaning backbenchers, and some embarrassing switches in key staff close to the Prime Minister. Sir Keir, although clearly intelligent and well-meaning, was more an administrator than a leader with vision; he lacked the common touch, was both a poor communicator and a bad listener. His international record in terms of supporting Ukraine, standing up to Trump and moving Britain back towards the EU was creditable; but he continued to lose support domestically until he became untenable.

Now, briefly, into 2026. Andy Burnham, elected of Labour Leader on 16.07.26, and thereby as Prime Minister on 20.07.26, is a pally politician from up North, left-leaning, and with a decent track record at his previous job as Mayor of Greater Manchester. He has the common touch, is articulate and has made a promising start with his good vibes and message of hope. But he may struggle to keep together the Left and the Centre of his party, and faces increasing pressure externally from the Right (Reform UK and Restore Britain) and the Left (the Greens). Not to mention the need for massive investment in defence and security, health and social care, education and infrastructure, all exacerbated by an aging population, climate and natural diversity issues as well as persistent low productivity and economic growth. Andy Burnham has his work cut out!

British Royal Family

Following their cancer treatment, both HM King Charles III and Catherine, Princess of Wales became more active again in terms of public engagements. King Charles hosted Donald Trump at the lavish Windsor Castle state visit. King Charles and Queen Camilla celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary. Meghan Markle’s lifestyle series “With Love, Meghan” premiered on Netflix on 04.03.25 but was neither a commercial nor a critical success.

As for the traditional Christmas celebrations at Sandringham, ex-Prince Andrew was again not invited, having been stripped of all his royal titles by his brother, King Charles, some weeks earlier. Harry and Megan again decided to stay in California for the Christmas holidays.

At the DBG Rhein-Main we had much to do during 2025. Besides our normal business we had big changes within the Board of Directors. Two longstanding Directors, Dr. Bernd von Maltzan and Michael Gehrig, stood down from active service in mid-year. Each had made an invaluable contribution to the continued success (indeed, the very survival) of the DBG Rhein-Main: Herr von Maltzan had, amongst other things, helped provide the society with a solid financial base; Michael Gehrig had been Managing Director for a remarkable 40 years and had helped guide us through Brexit and Covid. Both gentlemen deserve our hearty thanks. **APPLAUSE!**

In addition, two other Directors had decided to pursue other interests, leaving the remaining Board the job of finding four replacements. This we did first, by asking existing Member, Dr. Annette Groh, to upgrade to Deputy Chairperson and second, by requesting Internal Auditor (Kassenprüfer), Daniel Arndt to become our Managing Director. With the help of a friendly HR advisor we also made two

external appointments: on the positive side, Klaus Kassing, a former Banker with corporate CFO experience, who immediately made a strong contribution; and, sadly, on the negative side, Dr. Petruta Tatulescu, with whom we discovered irreconcilable differences in early 2026, obliging us to call an extraordinary general meeting in order to have this person removed from the Board. Outside the Board there was a further significant change: external accountant, Sylvia Schweikl, also retired mid-year. Happily, Treasurer Hendrik Schmidt agreed to take on the additional burden resulting from her departure.

Financial Position

Hendrik Schmidt will address this in some detail in a minute.

Königswinter Conferences

In 2025 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; and the Defence Conference in late November, also in Berlin.

Netzwerktreffen Berlin

The 2025 DBG Group “Netzwerktreffen” was postponed and ultimately held in person in Berlin in February 2026. Future Netzwerktreffen, by popular demand, will take place over 2 days at rotating DBG locations, the next probably in Munich in early 2027.

Cooperation with Other Societies & Clubs

We continue to work closely with the British Chamber of Commerce Germany, Rhein-Main and the Oxbridge Stammtisch. We are always on the lookout for opportunities to cooperate on special events with the Historisches Museum, the Freies Deutsches Hochstift, the Romantik Museum and the Museums-Gesellschaft für Museumskonzerte, as well as with the Club des Affaires de la Hesse, the Deutsch-Japanische Gesellschaft and the Deutsch-Italienische Vereinigung.

Membership

While membership at DBG R-M declined only slightly in 2025, the trend is clearly challenging given our aging demographic profile and the difficulty that all societies like ours are experiencing in attracting new, especially young, members.

Events Programme

Most of our events in 2025 were again hybrid and many of our in-person speakers also gave talks at DBG Heidelberg the following day. My 2025 event highlights were: Adrian Goldberg, this time talking about the UK’s Premier League; Sir Nick Harvey, Chief Executive of the European Movement UK, on the chances of the UK rejoining the EU; and, early in 2026, in a DBG Rhein-Main/Frankfurter PresseClub cooperation, John Kampfner gave an excellent “State of Britain” talk.

Looking ahead briefly, we will host Sir Leigh Turner on “Diplomacy” on 22.10.26, and Rev. Stephen Patterson on “British and German National Honours 1668-2025” on 12.11.26. We are planning a little party with Whisky and Scottish music for the first half of December. Highlights in early 2027 include a Dagmar Westberg-Prize evening when the 2025 winners will present their work; and another cooperation event with the Frankfurter PresseClub at which John Kampfner will present his latest book “Braver New World: The Countries Daring to Do Things Others Won’t”.

Against the current background, dear Members, we continue to rely on your ongoing strong support. Thank you very much for providing this again in 2025. For the remainder of 2026 and into 2027 please help us find new members (especially younger ones), and candidates for the Board (especially female ones). And please feel free to send us your ideas on new speakers, new event formats and possible improvements of any kind at the DBG Rhein-Main

Thank you for listening. I have said it before and I will say it again: you, dear Members, are the lifeblood of the DBG Rhein-Main, and absolutely vital for its future.

Now it's time for me to hand over to our Treasurer Hendrik Schmidt....

(After the Treasurer's presentation, and in Prof Christoph Heyl's absence, I also read out the following text regarding our patron and benefactress, Dagmar Westberg:

Dagmar Westberg University Prize

The 2025 prize was shared by Ulrike Kern for her planned UK-based research on Rachel Auerbach, the Holocaust survivor and author of "In the Fields of Treblinka"; and Prof. Dr. Kristin Böse to enable a school trip to the Bayeux Tapestry while on public display in the UK during 2026.)

Nick Jefcoat

Chairman

05.10.26