

Germany seeks to establish EU as global power

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The EU's Permanent Crisis

Germany is assuming the presidency of the EU-Council under what experts consider to be extremely difficult conditions. According to a [recent analysis](#) by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin, the EU has been in crisis mode for years. The global financial crisis of 2008 was followed by the euro crisis of 2010; the refugee crisis of 2015; and most recently the corona crisis – a succession of shock waves that have prevented a lasting stabilisation and reinvigoration of the EU. And now the EU is confronting a pandemic devastation, the SWP continues.

Besides tackling the pandemic's dramatic social and economic consequences, the German government must expect that during its Council presidency, at least at the beginning only 30 percent of the regular work of the Council can take place. Moreover, the escalation of global power struggles creates additional problems for the EU, further complicating the work of the Council under its six-month German presidency.

A Bad Atmosphere

In the pandemic's early phase, unilateral national initiatives by [Germany in particular](#) turned public opinion in some other EU member states against both Germany and the EU. Now, a [recent survey](#) commissioned by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) conducted in nine EU countries has confirmed that public perceptions of the EU have deteriorated significantly.

To the question about who the most helpful ally of their country was during the crisis, by far the most common answer in the nine countries was no one. Only in Poland did the EU manage to crawl into second place with 17 percent. In all other countries the EU was only named after the WHO, with mere single-digit percentages. In Italy the EU was in fourth place with 4 percent; Italians were much more likely to cite China as an ally (25 percent).

The proportion of those whose perception of the EU has deteriorated during the Covid-19 pandemic varies between 25 percent (Sweden) and 58 percent (Italy), with a particularly high figure (50 percent) in Spain, which had previously been considered very EU loyal.

Consolidating the EU

In light of southern Europe's growing rejection of the EU (in Italy, a relative majority recently spoke out in favour of withdrawing from the union), plus the fact that the Corona crisis has affected German industry's main sales markets in southern and western Europe, Berlin sees it as inevitable that certain concessions must be made to Italy and Spain in particular to implement the 750 billion EU Recovery Fund. Therefore, for the first time the German government has agreed

to a one-off borrowing plan for the EU Recovery Fund and the allocation of some of the funds as grants rather than loans.

To revive popular approval for the EU, Brussels will not only finance the salaries of short-time employees, but also introduce a minimum wage, Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas announced in a [speech to the ECFR](#). We must consolidate the union permanently, he declared.

The EU as a global power

During its presidency, the German government will also seek to maximize the EU's clout in global policymaking. Berlin explicitly aims to achieve this through European sovereignty, i.e. independence in relation to other global powers – above all China and the USA. In [his speech to the ECFR](#), Foreign Minister Maas called for an unsparing analysis of our strategic dependencies, be they technological, security-, trade- or monetary-related.

The EU should reduce its dependency on China, for example, not only for the supply of medicines, but also in 5G digitalization. At the same time, we will have to think about how to better contain the conflicts in Europe's vicinity, even without the US. In an earlier interview, Maas said that the EU has to succeed in positioning Europe as a united entity in the global great-power rivalry between the United States, China and Russia.

Only by standing united as Europeans, [Maas maintains](#), do we have a chance of holding our own in that environment. Otherwise we will become the plaything of others.

Military development

The fact that Berlin also intends to continue to promote the

militarisation of the EU can be seen in the [trio programme](#) jointly formulated by the German, Portuguese, and Slovenian governments (who successively assume the EU presidency next year). The programme states that in the future, all aspects of the Common Security and Defence Policy will be enhanced. This pertains not only to a strategic dialogue and a strengthening of the arms industry within the EU, but also the further development of and coherence among the defence initiatives of the Union.

An important factor is also cooperation with NATO, which will include military mobility, cyber security and defence, development of capabilities, hybrid threats, capacity building. Not to be forgotten is the military assistance to civilian authorities and measures to enhance resilience/civil preparedness. Resilience here refers not only to society's capacity to withstand natural catastrophes and pandemics, but also an escalation of international conflicts including warfare.
