

European Press Review of 03/02/2015

MAIN FOCUS

US discusses weapons deliveries to Kiev

The US has no plans to [deliver weapons](#) to Kiev 'in the near future', an adviser to US President Obama stated on Monday in response to reports to that effect published in *The New York Times*. The US and Europe must arm Kiev, some commentators write. Others warn that Russia would see weapons from the West as a pretext for stepping up its intervention in eastern Ukraine.

Rzeczpospolita - Poland

Without weapons deliveries war will escalate

The arguments of those who continue to speak out against delivering weapons to Ukraine are incomprehensible in the eyes of the conservative daily Rzeczpospolita: "In this way the war will not only not be ended, but will even escalate. Closing our eyes to reality doesn't help. The diplomats have been visibly stumped for months. And it doesn't look like the separatists supported by Russia will respect the demarcation lines set down in the [Minsk Protocol](#) of September 2014. ... This conflict will continue because the Kremlin still hasn't achieved its goal of subjugating Ukraine. ... And incidentally no embargo was imposed on Ukraine. So there are no legal hurdles preventing us from selling it weapons." (03/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, Polish\)](#)

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Mladá fronta Dnes - Czech Republic

Europe fails to recognise risks in Ukraine

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Monday ruled out the possibility of weapons deliveries to Ukraine. The wrong choice, liberal daily Mladá fronta Dnes laments: "Luckily information has leaked out according to which the Americans are rethinking their approach. Secretary of State John Kerry travelled to Kiev on Thursday, so we may learn quite soon whether there's any substance to these reports. The argument in favour of abandoning Ukraine to its fate is that no one wants to get involved in a proxy war between Russia and the West. Because, critics argue, that would mean a return to the days of the Cold War. And God only knows what would come of that. We have bigger concerns right now than provoking an open conflict with Putin the Conqueror. And yet Angela Merkel's attitude is short-sighted and bad news from Europe. We don't recognise the danger and we can't deal with it appropriately." (03/02/2015)

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Kaleva - Finland

Don't give Russia a pretext for aggression

Weapons deliveries to Ukraine would only be counter-productive to finding a solution to the conflict, the liberal daily Kaleva fears: "Weapons deliveries from the US would merely give Russia a good excuse to become even more active in the war. ... The conflict that began in April and has developed into a war in eastern Ukraine has already claimed over 5,000 lives, while around 900,000 people have been forced to flee. The [price](#) of this war is already too high, and the international community must do more to put an end to the fighting. More weapons are now the last thing eastern Ukraine needs. And the longer the war lasts, the more difficult it will be to find a solution." (03/02/2015)

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Die Presse - Austria

Weapons more effective than sanctions?

Providing Ukraine with military aid offers the chance to reduce the losses on Kiev's side, the conservative daily Die Presse writes, but questions whether this can end the war: "Kiev's run-down army is fighting and suffering heavy losses against a [hybrid machinery](#) whose software consists of armed locals and whose hardware is cutting edge and comes from Russia. Estimates range from 1,000 men at the leadership and planning level (Nato) to 10,000 Russian soldiers (Kiev's estimate). The army does indeed have all lack 'intelligent' equipment: the plan to equip it with military technology - radars that can locate artillery and missile launchers and drones - should take priority over lethal weapons. Admittedly the decisive question is: can weapons make the Kremlin do what the sanctions have failed to do so far? Namely change Vladimir Putin's behaviour, who in view of the increased risks and financial costs is supposed to be forced to rethink his course?" (03/02/2015)

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POLITICS

Večernji List - Croatia

Syriza and Podemos don't want revolution

Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos are not communist parties but social democratic organisations along the lines of the British Labour Party under ex-prime minister Tony Blair, the conservative daily Večernji List explains: "If we examine the political philosophy of Podemos and Syriza we quickly conclude that they stand behind the idea of democratic market socialism of the type [Tony Blair](#) presented, but never managed to put into practice. The people behind these two parties are not revolutionaries or traditional communists who want to overthrow the system with a revolution. They are democrats who don't want capitalist society to move backwards. They want to initiate a new social evolutionary cycle in which the gigantic social differences are reduced to an acceptable level and prosperity and security is guaranteed not for all, but certainly for more people." (03/02/2015)

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Who's saying what [» Athens rebels against austerity dictates](#)

Wedomosti - Russia

Global perspectives: Russia disappointed with Tsipras

After just a week in office the government of the left-wing Syriza alliance has disappointed the hopes its election had inspired in Russia, journalist Kirill Kharatian writes in the Russian daily Wedomosti: "A Eurosceptic environment has allowed Tsipras to say that Greece is the guinea pig of Europe, that five years of pain and humiliation would be forgotten with a Syriza victory, that the victory of leftist parties would send a signal for real democracy across Europe, that the troika has no business bossing Greece around, etc. ... Even Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov promised financial aid to Greece. Unfortunately Alexis Tsipras has not become a hero for Russia. Because he's already [let on](#) that Greece never so much as considered not fulfilling its obligations to its creditors. ... All that just a week after the elections." (03/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, Russian\)](#)

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Who's saying what [» Athens rebels against austerity dictates](#)

Handelsblatt - Germany

German is net contributor for good reason

In the conflict over Greece's debt crisis, Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis has once again raised the topic of [German war debt](#) from the Second World War. He's not the only one to have forgotten how Europe has benefited from Germany's war debt, the liberal business paper Handelsblatt criticises: "Germany remade itself from scratch politically and economically after the war, also thanks to the Allies. The financial consequences of the war debt weren't resolved in the form of reparations - even if the Soviet Union dismantled part of the East German industry. No, the result was a united Europe in which the German Federal Republic was - and still is - ready to be a net giver. All those who've forgotten that in Athens can jolly well remember it again. And anyone in Germany who thinks they should be outraged at how overstrained the 'German paymaster' is can take this argument to London, Paris or Amsterdam and see how much sympathy they get there." (03/02/2015)

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Corriere del Ticino - Switzerland

Bern in a dilemma over immigration

A year after Switzerland's vote on the [immigration initiative](#) the EU leaders made no concessions to Swiss President Simonetta Sommaruga on the free movement of persons when she visited Brussels on Monday. The results of two referendums have put Sommaruga in a tough spot, the liberal daily Corriere del Ticino comments: "The new article in the Swiss constitution [The independent control of immigration] doesn't give the government free rein break with the bilateral freedom of movement agreement. On the contrary, it forces Bern to [negotiate](#) a new agreement with Brussels that is reconcilable with the annual maximum figures and contingents of the immigration initiative. ... But the constitutional article gives no indication of what is to be done if the negotiations with the EU fail - which is probable. Terminate the bilateral agreement? No, because for that the people would have to be consulted again, particularly since they voted for the agreement. And to disregard it would also be to ignore the will of the people." (03/02/2015)

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Dagbladet Information - Denmark

Young Danes more conservative than grandparents

Because this year is an election year in Denmark, eight and ninth grade pupils at 300 schools have carried out their own mock elections. The conservative camp scored a clear victory securing around 40 percent of the vote. These are the new rebels, the left-wing daily Information comments: "The left wing clearly has nothing more to offer our young. With the right-wing liberal Venstre as the undisputed winner, new political colours are dominating the children's room. The world view of the 1968 generation according to which the youth started off on the left and then gradually - with the purchase of Volvos and villas - moved to the right no longer fits. Today's younger generation begins where the big postwar generation ended - as precocious conservatives. ... The grandchildren of the 1968 generation stand for the conservative ideals of effectiveness, privatisation and traditional roles against which their grandparents rebelled. Even if these were just mock elections and weren't representative, the results are an expression of an increasingly Protestant ethic and a capitalist spirit." (03/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, Danish\)](#)

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REFLECTIONS

Financial Times - United Kingdom

Mark Mazower on the threat from the right for Europe

The EU-critical policies of left-leaning parties like [Syriza](#) or [Podemos](#) do not pose a threat to Europe - unlike right-wing and far-right parties, historian Mark Mazower warns in the conservative daily Financial Times: "Though critical of the direction the EU has taken, parties such as Syriza and Spain's Podemos remain staunchly Europeanist. Not so the forces of the right. [Golden Dawn](#), a frankly Nazi party, held its vote steady in the Greek election, coming third, despite much of its leadership being behind bars. ... The shaved heads of these muscle-bound hard men may not worry people outside Greece. But a shift rightward is under way elsewhere, too. ... It is a phenomenon found right across the continent. In short, the battle to defend the continent's shared currency is reviving a rightwing language of national purity, racism and independence." (30/01/2015)

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ABC - Spain

José María Carrascal's conservative praise for Podemos

Despite all the criticism of Podemos the conservative columnist José María Carrascal agrees with the new left-wing party on one issue in the daily newspaper ABC: "I agree with Podemos on one thing: its denunciation of a new class, a 'caste', which breaks the equality among the Spaniards and is therefore incompatible with democracy. It was the biggest mistake of the fathers of the constitution of 1978 that - perhaps out of lack of experience with democracy or perhaps because of our tendency to swing from one extreme to the other - we went from banning political parties [during the dictatorship] to giving them all the powers, the executive to which they are entitled, the legislative, which they should decide among themselves, and the judicial, which does not belong to them at all. Those new democrats accused Franco's supporters of believing that Spain belonged to them because they won the war. They seemed to believe it belonged to them simply because they had won the elections." (03/02/2015)

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ECONOMY

NRC Handelsblad - Netherlands

Dutch lottery a swindle

The Dutch national lottery deliberately misled participants by overstating the chances of winning, the country's highest court has ruled. The blurred boundary between a game of chance and fraud has been overstepped, the liberal daily NRC Handelsblad comments: "Strictly speaking it is the national lottery's job to deceive. The question is simply how far it can go. The consumer wants to have the illusion that they have a chance of winning a jackpot that will make them a multimillionaire. ... But you have to be extremely shameless to describe the non-distributed prizes of non-sold lottery tickets as 'winners'. ... But the lottery management doesn't want to admit its mistake. ... Clearly, exploiting the consumers' naivety makes you cynical and immoral. For years this state-owned company has been selling nonsense to gullible citizens and earning a whole lot of money in the process." (03/02/2015)

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Alan Greenspan: "Greece Will Leave The Eurozone; The Eurozone Won't Continue In Its Current Form"

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/08/2015 12:03 -0500

Every two weeks or so on average, we ask ourselves: *why do central bankers only tell the truth after they have quit their post* (rhetorically, of course). The last time it was the BOE's former head Mervyn King, who said that "**more monetary stimulus will not help the world economy return to strong growth.**" This took place long after the BOE, under his watch, unleashed its own QE back in the early days of the great financial crisis. Another example: back in November, the Fed's own former head, the person who single-handedly unleashed the great moderation and led to the current terminal financial state where the global economy bounces from one bubble to another even bigger bubble or else everything implodes, Alan Greenspan said "**Gold Is Currency; No Fiat Currency, Including the Dollar, Can Match It.**"

It was another statement by the maestro that has caught the world's attention, this time opining on Greece, when he told BBC Radio's the World This Weekend that "Greece will leave the Eurozone. **I don't see that it helps Greece to be in the Euro, and I certainly don't see that it helps the rest of the Eurozone.** It's just a matter of time before everyone recognizes that parting is the best strategy.... **At this stage I don't see any people who are willing to put up the funds for Greece... All the cards are being held by the members of the Eurozone.**" Naturally, this is just what *anyone* with a functioning frontal lobe (which immediately excludes all tenured economists) would have said 5 years ago.

And it wasn't just Greece that the Maestro decided to throw under the revisionist history bus: he took a stab at the Eurozone itself. "**The problem is that there there is no way that I can conceive of the euro of continuing, unless and until all of the members of eurozone become politically integrated - actually even just fiscally integrated won't do it.**"

His conclusion: "short of a political Union, I find it very difficult to foresee the Euro holding together in its current form. It probably could get a union of Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Finland for example. But not south Europe."

With anti-Europe, anti-austerity, anti-Merkel political parties storming to the forefront in most peripheral European nations, **Greenspan is right for once.**

Which is not to say he said anything that these pages haven't covered extensively in the past. Recall this exchange at the April 2013 ECB meeting:

*Scott Solano, DPA: Mr Draghi, I've got a couple of question from the viewers at Zero Hedge, and one of them goes like this: say the situation in Greece or Spain deteriorates even further, and they want to or are forced to step out of the Eurozone, **is there a plan in place so that the markets don't basically collapse?** Is there some kind of structural system, structural safety net, especially in the area of derivatives? And the second questions is: you spoke earlier about the Emergency Liquidity Assistance, and what would have happened to the ELA in Cyprus, the approximately €10 billion, **if the country had decided to leave the Eurozone?***

*Mario Draghi, ECB: Well you really are asking questions that are so hypothetical that I don't have an answer to them. Well, I may have a partial answer. **These questions are formulated by people who vastly underestimate what the Euro means for the Europeans, for the Euro area. They vastly underestimate the amount of political capital that has been invested in the Euro.** And so they keep on asking questions like: **"If the Euro breaks down, and if a country leaves the Euro, it's not like a sliding door. It's a very important thing. It's a project in the European Union. That's why you have a very hard time asking people like me "what would have happened if." No Plan B.***

So much for the European "Union" then? Worse, **it looks like Europe's political capital just ran out** and Zero Hedge, even if it is filled with people "**vastly underestimate the amount of political capital that has been invested in the Euro,**" can't wait to ask Mario Draghi the logical follow-up question in an upcoming ECB press conference following the Grexit: "**what happened?**"

KRIEG DER ÖKONOMEN

08.02.15

Hans-Werner Sinn soll mundtot gemacht werden

Eine beispiellose Attacke soll Deutschlands prominentesten Ökonomen treffen. Sie zeigt, wie sich die Zunft dem Zeitgeist anpasst und die lästige Ordnungspolitik zu diskreditieren versucht.

Von **Dorothea Siems**, Chefkorrespondentin für Wirtschaftspolitik



Foto: dpalfo-Chef und Top-Ökonom Hans-Werner Sinn

Der Mann ist unbequem. Wenn es einen Ökonomen gibt, der deutsche Politiker regelmäßig in Erklärungsnot oder gar Rage bringt, dann ist das **Hans-Werner Sinn**. Ob Zuwanderung, Euro-Rettung, Klimawandel oder Sozialstaat – der Chef des Münchner Ifo-Instituts mischt sich mit seinen messerscharfen Analysen in alle relevanten Gesellschaftsdebatten ein und schert sich dabei herzlich wenig um politische Korrektheit.

Für Linke und Gewerkschafter ist der Professor mit dem markanten Kapitansbart ein Neoliberaler und damit von jeher ein Feindbild. Mittlerweile ist auch die Union, die früher häufig seinen Rat suchte, auf Distanz gegangen.

Vor allem seine wiederholten Warnungen vor den horrenden **Risiken der Euro-Politik** stoßen im Konrad-Adenauer-Haus sauer auf. Und Finanzminister Wolfgang Schäuble warf ihm wegen seiner Forderung nach einem Austritt Griechenlands aus der Währungsunion "Milchmädchenrechnungen" vor.

Doch an Einfluss auf die öffentliche Meinung hat die mahnende Stimme aus München deshalb nicht verloren. Im Gegenteil. Der 66-Jährige ist Stammgast in den Talkshows, schreibt Bestseller, gibt laufend Interviews und sorgt mit seinen provokanten Thesen immer wieder für Schlagzeilen.

Man will ihn zum Populisten stempeln

Dabei scheut er sich nicht, die komplexe Welt der Wirtschaft mitunter so stark zu vereinfachen, dass auch Laien die Zusammenhänge verstehen. Ihm ist es zu verdanken, dass international über gigantische Risiken debattiert wird, die zusätzlich zu den offiziellen Rettungsschirmen im europäischen Zentralbankensystem (Stichwort: Target 2) schlummern und die zuvor selbst Experten nicht bekannt waren.

Zuletzt sorgte der streitbare Forscher mit Berechnungen für Furore, dass **Zuwanderer** für den Fiskus ein Minusgeschäft sind – eine These, die Sinn den Vorwurf der Nähe zu den Rechtspopulisten von Pegida und AfD einbrachte, was der Parteilose von sich weist. Tatsächlich ist Sinn, der immer wieder auch unbequeme Reformen anmahnt, kein Populist, er ist nur nicht bereit, seine Erkenntnisse dem konsensverliebten Zeitgeist anzupassen.

Dass Sinns Schlussfolgerungen beim Bürger häufig auf Zustimmung stoßen und er dadurch auch die Politik unter Druck setzt, ärgert offenbar manchen seiner Kollegen, die andere Meinungen vertreten als er, über alle Maßen. Unter der Überschrift "Der falsche Prophet" ließ das "Handelsblatt" jüngst fünf Wirtschaftsforscher aufmarschieren, die sich über die "fünf Irrtümer" des Hans-Werner Sinn ereiferten.

In der beispiellosen Attacke wurden dem Starökonom von seinen Kollegen Fehlanalysen, Panikmache und die Verwendung falscher Zahlen vorgeworfen. Und einer dieser Kritiker mahnte Sinn gar, künftig solider zu analysieren, denn "es ist schon viel an Ansehen der Volkswirtschaftslehre verspielt worden".

Die "FAZ" nahm ihn gegen das "Handelsblatt" in Schutz

Die "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" schickte daraufhin ebenfalls namhafte Ökonomen ins Feld, die Sinn bescheinigten, "der innovativste und einflussreichste Ökonom der letzten zwei bis drei Jahrzehnte in Deutschland" zu sein. Seinen Kritikern attestierten sie "ein merkwürdiges Verständnis von Ökonomie" und legten dar, wie voreingenommen und überzogen deren Argumentation war.

Dass sich der erbitterte Ökonomenstreit an Sinn und seinen Thesen entzündet, ist kein Zufall. Der Ifo-Chef ist der prominenteste und einflussreichste Vertreter der **klassischen Ordnungspolitik** in Deutschland. In seinem erfolgreichsten Buch "Ist Deutschland noch zu retten?" von 2003 hatte Sinn viele Reformen, die mit der Agenda 2010 später und der Riester-Rentenreform umgesetzt wurden, gefordert. Die Verbesserung der Angebotsbedingungen machte Deutschland, den einstigen "kranken Mann Europas", wieder wettbewerbsfähig und löste ein Beschäftigungswunder aus.

Selbst die Gewerkschaften trugen damals mit einer moderaten Tarifpolitik den wirtschaftsfreundlichen Kurs mit. Doch mit Ausbruch der Finanzkrise schlug das Pendel zurück. Nun wird dem Staat mehr zugetraut als dem Markt, und der **Keynesianismus**, der die notfalls mit immer höheren Schulden finanzierte Nachfrage in den Mittelpunkt rückt, erlebt eine Renaissance.

Auch die Politik unter Angela Merkel setzt in der permanenten Krise auf Pragmatismus, ordnungspolitische Leitlinien zählen immer weniger. Dafür sorgt auch Vizekanzler Sigmar Gabriel, der keinen Hehl daraus macht, dass er den von Ordoliberalen dominierten Sachverständigenrat und dessen Jahresgutachten für überflüssig hält.

Marcel Fratzscher ist der neue Liebling der Politik

Der SPD-Chef hat den Präsidenten des Deutschen Instituts für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), **Marcel Fratzscher**, zu seinem wichtigsten Wirtschaftsberater auserkoren. Fratzscher steht für ökonomische Flexibilität, die man auch als Beliebigkeit bezeichnen könnte. Den Bundesfinanzminister hält der DIW-Chef für zu wenig ausgabenfreudig. Dafür lobt er den Präsidenten der Europäischen Zentralbank (EZB), Mario Draghi, für dessen Strategie des ultrabiligen Geldes.

Genau wie Hans-Werner Sinn will auch Fratzscher politischen Einfluss nehmen. Und das gilt vor allem in der Frage der Euro-Rettungspolitik, in der die beiden Forscher entgegengesetzte Positionen vertreten. Und so ist es kein Wunder, dass Gabriels Berater die Gelegenheit wahrnahm, Sinn im "Handelsblatt" niederzuschreiben.

Was die Attacke auf Sinn so perfide macht, ist die Herabwürdigung seiner Analysen als mangelhaft. Tatsächlich jedoch kommen seine Kritiker nur aufgrund anderer Daten oder veränderter Annahmen zu anderen Schlussfolgerungen. Ökonomie ist keine Naturwissenschaft. Sie arbeitet mit Modellen, die zwangsläufig nie die ganze Realität abbilden.

Dass Fratzscher die Target-2-Salden für unbedenklich hält, liegt vor allem daran, dass er den Austritt eines Euro-Lands oder gar den Zusammenbruch der Währungsunion generell ausschließt. Sinn hingegen hält das Scheitern für ein denkbare Szenario. Und er will mit seinen Warnungen keineswegs Ängste schüren, wie Fratzscher moniert, sondern er plädiert dafür, die Risiken auf praktikable Weise einzudämmen.

Sinn bleibt weiter politisch unkorrekt, zum Glück

Ob man in der Europapolitik eher die Position Sinns teilt oder aber Fratzscher zustimmt, ist weniger eine ökonomische als eine politische Frage. Der Professor aus München pocht auf eine Stabilitätsunion, in der nicht die hiesigen Steuerzahler für die fehlende Ausgabendisziplin anderer Länder zahlen müssen. Der DIW-Chef hingegen hält Merckels Sparkurs für die falsche Strategie im Kampf gegen die europäische Schuldenmisere und propagiert stattdessen schuldenfinanzierte Wachstumsimpulse.

Geradezu irrationale Züge trägt die Debatte über Zuwanderung, die Sinn mit Berechnungen auslöste, in denen er die von Migranten gezahlten Einzahlungen und Sozialabgaben den empfangenen Leistungen gegenüberstellte. Während zuvor eine [Studie des Zentrums für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung](#) zu dem Ergebnis gekommen war, dass jeder hier lebende Ausländer dem Fiskus ein Plus bringt, kam der Ifo-Präsident auf eine negative Steuer-Transfer-Bilanz.

Doch Sinn hat sich keineswegs verrechnet, wie ihm vorgeworfen wird. Er vertritt lediglich die Ansicht, dass eine derartige Rechnung unvollständig ist, wenn den Migranten neben den direkt empfangenen Transfers nicht auch anteilmäßig die Ausgaben des Staates für Straßen, Polizei oder Verwaltung zugeordnet werden.

Doch weil sich die Bilanz dann ins Negative verkehrte, schwappte eine Welle der Empörung über den Starökonom. Sinn aber bleibt politisch unkorrekt – zum Glück.

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FUNNY: How QE Helped Main Street

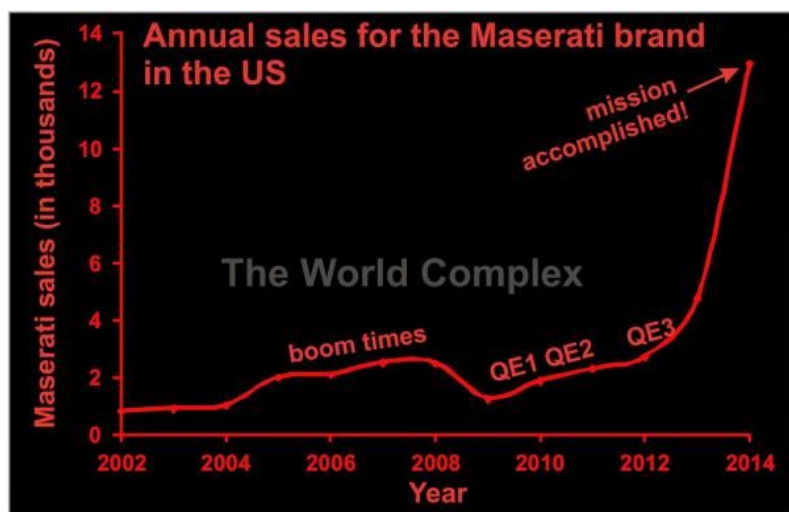
Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/08/2015 10:25 -0500

Submitted by [Michael Gipp](#) of [The World Complex](#)

How QE helped Main Street, Example 2: Maserati dealerships

I haven't written on [this topic](#) in a long time, but it is time once again to look at the magnificent benefits that have accrued to main street businesses as a result of [bailing out bad bets of banks](#). Today I have selected another typical main street business--the car dealership. I have randomly selected the Maserati brand as the subject of today's investigation.

Sales data for Maserati sold in North America are available [here](#).



Annual sales of the Maserati brand (in number of cars sold) ranged from less than a thousand per year in 2002 to nearly 13,000 in 2014, thanks to the benevolent leadership of the Fed.

This is a chart that truly screams "Recovery!" In fact, it is quite clear that things are far better now than they have ever been before. If your life seems to be at odds with the obvious economic reality, you are clearly not working hard enough (or perhaps not at all).

All the propaganda to the effect that the goal of [quantitative easing was to make the richer even richer](#) still is thoroughly debunked. We can see that small, struggling family businesses like [high-end diamond retailers](#) and Maserati dealerships have indeed benefited from quantitative easing.

Readers' comments:

There's a strong correlation between Maserati ownership and girlfriends/wives with silicone boobs. As boob enhancements have become more common and mainstream, the level of Maserati ownership has naturally risen to keep up. Annual sales of penis pills and mens' cologne are also way up.

Life's been good to me so far.

To be honest, I did an inverse leveraged bet on the Ruble last year at 1000:1. I bought most of those Maseratis myself. I have them stored underground in Yucca mountain as an 'investment'. That's why you're not allowed to dispose of radioactive waste from nuclear power plants there.

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The Opinion Pages | OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Don't Arm Ukraine

By JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER FEB. 8, 2015

The [Ukraine](#) crisis is almost a year old and [Russia](#) is winning. The separatists in eastern Ukraine are gaining ground and Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, shows no signs of backing down in the face of Western economic sanctions.

Unsurprisingly, a growing chorus of voices in the United States is calling for arming Ukraine. A recent report from three leading American think tanks endorses sending Kiev advanced weaponry, and the White House's nominee for secretary of defense, Ashton B. Carter, said last week to the Senate armed services committee, "I very much incline in that direction."

They are wrong. Going down that road would be a huge mistake for the United States, NATO and Ukraine itself. Sending weapons to Ukraine will not rescue its army and **will instead lead to an escalation in the fighting. Such a step is especially dangerous because Russia has thousands of nuclear weapons and is seeking to defend a vital strategic interest.**

There is no question that Ukraine's military is badly outgunned by the separatists, who have Russian troops and weapons on their side. **Because the balance of power decisively favors Moscow, Washington would have to send large amounts of equipment for Ukraine's army to have a fighting chance.**

But **the conflict will not end there. Russia would counter-escalate, taking away any temporary benefit Kiev might get from American arms.** The authors of the think tank study concede this, noting that "even with enormous support from the West, the Ukrainian Army will not be able to defeat a determined attack by the Russian military." **In short, the United States cannot win an arms race with Russia over Ukraine and thereby ensure Russia's defeat on the battlefield.**

Proponents of arming Ukraine have a second line of argument. The key to success, they maintain, is not to defeat Russia militarily, **but to raise the costs of fighting to the point where Mr. Putin will cave. The pain will supposedly compel Moscow to withdraw its troops from Ukraine and allow it to join the European Union and NATO and become an ally of the West.**

This coercive strategy is also unlikely to work, no matter how much punishment the West inflicts. What advocates of arming Ukraine fail to understand is that **Russian leaders believe their country's core strategic interests are at stake in Ukraine;** they are unlikely to give ground, even if it means absorbing huge costs.

Great powers react harshly when distant rivals project military power into their neighborhood, much less attempt to make a country on their border an ally. This is why the United States has the Monroe Doctrine, and today no American leader would ever tolerate Canada or Mexico joining a military alliance headed by another great power.

Russia is no exception in this regard. Thus Mr. Putin has not budged in the face of sanctions and is unlikely to make meaningful concessions if the costs of the fighting in Ukraine increase.

Upping the ante in Ukraine also risks unwanted escalation. Not only would the fighting in eastern Ukraine be sure to intensify, but it could also spread to other areas. The consequences for Ukraine, which already faces profound economic and social problems, would be disastrous.

The possibility that Mr. Putin might end up making nuclear threats may seem remote, but if the goal of arming Ukraine is to drive up the costs of Russian interference and eventually put Moscow in an acute situation, it **cannot be ruled out**. If Western pressure succeeded and Mr. Putin felt desperate, he would have a **powerful incentive to try to rescue the situation by rattling the nuclear saber**.

Our understanding of the mechanisms of escalation in crises and war is limited at best, although we know the risks are considerable. **Pushing a nuclear-armed Russia into a corner would be playing with fire.**

Advocates of arming Ukraine recognize the escalation problem, which is why they stress giving Kiev “defensive,” not “offensive,” weapons. Unfortunately, there is no useful distinction between these categories: All weapons can be used for attacking and defending. **The West can be sure, though, that Moscow will not see those American weapons as “defensive,”** given that Washington is determined to reverse the status quo in eastern Ukraine.

The only way to solve the Ukraine crisis is diplomatically, not militarily. Germany’s chancellor, Angela Merkel, seems to recognize that fact, as she has said Germany will not ship arms to Kiev. Her problem, however, is that she does not know how to bring the crisis to an end.

She and other European leaders still labor under the delusion that Ukraine can be pulled out of Russia’s orbit and incorporated into the West, and that Russian leaders must accept that outcome. They will not.

To save Ukraine and eventually restore a working relationship with Moscow, **the West should seek to make Ukraine a neutral buffer state between Russia and NATO**. It should look like Austria during the Cold War. Toward that end, the West should explicitly take European Union and NATO expansion off the table, and emphasize that its goal is a nonaligned Ukraine that does not threaten Russia. The United States and its allies **should also work with Mr. Putin to rescue Ukraine’s economy**, a goal that is clearly in everyone’s interest.

It is essential that Russia help end the fighting in eastern Ukraine and that Kiev regain control over that region. **Still, the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk should be given substantial autonomy, and protection for Russian language rights should be a top priority.**

Crimea, a casualty of the West’s attempt to march NATO and the European Union up to Russia’s doorstep, is surely lost for good. It is time to end that imprudent policy before more damage is done — to Ukraine and to relations between Russia and the West.

John J. Mearsheimer, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, is the author of “The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.”

Journal Interview with Frederick B. Hodges: The View From NATO's Russian Front

Sohrab Ahmari By Sohrab Ahmari 9 février 2015

Wiesbaden, Germany -- "I believe the Russians are mobilizing right now for a war that they think is going to happen in five or six years -- not that they're going to start a war in five or six years, but I think they are anticipating that things are going to happen, and that they will be in a war of some sort, of some scale, with somebody within the next five or six years."

So says Lt. Gen. Frederick "Ben" Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe. It's Monday evening at the Army's Lucius D. Clay garrison near Wiesbaden, a small town in southwest Germany. The air outside is freezing, the ground coated by a thin layer of snow. Moscow lies 2,400 kilometers to the east, but Russia comes up almost immediately as I sit down to dinner with Gen. Hodges and one of his aides in a cozy dining room at the base.

"Strong Europe!" reads a sign on one of the walls. Next to it is the U.S. Army Europe insignia, a burning sword set against a blue shield. The two signs represent the strategic framework the three-star general has introduced -- building on America's decades-long role on the Continent -- since taking command last year of the 30,000 or so U.S. soldiers stationed in Europe.

The U.S. military presence in Europe is more vital at this moment than it has been in many years. **American engagement is essential if the West is to deter a revanchist Russia that has set out to "redraw the boundaries of Europe," Gen. Hodges says with a native Floridian's drawl.**

He points to the recent increase in violence in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Kremlin forces in January assaulted the Black Sea port of Mariupol, killing 30 civilians, and are now consolidating their gains.

"What's happening in eastern Ukraine is very serious," the 56-year-old West Point alumnus says. "When they fired into Mariupol, that got my attention. Mariupol is an important place, city of 500,000 on the Black Sea. Russia has to resupply Crimea by sea or air, and that is very expensive, so obviously they would like to do it over land. Mariupol sits right in the way. They would really like to drive right through there."

What Russian President Vladimir Putin "has done in Ukraine," he says, "is a manifestation of a strategic view of the world. So when you look at the amount of equipment that has been provided, and the quality and sophistication of the equipment that has been provided to what I would call his proxies . . . they clearly have no intention of leaving there."

The new weapons Mr. Putin has supplied include "some of the latest air-defense systems," says Gen. Hodges. "They also have brought in some of the latest, most effective jamming, what we would call electronic-warfare, systems." This level of assistance suggests Ukraine "is not a foray, not a demonstration. They are deploying capabilities way above and beyond anything that any militia or rebel organization could ever come up with."

The fact that the political class in the West is still splitting hairs about the nature of the insurgency in Ukraine is testament to the success of the Kremlin's strategy of waging war without admitting it. "When you saw video of the Spetsnaz [Russian special forces], the so-called little green men" in eastern Ukraine, the general says, "unless you absolutely know nothing about military stuff, how they carry themselves, the fact that they were all perfectly in uniform, that's hard to do. It's hard to get soldiers to stay in uniform and everybody carrying their weapon the right way all the time. That's how you tell the difference between a militia, or rebels who have a variety of uniforms, and this group who are all perfectly in uniform."

Gen. Hodges then strips his own Ranger badge from a Velcro patch on his uniform sleeve, just as those well-organized soldiers aiding the Ukrainian insurgents are badgeless. **"I can take my patch off my uniform and say I'm not**

in the Army anymore," he chuckles. "So there's a reluctance to acknowledge it. I can understand that. This has huge implications. **But that's what so-called hybrid warfare is all about. It's about creating ambiguity, giving people who don't want to believe it an excuse to not believe. Or to create enough uncertainty so that the responses are slow, delayed, hesitant.**"

Such hesitation has already worked for Mr. Putin, and **contrasting Russia's military buildup with anemic military spending in the West gives the general further reason for concern.**

The Russians have "got some forces in Transnistria," he says of the state that broke away from Moldova in the 1990s. "They've got forces in Georgia. And I think they view China as their existential threat, so they've got a lot of capacity out there." The Russian military is thus already somewhat stretched, and Moscow had to carve out from existing units the battalion task groups currently arrayed near eastern Ukraine. Yet "they are clearly on a path to develop, to increase, their capacity," Gen. Hodges says. Add to this expansion that "they've got very good equipment, extremely good communications equipment, their [electronic-warfare] capability, T-80 tanks." How long will it take for Russia to reach its desired military strength? "I think within another two or three years they will have that capacity," he says.

Gen. Hodges notes that **the Russians already have an advantage in the information battleground: "They're not burdened with the responsibility to tell the truth. So they just hammer away, and whenever somebody in the West puts out a blog or a tweet, there's an immediate counterattack by these trolls."**

Russia Today, the Kremlin's foreign-language television service, is estimated to be within reach of **600 million viewers world-wide. Russia Today's YouTube channel has received a billion views, making it one of the most-watched channels on the online-video platform.**

Then there is the Kremlin's sheer aggressiveness, not least on the nuclear front. The Pentagon last year announced that it is removing missiles from 50 of America's underground silos, converting B-52 long-range bombers to conventional use and disabling 56 submarine-based nuclear-launch tubes -- all well ahead of the 2018 New Start treaty deadline. Moscow, by contrast, has been simulating nuclear strikes on Western capitals as part of annual exercises.

Gen. Hodges won't comment on the U.S. strategic-force posture in Europe other than to say he is "confident in that process." But he adds that the fact that the Russians rehearse nuclear-strike scenarios "shows that they're not worried about conveying a stark message like that. **You know, frankly, you hear this often from many people in the West, 'Oh, we don't want to provoke the Russians.' I think concern about provoking the Russians is probably misplaced. You can't provoke them. They're already on a path to do what they want to do.**"

Fear of provoking Russia has been part of the recent debate over providing lethal aid to Kiev. As a member of the military, Gen Hodges won't weigh in directly in the Washington policy debate. "What's more important is this," he says. **"We have to have a strategy. Just military aid is not a strategy." Western leaders should first determine what outcome they'd like to see emerge in the region, he says, and then apply a "whole-of-government" approach, including a military dimension, to achieve it.**

Before being posted here, and in between multiple post-9/11 deployments to the Middle East, Gen. Hodges served as an Army congressional liaison in Washington. What he learned was that lawmakers' "interests will tend to be domestic," he says.

"If you're the delegation from North Carolina that cares about Fort Bragg, you're going to want to see as much capability as possible and money spent in North Carolina. Same thing at Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Lewis, Washington," he says. "But there is no congressman for Wiesbaden, no senator for Bavaria."

Many Americans and their representatives are tempted to regard Crimea as a distant geographical abstraction -- and to say that it's about time Europeans met their own defense needs instead of financing bloated welfare states. "It's a fair question," Gen. Hodges says. **"Why won't the Germans do more? Why won't the Brits do more? You'll get that from people in the States. I've never been bashful about telling allies, 'Hey, you have a responsibility here, too. You all agreed to spend 2% of your GDP on defense. Right now only four countries are doing it.'"**

Yet the failure of many of European leaders to live up to their defense commitments "doesn't change our interest," Gen. Hodges says. "And the U.S. economic link to Europe, to the EU, dwarfs any other economic link in the world, anywhere in the Pacific, China, India, you name it. So if for no other reason it's in our interest that Europe be stable, that people make money so they can buy U.S. products. . . . We provide capability assurance here by being present here."

Gen. Hodges says there is also a huge payoff in U.S. security from U.S.-European cooperation. The main lesson of the post-9/11 wars is that "we are not going to do anything by ourselves militarily," he notes. The U.S. "needs the capacity that other countries can bring." These benefits come "from a relatively small investment -- I mean, U.S. Army Europe is 2% of the Army's budget and about 5% of the Army's manpower. . . . You can't sit back in Virginia, Texas or Oregon and build relationships with people here." He quotes his predecessor, Lt. Gen. Donald Campbell: "You can't surge trust."

Nor can the U.S. project national power world-wide, as it has since the end of World War II, with an overstretched Army. "There are 10 division headquarters in the Army," he says. "Nine of them are committed right now. I've never seen that. I don't think at the height of Iraq and Afghanistan you had nine out of 10 division headquarters committed against some requirement." That leaves little in reserve if another conflict breaks out.

To a commander like Gen. Hodges, the strain on the Army caused by budget sequestration is palpable. "With the possibility of sequestration hanging over our head, the Army will have to go to 420,000" personnel, he says. "That's about another 80,000 below where we are now. . . . The strength of the Army at the height of the buildup was about 560,000."

What Gen. Hodges fears is a "hollow" Army, in which commanders will have to forego a capable and sufficiently large personnel, readiness or modernization to meet budget requirements. To serve its purpose, however, an Army needs a depth of resources at its disposal.

"We're not a business," he says. "If you run a Napa [auto parts] franchise, the last thing you want is anything on the shelf. You basically want it coming out of the delivery truck to the customer, so you don't have money tied up in inventory. In the military, that's exactly what you want. You want stuff on the shelf, because you can't possibly know how many customers you might have."

In the Army, "customers" are global crises. "What are the three biggest things that have been on the news this past year?" Gen. Hodges asks. "Russia in Ukraine. Ebola. ISIL. A year ago, who had that on their list of things that are going to go wrong? Not all the geniuses in the think tanks and in all the agencies. I certainly didn't."

Even with supplies on the U.S. military's shelves thinning, there is no bigger deterrent to Vladimir Putin and other bad actors than the knowledge that men like Gen. Hodges and the forces he commands are working in customer service.

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Forderungen an Deutschland


Die Zeit für Reparationen ist vorbei

Immer noch wird Deutschland mit Reparationsforderungen konfrontiert – wie jüngst aus Griechenland. Auch aus Italien und Polen, sogar aus den Vereinigten Staaten gab es Forderungen.

09.02.2015, von REINHARD MÜLLER



Lingiades in Griechenland

© DPA  „Rechtsweg abgeschlossen“: Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck 2014 am Mahnmal des SS-Massakers von

Auch bald siebzig Jahre nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs wird Deutschland immer wieder mit Reparationsforderungen konfrontiert. Nicht nur aus Griechenland; **es gab Forderungen aus Italien und Polen, sogar aus den Vereinigten Staaten** während der Zwangsarbeiterdebatte. **Die Bundesregierung hat solche Forderungen bisher stets zurückgewiesen.** Nachdem das Athener Goethe-Institut 2001 wegen angeblicher Forderungen aufgrund eines deutschen Kriegsverbrechens gepfändet worden war, sprach die deutsche Regierung von einem „deutlichen Rechtsbruch“. **Mehrfach machte sie klar, dass die Reparationsfrage fünfzig Jahre nach Kriegsende „ihre Berechtigung verloren“ habe.**



Autor: Reinhard Müller, Jahrgang 1968, in der politischen Redaktion verantwortlich für „Zeitgeschehen“ und für „Staat und Recht“. Folgen:

Tatsächlich kam es nach dem Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts zu einer „abschließenden Regelung in bezug auf Deutschland“, dem Zwei-plus-vier-Vertrag. Die Bezeichnung „Friedensvertrag“ vermied man, um nicht eine neue Reparationsdebatte zu entfachen. Doch sollte der Vertrag einen Schlusspunkt setzen und Deutschland (also die Bundesrepublik, die DDR und Berlin) in die Souveränität entlassen. Reparationsforderungen – etwa durch den polnischen Staat – hätten spätestens zu diesem Zeitpunkt geltend gemacht werden müssen.

Durch bisherige Leistungen abgegolten?

Selbst wer anderer Auffassung ist, muss sich fragen lassen, ob nicht etwaige Forderungen gegenüber Deutschland durch bisherige Leistungen bereits erfüllt wären. Zudem hat **der Internationale Gerichtshof in Den Haag vor zwei Jahren mit Blick auf Italien entschieden, dass Deutschland nicht vor ausländischen Gerichten wegen NS-Verbrechen verklagt werden darf.** Italien, das deutsches Eigentum schon pfänden ließ, habe seine Pflicht verletzt, Deutschlands Immunität zu respektieren. **Berlin ist demnach nicht zur Zahlung von Wiedergutmachung an einzelne Opfer oder Angehörige von Opfern deutscher Kriegsverbrechen verpflichtet.** Die dazu in Italien gefällten Urteile verstoßen gegen das Völkerrecht.

Tatsächlich hatte Italien schon 1947 auf Reparationen verzichtet, 1961 zahlte Berlin gleichwohl 40 Millionen Mark Entschädigung. Im Jahr 2008 hatte sich Berlin in Abstimmung mit der italienischen Regierung zur Anrufung des Internationalen Gerichtshofs entschlossen. Der befand nun, Italien hätte Klagen von Privatpersonen gegen Deutschland vor italienischen Gerichten gar nicht zulassen dürfen. Auch die Beschlagnahmung deutschen Eigentums in Italien verstoße gegen Völkerrecht, so die Richter. Italien müsse dafür sorgen, dass entsprechende Urteile nicht vollstreckt würden. Auch habe Rom den Grundsatz der Immunität verletzt, indem es in Italien Entscheidungen griechischer Gerichte für vollstreckbar erklärte, die sich auf deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Griechenland bezogen.

Deutschland kann künftige Klagen nicht unterbinden

Deutschland wiederum scheiterte in Den Haag mit dem Versuch, solche Klagen wie die Italiens für die Zukunft zu unterbinden. Ein Gericht in Rom etwa hatte neun Familien von Opfern eines 1944 verübten Massakers das Recht auf Entschädigungen zugesprochen. Es ging um die Ermordung von mehr als 200 Menschen. Verhandlungen sind weiterhin möglich, doch die Zeit für Reparationen ist vorbei.

Auch vor dem Europäischen Gerichtshof für Menschenrechte waren Nachkommen der Opfer eines Massakers der Waffen-SS im griechischen Distomo von 1944 gescheitert. **Der Menschenrechtsgerichtshof hob 2011 hervor, dass die Menschenrechtskonvention den Mitgliedstaaten keine Verpflichtung auferlege, Wiedergutmachung für Schäden zu leisten, die ihre Vorgängerstaaten verursacht hätten.** In diesem Fall seien die deutschen Gerichte zu dem Ergebnis gekommen, dass die Kläger keinen Anspruch auf Entschädigung hätten.

Die Straßburger Richter befanden, dass die deutschen Gerichte nationales und internationales Recht nicht willkürlich angewendet hätten. Die Beschwerdeführer hätten keine „berechtigte Erwartung“ haben können, für den erlittenen Schaden entschädigt zu werden. Es gibt somit weder individuell noch von Seiten der Staaten noch Raum für Reparationsforderungen.

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The Opinion Pages | OP-ED COLUMNIST

Nobody Understands Debt

FEB. 9, 2015



Paul Krugman

Many economists, including Janet Yellen, view global economic troubles since 2008 largely as a story about “deleveraging” — a simultaneous attempt by debtors almost everywhere to reduce their liabilities. Why is deleveraging a problem? Because my spending is your income, and your spending is my income, so if everyone slashes spending at the same time, incomes go down around the world.

Or as [Ms. Yellen put it](#) in 2009, “Precautions that may be smart for individuals and firms — and indeed essential to return the economy to a normal state — nevertheless magnify the distress of the economy as a whole.”

So how much progress have we made in returning the economy to that “normal state”? None at all. You see, policy makers have been basing their actions on a false view of what debt is all about, and their attempts to reduce the problem have actually made it worse.

First, the facts: Last week, the McKinsey Global Institute issued a report titled “[Debt and \(Not Much\) Deleveraging](#),” which found, basically, that no nation has reduced its ratio of total debt to G.D.P. Household debt is down in some countries, especially in the United States. But it’s up in others, and even where there has been significant private deleveraging, government debt has risen by more than private debt has fallen.

You might think our failure to reduce debt ratios shows that we aren’t trying hard enough — that families and governments haven’t been making a serious effort to tighten their belts, and that what the world needs is, yes, more austerity. But we have, in fact, had unprecedented austerity. As [the International Monetary Fund](#) has pointed out, real government spending excluding interest has fallen across wealthy nations — there have been deep cuts by the troubled debtors of Southern Europe, but there have also been cuts in countries, like Germany and the United States, that can borrow at some of the lowest interest rates in history.

All this austerity has, however, only made things worse — and predictably so, because demands that everyone tighten their belts were based on a misunderstanding of the role debt plays in the economy.

You can see that misunderstanding at work every time someone rails against deficits with slogans like “[Stop stealing from our kids](#).” It sounds right, if you don’t think about it: Families who run up debts make themselves poorer, so isn’t that true when we look at overall national debt?

No, it isn’t. An indebted family owes money to other people; the world economy as a whole owes money to itself. And while it’s true that countries can borrow from other countries, America has actually been borrowing less from abroad since 2008 than it did before, and Europe is a net lender to the rest of the world.

Because [debt is money we owe to ourselves](#), it does not directly make the economy poorer (and paying it off doesn’t make us richer). True, debt can pose a threat to financial stability — but the situation is not improved if efforts to reduce debt end up pushing the economy into deflation and depression.

Which brings us to current events, for there is a direct connection between the overall failure to deleverage and the emerging political crisis in Europe.

European leaders completely bought into the notion that the economic crisis was brought on by too much spending, by nations living beyond their means. The way forward, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany insisted, was a return to frugality. Europe, she declared, should emulate the famously thrifty Swabian housewife.

This was a prescription for slow-motion disaster. European debtors did, in fact, need to tighten their belts — but the austerity they were actually forced to impose was incredibly savage. Meanwhile, Germany and other core economies — which needed to spend more, to offset belt-tightening in the periphery — also tried to spend less. The result was to create an environment in which reducing debt ratios was impossible: Real growth slowed to a crawl, inflation fell to almost nothing and outright deflation has taken hold in the worst-hit nations.

Suffering voters put up with this policy disaster for a remarkably long time, believing in the promises of the elite that they would soon see their sacrifices rewarded. But as the pain went on and on, with no visible progress, radicalization was inevitable. Anyone surprised by the left’s victory in Greece, or the surge of [anti-establishment forces in Spain](#), hasn’t been paying attention.

Nobody knows what happens next, although bookmakers are now giving better than even odds that Greece will exit the euro. Maybe the damage would stop there, but I don’t believe it — a Greek exit is all too likely to threaten the whole currency project. And if the euro does fail, here’s what should be written on its tombstone: “Died of a bad analogy.”

WORLD WAR II

Gauck visits site of WWII massacre in Greece on final day of trip

German President Joachim Gauck has asked the families of victims of a town wiped out by German soldiers in WWII for 'forgiveness.' Gauck visited the memorial site amid calls in Greece for more reparation payments.

In the morning of his final day in Greece, German President Gauck met with local business owners and trainees at a local school of tourism in the country's capital, Athens.

Economic relations between Germany and Greece have stood at the center of the two nations' diplomatic ties in recent years. But on Friday, it was a troubled relationship from many decades ago that would be the focus of Gauck's last hours in Greece before returning to Berlin.

In the early afternoon, the German president visited the site where the town of Lingiades once stood.

In October 1943, German soldiers under Adolf Hitler's Nazi dictatorship wiped out the entire village, located in Greece's northwest, killing over 90 civilians. The motive for the obliteration of Lingiades was the assassination of a German commander.

"With shame and pain I ask in the name of Germany the families of the victims for forgiveness ... I bow in front of the victims for this monstrous crime," Gauck said after laying a wreath at a memorial site. "We have to do everything in our power so that what happened is not forgotten."

"What happened was a brutal injustice," he said, adding that he wished those words had been uttered by the perpetrators or others held accountable after the war.

"These unspoken sentences that make up the foundation of [our other debt to our victims] because they banish even the victims from memory."

Greek President Karolos Papoulias honored the victims alongside Gauck. Following the memorial, the German president traveled to the neighboring town of Ioannina to meet with representatives from the Jewish community. The community claims to have paid the equivalent of 45 million euros to Nazi forces in 1942 to secure the release of 10,000 Jewish men submitted to forced labor.

On Thursday, the German head of state spoke of the moral debt Germany owed Greece for the people victims of Nazi terror. He offered to set up a new "Future Fund" to remind Germans of their past, but declined to give details on the size of the fund and what exactly it would finance.

Demands for reparations

Arguments over economic ties and Germany's debt to Greece for WWII atrocities intersected during Gauck's three-day visit this week.

He reiterated on Thursday that Berlin would not be issuing any further reparation payments, referring to demands over the past year from Athens and several groups representing Greek war victims.

Last year, several groups in Greece representing WWII survivors demanded some 162 billion euros (\$222 billion) - the equivalent of half of Greece's total government debt.

However, Berlin denies it owes any more money. In 1960, the German government paid 115 million Deutschmarks (60 million euros) to Greece. Athens claims it has always considered that money an initial payment with the remainder of the debt to be paid after German reunification, which occurred in 1990.

The state of Greece's economy - with the country seeing its economy shrink by a quarter and unemployment soar to 27 percent - has featured prominently in the relationship between Athens and Berlin in recent years. Contingents of Greek society blame Chancellor Angela Merkel and her cabinet, which has been at the forefront of austerity measures during the crisis, for the economic hardship besetting the Mediterranean country.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/09/angela-merkel-assailed-from-all-sides-in-drive-to-pacify-russia-and-us-on-ukraine>

114,15

The German chancellor has emerged as Europe's lone champion, but she faces a daunting and potentially thankless task

[Simon Tisdall](#)

Monday 9 February 2015 13.13 GMT

In what could prove a watershed moment in her long political career, Angela Merkel is [playing go-between](#) this week with two angry superpowers while trying to deliver peace to a European continent terrified that the Ukraine conflict could expand into an all-out, east-west war with Russia. She faces a daunting and potentially thankless task.

The German chancellor has emerged as Europe's lone champion in the dread-filled months following Vladimir Putin's calm-shattering invasion and annexation of Crimea almost one year ago. In part through her dozens of one-to-one telephone conversations with Russia's bellicose president, in part because of Germany's unmatched trade and energy ties with the country and in part because others have failed to step up, Merkel has come to be viewed as Europe's foremost [Ukraine](#) mediator, conduit and fixer. When she travelled to Moscow to see Putin last Friday, the fact that François Hollande, the French president, accompanied her was all but irrelevant. Hollande's is merely a walk-on part. His presence at the table strengthened Merkel's mandate as de facto spokesperson for the EU, but added little to her leverage with Putin.

Britain, which like France clings vainly to its self-perception as a European heavy-hitter on defence and security matters, has been even less involved. Perhaps David Cameron, fixated on the May general election, calculates that there are no votes in Ukraine. Be that as it may, Britain has been reduced to unhelpfully shouting insults from the touchline, as the foreign secretary, Philip Hammond, did in his [weekend tirade about Putin the "tyrant"](#).

The loneliness of Merkel's long-distance mission has become desperately clear in recent days. She is assailed from all sides, by friends and enemies alike. It is an experience another prominent European powerbroker and her distant predecessor, Otto von Bismarck, might have found familiar.

On the one hand, [Russia](#) continues to look both ways, Janus-like. Having encouraged hopes that a new Ukraine ceasefire and settlement was within reach, Putin quickly moved after Friday's talks to warn that the follow-up summit agreed for Minsk on Wednesday was contingent on key issues being settled in advance. Senior officials from all parties scrambled to Berlin on Monday to try to fulfil that demand.

On a visit to Egypt - in part to demonstrate that his is not internationally isolated - Putin [regurgitated his familiar grievances](#) about the west trying to encircle and crush Russia, and Nato breaking its promise not to expand up to the country's borders. "We repeatedly warned the US and its western allies about harmful consequences of their interference in Ukrainian domestic affairs, but they did not listen to our opinion," he said. This did not sound like a man about to sign an historic peace deal.

On the other hand, Merkel has to deal with the growing, slightly simplistic conviction in Washington that the only way to get Putin to back off is to supply state-of-the-art defensive weapons to the Ukrainian government, an option Merkel - like most EU leaders - firmly believes would make matters worse. Barack Obama, with whom she discussed the idea at a White House meeting on Monday, is expected to delay a decision pending the outcome in Minsk.

Joe Biden, his vice-president, has hinted, however, that US restraint may not be long-lived. "Given Russia's recent history, we need to judge its deeds not its words. Don't tell us, show us, President Putin," he said at the weekend. The Ukrainians "[have a right to defend themselves](#)".

Congressional hardliners have gone much further. They suggest Merkel's diplomacy has unwittingly provided cover for continued Russian misbehaviour, mendacity and land-grabs. Russia ignored last September's Minsk ceasefire accord,

upon which Merkel is basing the current negotiations, almost from day one, her US critics argue. So why believe the outcome will be any different now? According to Bild newspaper, US delegates to the weekend Munich security conference accused her of appeasement and described the peace talks as “Moscow bullshit”.

For the Republican right and its media allies, Merkel is naive, or worse, a defeatist. According to reports, Senator John McCain [compared her initiative to the 1938 Munich agreement](#) between Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler. “History shows us that dictators will always take more if you let them,” McCain was quoted as saying in Munich. “They will not be dissuaded from their brutal behaviour when you fly to meet them to Moscow – just as leaders once flew to this city.”

Pressed on both flanks, Merkel is also under attack from fellow EU members and those she is trying to help. East European states such as Estonia and Poland are particularly exercised about the potential threat, and are keen to see the US and Nato take a bigger, more active role in curbing Russian aggression. The Ukrainian government also worries that any deal with Putin, particularly over a proposed buffer zone embracing the current frontlines and the previous ceasefire line, will force Kiev to cede yet more territory to the separatists, possibly in perpetuity.

Given these many conflicting demands, Merkel could end up satisfying no one this week, either with a peace accord that is undermined and disregarded before the ink is dry or with no accord at all. If she does manage to pull off a lasting deal, however, the comparison with Bismarck may not be an idle one.

European Press Review of 09/02/2015

MAIN FOCUS

Merkel and Obama discuss arms supplies

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is due to meet US President Barack Obama today, Monday, to discuss a joint strategy on the war in Ukraine. Merkel has reaffirmed her opposition to the idea of [supplying arms](#) to Ukraine backed above all by the Republicans in the US. Only weapons from the West can stop Putin, some commentators argue. Others warn that hardliners are driving a wedge between Merkel and Obama.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung - Switzerland

End Putin's pinprick strikes

Supplying weapons to Ukraine to end Russia's dominance in the east of the country is long overdue, writes the liberal-conservative daily Neue Zürcher Zeitung: "Moscow is supplying the separatists with air defence missile systems and tanks and passing on the results of its military intelligence. Special forces are operating the state-of-the-art weapons and training the rebels. By contrast Ukrainian forces have only outdated equipment and lack ammunition. Their position is growing weaker by the day. If things continue this way Putin will be able to dictate the conditions in eastern Ukraine as he pleases. He can order his forces to advance further or concentrate on pinprick strikes and consolidating areas already captured. That would essentially be the opposite of what Merkel and the dwindling supporters of purely diplomatic initiatives supposedly want, namely peace for Ukraine." (09/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, German\)](#)

Der Standard - Austria

EU and US must work together

The EU and the US must not diverge in the debate about supplying weapons to Ukraine, warns the left-liberal daily Der Standard: "German Chancellor Angela Merkel and US President Barack Obama will have to find a way to prevent this happening when they meet. It will not be easy. Although Obama is cautious and probably favours Merkel's approach, he is under considerable pressure from Congress. A joint position may be for the US to send defensive weapons to Kiev that would leave its army less entirely [at the mercy](#) of artillery shells and drone attacks. At the same time Obama could pledge to match the most recent round of EU sanctions." (09/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, German\)](#)

Le Monde - France

Arms for Ukraine will destabilise all Europe

The debate over arms supplies for Ukraine is symptomatic of the general confusion about how to deal with the war in eastern Ukraine, the liberal daily Le Monde concludes: "In reality no one except a couple of Republican tenors in the US Congress and the single-minded Baltic states and Poland want to supply Ukraine with arms. President Obama is sceptical and European politicians are aware of the risk of escalation. Some are saying this more clearly than others. But in spite of the renewed [German-French attempt](#) to negotiate, which had Europe on tenterhooks all weekend, everyone knows this question must be addressed. That it will be on the table again regardless of the outcome of the Merkel-Hollande mission. Do we arm Ukraine? Ultimately there are few convincing arguments either for or against the idea. But supplying weapons to an almost bankrupt country with 46 million inhabitants certainly wouldn't promote European stability." (09/02/2015)

Efimerida ton Syntakton - Greece

Europe rebels against German austerity

In his policy statement before the Greek parliament on Sunday Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras declared the EU bailout programme a failure and stressed that he intends to make good on his campaign pledges despite the political headwind. The left-liberal daily Efimerida ton Syntakton is convinced that Tsipras has a good hand: "The main thing is that the government has started negotiations and knows it has the backing of a broad section of society. It was encouraging that thousands of people took to the streets on Friday to show their support for the government chanting the slogan: 'We won't be blackmailed'. It needs this support [during the negotiations](#). ... Europe is realising for the first time that the Greek problem has made it necessary to break the German government's hegemony because the latter has taken all the other governments hostage. The opposition of little Greece will soon mobilise political forces and movements in civil society across Europe." (09/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, Greek\)](#)

More from the press review on the subject [» EU Policy](#), [» Domestic Policy](#), [» Greece](#)
Who's saying what [» Athens rebels against austerity dictates](#)

114,18

L'action de la BCE fait polémique chez les économistes

Le Monde.fr | 23.01.2015 à 16h17 • Mis à jour le 03.02.2015 à 17h08 | Par [Antoine Reverchon](#)

Si l'accueil des [marchés financiers](#) et des dirigeants politiques européens à l'annonce, jeudi 22 janvier par Mario Draghi, le président de la Banque centrale européenne (BCE), d'un vaste programme de rachat de dettes a été au mieux enthousiaste, au pire prudent (en [Allemagne](#)), celui des économistes à ce que les Anglo-Saxons appellent du « quantitative easing » (QE) semble beaucoup plus diversifié, comme le montre une sélection de cinq tribunes publiées par *Le Monde*.

La réaction la plus positive à ce programme de rachat, dès mars, de 1 140 milliards d'euros de dettes publiques et privées, vient d'André Grjebine ([Centre](#) d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales CERI/[Sciences](#) Po) et Paul De Grauwe (London School of Economics), pour qui les Allemands « *ne doivent pas avoir peur* » du QE, au contraire.

Lire aussi : [N'ayons pas peur des rachats de titres publics par la BCE !](#)

Trois économistes allemands réputés, Marcel Fratzscher (université Humboldt, Berlin), Michael Hüther (Institut de recherche économique, Cologne) et Guntram Wolff (Institut de recherche économique Bruegel, Bruxelles) rompent également avec la méfiance qui prévaut à Berlin. Ils suggèrent à la BCE de « *sortir de son dilemme* », en choisissant les options les plus propres à [calmer](#) les craintes de leurs compatriotes.

Lire aussi : [Rachat d'obligations : le dilemme de la BCE](#)

En revanche, Jean-Michel Naulot, ancien banquier et ancien membre du Collège de l'Autorité des marchés financiers, estime l'initiative de la BCE dangereuse et surtout inutile, dénonçant « *l'illusion monétaire* ».

Lire aussi : [BCE : l'illusion monétaire](#)

Enfin, certains économistes jugent l'initiative de la BCE inachevée. Pour Frédéric Boccara (Université [Paris](#) 13) et Alain Grandjean (Fondation Nicolas Hulot), « *l'argent de la BCE* » doit [servir](#) à [financer](#) la transition énergétique et les [services](#) publics plutôt que les marchés financiers.

Lire aussi : [A quoi doit servir l'argent de la BCE ?](#)

Pour Natacha Valla et Urszula Szczerbowicz (Centre d'études prospectives et d'informations internationales, Cepii), le QE sera inutile s'il ne comprend pas un volet d'achats « *sur le marché des actions* ».

Lire aussi : [Et si la BCE achetait des actions ?](#)

Pour l'économiste Bruno Moschetto, la plupart des observateurs sont très réservés, selon lui, quant à la réussite de cette [politique](#) d'injection de liquidités qui pourrait [faire](#) l'objet de fuites. Une augmentation de taux d'intérêt devrait entraîner un taux d'inflation sensiblement équivalent. Cet environnement contra-déflationniste ne pourrait qu'inciter les agents économiques à accroître leur demande de biens réels. Sans [compter](#) que le retour à un taux d'inflation dynamique, aux yeux de tous - sauf peut-être de l'Allemagne - contribuerait à [effacer](#) implicitement le poids des dettes nouvelles ou antérieurement contractées.

Lire aussi : [Agir plutôt sur les taux d'intérêt](#)

• [Antoine Reverchon](#)
Journaliste au Monde

114,19

Faut-il livrer des armes à l'Ukraine?

Le Monde.fr | 09.02.2015 à 10h06



Angela Merkel et [François Hollande](#) tentaient, les 5 et 6 février, une médiation dans le conflit entre l'[Ukraine](#) et la [Russie](#). Cette crise est au coeur des [débats](#) à la conférence sur la sécurité en [Europe](#), qui s'est terminée le 8, à Munich.

- [Il faut verser d'urgence une aide économique et militaire à Kiev](#), par François Heisbourg, [conseiller](#) spécial à la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique. L'Ukraine risque de s'effondrer si l'on ne lui porte pas assistance. Cependant, se [contenter](#) de lui [livrer](#) des armes ne suffira pas.
- [Trouvons un compromis avant l'irréparable](#), par Andreï Gratchv. Plutôt que d'écouter les foudres de guerre, il est urgent d'entendre les préoccupations de chacun des belligérants et de leurs parrains. [Accorder](#) davantage d'autonomie des régions russophones pourrait [apaiser](#) la situation.
- [Réarmer l'Ukraine, un choix difficile](#), par Stéphane Delory, spécialiste des questions de [défense](#), chargé d'études à la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique. Les Occidentaux ne pourront [faire](#) l'économie d'une épreuve de force avec Moscou.
- [Armer l'Ukraine... de patience](#), par Sylvie Kauffmann. C'est une question qui agite l'establishment de défense et de [politique](#) étrangère occidentale depuis une dizaine de jours. Inévitablement, elle a fait irruption dans [les débats](#) de la conférence annuelle de Munich sur la sécurité dès son ouverture, vendredi 6 février : faut-il [armer](#) l'Ukraine ? Il y a moyen d'[aider](#) l'Ukraine sans s'[engager](#) ouvertement dans une guerre par procuration.

114,20

Le Point - Publié le 09/02/2015 à 17:37

Faudra-t-il attendre que deux Français sur trois votent FN pour qu'on se pose les bonnes questions ? Philippe Tesson sonne la charge et la révolte.

Par PHILIPPE TESSON

Il ne suffit pas d'invoquer l'argument républicain pour dissuader les électeurs français de voter Front national. Il y a longtemps que nous le pensions. On avait à peine le droit de le dire, dans ce pays, persuadé qu'il est d'être le parangon de la liberté d'expression. Les résultats de l'élection législative du Doubs nous autorisent à l'affirmer aujourd'hui avec moins de scrupule et de prudence. La moitié de l'électorat de la circonscription concernée a voté hier pour la candidate d'un parti désigné antirépublicain par l'establishment politique au long d'une campagne de manipulation initiée il y a trente ans par la gauche et trop complaisamment soutenue par la droite, l'une et l'autre pour la défense de leurs intérêts politiques respectifs.

Est-ce à dire que la moitié de l'électorat de cette région de France est peuplée d'antirépublicains ? N'est-ce pas les insulter ? N'est-ce pas les prendre pour des crétins, au pire animés soudain par la haine de la République, au mieux abusés par la propagande démagogique de la fille diabolique d'un vieillard hystérique ? Oh certes, ni celui-ci ni celle-là ne sont des anges indifférents à leurs propres ambitions à l'instar de tous les animaux politiques, pas plus que des modèles de vertu républicaines. Encore faudrait-il s'interroger sur ce qu'est aujourd'hui la République, sur ce que signifie son affaissement et par la faute de qui sa vertu chancelle.

Les mensonges de l'illusion démocratique

Faudra-t-il attendre, alors qu'on constate aujourd'hui qu'un Français sur deux peut voter Front national, faudra-t-il attendre que deux Français sur trois le fassent, pour qu'on se pose ces questions pourtant judicieuses ? Qui croit encore, ou fait semblant de croire, que le vote du Doubs est de nature idéologique ? On n'est plus dans les années d'avant 1980, où l'extrême droite peuplée de revanchards excités ressassait des slogans hérités de la pensée cagoularde. Qui étaient ces quelques électeurs qui ont failli porter à l'Assemblée nationale une illustre inconnue, même d'eux-mêmes, qui avait à peine fait campagne ? Des Français comme les autres, sans doute moins favorisés que les autres - faut-il de ce fait les exclure ? -, qui exprimaient par leur vote leur lassitude, leur colère, leur révolte contre le sort auquel les condamne la politique injuste menée par leurs dirigeants. Est-ce pour autant un vote antirépublicain ? Si d'aventure ils se sont par scrupule posé cette question, ils y ont répondu par une autre question : cette politique qu'on nous impose et qui est à l'origine de nos souffrances est-elle républicaine ?

Et d'où venaient-ils, ces électeurs-là ? L'analyse des résultats le dit : ils ne venaient pas de nulle part. Ils venaient, en rangs mêlés, de la droite, de la gauche, de l'extrême gauche. Même la gauche de la gauche n'a pas tiré bénéfice des consignes favorables au front républicain.

La défaite collective qu'a subie hier l'ensemble de la représentation politique institutionnelle française, et qui enflamme soudain le feu qui couvait depuis longtemps, met au jour des problèmes graves, qui tous tournent autour de la question républicaine. C'en est assez à cet égard de la rhétorique passive et bien-pensante. Sont à la fois en cause le concept et la pratique de la République. D'une part, la redéfinition des principes et la refondation institutionnelle d'une République adaptée à son temps et telle que le peuple tout entier se reconnaisse en elle. D'autre part, la mise en oeuvre de conditions propres à un exercice du pouvoir plus juste, plus responsable, plus respectueux de la personne. L'épisode de l'élection du Doubs nous éclaire brutalement sur les effets malfaisants, les égarements et les mensonges de l'illusion démocratique.

114,21

Greece's debt-reduction offensive

Not for turning

Alexis Tsipras's diplomatic campaign fails, but he is not letting that stop him

Feb 9th 2015 | [Europe](#)



LAST week was the week of the new Greek government's "[charm offensive](#)", a whirlwind diplomatic tour of Europe to win allies for its efforts to gain a cut in the country's debt burden and undo the onerous terms of its bail-out programme. In the end, the tour involved more offense than charm. Alexis Tsipras (pictured), the firebrand prime minister, found little sympathy on his visit to Brussels, while Yanis Varoufakis, his unorthodox finance minister, was rebuffed politely in a long string of European capitals (and rather impolitely in Berlin). Among European Union officials, the hope took hold that this show of unity would persuade Mr Tsipras to back off and accept an extension of the bail-out programme, if only temporarily, to avoid the increasingly worrisome possibility that Greece could soon run out of money to pay its debts. The moment for such a climb-down would have been Mr Tsipras's first policy speech to the Greek parliament on Sunday.

Mr Tsipras was having none of it. He sounded just as hardline speaking to parliament as he did on the campaign trail last month. He insisted that Greece would pursue concessions that the country's eurozone partners had already rejected last week in talks with Mr Varoufakis: a debt restructuring in the shape of two [exotic new bonds](#), and a bridge programme to keep the country afloat until June. That is when he plans to present to the eurozone Greece's own reform programme, a "new deal" that he promises will not contain any input from international lenders.

Mr Tsipras also stuck to his guns on three critical issues that together have the potential to derail the 2015 budget: a generous social welfare package; the abolition of an unpopular property tax; and a halt to privatisation. If implemented as promised, these measures would knock at least €6 billion off projected revenues this year, wiping out any prospect of Greece achieving a budget surplus. He promised to restore the minimum wage from the current €580 a month to the pre-crisis level of €750 a month by 2016, and to reverse labour-market reforms. The only parts of the speech that might have pleased Greece's creditors were an outline of new administrative measures to speed a crackdown on tax evasion by the wealthy, and pledges to end the tight grip of interest groups known as the "oligarchs" (ancient Greek for robber barons) on public procurement contracts and the electronic media.

Lawmakers from other parties said they were not surprised by Mr Tsipras's tough stance. His approval ratings rose above 70% last week (up from between 65% and 68% the previous week, his first in office). "First comes the grandstanding, then, after the European summit, the real negotiations [with the EU and International Monetary Fund] will begin," said one former cabinet minister. Impoverished Greeks hope the new government led by Mr Tsipras's Syriza party will fulfil its promise to "end austerity" by providing them with free electricity, food stamps, and a bonus for pensioners struggling to get by on less than €700 per month.

In Brussels, Mr Tsipras's determination triggered disappointment and anxiety. Time is running short to find a solution to avoid a Greek default. Athens says it needs up to €5 billion to meet its budget and debt repayment bills through June. Because of a slowdown in tax receipts (as taxpayers wait for the new government to unveil policy changes), it could run into trouble as soon as March, when it is due to make a €1.5 billion payment to the IMF. Most European officials assume that some sort of a compromise will be struck in time.

But it is increasingly difficult to imagine what the shape of such a compromise might be. The [European Central Bank](#) has ruled out lifting the ceiling it has imposed on Greek debt issuance, which would be required by Mr Tsipras's original plan to issue €10 billion in new treasury bills; it sees this as tantamount to monetary financing. The ECB has also waved off talk of returning to Greece €1.9 billion in interest it earned on an earlier stage of the rescue, saying this is impossible if Greece insists on exiting its programme. As for talk of a bridge loan, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the chairman of the EU's Eurogroup of finance ministers, stated categorically on Friday that "we don't do" those.

EU officials are worried that Athens is misreading the signals. On Monday Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, warned Greece not to "assume that the overall mood has so changed" that Europe will "accept Tsipras's programme unconditionally". Indeed, Mr Tsipras's first weeks in power have been remarkable for the degree of solidarity they have prompted among other eurozone countries, and between the sometimes fractious institutions composing the "troika" that negotiated the bail-out programme (the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF). While some are sympathetic to dialing back austerity, all insist that Greece must fulfill the terms earlier governments agreed to, and should not exit the bail-out programme unilaterally.

Optimists hope a compromise for the short-term funding crunch may be struck on Wednesday, when the Eurogroup holds its next meeting. The European Council, which brings together the EU's heads of state, is to meet the following day. Neither Athens nor any of its creditors want to see Greece forced out of the eurozone. Europe has undergone five years of institutional reform, and extended hundreds of billions of euros in loans, to prevent that from happening. Over the course of the euro crisis, no one has yet made money betting against the EU's ability to muddle through. But it is becoming difficult to figure out how it will do so this time.

114,23

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[JOSCHKA FISCHER](#)

Joschka Fischer was German Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor from 1998-2005, a term marked by Germany's strong support for NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, followed by its opposition to the war in Iraq. Fischer entered electoral politics after participating in the anti-establishment... [READ MORE](#)

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[HENRIK ENDERLEIN](#)

Henrik Enderlein is a professor at the Hertie School of Governance and Director of the Jacques Delors Institute in Berlin. [READ MORE](#)

FEB 5, 2015 22

Europe's War in Ukraine

BERLIN – War is ravaging Europe's east. Ukraine is a victim of Russian military aggression, and, like it or not, its fate will essentially determine that of Europe's, because the current crisis will define the rules and principles that Europeans live by in the twenty-first century.

Will Europe be governed by the principles of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and the inviolability of national borders? Or will sheer might and the willingness to use force triumph? Will “managed” democracy and spheres of influence trump the right of countries, large or small, to determine their own future?

With the Cold War's end and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity quickly became a cornerstone of the European order. This strategic fact is more evident now than ever before. Simply put, today's democratic Ukraine is fighting for Europe's future.

Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to restore an international order based on exclusive spheres of influence controlled by major powers – the system that prevailed in Europe's war-torn eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A European Ukraine and the European Union stand in the way of this goal. That is why current Russian policy seeks to destabilize Ukraine permanently, especially militarily and financially. In its own interest, Europe must not allow this policy to prevail.

Despite the war in eastern Ukraine, the country has managed to take important steps toward democracy since the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich last February. Indeed, since the “Euromaidan” uprising began in Kyiv in November 2013, a new Ukraine has emerged. Free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections have brought to power leaders who, by implementing radical reforms, are determined to realize voters' demands for a modern economy and an end to corruption. Nonetheless, the goal of domestic political stabilization is far from reached. Apart from tensions within the Ukrainian government, the main reason is the country's dire financial situation.

The United States, the European Commission, and the EU's main member states all agree, at least in principle, that Ukraine needs quick and substantial financial help in order to be able to resist Russian aggression. Likewise, they agree to support the deep social and economic reforms that Ukraine must carry out.

So far, no package has been put together, which is deeply troublesome, because the IMF is authorized to release the money it pledged only if Ukraine's financial stability is guaranteed for at least 12 months. The country is facing a severe shortage of money, which could lead to a serious financial crisis, in addition to the ongoing and dramatic military crisis.

The EU's difficulty in devising a concrete financial commitment stems from its dearth of financial means. A major weakness of EU foreign policy is its lack of versatile instruments for allocating financial aid to neighboring countries. It would be absurd if Ukraine were to slide into a financial crisis because the EU could not agree on how to raise the funds to prevent it.

The way to avoid that outcome is to adjust one of the EU's two instruments for non-eurozone members to meet Ukraine's needs: The [Macro-Financial Assistance scheme](#), a versatile instrument that can combine loans and direct subsidies; or the [balance-of-payments assistance facility](#), which could complement an IMF program to EU countries. Both instruments could be subject to conditions designed to ensure that the funds do not sustain rampant corruption, but flow instead to where they are needed most. Moreover, the commitments should be made in the context of a donor agreement that bars the aid from being used to make direct payments to Russia.

Today, it is more important to give adequate financial support to Ukraine than to impose new sanctions on Russia. That is why Russia may also be interested in a donor conference and fresh money from Europe for Ukraine. Indeed, economic sanctions not only exacerbate the crisis in Russia; they also negatively affect other European countries. By contrast, financial aid to Ukraine would clearly signal that the EU will not tolerate the country's destabilization, while providing economic stimulus in Ukraine and the entire region.

Equally important, if the West's response to Russian aggression toward Ukraine is effectively limited to economic sanctions, Putin will more easily be able to blame the West and its alleged hostility toward Russia for the collapse in ordinary Russians' living standards, thus enabling him to double down on aggressive nationalism.

Today, the only thing needed to convert EU funds into financial aid for Ukraine is political will. The most immediate step should be an initiative by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker to get the funds flowing with a minimum of bureaucratic delay. Even if doing so takes some time, initiating the process would send a powerful political signal of the EU's determination to support Ukraine. The announcement alone would help Ukraine in its acute financial plight.

Many of Europe's leaders will meet this week at the Munich Security Conference. They should seize this opportunity to urge Juncker to start the proceedings needed to repurpose one of the EU's two available funds. A financial crisis, in addition to the military and political crisis, would be devastating for Ukraine, and there is no good reason why it cannot be avoided.

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Die Athener Forderung ist im Völkerrecht ungeklärt

Die Athener Forderung ist im Völkerrecht ungeklärt Die neue Regierung in Athen hat eine alte Forderung der Griechen wieder aufgewärmt: 11 Milliarden Euro solle Deutschland zahlen, sagte Premierminister Alexis Tsipras jetzt in seiner Regierungserklärung. Dabei geht es um einen Zwangskredit in Höhe von 476 Millionen Reichsmark, den die Nationalsozialisten der griechischen Staatsbank im Jahr 1942 abgepresst hatten. Darüber hinaus will Tsipras in Berlin Wiedergutmachung für die Zerstörungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg fordern. Die Bundesregierung hat dies zuletzt im Januar zurückgewiesen - ebenso im vergangenen Jahr, als Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck bei einem Griechenland-Besuch von Staatspräsident Karolos Papoulias mit dem Wunsch nach Reparationen konfrontiert wurde.

Die Rechtslage ist keineswegs eindeutig. Besonders in Bezug auf den Zwangskredit liefert das Völkerrecht keine klaren Antworten. Der Wissenschaftliche Dienst des Bundestags bezeichnete die Auffassung der Bundesregierung, dass Athen keine Ansprüche mehr habe, vor einem Jahr zurückhaltend als „nicht zwingend“. Deutschland habe ein „umfangreiches System der Wiedergutmachung“ geschaffen, argumentierte sie damals auf eine Anfrage der Linksfraktion hin - wie schon einmal acht Jahre zuvor. Mit zwölf westlichen Staaten habe die Regierung Anfang der sechziger Jahre „Globalentschädigungsabkommen zum Ausgleich spezifischen NS-Unrechts“ abgeschlossen. In diesem Zusammenhang habe Griechenland 115 Millionen Euro erhalten. Nach seinem Wortlaut habe dieser deutsch-griechische Vertrag von 1960 „auch für die griechische Seite die Frage der Wiedergutmachung von NS-Unrecht abschließend geregelt“.

Deutschland pocht außerdem auf den „Zwei-plus-vier-Vertrag“, mit dem 1990 die Wiedervereinigung besiegelt wurde. Dieser habe erklärtermaßen das Ziel gehabt, eine abschließende Regelung herbeizuführen. Bekräftigt wurde das aus Sicht der Bundesregierung durch die „Charta von Paris“ aus demselben Jahr, die 32 europäische Staaten - darunter Griechenland - sowie die Vereinigten Staaten und Kanada unterzeichnet haben. Damit habe sich auch der Vorbehalt des Londoner Schuldenabkommens von 1953 erledigt, das die Frage noch offenhielt. Berlin beruft sich zudem auf eine Art von Verjährung: 70 Jahre nach Kriegsende und Jahrzehnten friedlicher Zusammenarbeit habe die Reparationsfrage ihre Berechtigung verloren; nach so langer Zeit wäre eine Zahlung „ohne jede Präzedenz“. Durch Wiedergutmachung und sonstige Leistungen habe Deutschland überdies ein Vielfaches an Reparationen erbracht.

Die Bundestagsjuristen halten es allerdings für fraglich, ob dies auch für jenen Zwangskredit gilt. Dieser sei womöglich als „Geltendmachung eines vertragsrechtlichen Darlehensrückzahlungsanspruchs“ zu betrachten, erwägen sie. Auch nicht sicher ist demnach, ob die Pariser Charta wirklich eine Verzichtserklärung durch Athen beinhaltet. Denn dort heiße es insofern nur, der Zwei-plus-vier-Vertrag werde „zur Kenntnis“ genommen. Das letzte Wort könnte da nur der Internationale Gerichtshof in Den Haag sprechen. (*jja.*)

114,26

FEB 9, 2015 18

Greece is Playing to Lose

LONDON – The future of Europe now depends on something apparently impossible: Greece and Germany must strike a deal. What makes such a deal seem impossible is not the principled opposition of the two governments – Greece has demanded a debt reduction, while Germany has insisted that not a euro of debt can be written off – but something more fundamental: while Greece is obviously the weaker party in this conflict, it has far more at stake.

Game theory suggests that some of the most unpredictable conflicts are between a weak, but determined, combatant and a strong opponent with much less commitment. In these scenarios, the most stable outcome tends to be a draw in which both sides are partly satisfied.

In the Greek-German confrontation, it is easy, at least in theory, to design such a positive-sum game. All we must do is ignore political rhetoric and focus on the economic outcomes that the protagonists really want.

Germany is determined to resist any debt write-offs. For German voters, this objective matters much more than the details of Greek structural reforms. Greece, for its part, is determined to gain relief from the punitive and counter-productive austerity imposed on it, at Germany's insistence, by the "troika" (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund). For Greek voters, this objective matters much more than detailed calculations about the net present value of national debt in 30 years.

A deal should be easily negotiable if both sides concentrate on their top priorities, while compromising on their secondary aims. Unfortunately, human fallibility seems to be working against such a rational solution.

Yanis Varoufakis, Greece's new finance minister, is a professor of mathematical economics who specializes in game theory. But his negotiating technique – unpredictable oscillations between aggressiveness and weakness – is the opposite of what game theory would dictate. Varoufakis's idea of strategy is to hold a gun to his own head, then demand a ransom for not pulling the trigger.

German and European Union policymakers are calling his bluff. As a result, the two sides have become stuck in a passive-aggressive standoff that has made serious negotiation impossible.

There was nothing inevitable about this outcome. Just last month, ECB President [Mario Draghi](#) provided a textbook example of how these negotiations could, and should, have progressed, when he outmaneuvered German opposition to the monetary stimulus that Europe clearly needed.

Draghi spent months before the ECB's [January 22 announcement](#) that it would launch quantitative easing (QE) in intense public debate with the Germans over which point of principle they chose as a "red line" – the point beyond which no deal would be possible. Germany's red line was debt mutualization: there must be no sharing of losses if any eurozone country should default.

Draghi let Germany win on this issue, which he viewed as economically irrelevant. But, crucially, he was careful not to back down until the last possible moment. By focusing the QE debate on risk-sharing, Draghi managed to distract Germany from an infinitely more important issue: the enormous size of the QE program, which completely defied the German taboo against monetary financing of government debts. By conceding at the right time on an issue of no importance, Draghi achieved an enormous breakthrough that really mattered to the ECB.

Had Varoufakis adopted an equivalent strategy for Greece, he would have stuck doggedly to his demand for debt cancellation until the last moment, then backed down on this “principle” in exchange for major concessions on austerity and structural reforms. Or he could have adopted a less aggressive strategy: Concede from the start the German principle that debts are sacrosanct and then show that austerity could be eased without any reduction in the face value of Greek debt. But, instead of consistently pursuing either strategy, Varoufakis veered between defiance and conciliation, losing credibility both ways.

Greece started the negotiation by insisting on debt reduction as its red line. But, instead of sticking to this position and turning a debate over debt forgiveness into a Draghi-style diversionary tactic, Greece abandoned this demand within days. Then came the pointless provocation of refusing talks with the troika, despite the fact that the three institutions are all much more sympathetic to Greek demands than the German government.

Finally, Varoufakis rejected any extension of the troika program. This created an unnecessary new deadline of February 28 for the withdrawal of ECB funding and consequent collapse of the Greek banking system.

Greece’s idealistic new leaders seem to believe that they can overpower bureaucratic opposition without the usual compromises and obfuscations, simply by brandishing their democratic mandate. But the primacy of bureaucracy over democracy is a core principle that EU institutions will never compromise.

The upshot is that Greece is back where it started in the poker contest with Germany and Europe. The new government has shown its best cards too early and has no credibility left if it wants to try bluffing.

So what will happen next? The most likely outcome is that Syriza will soon admit defeat, like every other eurozone government supposedly elected on a reform mandate, and revert to a troika-style program, sweetened only by dropping the name “troika.” Another possibility, while Greek banks are still open for business, might be for the government to unilaterally implement some of its radical plans on wages and public spending, defying protests from Brussels, Frankfurt, and Berlin.

If Greece tries such unilateral defiance, the ECB will almost certainly vote to stop its emergency funding to the Greek banking system after the troika program expires on February 28. As this self-inflicted deadline approaches, the Greek government will probably back down, just as Ireland and Cyprus capitulated when faced with similar threats.

Such last-minute capitulation could mean resignation for the new Greek government and its replacement by EU-approved technocrats, as in the constitutional putsch against Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi in 2012. In a less extreme scenario, Varoufakis might be replaced as finance minister, while the rest of the government survives. The only other possibility, if and when Greek banks start collapsing, would be an exit from the euro.

Whatever form the surrender takes, Greece will not be the only loser. Proponents of democracy and economic expansion have missed their best chance to outmaneuver Germany and end the self-destructive austerity that Germany has imposed on Europe.

Read more at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/greece-germany-debt-forgiveness-by-anatole-kaletsky-2015-02#D8UvZRhJFduxEcie.99>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/08/us-eurozone-greece-varoufakis-idUSKBN0LCoQO20150208>

114,28

Greek finance minister says euro will collapse if Greece exits

BY [GAVIN JONES](#)

ROME Sun Feb 8, 2015 2:34pm EST



Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis looks on before the first major speech of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in parliament in Athens February 8, 2015.

CREDIT: REUTERS/ ALKIS KONSTANTINIDIS

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(Reuters) - **If Greece is forced out of the euro zone, other countries will inevitably follow and the currency bloc will collapse**, Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said on Sunday, in comments which drew a rebuke from Italy.

Greece's new leftist government is trying to re-negotiate its debt repayments and has begun to roll back austerity policies agreed with its international creditors.

In an interview with Italian state television network RAI, Varoufakis said **Greece's debt problems must be solved as part of a rejection of austerity policies for the euro zone as a whole. He called for a massive "new deal" investment program funded by the European Investment Bank.**

"The euro is fragile, it's like building a castle of cards, if you take out the Greek card the others will collapse." Varoufakis said according to an Italian transcript of the interview released by RAI ahead of broadcast.

The euro zone faces a risk of fragmentation and "de-construction" unless it faces up to the fact that Greece, and not only Greece, is unable to pay back its debt under the current terms, Varoufakis said.

"I would warn anyone who is considering strategically amputating Greece from Europe because this is very dangerous," he said. "Who will be next after us? Portugal? What will happen when Italy discovers it is impossible to remain inside the straitjacket of austerity?"

Varoufakis and his Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras received friendly words but no support for debt re-negotiation from their Italian counterparts when they visited Rome last week. But Varoufakis said things were different behind the scenes.

"Italian officials, I can't tell you from which big institution, approached me to tell me they backed us but they can't tell the truth because Italy also risks bankruptcy and they are afraid of the reaction from Germany," he said.

"Let's face it, Italy's debt situation is unsustainable," he added, a comment that drew a sharp response from Italian Economy Minister Pier Carlo Padoan, who said in a tweet that Italy's debt was "solid and sustainable."

Varoufakis's remarks were "out of place", Padoan said, adding that Italy was working for a European solution to Greece's problems, which requires "mutual trust".

Italy's public debt is the largest in the euro zone after Greece's and Italian bond yields surged in 2011 at the height of the euro zone crisis. They have since fallen steeply and have so far come under little pressure from the renewed tensions in Greece.

Varoufakis said his government would propose a "new deal" for Europe like the one enacted in the United States in the 1930s. This would involve the European Investment Bank investing ten times as much as it has so far, Varoufakis said.

If Europe continues to pursue counterproductive austerity policies the only people who will benefit will be "those who hate European democracy," he said, citing the Golden Dawn party in Greece, the National Front in France and the United Kingdom Independence Party in Britain.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/09/us-eurozone-greece-germany-reparations-idUSKBN0LD1Q720150209>

114,29

Germany rejects Greek claim for World War Two reparations

BERLIN Mon Feb 9, 2015 10:27am EST

(Reuters) - Germany said on Monday there was "zero" chance of it paying World War Two reparations to Athens, following a renewed demand from Greece's new leftist Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.

Tsipras, in his first major speech to parliament on Sunday, laid out plans to dismantle Greece's austerity program, ruled out any extension of its 240 billion euro international bailout and vowed to seek war reparations from Berlin.

The demand for compensation, revived by a previous Greek government in 2013 but not pursued, was rejected outright by Sigmar Gabriel, Germany's vice chancellor and economy minister.

"The probability is zero," said Gabriel, when asked if Germany would make such payments to Greece, adding a treaty signed 25 years ago had wrapped up all such claims.

Germany and Greece share a complex history that has complicated the debt debate. Greece was occupied by German troops in World War Two, an issue that has resurfaced since it has been forced to endure tough reforms in return for a financial bailout partly funded by euro zone partners.

Many Greeks have blamed euro zone heavyweight Germany for the austerity, leading to the revival of a dormant claim against Berlin for billions of euros of war reparations.

As part of a wider appeal to Europe for solidarity, Greece's new finance minister has suggested a parallel between his country and the rise of Nazism in a bankrupt Germany in the 1930s, referring to Greece's far-right Golden Dawn party.

Gabriel referred to the "Treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany", also known as the "Two plus Four Treaty" signed in September 1990, by the former West and East Germans and the four World War Two allies just before German reunification.

Under its terms, the four powers renounced all rights they formerly held in Germany. For Berlin, the document, also approved by Greece among other states, effectively drew a line under possible future claims for war reparations.

Germany thus denies owing anything more to Greece for World War Two after the 115 million deutsche marks it paid in 1960, one of 12 war compensation deals it signed with Western nations.

But Athens has said it always considered that money as only an initial payment, with the rest of its claims to be discussed after German reunification, which eventually came in 1990.

114,30

Opinions Harold Meyerson writes a weekly political column that appears on Thursdays and contributes to the PostPartisan blog. [View Archive](#)

In Greek crisis, Germany should learn from its fiscal past

By [Harold Meyerson](#) Opinion writer January 28

If you made a list of countries you hope have learned from their past hundred years of mistakes, Germany would have to be at the top. Happily, the staunch opposition to a nativist fringe that the nation's government and citizenry have shown in recent weeks makes it clear, again, that Germany understands the costs of bigotry and the virtues of tolerance.

Unhappily, it has not learned the costs of a mad adherence to fiscal orthodoxy, despite the fact that its prosperity is rooted in the decision of its World War II adversaries to allow West Germany's postwar government to write off half of its debts.

Indeed, the policies that Angela Merkel's government have inflicted on the nations of Southern Europe could not be more different from those that European leaders and the United States devised in the early 1950s to enable West Germany to rebuild its damaged economy. Since the crash of 2008, Germany, as Europe's dominant economy and leading creditor, has compelled Mediterranean Europe, and Greece in particular, to sack their own economies to repay their debts.

Germany's insistence has reduced Greece to a condition like that of the United States at the bottom of the Great Depression. Unemployment has soared to 25 percent, and youth unemployment to more than 50 percent ; the economy has shrunk by 26 percent and consumption by 40 percent. Debt has risen to 175 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. And the funds from the loans that Germany and other nations have extended to Greece have gone almost entirely either to cover interest payments or repay past loans; only 11 percent has actually gone to Greece's government. Stuck on a treadmill of debt repayment and anemic economic activity, Greece, as the Financial Times noted, has been reduced to a "quasi-slave economy" run "purely for the benefit of foreign creditors."

Not surprisingly, when Greek voters went to the polls Sunday, they [elected a new government](#) that is demanding a renegotiation of its debt. German and European Union officials have responded with adamant opposition to any such changes.

Fortunately for Germany, its own creditors took quite a different stance after World War II. In the London Debt Agreement of 1953, the 20 nations — including Greece — that had loaned money to Germany during the pre-Nazi Weimar Republic and in the years since 1945 agreed to reduce West Germany's debts by half. Moreover, they agreed that its repayments could not come out of the government's spending but only and explicitly from export income. **They further agreed to undervalue the German mark, so that German export income could grow.** By the consent of all parties, the London Agreement, and subsequent modifications, were crafted **in proceedings that made West Germany an equal party to its creditors:** It could, and sometimes did, reject the creditors' terms and insist on new negotiations.

The United States was particularly insistent on making the terms of West Germany's repayments as lenient as possible. It needed the nation to be a strong ally in the Cold War. Besides, West Germany's government, headed by Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, was (presumably) Nazi-free. **To further punish Germany, its onetime mortal enemies concluded, was strategically — and, just maybe, morally — unwise.**

No such scruples have informed Germany's current policies toward Greece. As a member of the euro zone, Greece cannot undervalue its currency, and rather than enabling Greece to increase its exports, Germany has done everything possible to increase its own trade balance with Greece and its European neighbors. Far from rebuilding the economies of Southern Europe, Germany pillaged them in the name of fiscal rectitude.

But the considerations that informed Germany's creditors six decades ago are just as pertinent today. Strategically and economically, it would be a disaster for Germany if Greece were compelled to repudiate its debts and leave the euro zone, as such a move would threaten the zone's continued existence. The new Greek government represents at least as clean a break with Greece's previous mis-rulers as the Adenauer government did with Hitler's. Its [early appointments](#) signal a novel development in Greek governance: a fight against the corruption and crony capitalism that have long corroded the nation's economy.

Why can't Germany apply the lessons of its own past to today's economic challenge? As [Jurgen Kaiser](#) noted in a brilliant paper for the think tank of Germany's Social Democrats, **“little knowledge about Germany's debt relief is to be found among the broader public in Germany.”**

The world will be a better place when Germans know their history — all of it.

114,32

Germany Emerges

[Geopolitical Weekly](#)

FEBRUARY 10, 2015 | 09:00 GMT [Print](#) [Text Size](#)

Stratfor By [George Friedman](#)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, accompanied by French President Francois Hollande, met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Feb. 6. Then she met with U.S. President Barack Obama on Feb. 9. The primary subject was Ukraine, but the first issue discussed at the news conference following the meeting with Obama was Greece. Greece and Ukraine are not linked in the American mind. They are linked in the German mind, because both are indicators of Germany's new role in the world and of Germany's discomfort with it.

It is interesting to consider how far Germany has come in a rather short time. When Merkel took office in 2005, she became chancellor of a Germany that was at peace, in a European Union that was united. Germany had put its demands behind it, embedding itself in a Europe where it could be both prosperous and [free of the geopolitical burdens](#) that had led it into such dark places. If not the memory, then the fear of [Germany](#) had subsided in Europe. The Soviet Union was gone, and Russia was in the process of trying to recover from the [worst consequences of that collapse](#). The primary issue in the European Union was what hurdles nations, clamoring to enter the union, would have to overcome in order to become members. Germany was in a rare position, given its history. It was in a place of comfort, safety and international collegiality.

The world that Merkel faces today is startlingly different. The [European Union is in a deep crisis](#). Many blame Germany for that crisis, arguing that its [aggressive export policies](#) and demands for austerity were self-serving and planted the seeds of the crisis. It is charged with having used the euro to serve its interests and with shaping EU policy to protect its own corporations. The vision of a benign Germany has evaporated in much of Europe, fairly or unfairly. In many places, old images of Germany have re-emerged, if not in the center of many countries then certainly on the growing margins. In a real if limited way, Germany has become the country that other Europeans fear. Few countries are clamoring for membership in the European Union, and current members have little appetite for expanding the bloc's boundaries.

At the same time, the peace that Germany had craved is in jeopardy. [Events in Ukraine](#) have aroused Russian fears of the West, and [Russia](#) has annexed Crimea and supported an insurgency in eastern [Ukraine](#). Russia's actions have sparked the United States' fears of the re-emergence of a Russian hegemon, and the United States is discussing [arming the Ukrainians](#) and pre-positioning weapons for American troops in the Baltics, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. The Russians are predicting dire consequences, and some U.S. senators are wanting to arm the Ukrainians.

If it is too much to say that Merkel's world is collapsing, it is not too much to say that her world and Germany's have been reshaped in ways that would have been inconceivable in 2005. The confluence of a financial crisis in Europe that has led to [dramatic increases in nationalism](#) — both in the way nations act and in the way citizens think — with the threat of war in Ukraine has transformed Germany's world. Germany's goal has been to avoid taking a leading political or military role in Europe. The current situation has made this impossible. The European financial crisis, now seven years old, has long ceased being primarily an economic problem and is now a political one. The Ukrainian crisis places Germany in the [extraordinarily uncomfortable position](#) of playing a leading role in keeping a political problem from turning into a military one.

The German Conundrum

It is important to understand the twin problems confronting Germany. On the one hand, Germany is trying to hold the European Union together. On the other, it wants to make certain that Germany will not bear the burden of maintaining that unity. In Ukraine, Germany was an early supporter of the demonstrations that gave rise to the current government. I don't think the Germans expected the Russian or U.S. responses, and they do not want to partake in any military reaction to Russia. At the same time, Germany does not want to back away from support for the government in Ukraine.

There is a common contradiction inherent in German strategy. The Germans do not want to come across as assertive or threatening, yet they are taking positions that are both. In the European crisis, it is Germany that is most rigid [not only on the Greek question](#) but also on the general question of Southern Europe and its [catastrophic unemployment situation](#). In Ukraine, Berlin supports Kiev and thus opposes the Russians but does not want to draw any obvious conclusions. The European crisis and the Ukrainian crisis are mirror images. In Europe, Germany is playing a leading but aggressive role. In Ukraine, it is playing a leading but conciliatory role. What is most important is that in both cases, Germany has been forced — more by circumstance than by policy — to play leading roles. This is not comfortable for Germany and certainly not for the rest of Europe.

Germany's Role in Ukraine

The Germans did play a significant part in the fall of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's government. Germany had been instrumental in [trying to negotiate](#) an agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, but Yanukovich rejected it. The Germans supported anti-Yanukovich demonstrators and had very close ties to one of the demonstration leaders, current Kiev Mayor Vitali Klitschko, who received training in a program for rising leaders sponsored by the Christian Democratic Union — Merkel's party. The Germans condemned the Russian annexation of Crimea and Moscow's support for the Ukrainian secessionists in the east. Germany was not, perhaps, instrumental in these events, but it was a significant player.

As the Germans came to realize that this affair would not simply be political but would take on a military flavor, they began to back away from a major role. But disengagement was difficult. The Germans adopted a complex stance. They opposed the Russians but also did not want to provide direct military support to the Ukrainians. Instead, they [participated in the sanctions against Russia](#) while trying to play a conciliatory role. It was difficult for Merkel to play this deeply contradictory role, but given Germany's history the role was not unreasonable. Germany's status as a liberal democracy is central to its post-war self-conception. That is what it must be. Therefore, supporting the demonstrators in Kiev was an obligation. At the same time, Germany — particularly since the end of the Cold War — has been uneasy about playing a direct military role. It did that in Afghanistan but not Iraq. And participating in or supporting a military engagement in Ukraine resurrects memories of events involving Russia that Berlin does not want to confront.

Therefore, Germany adopted a contradictory policy. Although it supported a movement that was ultimately anti-Russian and supported sanctions against the Russians, more than any other power involved it does not want the political situation to evolve into a military one. It will not get involved in any military action in Ukraine, and the last thing Germany needs now is a war to its east. Having been involved in the beginnings of the crisis, and being unable to step away from it, Germany also wants to defuse it.

The Greek Issue

Germany repeated this complex approach with [Greece](#) for different reasons. The Germans are trying to find some sort of cover for the role they are playing with the Greeks. Germany exported more than 50 percent of its gross domestic product, and more than half of that went to the European free trade zone that was the heart of the EU project. Germany had developed production that far exceeded its domestic capacity for consumption. It had to have access to markets or face a severe economic crisis of its own.

But barriers are rising in Europe. The attacks in Paris raised demands for the resurrection of border guards and inspections. Alongside threats of militant Islamist attacks, the free flow of labor from country to country threatened to take jobs from natives and give them to outsiders. If borders became barriers to labor, and capital markets were already distorted by the ongoing crisis, then how long would it be before weaker economies used protectionist measures to keep out German goods?

The economic crisis had unleashed nationalism as each country tried to follow policies that would benefit it and in which many citizens — not in power, but powerful nonetheless — saw EU regulations as threats to their well-being. And behind these regulations and the pricing of the euro, they saw Germany's hand.

This was dangerous for Germany in many ways. Germany had struggled to shed its image as an aggressor; here it was re-emerging. Nationalism not only threatened to draw Germany back to its despised past, but it also [threatened the free trade](#) essential to Germany's well-being. Germany didn't want anyone to leave the free trade zone. The eurozone was less important, but once they left the currency bloc, the path to protectionism was short. Greece was of little consequence itself, but if it demonstrated that it would be better off defaulting than paying its debt, other countries could follow. And if they demonstrated that leaving the free trade zone was beneficial, then the entire structure might unravel.

Germany needed to make an example of Greece, and it tried very hard last week to be unbending, appearing to be a bit like the old Germany. The problem Germany had was that if the new Greek government wanted to survive, it couldn't capitulate. It had been elected to resist Germany. And whatever the unknowns, it was not clear that default, in whole or part, wasn't beneficial. And in the end, Greece could set its own rules. If the Greeks offered a fraction of repayment, would anyone refuse when the alternative was nothing?

Therefore, Germany was facing one of the other realities of its position — one that goes back to its unification in 1871. Although economically powerful, Germany was also [extremely insecure](#). Its power rested on the ability and willingness of other countries to give Germany access to their markets. Without that access, German power could fall apart. With Greece, the Germans wanted to show the rest of Europe the consequences of default, but if Greece defaulted anyway, the only lesson might be that default works. Just as it had been in the past, Germany was simultaneously overbearing and insecure. In dealing with Greece, the Germans could not risk bringing down the European Union and could not be sure which thread, if pulled on, would unravel it.

Merkel's Case in Washington

It was with this on her mind that Merkel came to Washington. Facing an overwhelming crisis within the European Union, Germany could not afford a war in Ukraine. U.S. threats to arm the Ukrainians were exactly what she did not need. It wasn't just that Germany had a minimal army and couldn't participate or, in extremis, defend itself. It was also that in being tough with Greece, Germany could not go much further before being seen as the strongman of Europe, a role it could not bear.

Thus, she came to Washington looking to soften the American position. But the American position came from deep wells as well. Part of it had to do with human rights, which should not be dismissed as one source of decision-making in this and other administrations. But the deeper well was the fact that for a hundred years, since World War I, through World War II and the Cold War, the United States had a single rigid imperative: No European hegemon could be allowed to dominate the Continent, as a united Europe was the only thing that might threaten national security. Therefore, regardless of any debate on the issue, the U.S. concern about a Russian-dominated Ukraine triggered the primordial fear of a Russian try at hegemony.

It was ironic that Germany, which the United States blocked twice as a hegemon, tried to persuade the United States that increased military action in Ukraine would not solve the problem. The Americans knew that, but they also knew that if they backed off now, the Russians would read it as an opportunity to press forward. Germany, which had helped set in motion both this crisis and the European crisis, was now asking the United States to back off. The request was understandable, but simply backing off was not possible. She needed to deliver something from Putin, such as a pledge to withdraw support to Ukrainian secessionists. But Putin needed something, too: a promise for an autonomous province. By now Merkel could live with that, but the Americans would find it undesirable. An autonomous Ukrainian province would inevitably become a base for undermining the rest of the country.

This is the classic German problem told two ways. Both derive from disproportionate strength overlying genuine weakness. The Germans are trying to reshape Europe, but their threats are of decreasing value. The Germans tried to reshape Ukraine but got trapped in the Russian reaction. In both cases, the problem was that they did not have sufficient power, instead requiring the acquiescence of others. And that is difficult to get. This is the old German problem: The Germans are too strong to be ignored and too weak to impose their will. Historically, the Germans tried to increase their strength so they could impose their will. In this case, they have no intention of doing so. It will be interesting to see whether their will can hold when their strength is insufficient.

114,34


Vor dem Gipfel in Minsk

Good cops, bad cops?

Ganz so simpel geht es in der Ukraine-Krise nicht zu. **Der Westen muss zur Einhegung Putins wieder auf Abschreckung setzen.** Das schließt Angebote zur Entspannung nicht aus. Ein Kommentar.

11.02.2015, von BERTHOLD KOHLER



© DPA  Russische Karikatur: Obama, der Strippenzieher eines Sanktionstheaters, wie eine Ausstellung Ende Oktober in Moskau suggerierte?

Wenn die Ukraine-Krise der Phantasie eines Krimi-Autors entsprungen wäre, dann wüsste man, als was die Bundeskanzlerin und der französische Präsident an diesem Mittwoch nach Minsk reisten: als „good cops“, die Putin mit einem letzten guten Zureden zum Einlenken bringen wollen - aber auch mit dem Hinweis, dass draußen schon der „bad cop“ warte, der ganz anders drauf sei. Diese Rolle wäre Obama zugedacht mit dem in dieser Hinsicht weit überzeugenderen Nebendarsteller John McCain. Der Revolver, den die beiden Amerikaner auf den Tisch legen würden, wären Waffenlieferungen an die Ukraine.

Ganz so simpel geht es in der Politik jedoch nicht zu. Angela Merkel ist kein naiver Friedensengel, Obama kein Kriegstreiber, McCain nicht blind für die Kräfteverhältnisse. Und Putin ist nicht dumm.

Putins „Eskalationsdominanz“

Der russische Präsident weiß, dass Europa wie Amerika die Eskalation dieses Konflikts weit mehr fürchten als er selbst. Putin könnte den Krieg jederzeit ausweiten und auf jedem Niveau der militärischen Auseinandersetzung die Oberhand behalten. Er schreckte mit dieser Fähigkeit den Westen erfolgreich davon ab, an ein militärisches Vorgehen auch nur zu denken. Das nennt man „Eskalationsdominanz“. Sie wird Putin bei jeder Gelegenheit attestiert, was die Verhandlungen mit ihm nicht erleichtert.

Alle Begründungen, warum der Rückgriff auf militärische Mittel (auch nur zur Abschreckung) sinnlos, ja sogar äußerst gefährlich sei, enden mit dem Hinweis auf den Atommachtstatus Russlands. Das bedeutet im Klartext: Man hält es für möglich, dass Putin den Konflikt bis an die Schwelle einer nuklearen Auseinandersetzung eskalieren lassen würde.

Merkel, über deren ganzer Kanzlerschaft das Motto „Respice finem“ (Bedenke das Ende) stehen könnte, schreckt daher schon vor Waffenlieferungen an Kiew zurück, die den Westen in einen Stellvertreterkrieg verwickeln könnten. Sie baut weiter darauf, Putin mit einer Mischung aus Sanktionen und Verheißungen (Freihandelszone) zur Vernunft zu bringen. Einer ernsthaften Sanktionspolitik stünden in der Tat noch viele Möglichkeiten offen. Auf dem Feld der Wirtschaft ist die EU Russland deutlich überlegen.

Aber auch mit einer Unterbrechung des Zahlungsverkehrs wären Putins Panzer kurzfristig nicht zu stoppen. Der Osten ist für Kiew faktisch verloren, auch wenn es eine Anschluss-Show wie auf der Krim noch nicht gab. Daran würden auch Waffenlieferungen nichts mehr ändern. Putin hat den Westen abermals überrumpelt. Beim

Abstecken der Demarkationslinie kommt es ihm nun offenbar auf jeden Quadratkilometer an. Während Obama noch seine Optionen wägt, lässt der russische Marschall Vorwärts unter einem breiten Propagandaschirm seine Truppen vorrücken. Wenn der Westen bei seiner Einschätzung bleibt, dass der Konflikt „militärisch nicht zu lösen ist“, könnte der Kreml im Extremfall seine „Separatisten“ bis nach Kiew marschieren lassen.

Putins gegenteilige Überzeugung, dass von ihm begonnene Konflikte sehr wohl militärisch zu lösen seien, zwingt den Westen nicht nur zur Beschäftigung mit der Frage, ob und wann man einem angegriffenen Staat, dessen territoriale Integrität auch von westlichen Mächten garantiert worden ist, mit Waffen zur Selbstverteidigung beliefert. In dieser Konfrontation steckt eine strategische Herausforderung, deren Bewältigung von größter Bedeutung für die Sicherheit und Stabilität Europas ist: Wie hegt man eine aggressive und expansive Macht ein, die die Grundprinzipien der europäischen Friedensordnung missachtet, zur Durchsetzung ihrer Interessen militärische Mittel anwendet und dabei eine Politik des „brinkmanship“ verfolgt, die den Kontinent an den Rand eines großen Krieges führen könnte?

Glaubwürdige Abschreckungsstrategie nötig

Die Antwort ist unangenehm, aber unausweichlich: mit Abschreckung, und zwar bis hinauf zu ihrer höchsten Stufe. Hätte Putin es gewagt, die Krim zu besetzen, wenn die Ukraine noch ihre Atomwaffen besessen hätte? Ihr Schicksal wird die Atommächte dieser Welt nicht dazu ermuntern, ihre Nuklearsprengköpfe zu verschrotten - und die Zahl der Atommachtaspiranten nicht verkleinern. Nach Putins Triumphen in der Ukraine, die den Westen schwach erscheinen ließen, muss auch die Nato an der Glaubwürdigkeit ihrer Abschreckungsstrategie arbeiten. Sie muss dem Kreml verdeutlichen, dass er bei einer Verletzung des Bündnisgebiets mit militärischen Reaktionen zu rechnen hätte - und mit der Bereitschaft des Westens, auf der Eskalationsleiter mit nach oben zu steigen, im schlimmsten Fall auch schneller als die Russen.

Von solchen Szenarien will im Westen natürlich niemand offen sprechen, denn schon das widerspricht dem geltenden Dogma der Deeskalation. Die Russen haben auch da weniger Skrupel. Doch inzwischen finden sich auch in den Reden westlicher Politiker Belege dafür, dass sie sich auf eine lange Eiszeit im Verhältnis zu Russland einstellen, die in vielem dem Kalten Krieg ähnelt. Merkels Vergleich der Ukraine-Krise mit der deutschen Teilung war ein solcher Hinweis. Das Treffen in Minsk steht dieser Einschätzung nicht entgegen. Denn auch in den dunkelsten Zeiten des Ost-West-Konflikts setzte die Nato nicht allein auf Abschreckung, sondern auch auf das Angebot zur Entspannung.

114,36

Infographie

États-Unis, Chine, Allemagne: ils ont tous adopté le salaire minimum

Par [Géraldine Russell](#), Service infographie du Figaro Publié le 11/02/2015 à 06:01

INFOGRAPHIE - Montant, mode de calcul, revalorisation... Bien que mis en place dans de nombreux pays, le salaire minimum est loin d'être le même partout. *Le Figaro* passe en revue les salaires planchers, en Europe et dans le reste du monde.

De la Grèce aux États-Unis, en passant par la Chine ou l'Allemagne, de nombreux pays ont mis en place un salaire minimum. Celui-ci doit garantir un certain niveau de revenu aux employés mais il n'est pas partout calculé de la même manière. Certains pays, comme la France ou les États-Unis, définissent un taux horaire qui doit être multiplié par le nombre d'heures effectuées dans le mois pour obtenir un équivalent mensuel. D'autres le calculent sur une base hebdomadaire (comme les Pays-Bas) ou mensuelle (comme l'Espagne ou le Luxembourg).

À l'instar des États-Unis, du Canada ou de la Chine, le salaire minimum peut également être différent d'un État ou d'une province à un(e) autre. Aux États-Unis, bien qu'un salaire minimum soit fixé au niveau fédéral, chaque État peut légiférer de manière autonome sur la question. Dans la majorité des cas, le montant du salaire minimum est ainsi supérieur à celui fixé par l'État fédéral. En Chine, il s'agit pour le gouvernement de moduler le salaire minimum en fonction du coût de la vie dans les différentes provinces, comme cela pouvait être le cas en France lors de la création en 1950 du Salaire minimum interprofessionnel garanti (Smig), l'ancêtre de l'actuel Smic. *Le Figaro* fait un tour non exhaustif des salaires minimums, en Europe et dans le reste du monde.

L'Europe divisée sur le salaire minimum

• À l'Est, des planchers très bas

Les pays de l'Est restent ceux qui proposent les salaires minimums les plus faibles au sein de l'Union européenne. La palme revient à la Bulgarie, avec un salaire plancher mensuel brut équivalent à 174 euros. Avec la Roumanie (190 euros), elles sont les deux seuls pays à offrir un salaire minimum en-dessous des 200 euros. Si le Smic slovaque est deux fois plus élevé que son équivalent bulgare (352 euros), il est tout de même plus de deux fois moins élevé que le salaire minimum moyen (781 euros). La Slovénie est le seul pays de l'Est de l'Europe à offrir un salaire plancher supérieur à 500 euros: 789 euros brut mensuels.

• Les pays du Sud plus généreux malgré la crise

Le Portugal, Malte, l'Espagne et même la Grèce proposent des salaires minimums au-dessus de 500 euros. L'Espagne a réussi à surmonter la crise qu'elle a connu en 2010-2011 pour offrir le plus haut salaire plancher de l'Europe du Sud, à 753 euros. En Grèce, le montant du salaire minimum a maintes fois été discuté, la crise exerçant [une pression à la baisse](#). D'un montant de 684 euros au 1er janvier 2014, il a été ramené à 580 euros et [gelé jusqu'en 2016](#). Malgré cela, le Smic grec reste plus élevé que son équivalent portugais (566 euros).

• Des salaires minimums plus élevés à l'Ouest

Les plus hauts minima sont tous sans exception situés à l'Ouest de l'Europe. Le Luxembourg est le pays le plus généreux, avec un salaire minimum de 1921 euros par mois, suivi par la Belgique et les Pays-Bas. L'Allemagne, [qui vient de mettre en place le salaire minimum](#), se classe quatrième (1473 euros). Avec son Smic à 1445 euros au 1er janvier 2014, la France ne se classe que sixième des pays européens, derrière l'Irlande. Le

Royaume-Uni est quant à lui le seul pays de l'Ouest dont le salaire plancher mensuel ne dépasse pas l'équivalent de 1400 euros brut.

- Les pays scandinaves réticents

Ni le Danemark, ni la Finlande ou la Suède n'ont mis en place de salaire minimum. Ils font partie des six derniers pays européens (avec l'Autriche, Chypre et l'Italie) à ne pas proposer de salaire plancher. Pourtant, il existe bien des accords de branches qui imposent des minima aux entreprises. Mais ils résultent de discussions poussées entre les partenaires sociaux, grâce à la large place laissée à la négociation collective dans les pays nordiques.

- Un Smic à 3200 euros en Suisse?

Une votation a eu lieu au printemps 2014 pour décider si un salaire minimum de 4000 francs suisses, soit environ 3260 euros à l'époque, devait être instauré. Un montant qui paraît démesuré comparé aux autres salaires minimums en vigueur en Europe mais qui n'est [pas si exorbitant rapporté au coût de la vie en Suisse](#). L'initiative n'a cependant pas convaincu les Helvètes, qui l'ont finalement [rejetée à 77%](#).

À l'international, des problématiques très diverses

- Aux États-Unis, le combat contre la pauvreté

En janvier 2014, contre l'avis du Congrès, Barack Obama décide de [revaloriser le salaire minimum fédéral](#) de près de 40% d'ici 2017, le faisant passer de 7,25 à 10,10 dollars de l'heure (environ 8,90 euros). Pour éviter tout abus constitutionnel, cette mesure ne s'applique qu'aux salariés des entreprises fournisseurs de l'État. Bien que les Républicains estiment qu'une hausse du salaire plancher dissuade l'embauche et entraîne donc une hausse du chômage, ils ont fini par soutenir à contre-cœur l'initiative présidentielle. Barack Obama l'a défendue en arguant que la lutte contre les inégalités devait constituer une priorité pour l'État. Un peu moins de quatre millions d'Américains sont encore payés au salaire minimum, souvent des jeunes sans qualification ou des employés à temps partiel.

- En Chine, une hausse de la demande

En Chine, le montant du salaire minimum dépend de la zone dans laquelle le salarié travaille. À Zhejiang, il équivaut désormais à 220 euros. Le gouvernement chinois [encourage depuis plusieurs années les provinces à relever leur salaire plancher](#) afin de dynamiser la demande intérieure et de doper la consommation. Cela encourage également les délocalisations vers le Cambodge ou le Bangladesh, où le coût du travail est moins élevé... ce qui est bien un des objectifs du parti communiste chinois, confronté au tarissement de la main-d'œuvre au sein du pays.

- Au Japon, la lutte contre la déflation

Depuis octobre dernier, le salaire minimum moyen au Japon s'élève à 780 yens par heure, soit environ 5,8 euros. Pour la troisième année consécutive, il a bénéficié d'une augmentation à deux chiffres, selon les vœux du gouvernement japonais qui [supplie également les entreprises de revaloriser les salaires](#). Shinzo Abe, le très charismatique premier ministre, mène une politique monétaire destinée à redynamiser la consommation, qui doit elle-même conduire à une hausse de la demande afin d'enrayer la déflation. Augmenter le salaire plancher constitue donc un levier supplémentaire des Abenomics, les politiques économiques audacieuses menées par Shinzo Abe.

« Assimilation/ La fin du modèle français » de Michèle Tribalat (une deuxième analyse)

13 OCTOBRE 2013 | POLÉMIA

Note de lecture de Bruno Guillard.

Il y a peu, Polémia présentait sous la signature de Claude Lorne une note de lecture consacrée au dernier livre de Michèle Tribalat, « Assimilation/ La fin du modèle français ».

Depuis, nous venons de recevoir de Bruno Guillard une analyse critique de ce même ouvrage.

Ce livre est d'une extrême importance : il éclaire le lecteur sur la nature des chiffres qui sont jetés en pâture au public sans grande cohérence par les grands offices statistiques et qui, on peut le craindre, sont destinés à minimiser la présence étrangère en France ; il explique également comment, sous les pressions idéologiques, on est passé de l'assimilation à l'intégration, pour finir tout simplement par l'insertion qui n'exige aucun effort des allogènes. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons jugé nécessaire de publier les deux comptes rendus.

Nos lecteurs trouveront donc ci-après l'analyse de Bruno Guillard qui tout naturellement vient en complément des commentaires de Claude Lorne auxquels ils peuvent se reporter ().*

Polémia.

La démographe Michèle Tribalat, qui a publié en 2010 un essai particulièrement « décapant » intitulé *Les yeux grands fermés* (éditions Denoël), réitère avec un ouvrage consacré au modèle assimilationniste français qui va susciter autant de critiques que le précédent de la part de la nomenklatura intellectuelle et journalistique. Cet ouvrage est intitulé *Assimilation : la fin du modèle français* et il a été publié en septembre par les éditions du Toucan.

Un désordre statistique inextricable

Comme elle l'avait fait dans son précédent ouvrage, Michèle Tribalat expose les difficultés rencontrées par les chercheurs qui étudient les flux migratoires en France du fait d'un « désordre statistique inextricable » auquel « les institutions dont ce devrait être l'un des intérêts majeurs, qu'il s'agisse du département de démographie à l'INSEE ou de l'INED, n'accordent pas l'attention qu'ils devraient ». De plus, « il semble que le solde migratoire global combine un solde négatif des natifs ou des nationaux et un solde positif des immigrés ou des étrangers. C'est pourquoi il apparaît si faible en France ». Cette notion de solde migratoire global a, bien évidemment, pour but de relativiser l'importance de l'immigration étrangère.

Une immigration record

Un des poncifs les plus fréquents tend à affirmer la stabilisation voire la décrue de l'immigration dans notre pays, ce que notre démographe nie catégoriquement :

« Il y a bien eu une stabilisation, mais seulement sur la période 1975-1979. Pendant ce quart de siècle, la population immigrée a crû à peu près au même rythme que celle des natifs, soit une croissance de 11% sur l'ensemble de la période. Depuis 1999, la population immigrée a augmenté de 24% en 10 ans. Le nombre des natifs n'a progressé, lui, que de 5% sur la même période. La proportion d'immigrés est donc passée de 7,4% en 1999 à 8,5% en 2009. En termes relatifs, l'accroissement de la proportion d'immigrés est voisin de celui observé pendant les Trente Glorieuses, période que personne n'oserait qualifier de stagnation migratoire. La France est donc sortie de sa phase de faible intensité des flux migratoires qui a effectivement suivi la suspension de l'immigration de travail en 1974 et a duré un quart de siècle, pour entrer dans un nouveau cycle migratoire. Elle connaît la proportion d'immigrés la plus élevée de son histoire ».

Cette immigration record se traduit par une augmentation sans précédent de la part de la population qui est étrangère et d'origine étrangère, soit 11,7 millions en 2009 (cette estimation effectuée par l'INSEE ne comprend que deux générations : immigrés et enfants d'au moins un parent immigré) et 19% de la population totale ! Le taux d'accroissement de la population immigrée et d'origine immigrée a été voisin, entre 1999 et 2008, de 18 pour mille quand celui des natifs a été de 4 pour mille seulement. Compte tenu du fait que les

dirigeants de l'Union européenne ont entériné l'idée que l'avenir démographique de l'Europe passe par l'immigration, nous allons connaître, si rien ne change au plan politique (mais rien n'est moins sûr que la pérennité de cette organisation calamiteuse), des jours pour le moins difficiles parce que, comme l'écrit Michèle Tribalat, « cette politique aura un prix dont les citoyens européens ne sont pas encore complètement conscients. Quand on délègue son destin à d'autres, on ne peut guère s'attendre à en conserver la maîtrise ».

Une forte augmentation de la présence de l'islam

Michèle Tribalat estime le nombre de musulmans résidant en France à 4,2 millions à la fin de 2008 (la population totale était alors de 62.469.000) mais l'accroissement démographique des musulmans a été de 151.000 en 2008 et celui des non-musulmans de 180.000 seulement ; nous allons donc atteindre le chiffre de 5 millions de musulmans à la fin de cette année et celui de 6 millions en 2020. « La forte croissance démographique de la population musulmane est (donc) favorisée par ses caractéristiques démographiques : grande jeunesse et fécondité élevée. L'apport annuel, par l'immigration, de personnes relativement jeunes en âge d'avoir des enfants contribue au dynamisme démographique des musulmans ». La France est le pays qui compte le plus de musulmans et dont la part relative de la population musulmane est la plus importante en Europe après celle de la Bulgarie.

L'évolution de la communauté musulmane en matière de religion est à l'opposé de celle des natifs dont la sécularisation s'amplifie régulièrement. Contrairement à tous les pronostics, les jeunes générations de musulmans sont de plus en plus pieuses et respectueuses des règles et interdits de l'islam : « On assiste (donc) à une forme de durcissement identitaire qui sépare les musulmans des autres, renforce le contrôle social et pèse sur la liberté des fidèles mais aussi sur celle des non musulmans ». Michèle Tribalat constate que le raidissement des musulmans a des conséquences sur la communauté musulmane mais aussi sur les natifs : « Ces interdits concernent tous les aspects de la vie privée et sociale et, comme il est interdit de médire de l'islam, les non-musulmans se sont trouvés eux-mêmes visés dans ce qu'ils ont de plus cher : la liberté d'expression. Après l'affaire Rushdie, l'intimidation est devenue monnaie courante. On risque à nouveau sa vie en Europe, mais aussi aux Etats-Unis, à dire, écrire, figurer ce que l'on pense. Les ajustements à l'intimidation par la censure, l'autocensure, la langue de bois et, quelquefois, le ralliement ont remis les Occidentaux dans la position d'avoir à plier ou se battre pour reconquérir ce qui leur semblait définitivement acquis. »

La fin de l'assimilation

L'assimilation devient impossible pour deux raisons : d'une part, du fait de la séparation entre populations natives et populations immigrées qui a été étudiée par Christophe Guilluy (*Fractures françaises*, François Bourrin éditeur, 2012) et, d'autre part, du fait de la politique d'intégration mise en œuvre par l'oligarchie européenne. Les élites comptaient sur le brassage des populations natives et immigrées au sein des classes sociales les moins favorisées pour assurer l'assimilation des nouveaux venus ; ces dernières avaient donc la charge de régler l'énorme problème posé par l'arrivée de ces masses étrangères à notre culture, tout en étant systématiquement dénigrées par des élites qui valorisent l'Autre et méprisent leur culture et leur histoire ; la réaction des natifs, totalement imprévue, a consisté à se séparer en fuyant dans les zones péri-urbaines, loin des immigrés. De ce fait, l'assimilation devient impossible et ce d'autant plus que la politique d'intégration imposée par l'Union européenne va dans le sens d'une valorisation des cultures des immigrés. Les oligarques de Bruxelles considèrent, en effet, que l'immigration et la diversité qu'elle induit sont une chance pour l'Europe, sans en avoir jamais fait la démonstration ; on peut d'ailleurs raisonnablement penser le contraire : un ensemble politique est d'autant plus stable et cohérent qu'il est homogène. En survalorisant l'Autre, les oligarques ont réveillé les sentiments nationaux assoupis qu'ils essayent de détruire ; en mettant l'accent sur la diversité et en valorisant les appartenances ethniques des minorités, ils ont fait surgir la question identitaire chez les « natifs au carré ». « Si les personnes d'origine étrangère ont une identité si précieuse qu'il faille se mobiliser pour la préserver, pourquoi n'en irait-il pas de même pour les natifs au carré ? ». La désécularisation

des musulmans s'ajoute au mouvement de séparation volontaire des natifs et renforce le processus de séparation des différentes communautés.

Contrairement à ce qu'affirment ceux qui pensent, comme Emmanuel Todd, que les populations immigrées et natives vont se fondre dans un heureux *melting pot*, Michèle Tribalat constate une fragmentation ethnoculturelle de notre société qui est une source de tensions et d'affrontements. Un certain nombre d'indices permettent de penser que pour les « natifs au carré », désormais, la coupe est pleine. Malgré une propagande digne des régimes totalitaires, le rejet de la politique menée par l'oligarchie immigrationniste prend une ampleur qui commence à la faire paniquer ; la question identitaire est désormais au cœur de la problématique politique française et européenne. Michèle Tribalat souligne les difficultés qui rendront difficile le changement de politique en matière d'immigration et qui sont, outre les traités internationaux signés par la France, les engagements contractés au sein de l'Union européenne ; mais elle évoque la possibilité que le changement de politique dans quelques pays européens pourrait permettre un changement radical dans l'ensemble de l'Europe.

Greece's Antireform

More austerity for the private economy, less for the government.

Greece's new left-wing government is trumpeting that it agrees with 70% of the reforms its predecessors committed to in two previous bailouts. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras says he'll proceed with plans to privatize a major port, while Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis has promised to maintain a budget surplus, excluding debt service.

All of this came ahead of a gathering of eurozone leaders in Brussels on Wednesday to discuss the Greek crisis. Will it succeed? It's hard to be hopeful when you consider the other 30% of reforms that the Greeks plan to reverse.

In his first speech to the new parliament on Sunday, Mr. Tsipras unveiled a raft of antireforms that are mainly a gift to the public sector. These include a promise to restore state broadcaster ERT to its former glory with up to 800 government jobs, and rehiring an unspecified number of workers he says were "wrongly fired" from government agencies under the bailout.

Mr. Tsipras also promised free housing, electricity, food and medical insurance for families that suffered under the "barbarism of the Memorandum" that laid out reforms under the 2010 bailout. In addition to returning the minimum wage to its pre-crisis level of 751 euros (\$849) per month from 580 euros, he would restore the union-friendly collective-bargaining rules that calcified the labor market before 2010.

Meanwhile, Energy Minister Panagiotis Lafazanis said he would try to block a Canadian investment in a gold mine in northern Greece that is a test case of openness to foreign capital. Mr. Lafazanis also reiterated the government's opposition to electricity privatization.

Whatever gestures Athens makes to reality, the overriding theme of Mr. Tsipras's program is to reverse the limited "austerity" that was imposed on the government and unions while tightening the squeeze on the private economy. Employees at state-owned companies keep their jobs. Everyone else pays higher prices to state monopolists. Union leaders will enjoy more power. Everyone else will be out of a job if employers can't afford the higher minimum wage. And so on.

This won't reassure creditors that Athens would make good use of any leeway it receives in debt talks. This makes it hard to credit even the useful measures in Mr. Tsipras's agenda, such as an increase in the standard personal-tax exemption and elimination of an onerous property tax, which reverse the International Monetary Fund's antigrowth revenue obsessions.

At 175% of gross domestic product, **Greece's** debt level looks unsustainable. But it's that high largely because GDP has contracted by some 25% during the crisis. Whatever he says about his commitment to the euro, Mr. Tsipras's actions are the opposite of a growth strategy, and a recipe for an eventual Greek exit from the euro.

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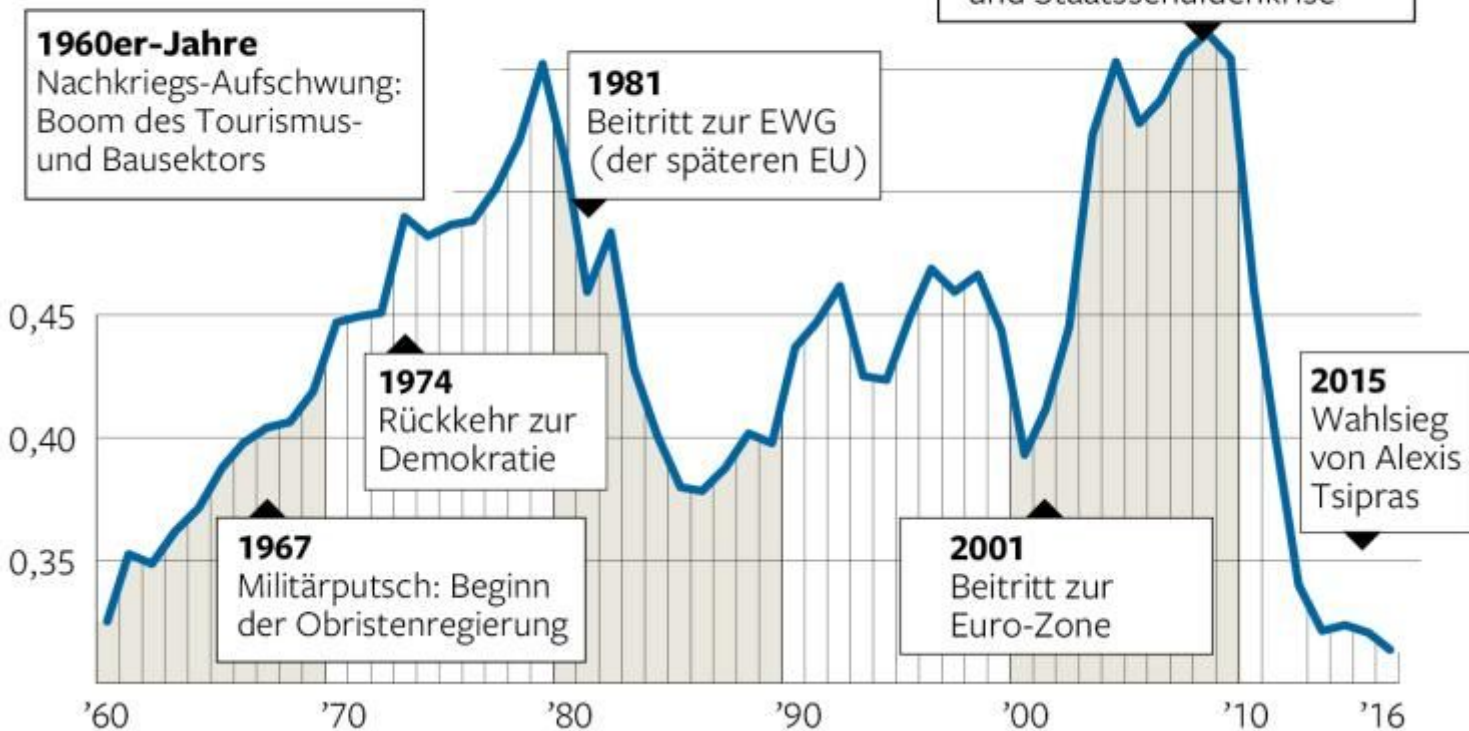
Der geniale Bluff des griechischen Winzlings

Griechenland dominiert die Welt wie eine Großmacht, dabei ist das Land wirtschaftlich ein Zwerg. Doch Athen versteht sich auf die Kniffe der Spieltheorie und zwingt Europa zu einem Tanz am Abgrund.

Von Anja Ettl, Holger Zschäpitz

SCHWINDENDE BEDEUTUNG

Anteil Griechenlands an der Weltwirtschaft in Prozent



Der griechische Anteil an der weltweiten Wirtschaftsleistung ist auf unter 0,3 Prozent gesunken. Foto: Infografik Die Welt

Angenommen, ein Außerirdischer mit ökonomischem Sachverstand schaute in diesen Tagen auf die Erde, er würde sich wundern. Er wäre erstaunt, dass es auf diesem Planeten derzeit vor allem ein Thema gibt, das die Wirtschafts- und Finanzwelt erregt: Griechenland.

Und seine Verwunderung wäre durchaus verständlich. Wie kann eine Ökonomie mit gut zehn Millionen Einwohnern, die gerade mal 0,3 Prozent zur weltweiten Wirtschaftsleistung beiträgt, derart die Nachrichten dominieren? China produziert durch sein rasantes Wachstum alle drei Monate eine zusätzliche Wirtschaftsleistung von der Größe Griechenlands.

Und selbst das Wachstum in der Euro-Zone reicht aus, um in einem guten Jahr ein zusätzliches Bruttoinlandsprodukt (BIP) von der Größe Griechenlands zu produzieren. An der wirtschaftlichen Größe liegt es also ganz sicher nicht, dass Griechenland wieder einmal im Zentrum der Finanzwelt steht, umso mehr, als die Verhandlungen am Mittwoch erst einmal gescheitert sind und am Montag fortgesetzt werden sollen.

Sicher, das Land genießt seit Langem den zweifelhaften Ruf als Serienpleitier. Seit seiner Unabhängigkeit hat Athen die Hälfte der Zeit im Status des Staatsbankrotts verbracht. Im Jahr 2012 brachte Griechenland es sogar fertig, die größte Pleite in der Geschichte hinzulegen. Und das Land bewegt sich erneut mit beinahe schlafwandlerischer Sicherheit auf einen Staatsbankrott zu.

Angst vor einer Kettenreaktion

Das allein würde allerdings noch nicht die große weltweite Aufmerksamkeit erklären. Zumal auch die Schulden – im weltweiten Kontext betrachtet – eher vernachlässigenswert sind. Die rund 330 Milliarden Euro, die Griechenland mittlerweile angesammelt hat, entsprechen gerade mal 0,7 Prozent der weltweiten Verbindlichkeiten.

KLEINER SCHULDNER

Anteil Griechenlands an den weltweiten Verbindlichkeiten in Prozent

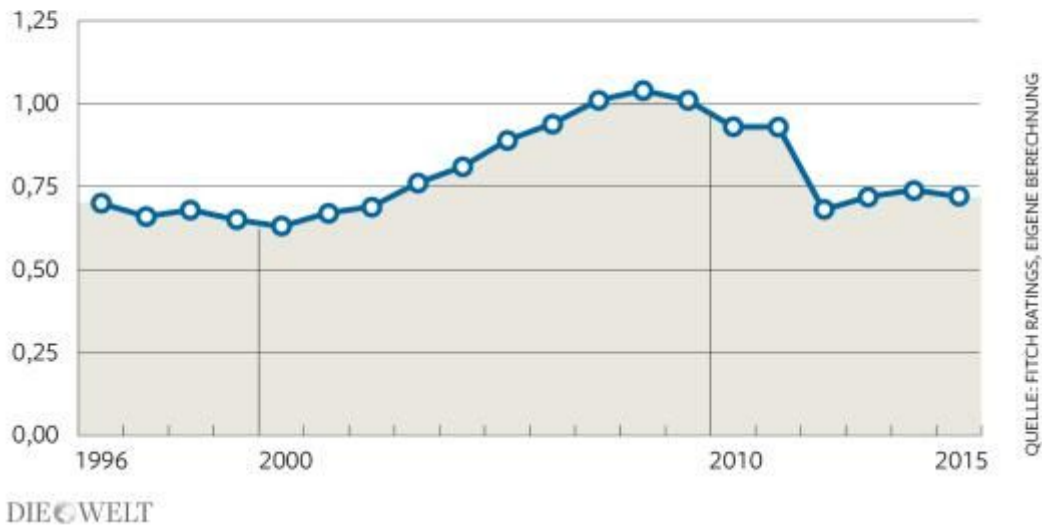


Foto: Infografik Die Welt Die griechischen Schulden sind im globalen Vergleich ebenfalls verschwindend gering

Dass Griechenland trotzdem im Zentrum der weltweiten Wirtschaftsnachrichten steht, liegt also nicht einmal am Land selbst, sondern vor allem an der Verknüpfung mit dem Euro und der möglichen Kettenreaktion, die ein Pleitefall oder gar der Austritt des Landes aus der Währungsunion – kurz "Grexit" genannt – nach sich ziehen würde.

Dabei hat Griechenland einen beispiellosen Abstieg hinter sich. Noch kurz vor dem Ausbruch der Euro-Schuldenkrise gehörte das Land zu den wachstumsstärksten der Währungsgemeinschaft. Zwischen 2000 und 2008 weitete der Ägäisstaat seinen wirtschaftlichen Fußabdruck im globalen Gefüge von unter 0,4 auf fast 0,6 Prozent des Welt-BIP aus.

Doch ein Großteil des Wachstums basierte auf Schulden. Und mit der Euro-Krise brach ein Viertel des griechischen BIP weg. Mittlerweile beträgt der Anteil des Landes an der weltweiten Wirtschaftsleistung nur noch 0,3 Prozent.

Stabiler Euro brachte den Aufschwung

Ein solider Wachstumsbringer war Griechenland ohnehin nie. Das Land blickt ökonomisch gesehen auf eine bewegte Vergangenheit zurück: Im Nachkriegsaufschwung der Sechzigerjahre arbeitete sich Athen von 0,3 Prozent auf 0,55 Prozent des Welt-BIP hoch.

Die Militärdiktatur und die Ölkrise brachten dann einen herben Rückschlag. Als Bürde entpuppte sich vor allem die schwache Landeswährung Drachme, durch die das Land im globalen Wettbewerb immer weiter ins Hintertreffen geriet.

Die Wende brachte erst der stabile Euro, der den Abwertungseskapaden gleich mehrerer südeuropäischer Mitglieder ein Ende setzte. Für Griechenland ging es wirtschaftlich nach dem Beitritt zur Europäischen Union wieder aufwärts, bevor kurz darauf die nächste Talfahrt einsetzte, die bis heute andauert.

Die fehlende Verhandlungsmacht als kleiner, hoch verschuldeter Staat, macht die neu gewählte griechische Regierung allerdings durch lautstarkes Auftreten mehr als wett. In den ersten Tagen nach der Wahl schockten Neu-Premier und Politaufsteiger Alexis Tsipras und sein Finanzminister Janis Varoufakis die Weltgemeinschaft noch mit der polternden Ankündigung, die Troika aus Internationalem Währungsfonds (IWF), Europäischer Zentralbank (EZB) und EU-Kommission aus dem Land jagen zu wollen.

Strategie wie im Kalten Krieg

Was zunächst wie eine Impulsreaktion zweier Hitzköpfe wirkte, könnte durchaus ein kluger strategischer Schritt ganz nach dem Lehrbuch aus der Zeit des Kalten Krieges gewesen sein. Schon der US-Nobelpreisträger Thomas Schelling beschrieb 1960 in seiner preisgekrönten Schrift, wie sich vermeintlich gleich starke Akteure durch überraschendes Verhalten einen Verhandlungsvorteil verschaffen konnten.

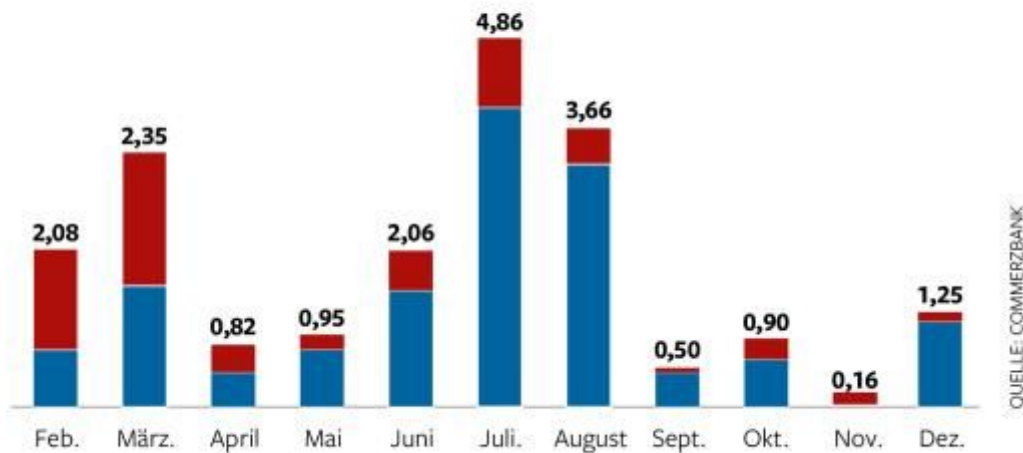
Schelling wählte dafür das Beispiel zweier Gefangener, die aneinandergelockt auf einer Felsenklippe stehen. Die Belohnung winkt in diesem Szenario jenem, der den anderen zum Aufgeben zwingt, zum Beispiel, indem er – vermeintlich verrückt – immer näher an den Abgrund herantänzelt.

"Wenn dieser Irrsinn einen rationalen Beweggrund hat – und im Fall des Spieltheoretikers Varoufakis ist davon auszugehen – könnte dieses Verhalten sogar zur Deeskalation beitragen", schreibt Alberto Gallo, Stratege bei der RBS in London.

FINANZBEDARF

Fällige Zahlungen 2015 in Mrd. Euro

■ Fällige Anleihen und Kredite
■ Zinszahlungen



DIE WELT

Foto: Infografik Die Welt So hoch sind die fälligen Verbindlichkeiten der Griechen in diesem Jahr

Varoufakis, der sich in der schwächeren Position befindet, müsse im Euro-Spiel den Verhandlungspartnern aus EU-Kommission, Finanzministern, Europäischer Zentralbank (EZB) und Internationalem Währungsfonds (IWF) einen Tanz an der Klippe vorführen, um diese zur Aufgabe zu bewegen. Ganz dieser Rolle entsprechend hat sich Varoufakis auch nach dem gescheiterten Treffen der Euro-Gruppe verhalten. "Griechenland werde nie das bestehende Rettungsprogramm niemals fortführen", ließ er wissen.

Niemand würde Athen Anleihen abkaufen

Allerdings hat diese Strategie einen entscheidenden Nachteil für die schwachen Griechen. "Je länger die Verhandlungen dauern, desto deutlicher wird, dass Varoufakis nur an der Klippe tänzelt und gar nicht wirklich springen möchte", sagt Gallo.

Ohnehin können die Griechen nicht ewig tänzeln, denn irgendwann geht ihnen schlicht das Geld aus. Vor der Wahl von Tsipras gingen die Experten davon aus, dass Athen noch bis Juni liquide bleibt. Dann werden große Anleihen sowie Zinszahlungen im Volumen von insgesamt fast fünf Milliarden Euro fällig.

Doch wegen der großzügigen Wahlversprechen und der gleichzeitig drastisch gesunkenen Steuereinnahmen ist nun nicht mehr gesichert, dass Varoufakis nach den Märzüberweisungen von über zwei Milliarden Euro noch im April flüssig ist.

Auf die Finanzmärkte kann Athen nicht setzen. Niemand würde dem Staat langfristige Anleihen abkaufen. Die Zinsen für dreijährige Schuldtitel notieren über 20 Prozent. Und auch kurz laufende Schatzwechsel kann Varoufakis nicht mehr begeben.

Hier liegt die von der EZB genehmigte Obergrenze bei 15 Milliarden Euro, die bereits ausgeschöpft sind. Wie groß das Misstrauen der Kapitalmärkte ist, zeigt die Tatsache, dass die Akteure das Risiko einer Staatspleite in den kommenden fünf Jahren auf rund 75 Prozent taxieren.

Kleine Staaten lösen oft globale Krisen aus

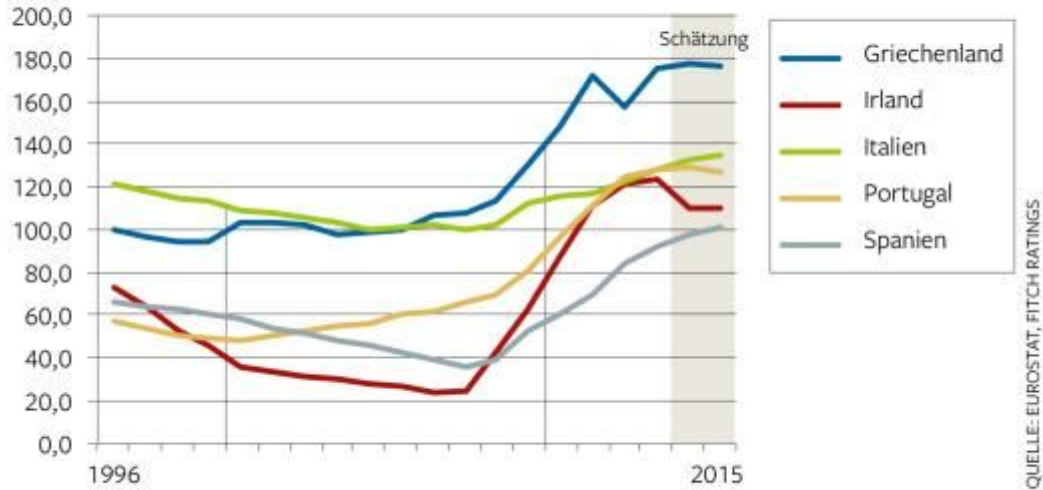
Doch immerhin kann Athen in den Verhandlungen mit einer Staatspleite und einem Austritt aus der Währungsunion drohen. Tatsächlich lehrt die Wirtschaftsgeschichte, dass nicht selten globale Krisen von kleineren Staaten ausgelöst werden. Beispielsweise ging die Asien-Krise 1997 vom kleinen Thailand aus.

Selbst wenn die EZB mit ihren angekündigten Anleihekäufen die Situation an den Märkten der Euro-Zone bislang beruhigen konnte, ist eine Ansteckung nicht auszuschließen.

Denn nicht nur Griechenland leidet unter drückenden Schuldenlasten. Auch bei anderen Staaten der Währungsgemeinschaft sind die Staatsfinanzen nicht gerade solide. Italien etwa hat eine Schuldenquote von mehr als 130 Prozent, Portugal von nahezu 130, und selbst in den Vorzeigeländern Spanien und Irland liegt die Quote jenseits von 100 Prozent. Steigende Renditen könnten daher sehr schnell sehr teuer werden.

SCHULDENQUOTEN

der Euro-Krisenländer in Prozent des Bruttoinlandsprodukts



DIE WELT

Foto: Infografik Die Welt Die Schulden der Euro-Krisenländer sind jeweils über das jährliche Bruttoinlandsprodukt der Staaten gestiegen

Ein Euro-Austritt könnte ein verheerendes Signal setzen. Bislang basiert die Währungsunion auf der Annahme, dass die Mitgliedschaft irreversibel ist. Dieser Konsens wäre dahin, es würde ein permanentes Geraune über weitere Austrittskandidaten an den Märkten geben.

Furcht vor einer Kernschmelze

"Einen 'Grexit' kann niemand wollen", sagt RBS-Mann Gallo. Seines Erachtens dürfte es zu einer Einigung der Kontrahenten kommen. Denn ein drohender "Grexit" könnte die Euro-Krise mit voller Wucht wieder aufleben lassen. Denkbar wäre ein Ansturm auf die Banken in anderen schwächeren Euro-Staaten.

Währungshistoriker wie Barry Eichengreen erwarten für den Fall eines "Grexit" eine Kernschmelze an den Finanzmärkten vergleichbar mit den Folgen nach der Pleite der US-Investmentbank Lehman Brothers.

Deshalb beobachtet man auch an der Wall Street die Geschehnisse um Griechenland ganz genau. Selbst der amerikanische Finanzminister Jack Lew hat die Euro-Zone ermahnt, doch eine Lösung zu finden. Und so bewegt ein Land, das 0,3 Prozent der Weltwirtschaft ausmacht, selbst Amerika, das für ein Viertel des globalen BIP steht.

114,47

Athènes demande des réparations de guerre à Berlin

Par lefigaro.fr Publié le 12/02/2015 à 07:56

Le nouveau gouvernement d'[Alexis Tsipras](#) avait évoqué la possibilité [de demander des indemnités à l'Allemagne suite à l'occupation Nazi](#) de son pays pendant la seconde guerre mondiale. C'est désormais chose faite puisque le ministre grec des affaires étrangères, Nikos Kotzias, a remis, mardi 10 février à Berlin, une demande formelle de son gouvernement pour des réparations de guerre à la suite de l'occupation de la Grèce par la Wehrmacht, entre 1941 et la fin 1944.

Dimanche, dans son discours de politique générale, le premier ministre grec avait déjà déclaré qu'«il y a une obligation morale envers notre peuple, envers l'Histoire, envers tous les peuples européens qui se sont battus et ont donné leur sang contre le nazisme, une obligation historique» à réclamer à l'Allemagne «des indemnités de guerre».

Un montant de 80 à 160 milliards d'euros

Face à l'insistance de l'Allemagne pour que la Grèce rembourse sa dette, les Grecs ont réveillé en effet un souvenir de guerre. En 1941, un montant de 476 millions de reichsmarks - la monnaie allemande de l'époque - avait notamment été directement extorqué à la Grèce par l'Allemagne nazie. En 1946, l'Allemagne avait ainsi été condamnée à payer 7 milliards de dollars à la Grèce à titre de réparation pour l'occupation. Cette dette n'était pas couverte par l'accord de Londres de 1953.

Ainsi, en 2012, le député européen Daniel Cohn-Bendit avait estimé que cette créance vaudrait aujourd'hui l'équivalent de 80 milliards d'euros. [Jean-Luc Mélenchon, fondateur du Parti de gauche, estime lui que «les Allemands doivent 168 milliards d'euros, à la valeur actuelle, à la Grèce. Pourquoi? Parce que les Allemands ont occupé la Grèce et lui ont fait payer les frais d'occupation».](#) La facture s'élèverait, selon une évaluation faite en 2012 par la Cour des comptes grecque, à 162 milliards d'euros. Soit plus de la moitié de la dette publique grecque actuelle (315 milliards).

Berlin rejette la demande grecque

Mais Berlin affirme avoir payé son dû en 1960 lorsque le pays a versé 115 millions de Deutsche mark à la Grèce pour les réparations de guerre à la suite de l'occupation de la Grèce par la Wehrmacht. Le ministre allemand des Affaires étrangères Frank-Walter Steinmeier a affirmé «Nous sommes conscients de la responsabilité politique et morale dans les terribles événements survenus en Grèce entre 1941 et 1944, a déclaré le chef de la diplomatie allemande. Pourtant, nous sommes fermement convaincus que toutes les questions sur les réparations, y compris les emprunts forcés, ont été juridiquement réglées une fois pour toutes». Le ministre allemand de l'Economie a également rappelé qu'un traité signé il y a vingt-cinq ans avait définitivement réglé cette question, juste avant la réunification allemande.

Par ailleurs, l'Allemagne rétorque qu'en acceptant le Traité de Moscou qui entérine la réunification des deux Allemagne, la Grèce a également accepté de tirer un trait sur cette dette. En 1990 après la réunification, ce traité exonéra l'Allemagne de certaines réparations, notamment celles qu'elle aurait dû payer à la Grèce.

114,48

Le Point - Publié le 12/02/2015 à 12:05

VIDÉO. Une chaîne de Saint-Pétersbourg explique, en images, comment Moscou pourrait prendre la capitale allemande en cas de guerre. Édifiant.



Extrait de la vidéo

de propagande d'une chaîne russe. © Capture d'écran

Par MARC NEXON

La propagande russe, attisée par le conflit ukrainien, se surpasse. Cette fois, c'est la cinquième chaîne, basée à Saint-Pétersbourg, qui donne le ton. Dans son émission dominicale baptisée *L'Essentiel*, elle montre comment les chars russes pourraient faire leur entrée à Varsovie ou Berlin. Une présentation teintée d'ironie mais glaçante.

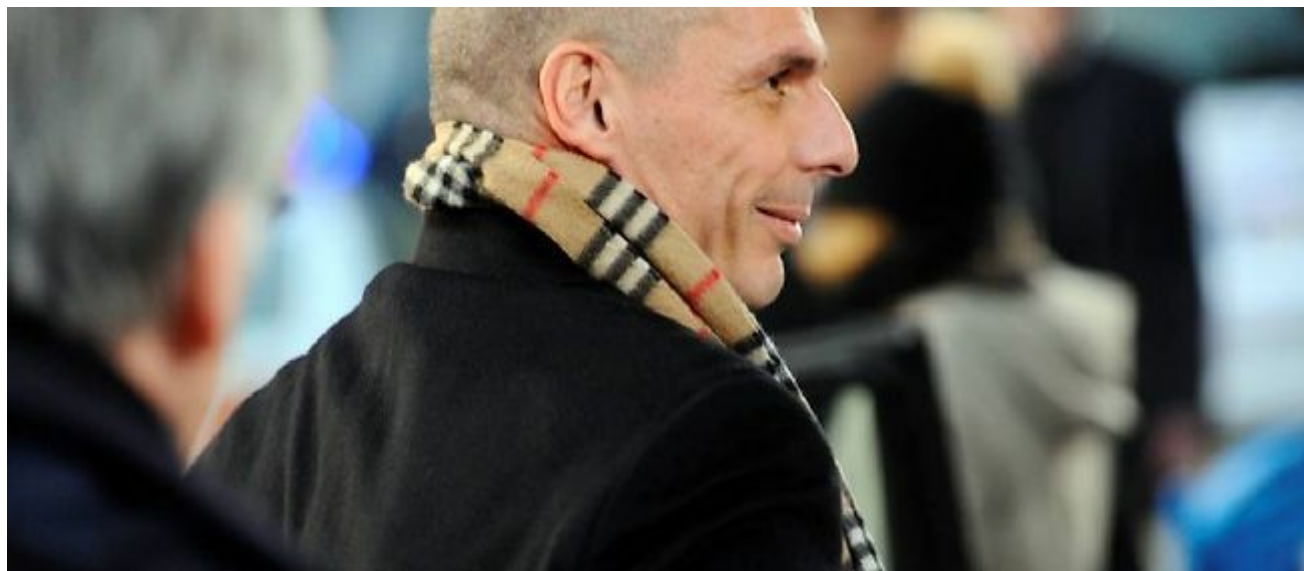
"Varsovie n'est qu'à 1 300 kilomètres. Un char T90 pourrait y arriver en 24 heures", explique le commentateur. Et Berlin n'est qu'à 1 800 kilomètres ! Pour une armée moderne, c'est une distance raisonnable... Nos soldats pourraient même s'y rendre à pied comme il y a soixante-dix ans... Ça fait longtemps que nous n'y sommes pas allés... Beaucoup d'officiers russes connaissent l'Allemagne, mais il ne faudrait pas occuper les anciennes villes de la RDA... Pour Londres et Washington, nous avons besoin de bateaux et d'avions, mais notre armée est grande. On pourra encore en laisser une partie à Moscou."

114,49

Le Point - Publié le 12/02/2015 à 08:51 - Modifié le 12/02/2015 à 09:04

Fiasco pour l'Eurogroupe sur la Grèce

Les ministres des Finances de la zone euro ne sont pas parvenus à s'entendre sur un communiqué commun. Les négociations reprendront lundi.



Le ministre des

Finances grec, Yanis Varoufakis, aurait bloqué les négociations mercredi soir après une conversation téléphonique avec Alexis Tsipras. © John Thys / AFP

Par LORELIN MERELLE ET MARC VIGNAUD

Personne n'attendait un accord mercredi soir. Il n'empêche, les négociations entre la Grèce et ses créanciers se sont bien mal engagées. Il a fallu attendre minuit passé mercredi soir - ou plutôt jeudi - pour que le président de l'Eurogroupe, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, finisse par tenir sa traditionnelle conférence de presse pourtant prévue à 20 heures, à l'issue d'une première réunion des ministres des Finances de la zone euro avec leur nouveau collègue Yanis Varoufakis.

Aux côtés du commissaire aux Affaires économiques, Pierre Moscovici, de la directrice générale du FMI, Christine Lagarde, et du patron du fonds de secours de la zone euro, Klaus Regling, le Néerlandais a expédié l'exercice en moins de 10 minutes, sans détailler le contenu d'une discussion qui a pourtant duré plus de 6 heures.

Constat de désaccord

"Nous ne sommes pas parvenus à des conclusions communes", a-t-il simplement regretté. Aucun communiqué final commun n'a donc été publié. Une première pour un Eurogroupe : même au plus fort de la crise grecque en 2011-2012, les ministres des Finances avaient toujours fini par s'entendre sur un texte commun.

Il semble que ce soit Yanis Varoufakis qui ait fait blocage. Le ministre grec, qui n'a pas présenté de propositions écrites détaillées ni d'ébauche de programme pour assurer le financement de son pays à court terme aurait été réticent à accepter un allongement du programme actuel d'ajustement supervisé par la troïka.

Au téléphone avec Tsipras

Déjà tard dans la soirée, alors que même Wolfgang Schäuble, le ministre allemand, pensait le texte commun prêt à être adopté, le ministre grec a tergiversé, passant plus d'une demi-heure au téléphone avec son Premier ministre Alexis Tsipras avant de tout bloquer, selon un participant.

Pour faire bonne figure, Jeroen Dijsselbloem a tout de même assuré, très diplomatiquement, que cette réunion non prévue initialement avait été "bienvenue et utile" parce qu'elle avait permis aux Grecs et à leurs partenaires européens de "mieux comprendre" leurs positions respectives. Pierre Moscovici a abondé dans le même sens.

L'accord s'éloigne

Le représentant de la Commission européenne s'est contenté de répéter que la réunion avait permis de "clarifier la vision qu'a la Grèce de sa propre situation" et la perception des autres Européens. Il a aussi réitéré la nécessité de respecter le scrutin grec, mais aussi les engagements pris par le pays et ses précédents gouvernements vis-à-vis de ses partenaires, deux exigences apparemment toujours aussi difficilement conciliables.

Ces propos convenus ont toutefois eu du mal à masquer ce qui ressemble fort à une douche froide pour le président de l'Eurogroupe, qui avait confié son espoir de pouvoir se mettre d'accord sur des "étapes" dans les prochains jours pour signer sereinement un accord dès lundi prochain lors de la prochaine réunion régulière de l'Eurogroupe. Cette perspective s'éloigne alors que le temps presse : le 28 février, le programme supervisé par la troïka prend fin et la Grèce pourrait se retrouver en défaut de paiement.

114,50

Schuldenkrise

Was passiert, wenn Griechenland den Euro verlässt?

Mit jeder gescheiterten Verhandlung wird ein Euro-Austritt der Griechen wahrscheinlicher. Europa könnte diesen Schritt wohl ohne großen Schaden überstehen. Griechenland selbst wohl eher nicht.

12.02.2015, von PHILIP PLICKERT

Die Lage spitzt sich zu: Je mehr sich die Fronten zwischen der Tsipras-Regierung in Griechenland und den europäischen Kreditgebern, vor allem Deutschland, verhärten, desto größer wird die Wahrscheinlichkeit eines „Grexit“. **Offiziell will keine Seite ein Ausscheiden der Griechen aus dem Euroraum.** Sowohl Regierungschef Alexis Tsipras und sein Finanzminister Giannis Varoufakis lehnen das ab als auch fast alle wichtigen europäischen Politiker – bis auf einige Euro-Kritiker wie etwa die AfD. **Dennoch ist der Grexit mittlerweile kein rein hypothetisches Szenario mehr, sondern eine reale Möglichkeit.** Wenn die Tsipras-Regierung gegenüber den Kreditgebern zu hoch pokert, könnte es zu einem „Unfall“ kommen.

Möglich wäre beispielsweise, dass die Europäische Zentralbank den Griechen den Hahn für [Ela-Notkredite](#) zudreht. Erst vor kurzem hat sie den **Ela-Rahmen für die griechischen Banken auf 59,5 Milliarden Euro** ausgeweitet, weil Staatsanleihen nicht mehr als Sicherheiten akzeptiert werden und die Banken deshalb Notliquidität brauchen. Im Falle Zyperns hat der EZB-Rat vor gut zwei Jahren mit Zweidrittelmehrheit ein Ende der Ela-Kredite angedroht, als das dortige Parlament ein hartes Hilfsprogramm abgelehnt hatte. Über ein Wochenende wurde nach hektischer Krisendiplomatie ein abgeschwächtes Programm ausgehandelt. Doch niemand kann garantieren, dass die Regierung in Athen nicht hart bleibt – und sich damit ins Abseits schießt.

„Es gibt ein 35-Prozent-Risiko für einen Grexit“, sagt Holger Schmieding, Chefökonom der Berenberg-Bank und überzeugter Eurofreund. **Griechenland würde dann Kapitalverkehrskontrollen und längere Bankferien anordnen müssen, um eine Währungsstellung auf eine neue Drachme logistisch zu bewerkstelligen. Es würde chaotisch werden.**

EZB verschafft anderen Krisenländern Sicherheit

Im Syriza-Lager haben indes einige Vordenker das Szenario schon durchgespielt. Costas Lapavistas, bis vor kurzem Wirtschaftsprofessor in London und jetzt Syriza-Abgeordneter, empfiehlt seiner Regierung eine „taktische“ Drohung mit dem Euro-Aus. Um einen Ansturm auf die Banken zu verhindern und den Abfluss des Kapitals ins Ausland zu bremsen, seien Abhebelimits und Kapitalkontrollen unerlässlich. Schuldscheine der Regierung könnten als Not-Zahlungsmittel fungieren. Die Notenbank sollte dann, falls es keine neuen Hilfskredite mehr gebe, eine Parallelwährung einführen, meint Lapavistas. So könnte die Regierung ihre Beamten und Sozialleistungen bezahlen. Gegenüber dem Ausland würde die neue Währung allerdings stark abwerten.

Kurzfristig würde der Grexit zu erheblichen wirtschaftlichen und finanziellen Verwerfungen führen. Allerdings wäre die Erschütterung für den Euroraum insgesamt verkraftbar. **Die Warnung (oder Drohung) von Finanzminister Varoufakis, die Eurozone würde wie ein Kartenhaus zusammenfallen, halten die meisten Fachleute für völlig überzogen.** Die Ansteckungsgefahr für den Rest Europas bei einem Griechen-Zusammenbruch sei nicht so groß, sagt etwa Moritz Krämer, Chefanalyst der Ratingagentur S&P. Zum einen hat Griechenland mit **seinen elf Millionen Einwohnern** wirtschaftlich nur ein geringes Gewicht. **Es kommt auf nur knapp 2 Prozent des Bruttoinlandsprodukts des Euroraums, und die wirtschaftlichen Verflechtungen seien noch geringer**, sagt Krämer. **Europas Banken haben inzwischen kaum noch Außenstände in Griechenland – weil die öffentliche Hand, sprich Europas Steuerzahler, ja die meisten Schulden übernommen hat.**

Wenn es zum Knall käme und Griechenland austreten müsste, würde es allerdings an den Börsen ohne Zweifel erst mal stark nach unten gehen. Die Zinsen, die andere Krisenländer der Europeripherie für ihre Anleihen zahlen müssten, würden steigen, warnt John Higgins vom Analysehaus Capital Economics. Allerdings muss er zugeben, **dass die Risikoaufschläge der anderen Krisenländer nach dem Syriza-Wahlsieg und der neuen Eskalation der Griechen-Krise fast gar nicht gestiegen sind. Italien, Spanien und Portugal können sich zu historisch niedrigen Zinsen refinanzieren. Ein Grund dafür ist, dass die EZB für notfalls unbegrenzte Anleihekäufe bereitsteht.** Zudem gibt es, falls die Märkte keinen Kredit mehr

geben sollten, den Euro-Krisenfonds **ESM**, der neue Hilfen vergeben könnte. Berenberg-Ökonom Schmieding spricht von einer „gut geölten Maschinerie, um mit Krisen im Euroraum umzugehen“.

Unklar was mit griechischen Schulden passieren würde

Für Griechenland selbst und seine Bevölkerung würde ein Euro-Ausstieg allerdings kurzfristig „verheerend“ sein, warnt S&P-Analyst Krämer. Er sagt für die einfachen Leute schwere Entbehrungen voraus. **Griechenland ist stark von Importen abhängig. Wenn das Land knapp an Devisen werde und sich mit der abgewerteten neuen Währung teurere Importe nicht mehr leisten kann, könnte es zu Engpässen in der Versorgung etwa von Benzin oder Medikamenten kommen.** Der Grexit-Schock würde zudem zunächst einmal sämtliche Investitionen stoppen, die Produktions- und Lieferketten unterbrechen und das Land abermals in eine Rezession werfen. Schon jetzt ist die Arbeitslosigkeit mit über 25 Prozent die höchste im Euroraum. **Andere Ökonomen halten jedoch nach einer starken Abwertung einer neuen griechischen Währung um vielleicht ein Drittel auch eine schnellere Erholung der hellenischen Wirtschaft als im Euro für möglich, weil griechische Produkte oder Hotelangebote dann preislich sehr viel wettbewerbsfähiger wären.** **Das ist der Grund, warum etwa Hans-Werner Sinn, der Chef des Ifo-Instituts, einen Euro-Ausstieg empfiehlt.**

Ob mit oder ohne Euro-Austritt ist Griechenlands langfristige Schuldentragfähigkeit nicht gesichert. „Die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass Griechenland entweder kurz- oder mittel- bis längerfristig nochmals einen Zahlungsausfall erleidet, beziffern wir auf über 70 Prozent“, sagt DZ-Bank-Chefvolkswirt Stefan Bielmeier. **Es stehen große Summen auf dem Spiel. Von den 322 Milliarden Euro Schulden Griechenlands halten öffentliche Gläubiger ganze 257 Milliarden Euro, rund 80 Prozent.** Auf Deutschland entfallen mehr als 60 Milliarden Euro an Hilfskreditegarantien und indirekten Ausfallrisiken, die etwa über den Target-Saldo der griechischen Zentralbank zustande kommen.

Wie viel von diesen Forderungen uneinbringbar ist – ob mit oder ohne Grexit –, darüber wird es noch langen und heftigen Streit geben. Im Bundesfinanzministerium will man von der Frage nichts wissen, doch einige Ökonomen sind schon weiter. Der Chef des Deutschen Instituts für Wirtschaftsforschung, **Marcel Fratzscher, hat unlängst empfohlen, dass Deutschland es sich leisten könnte, davon 40 bis 50 Milliarden Euro abzuschreiben.**

114,52

Eurozone QE Could Fall on Barren Ground, Warns ECB Economist

There is a Risk to Program if Governments Don't do Enough to Reform, Says Peter Praet

By **TODD BUELL**

LONDON--The biggest risk the [European Central Bank](#) faces in its new quantitative-easing measures may be that governments don't do enough to reform economies, risking that the stimulus measure falls on "barren ground," a key [ECB](#) policy maker said Thursday.

Speaking at a conference in the U.K. capital, [ECB](#) chief economist Peter Praet, said, however, that if governments do make the necessary reforms, then growth in the [eurozone could](#) be better than expected.

Mr. Praet also said that inflation will remain negative for some months to come in the [eurozone](#). "We expect inflation to remain in negative territory until latter stages of this year," he said according to a prepared speech text.

"Indeed, perhaps the biggest risk we face with our new measures is that they [fall on barren ground](#) because governments are not doing enough to raise confidence in the future," he said.

"If firms are simultaneously revising down their growth expectations as we expand our monetary policy, we will not see the impact we expect and which is required," he added.

The comments suggest further that the [ECB](#), despite recently embarking on an unprecedented program of large-scale asset purchases known as quantitative easing, or [QE](#), believes that it cannot prop up the [eurozone](#) economy on its own.

But it needn't be this way, Mr. Praet said. "The opposite story is also possible. If governments are determined in addressing their structural challenges, all the conditions are there for growth to surprise on the upside."

In explaining the [ECB's](#) rationale for its new [QE](#) program, he told his audience that while "it is true" that oil prices are largely responsible for the [fall](#) in inflation, "we also said, we cannot take the luxury to look through and say this is just oil prices," and wait to look at second-round effects. The reason for this, he said was that when oil prices fell, there was already "a situation of fragility of inflation expectations."

114,54

Benefit of ECB's Bond Buying: Fiscal Breathing Room

Countries, Such as Spain and Italy, Gain Leeway to Stabilize Their Debt Ratios

By GREG IP

When the threat of Greek insolvency first erupted in 2010, the worries rapidly spread to the eurozone's other peripheral economies, sending borrowing costs skyrocketing.

This time around, what's happened in Greece has stayed in Greece. While yields on Greek bonds hover near 11%, they're below 2% in Ireland, Spain and Italy—less than what the U.S. Treasury pays to borrow.

This matters for more than just the markets. It is also critical to the eurozone's most indebted members' efforts to fix their finances. As European Central Bank President Mario Draghi said last month in unveiling a much-anticipated plan to purchase government bonds: "All monetary-policy measures have some **fiscal** implications."

That would be an understatement. By driving rates so low and promising to buy government bonds, the ECB makes it much easier for peripheral economies to stabilize their crushing debts. It obviates the need for added short-term austerity, which could provoke a political backlash that derails the economic reforms essential to bringing down debt in the long run. In other words, monetary policy is central to the success of **fiscal** policy.

To understand why, consider some simple arithmetic. A stable debt is one that stays the same as a share of gross domestic product. If the interest rate the country pays on its debt is higher than the growth of nominal GDP (that's real GDP plus inflation) that debt ratio automatically goes up—unless the government runs a surplus in the budget excluding interest. Conversely, when the interest rate a country pays on its debt is below its growth rate, the ratio automatically drops, unless there's a deficit in the budget, excluding interest.

The latter scenario—having interest rates below the growth rate—is like having the wind at your back. And that's the situation Spain, Ireland and Portugal should all be in this year. Italy is close.

A few years ago, those countries were in the opposite situation, with soaring interest rates and shrinking GDP. What changed?

Investors typically don't worry that a government will default on debt issued in its own currency; in a pinch, the central bank can print the money needed to repay that debt. That option, though, isn't necessarily available to members of the euro, who can't order the ECB around.

After European governments bailed out Greece in 2010, they wanted investors to share the pain and so embraced the principle that government bonds could be subject to a "haircut"—or a repayment of less than 100 cents on the euro. The prospect of Greek default or exit from the euro sent Italian and Spanish yields over 6%, Portuguese and Irish yields above 10%, and Greece's over 30%. At such punishing interest rates, fear of default becomes self-fulfilling.

Mr. Draghi largely put an end to those fears in 2012 by promising to do "whatever it takes" to save the euro. So long as a country abides by the terms of a bailout, the ECB vowed to not let it be forced out of the euro.

Those actions helped narrow, though not eliminate, the difference in yields between peripheral and what is seen as safe German debt. Then, last spring, Mr. Draghi opened the door to quantitative easing—the outright purchase of government bonds with newly created money—in an effort to push the region's inflation rate back up. QE will soon begin.

That has brought yields throughout the region down even further, to levels that significantly improve the region's debt dynamics. Goldman Sachs estimates that a one percentage point drop in interest rates reduces the deficit cuts needed for Italy to stabilize its debt by 1.3% of GDP, and Spain by 1%. That won't happen immediately: Existing debt has to be refinanced. It helps, then, that QE could have several years to run. Investors are betting that Spanish and Italian yields will remain around 2.5% five years from now, notes Zsolt Darvas of Bruegel, a Brussels-based think tank.

Because Italy already runs a sizable budget surplus excluding interest, that means it needs no new austerity for its debt-to-GDP ratio to drop. Spain still has a deficit excluding interest, but the task of stabilizing its debt is now nearly complete.

It's not enough for peripheral countries just to stabilize debt, of course; eventually the debt-to-GDP ratio has to come down. But the ECB has given them **breathing room** to ease austerity and give structural reform the necessary time to raise long-term growth. All that assumes no contagion from Greece.

There are big caveats to this upbeat picture.

First, the reason the ECB has acted on QE is because eurozone growth is so weak and inflation is running well below its target of near 2%. If even modest growth fails to materialize, or low inflation turns to deflation, stabilizing the debt as a share of GDP becomes much harder. As Angel Ubide and Adam Posen note in a recent report for the Peterson Institute, a U.S.-based think tank: "The high level of euro-area debt is not sustainable with weak nominal GDP growth."

The second big risk is political. Austerity-weary voters may follow the path of Greece and abandon not just near-term austerity but long-term reform.

The ECB could well abandon them then, and the deadly dynamics of 2010 would be back. The ECB is a crucial player in solving the euro zone's **fiscal** woes; but it won't do it on its own.

114,55

Bring Politics Back to the European Mainstream

Fringe parties are flourishing because centrists on both the right and left have abdicated their responsibility to vigorously oppose each other.

By

CARLO INVERNIZZI ACCETTI AND FRANCESCO RONCHI

Watching events unfold on the Continent and beyond, it might at first appear that politics isn't being kind to the European Union. Greek voters recently handed power to a radical party that pledged to repudiate the economic agreements Athens previously negotiated with its European peers. The rise of the left-wing Podemos movement in Spain seems to send the same message, as does the rise of anti-EU parties in France and the U.K. Yet these populist movements on both the left and right weren't born in a vacuum. They were also unwittingly fostered by Europe's mainstream parties.

To address the most important political challenges of the day, mainstream political parties in the past few years have adopted a collusive rather than competitive approach. Many European countries are now governed by "grand coalitions" between traditional left- and right-wing parties.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel's cabinet includes ministers from both her right-leaning Christian Democratic Union and the left-leaning Social Democratic Party. In Italy, Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's ostensibly left-wing government depends on parliamentary support from the center-right. In Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden, far-right political parties are only kept out of power by broad agreements between most of the other mainstream forces.

Even when there isn't a grand coalition, voters sense that their mainstream parties are failing to vigorously compete against each other. In France, Francois Hollande's 2012 presidential victory was based on his call against austerity and for a more expansive fiscal policy. But the lack of results from that economic platform has since left Mr. Hollande's supporters disenchanted. This frustration has spurred on Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front.

Something similar could happen in Italy. Mr. Renzi secured a strong position of power through his calls for a more dynamic economic policy and greater involvement of citizens in the political decision-making process. This has effectively deprived the populist Five Star movement of its prime issue. However, Mr. Renzi's government has yet to produce any significant changes both in terms of economic policy and democratic representation.

The lesson here is that political conflict and competition in democratic institutions can't be avoided without paying a price. The most visible consequence is that the mantle of political opposition is increasingly being taken up by unconventional populist movements seeking to move beyond the traditional left-right divide. Greece's far-left Syriza party preferred to form an alliance with the far-right Independent Greeks party rather than the center-left Potami -- which had also offered its support to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras -- suggesting that a new axis of opposition, driven by populism, is emerging against the cartelized mainstream.

Mainstream parties on the left are viewed, rightly or wrongly, as the worst offenders in this dereliction of political duty. To enter into grand coalitions with their traditional opponents, they are perceived as having renounced any significant alternative to the stiff austerity agenda the center-right proposed as a response to the economic crisis.

Greece's socialist party, Pasok, is a case in point. Once a frequent party of government in its own right, after the economic crisis it formed a coalition with the right-leaning New Democracy party and agreed to implement an unpopular program of fiscal tightening and reform. Voters who would have preferred a more vigorous opposition from this ostensible opposition party punished it in 2012, allowing Syriza to become the official opposition.

Similarly, deepening and expanding the forms of democratic representation has traditionally been at the heart of the European left's political project. Political agreement with their former opponents reinforced the perception that mainstream political parties are only interested in power-sharing deals that will keep them in office without having to address widespread demands for political reform. This too has allowed populists to rise and present themselves as viable alternatives.

All of which suggests that the best way to counter the ascendance of populist extremist parties is decidedly not for mainstream parties to unite against the upstarts. Europeans prefer that their mainstream parties stay at odds with each other on the economic, social and foreign-policy issues -- and on democratic representation within the EU itself -- that used to divide the mainstream right and left. Voters are demanding competitive politics and a vigorous debate that reflect the seriousness of the challenges facing Europe. If mainstream parties aren't prepared to deliver, voters will look elsewhere.

Messrs. Accetti and Ronchi are lecturers in political science at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris.

114,56

Greece To ECB: "Get To Work, Mr. Draghi"

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/12/2015 08:18 -0500

With talk that Greek banks have hit their emergency lending limit with the ECB (which has prompted a teleconference this morning among ECB policy-makers), it seems the newly-found position of negotiating strength for Greece (perhaps encouraged by China or Russia behind the scenes) has prompted more demands:

- GREECE'S SYRIZA CHIEF ECONOMIST JOHN MILIOS PROPOSES OVERALL EURO ZONE DEBT OVERHANG REDUCTION BY ECB
- ECB COULD BUY ALL EURO ZONE DEBT MATURING IN 2016-2020 AND ALL INTEREST PAYMENTS-SYRIZA'S MILIOS
- ECB WOULD FOOT THE BILL NOW, BUT BY 2040 IT WOULD BE ABLE TO ERASE ALL LOSSES THROUGH PROFIT RETENTION-MILIOS

Roughly translated - "Get back to work, Mr. Draghi" and monetize all of Europe's debt. With negative net issuance (i.e. central banks already monetizing over 100% of 2015's expected issuance) already here, this demand merely pushes the 'independent' monetary policymakers to enable more fiscal profligacy.

Greek bank liquidity running dry...

The ECB moved Greek banks onto ELA last week after it ended a waiver on the quality of the nation's debt it accepts as collateral amid doubts that the newly elected government will conclude its aid program.

Greek banks have almost exhausted the 59.5 billion euros granted by the ECB, Skai Television reported yesterday, without saying how it got the information.

And so ECB policymakers are discussing what to do next... (as Reuters reports)

European Central Bank policymakers held a telephone conference on Thursday concerning the provision of Emergency Liquidity Assistance (ELA) to banks in Greece, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The ECB has authorised Greece's national central bank to provide the country's lenders with some 60 billion euros (\$68.08 billion) in ELA, people familiar with the matter have said, but this requires regular approval from the ECB's Governing Council.

The ECB declined to comment, when asked about the telephone conference.

ELA provision is critical to the fate of Greece's banks, and in turn the country's fate, after the ECB cancelled its acceptance of Greek bonds in return for funding last week.

The question is - does The 'independent' ECB play hard ball and squeeze Greek banks by withholding more funding to aid Eurogroup negotiations into Monday? For now, Greek bank bonds and stocks are notably higher (for what reason is anyone's guess)...

114,57

[John F. Kerry](#)

John F. Kerry, former US Senator from Massachusetts and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is US Secretary of State. [read more](#)
FEB 10, 2015 16

Challenging Disorder

MUNICH – A few years after World War II, when the North Atlantic Treaty was ratified in the United States and our relationship with Europe was cemented, President Harry Truman [said simply](#), “The more closely the nations of the Atlantic community can work together for peace, the better for all people, everywhere.”

The decades since have proven him right. And, as our transatlantic relationship has grown both stronger and more expansive, so has democracy, prosperity, and stability in Europe, the United States, and around the globe.

But, though the transatlantic relationship today is as strong and as critical as ever, there is no question that we are in the midst of a defining moment for our partnership. We are facing multiple tests, two of which are especially worthy of attention, because they test international law, multilateral mechanisms, and the global order that we have spent the last 70 years working to build and maintain.

The first test is obviously Ukraine, where Russia has endangered the security landscape of Eastern and Central Europe, first through its illegal occupation of Crimea and now through its overt and brazen effort to destabilize eastern Ukraine.

This challenge recently led me back to Kyiv to meet with President Petro Poroshenko, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin, while German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande visited Kyiv and then Moscow in pursuit of a plan to de-escalate the situation. We all agree that military force will not end this challenge – diplomacy will.

But the longer it takes, the more the world will have no choice but to raise the costs to Russia and its proxies. The US, France, Germany, and our allies and partners will stand together in support of Ukraine and in defense of the fundamental principle that international borders must not be changed by force, in Europe or anywhere else. There is no division among us whatsoever on this fundamental conviction.

The second major test is the rise of violent extremism. ISIS’s new video showing the brutal immolation of a captured Jordanian pilot represented a new low in depravity. And last week, the [United Nations reported](#) what so many already knew: that this evil group crucifies children, buries them alive, and uses mentally disabled young people as suicide bombers.

ISIS is not alone among extremists. Last month, Pakistani officials showed me time-stamped photos of the Army Public School in Peshawar before and after the Taliban killed 145 people (including 132 children) in December. The school’s assembly hall, filled with students sitting attentively in their chairs, was transformed into a death chamber – blood, broken eyeglasses, scattered textbooks, torn jackets, and lifeless young bodies. The school’s principal tried to save her students. When challenged by the murderers, she pointed to the children and said, “I am their mother.” Those were her last words.

The world cannot and will not wilt in the face of such extremism, wherever it exists, whether in the Sahel, Nigeria, Iraq, or Syria. Today, the international coalition fighting ISIS has grown to more than 60 active members. Since September, we have retaken 700 square kilometers of territory. We have deprived the group of the use – and resulting revenues – of 200 oil and gas facilities. We have disrupted its command structure,

undermined its propaganda, taken out half of its senior leadership, squeezed its financing, damaged its supply networks, and dispersed its personnel.

Consider the case of Kobani, on Syria's border with Turkey, which was threatened with annihilation after ISIS captured more than 300 nearby Kurdish villages. The militants already controlled large swaths of the city itself, and both they and the world's media expected an easy victory. But, thanks to diplomatic cooperation among coalition partners, targeted air strikes, and on-the-ground support from Iraqi Kurdish forces, the militants were driven out, after losing roughly a thousand fighters.

But defeating ISIS is only the beginning. The fight against violent extremists will not be decided on the battlefield alone. It will be decided in classrooms, workplaces, houses of worship, community centers, urban street corners, and halls of government. And it will be decided by the success of our efforts to stop terrorist recruitment; address the intolerance, economic hopelessness, and exclusion that help create vacuums which extremism fills; and create credible, visible, and empowering alternatives to violent extremism in countries where it is prevalent.

In recent years, it has been fashionable to look at challenges like these and pontificate that the international system is somehow unraveling. I strongly disagree. In fact, I see the opposite. I see countries working together to negotiate new and far-reaching trade pacts, covering some 70% of global GDP. I see the world working together to end the Ebola pandemic. I see work to achieve a peaceful resolution to the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. I see cooperation to reach an ambitious global agreement on climate change, and to curb the strife in places like the Central African Republic, Colombia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Yes, these are challenging times. But I see countries around the world reducing extreme poverty, improving maternal healthcare, aiding child nutrition, expanding access to primary education, and increasing life expectancy. More people have attained – or are reaching for – prosperity than at any time in history, and, despite the threat that violent extremism poses, the percentage of people who die violently has reached a low for the modern era. All of this has happened or is happening because of the strength of the international order. We just need to help bring that reality to the places where today it feels a million miles away.

We are fortunate to be the descendants of innovators, of doers, of people who overcame slavery, plagues, depressions, global wars, and totalitarianism – people who were utterly unafraid of great challenges and were most effective when put to the test.

Now it is our turn. The tests that we face today compel us to prepare and to plan, to unite, and to defend our collective future from the atavistic paranoia of terrorists and thugs. The future still belongs to the universal values of civility, reason, and the rule of law.

This commentary was adapted from a speech delivered at this year's Munich Security Conference.

Read more at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/islamic-state-global-order-by-john-f--kerry-2015-02#6gSqA54kmxFrwwFW.99>

Athens vs. Brussels: Greece Inches Closer to Renewal of Debt Crisis

By Martin Hesse and Christian Reiermann



Graffiti in Athens: The troika is more hated in Greece than in any other crisis country. Greeks view the body as the equivalent to an occupying power.

The new government in Athens is intent on forcing Europe to change its approach to Greek debt -- thus far in vain. A confrontation is brewing, and both sides stand to lose.

After new Greek Finance Minister Giannis Varoufakis had been repeatedly rebuffed on his introductory tour of European capitals, he opted for flattery and solicitation during his visit to Berlin last week. German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, Varoufakis said, had been an object of his admiration since way back in the 1980s for his dedication to Europe. He said that his host's career, focused as it has always been on European unity, has been impressive.

Varoufakis went on to say that Germans and Greeks are linked by their experiences of suffering. Just like the Germans, who were yoked with the burdensome Versailles Treaty after losing World War I, his country too has been humiliated by agreements forced onto it from the outside. Both countries, he said, suffered from deflation and economic depression, the Germans in the 1930s and the Greeks today. "The Germans understand best how the Greeks are doing," Varoufakis said.

Schäuble's sympathy for Varoufakis' plight was limited. Indeed, the German finance minister sees Greek demands for an end to the troika and for a renegotiation of previous agreements as an affront. "We agreed to disagree," is how Schäuble summed up their meeting, a tête-à-tête that took 45 minutes longer than the one hour that had been scheduled.

Just one day prior to his meeting with Schäuble last Thursday, Varoufakis had been [given the cold shoulder](#) at European Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt. ECB head Mario Draghi rejected virtually all of Varoufakis' requests, including his demand for more leniency on debt repayments. That evening, the ECB opted to stop accepting Greek government bonds as collateral, a move which will make it even more difficult for banks in Greece to access liquidity. The move came as a surprise to Varoufakis. Draghi had told him nothing about it during their meeting that morning.

New Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had no better luck during [his own round of inaugural visits](#) to European capitals. While he received demonstrably cordial welcomes in Brussels and Paris, he was unable to make any headway toward changing Europe's approach to Greek aid.

Initially, Athens had [demanded a debt haircut](#). That, though, would require Greece's nation-state creditors to undertake immediate write-downs and either take on more debt themselves or raise taxes to make up the difference. Finding support for such a plan proved impossible, even among those governments that view Tsipras' rejection of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's focus on austerity with a certain degree of benevolence.

The most recent idea propagated by Greece is that of bonds that never have to be paid back -- but it too was rejected. The European Union and the ECB have already made several concessions to Greece and are [now insisting that treaties and agreements made with previous Greek governments be respected](#). The German government, meanwhile, believes that the Greek economy will return to health as long as the current path is strictly adhered to.

Tsipras and Varoufakis, however, do not feel bound by past agreements, saying that they are invalid because they have done nothing but cause suffering and hardship.

So who is right? With almost five years having elapsed since the first aid package for Greece was established, it is time to take a look at where the country stands.

WHERE DID ALL THE MONEY GO?

One of the myths of Greek aid is that the billions of euros made available by Europe only helped the banks rather than the country and its people. In other words, it wasn't Greece that was bailed out, but German financial institutions and insurance companies, for example.

That isn't wrong. But it isn't totally correct either. It is true that only the smallest portion of the aid package flowed into the Greek budget to help Athens meet its spending obligations. The largest portion went toward paying back debts. That means that private investors who held Greek sovereign bonds -- particularly banks, insurance companies and funds -- were the greatest beneficiaries of the aid efforts.

In 2010, Greece was no longer able to pay their debt claims because Athens wasn't able to obtain sufficient liquidity on the international capital markets. The country's euro-zone partners sprang into the gap, along with the ECB and the International Monetary Fund. Later, the European emergency backstop fund, which was founded specifically for the purpose, took over. The result was an almost complete turnover of Greek sovereign debt. Prior to the crisis, almost 100 percent of Greek debt was held privately whereas now, 80 percent is held by public institutions. Four-fifths of Greek debt was essentially socialized.

Without this aid, Greece would have gone bankrupt and an exit from the euro zone would have been unavoidable.

WHO WERE THE BIGGEST LOSERS?

The share of Greek debt held by private creditors plunged rapidly in 2012 following a €107 billion debt write down which also forced investors to accept longer loan terms and lower interest payments. The move only came following six months of negotiations involving Greece, the troika -- made up of the ECB, the European Commission and the IMF -- and Greece's private creditors.

"Had the write down taken place earlier and more rapidly, it would have been possible to push a lower share of the debt burden onto public creditors," says Guntram Wolff from the Brussels-based European think tank Bruegel. But by the time an agreement had finally been reached in early 2012, many creditors had already sold off their shares, often at a loss.

German institutions, which held around €20 billion in Greek debt, were among the biggest losers of the debt haircut, but it was still taxpayers who bore the brunt of the losses. The bad bank FMS Wertmanagement, which took over liabilities from the nationalized holding company Hypo Real Estate, lost more than €9 billion. The bad bank associated with the Düsseldorf-based financial institution West LB as well as several state banks were forced to relinquish claims on several hundred million euros. Commerzbank, which is also partly owned by the German government, had already written down €2.2 billion.

But without the debt haircut, it is possible that banks and other financial institutions would have lost even more, Bruegel economist Wolff says. "The debt write-downs and rescheduling along with the troika aid programs ultimately helped private investors to limit their losses in Greece and in other euro-zone member states."

NEW WRITE DOWN OR RESCHEDULING?

The ECB holds around €20 billion in Greek debt, the result of the European Central Bank's sovereign bond purchasing scheme designed to lower the interest rates crisis-stricken euro-zone countries had to pay on international financial markets.

A further €227 billion in debt is the result of bailout packages made available by Greece's EU partners, by the EFSF bailout fund and by the IMF. The first bailout fund, assembled in 2010, was made up completely of bilateral aid payments from EU member states and the IMF. It had a volume of €73 billion. The German share, made available to Athens by the state-owned development bank KfW, was worth €15.2 billion and was guaranteed by the German federal government. Greece pays interest of roughly 1 percent on the loan and does not have to begin repaying it until 2020. It has a period of 30 years.

The second aid package followed in March 2012. The European backstop fund EFSF had been established by then and it made €144.6 billion available to Athens, €141.9 billion of which has now been paid out. The IMF contributed a further €19 billion, of which €7 billion remains available.

Greece only has to begin paying back the EFSF loans in 2023 and they have an average period of 32.5 years. The interest rates on these loans, too, are extremely low. Recently, the Troika calculated that the average interest rate Athens pays on its sovereign debt is 2.4 percent. Germany, by comparison, must pay an average of 2.7 percent interest on its debt.

In total, Greece must dedicate around 2 percent of its economic output to interest payments, according to Bruegel. That is more than Germany, at 1.8 percent, but less than France, at 2.3 percent.

Partly because of these low interest rates facing Greece, the country's creditors do not believe an additional debt haircut is necessary. Furthermore, with the exception of money Athens owes to the IMF, Greece only has to begin paying down its debt in 2020. Similar skepticism surrounds Greek proposals for debt swaps that would see current debt traded in for "perpetual bonds" that wouldn't have to be paid back and bonds whose interest payments are tied to the country's economic performance.

HOW IS GREECE DOING?

Whether Greece will ever be able to pay back its debts on its own is a question about which experts have been arguing since the beginning of the crisis. Meanwhile, Greece's debt burden, when measured as a share of gross domestic product, has only grown due to the country's massively shrunken economy -- to 175 percent.

The IMF isn't worried. Original forecasts called for Greece's debt load to shrink to 120 percent of GDP by 2022. But with the economy now having returned to growth and looking stronger than experts thought it would, IMF officials now believe the country's debt load could shrink to 112 percent of GDP by 2022. Furthermore, Greece won't end up needing as much money to recapitalize its banks as originally thought.

To be sure, Greece suffered the most dramatic setbacks of any of the euro-zone crisis countries. The country's economy shrank for 16 consecutive quarters, with output plunging by over 25 percent since 2008. Furthermore, unemployment rose to unheard of levels, with the jobless rate averaging 27.5 percent in 2013.

But last summer, the economy returned to growth and the troika believes it will expand by 2.9 percent this year and 3.7 percent in 2016, though such projections assume a continuation of the reform path Greece currently finds itself on. Even joblessness has begun dropping, though only slowly.

"Labor market reforms, such as a lower minimum wage and the reduction of incidental wage costs, have made it possible for Greece to almost completely recuperate lost competitiveness when it comes to unit labor costs," reads an analysis undertaken by the German Finance Ministry. Exports have begun rising and tourism is booming. The current account deficit has noticeably decreased.

But Greece's most impressive achievements have come in getting its federal budget under control. Last year, the Greek government brought in significantly more than it spent, once interest payments and debt payments are factored out -- achieving a so-called "primary surplus." In 2014, that surplus was 2 percent of gross domestic product, the second highest result in the EU behind Germany.

Still, this notable achievement was only made possible via drastic spending cuts. Incomes sank significantly, youth unemployment remains over 50 percent and long lines can still be found outside of the country's soup kitchens.

THE END OF THE TROIKA?

Berlin and Brussels have been at pains to note that the troika was not exclusively responsible for deciding where cuts would be made -- for example, the fact that shipping magnates were largely untouched whereas the tax burden on pensioners and average earners was increased. The EU has sought to allow individual governments to decide where cuts should be made. The troika is only interested in ensuring that promised budgetary targets are achieved.

Nevertheless, the troika is hated to a greater degree in Greece than in any other crisis country and its visits to Athens are seen by Greeks as those of an occupying power. As a result, the Tsipras administration has made it clear that input from the troika technocrats is no longer desired. Furthermore, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has expressed understanding for Athens' point of view. German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, by contrast, believes the troika must stay and that the system has proven successful. More than anything, he is skeptical that the troika can be simply eliminated with the stroke of a pen.

The term troika, to be sure, does not appear in any EU treaties. But the agreements that established the two European bailout funds -- the EFSF and the ESM -- are clear about the cooperation between the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission. As such, Berlin sees the troika as being anchored in European law. "If you want to change that, you have to change the European treaties," Schäuble says. And that can only be done unanimously. Germany's parliament would also have to agree.

Still, Schäuble would like to accommodate the Greeks on this point, even if only on the surface. He has no problem with renaming the troika. And he has also said that the overseers don't actually have to travel to Athens -- they can just as well work from Paris, as they have often done in the past.

OUT OF THE EURO ZONE?

Should the conflict between Greece and its creditors continue to worsen, an old question will once again surface: Should Greece stay in the euro zone or not? And how dangerous would a so-called "Grexit" be for the country and for the remainder of the common currency union? The second question is vital for determining who has the better cards in the poker game between Greece's new government and the country's creditors.

A possible Greek exit from the euro zone is not, obviously, a new concern. Three years ago, it looked like a realistic possibility until Berlin became convinced that the risks of contagion for other euro-zone countries was [too great](#). But since then, the situation has changed dramatically. Both Greece and the euro zone are in better shape than they were in 2012 and would be [better prepared to handle a Grexit](#).

Still, Greece's departure from the common currency union would almost certainly be more problematic than Schäuble has made it sound. Josef Ackermann, the former head of Deutsche Bank who led the debt haircut negotiations in 2012 on behalf of Greece's private creditors, continues to believe that a Greek exit "is still a very risky proposition. It would very probably lead to bank insolvencies and enormous social costs in Greece."

Euro-zone countries may have established a functioning bailout fund and made progress on a banking union scheme, but a Greek exit could attract speculators. "International investors would quickly begin asking which country might fall next," Ackermann believes. Markets could gain the impression that the currency union is a club that countries could join or leave as they liked.

Speculators could begin testing just how durable the rest of the euro zone really is and focus on countries like Portugal, Spain or Italy. "Their interest rates would increase drastically, which would thwart the policies of ECB head Mario Draghi, who would like to prevent exactly that," says Jochen Felsenheimer, CEO of the investment firm Xaia.

Greece's departure would also be just as expensive for the remaining euro-zone member states as a debt haircut because Athens would hardly be in a position to fulfill its financial obligations. Its currency would be drastically devalued and its economy would be threatened with collapse.

As such, both sides have an interest in Greece remaining part of the common currency union. But it remains possible that Athens could accidentally stumble out of the euro zone rather than actively deciding to leave. Such a scenario is referred to in Berlin as an ["exit by accident"](#).

HOW DANGEROUS IS THE SITUATION?

A senior German government expert believes the chances of an "exit by accident" are significant. And Felsenheimer, from Xaia, confirms that Berlin isn't alone in its fears. "Currently, investors believe there is a 50 percent chance of default on Greek sovereign bonds within the next year. That indicates that a Greek exit from the euro zone is seen as a real danger," Felsenheimer says.

How, though, might such a situation unfold? In the coming months, Greece badly needs fresh liquidity to, for example, service its debts to the IMF. Should the new government continue to refuse to bring the second bailout package -- which is still running -- to an orderly conclusion, the situation could rapidly get out of hand.

To begin with, Greece would not receive the final outstanding payment from the second bailout package, a sum of €1.8 billion. Athens could initially withstand such a blow due to its primary surplus and Finance Minister Varoufakis would be able to continue paying pensions and civil servant salaries for some time.

DPA

New Greek Finance Minister Giannis Varoufakis had a mixed reception during his tour of European capitals last week.

Ultimately, though, the surplus would be used up and the new government would have to borrow money on international financial markets. That, though, could prove difficult to do at a price that Athens could afford. "Because of the turbulences that the new government has caused in recent days, interest rates have climbed into double-digits and the strategy followed thus far, that of replacing IMF debt with private debt, can no longer be implemented," says Wolff, the economist from Bruegel.

Greece would likewise be unable to turn to its euro-zone partner countries. They are only prepared to make more money available if Athens adheres to terms requiring continued reforms and austerity. In such a scenario, Greece could even be forced to issue state promissory notes which could then serve as a replacement currency. That would be the first step towards reintroducing a Greek currency in lieu of the euro.

Athens can also not rely on aid from the European Central Bank, as last Wednesday's decision made abundantly clear. The ECB is only prepared to assist Greek banks so long as the country remains a part of a bailout program. Yet Greek banks are in vital need of liquidity from the ECB, partly because Greeks continue to withdraw money from their accounts out of concern about a banking system collapse. Indeed, the new government will only be able to prevent the looming run on Greek banks by rapidly reestablishing trust or via the introduction of controls on capital flows.

The ECB's tough stance has ratcheted up the pressure on Greece's new government, raising the question as to whether Athens will give in and seek to reach an agreement with its creditors or whether it will risk a damaging confrontation that could end in a Grexit.

Thus far, there has been little sign of panic on the stock markets, indicating that financial markets are, for the moment, betting on a peaceful solution.

And even a banker like Ackermann is able to see Tsipras in a positive light. "The new government, unburdened by the past as it is, could represent an opportunity to cease whitewashing the situation and to finally do away with old, incrustated structures," he says. "Nevertheless, initial measures under consideration would seem to be more designed to drive investors and companies out of the country or to discourage them from becoming involved there in the first place."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/11407256/Germany-faces-impossible-choice-as-Greek-austerity-revolt-spreads.html>

114,63

Germany faces impossible choice as Greek austerity revolt spreads

"What's happening to Greece today, will be happening to Italy tomorrow. Sooner or later, default is coming," says Italy's Beppe Grillo



Only Germany's Angela Merkel can stop the coming train-wreck that has been initiated by Greece's recent election

By **Ambrose Evans-Pritchard** 9:53PM GMT 11 Feb 2015

 [1251 Comments](#)

The political centre across southern Europe is disintegrating. Establishment parties of centre-left and centre-right - La Casta, as they say in Spain - have successively immolated themselves enforcing EMU debt-deflation.

Spain's neo-Bolivarian Podemos party refuses to fade. It has endured crippling internal rifts. It has shrugged off hostile press coverage over financial ties to Venezuela.

Nothing sticks.

The insurrectionists who came from nowhere last year - with Trotskyist roots and more radical views than those of Syriza in Greece - are pulling further ahead in the polls. The latest Metroscopia survey gave Podemos 28pc. The ruling conservatives have dropped to 21pc.

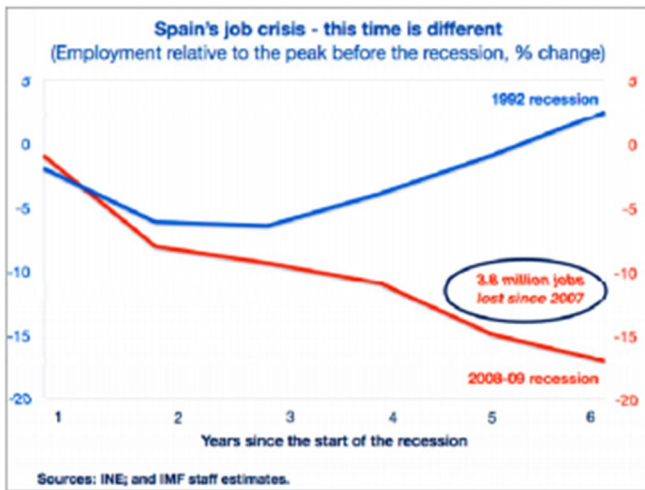
The once-great PSOE - Spanish Workers Socialist Party - has fallen to 18pc and risks fading away like the Dutch Labour Party, or the French Socialists, or Greece's Pasok.

You can defend EMU policies, or you can defend your political base, but you cannot do both.

As matters stand, Podemos is on track to win the Spanish elections in November on a platform calling for the cancellation of "unjust debt", a reversal of labour reforms, public control over energy, the banks, and the commanding heights of the economy, and withdrawal from Nato.

Greece's last minute offer to Brussels changes absolutely nothing

Europe's policy elites can rail angrily at the folly of these plans if they wish, **but they must answer why ex-Trotskyists with a plan to dismantle market capitalism are taking a major EMU state by storm.** It is what happens 5.46m people lack jobs, when 2m households still have no earned income, when youth unemployment is still running at 51.4pc, and home prices are down 42pc, six years into a depression.



It is pointless protesting that Spain's economy is turning the corner, a contested claim in any case. There comes a point when a society breaks and stops believing anything its leaders say.

The EU elites themselves have run their currency experiment into the ground by imposing synchronized monetary, fiscal, and banking contraction on the southern half of EMU, in defiance of known economic science and the lessons of the 1930s. It is they who pushed the eurozone into deflation, and thereby pushed the debtor states further into compound-interest traps.

It is they who deployed the EMU policy machinery to uphold the interests of creditors, refusing to acknowledge that the root cause of Europe's crisis was a flood excess capital flows into vulnerable economies. It is they who prevented a US-style recovery from the financial crisis, and they should not be surprised that such historic errors are coming back to haunt.

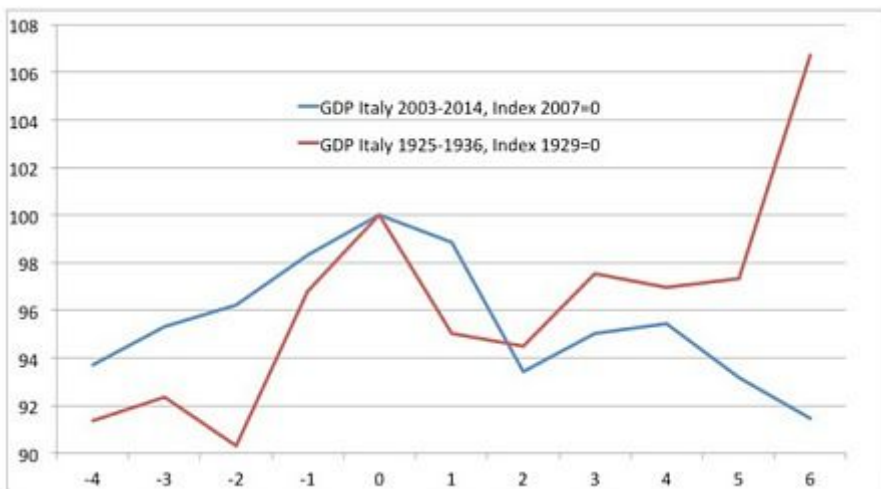
The revolt in Italy has different contours but is just as dangerous for Brussels. Italians may not wish to leave the euro but political consent for the project but broken down. All three opposition parties are now anti-euro in one way or another. Beppe Grillo's Five Star movement - with 108 seats in parliament - is openly calling for a return to the lira.

Mr Grillo proclaims that Syriza is carrying the torch for all the long-suffering peoples of southern Europe, as it is in a sense.

"What's happening to Greece today, will be happening to Italy tomorrow. Sooner or later, default is coming," he said.

Premier Matteo Renzi staked everything on a recovery that has yet to happen. He is running out of political time. Deflationary dynamics are overwhelming the fiscal gains from austerity. Italy's public debt has jumped from 116pc to 133pc of GDP in three years. The youth jobless rate is 44pc and still rising. Italian GDP has fallen almost 10pc in six years, and by 15pc in the Mezzogiorno. Italy's industrial production has dropped back to the levels of 1980.

Worse than the Great Depression



The leaders of Spain and Italy know that their own populists at home will seize on any concessions to Syriza over austerity or debt relief as proof that Brussels yields only to defiance. They have a very strong incentive to make Greece suffer, even if it means a cataclysmic rupture and a Greek ejection from the euro.

Yet to act on this political impulse risks destroying the European Project. Europe's Left would nurture a black legend for a hundred years if the first radical socialist government of modern times was crushed and forced into bankruptcy by Frankfurt bankers - acting at the legal boundaries of their authority, or beyond - choosing to switch off liquidity support for the Greek financial system.

• **Greece's rock-star finance minister Yanis Varoufakis defies ECB's drachma threats**

It would throw the Balkans into turmoil and probably shatter the security structure of the Eastern Mediterranean. It is easy to imagine a chain of events where an embittered Greece pulled out of Nato and turned to Russia, paralysing EU foreign policy in a self-feeding cycle of animosity that would ultimately force Greece out of the union altogether. The charisma of the EU - using the Greek meaning - would drain away if such traumatic events were allowed to unfold, and all because a country of 11m people wanted to cut its primary budget surplus to 1.5pc from 4.5pc of GDP, and shake a discredited Troika off its back, for that is what it comes down to.

One is tempted to cite **Jacques Delors' famous comment that "Europe is like a riding bicycle: you stop pedalling and you fall off"** but that hardly captures the drama of what amounts to **civil war in a union built on a self-conscious ideology of solidarity.**

"The euro is fragile. It is like a house of cards. If you pull away the Greek card, they all come down," warned **Greece's finance minister Yanis Varoufakis.**

"Do we really want Europe to break apart? Anybody who is tempted to think it possible to amputate Greece strategically from Europe should be careful. It is very dangerous. Who would be hit after us? Portugal?" he said.

George Osborne clearly agrees. The worries have been serious enough to prompt a one-hour Cobra security meeting. "The risks of a miscalculation or a misstep leading to a very bad outcome are growing," said the Chancellor.

Currency guru Barry Eichengreen - the world's leading expert on the collapse of the Gold Standard in 1931 - thinks Grexit might be impossible to control. "It would be Lehman Brothers squared," he said.

This is not the view in Germany, at least not yet. The IW and ZEW institutes both argue that Europe can safely withstand contagion now that it has a rescue machinery and banking union in place. It must not give in to "blackmail".

Such is the 'moral hazard' view of the world, the reflex that led to the Lehman collapse in 2008. "If we knew then what we know now, we wouldn't have done it," the then-US treasury secretary Tim Geithner told EMU leaders in early 2011, the first time they were tempted to eject Greece.

The fond hope is that the European Central Bank can and will smooth over any turbulence in Portugal, Italy and Spain by mopping up their bonds, now that quantitative easing is on the way. **Yet the losses suffered from a Greek default would surely ignite a political firestorm in Germany.**

Bild Zeitung has devoted two pages to warnings that Grexit would cost Germany €65bn, or much more once the Bundesbank's Target2 payments though the ECB system are included. The unpleasant discovery that Germany's Target2 exposure can in fact go up in smoke - despite long assurances that this could never happen - might make it untenable to continue such support.

It is unfair to pick on **Portugal but its public and private debts are 380pc of GDP - the highest in Europe and higher than those of Greece** - making it acutely vulnerable to toxic effects of deflation on debt dynamics.

• **Devaluation by China is the next great risk for a deflationary world**

Portugal's net international investment position (NIIP) - the best underlying indicator of solvency - has reached minus 112pc of GDP. **Public debt has jumped from 111pc to 125pc of GDP in three years. The fiscal deficit is still 5pc.** The country's ranking in global competitiveness is close to that of Greece.

"The situation in Portugal is very different," says Paulo Portas, the deputy premier. Sadly it is not. **Once you violate the sanctity of monetary union and reduce EMU to a fixed-exchange system, the illusion that Portugal is out of the woods may not last long. Markets will test it.**

Only two people can now stop the coming train-wreck. Chancellor Angela Merkel and her finance minister Wolfgang Schauble, a man who masks his passion for the EU cause behind an irascible front.

Syriza have made a strategic blunder by turning their struggle into a fight with Germany, demanding Nazi war reparations, and toying with the Russian card at the very moment when **Mrs Merkel is locked in make-or-break talks on Ukraine with Vladimir Putin.**

Mr Varoufakis is trying to limit the damage, praising Mrs Merkel as the "most astute politician" in Europe, and Mr Schauble as the "only European politician with intellectual substance" - a wounding formulation for the others. He has called on Germany to cast off self-doubt and assume its role as **Europe's benevolent hegemon,** almost as if he were evoking the glory days of the Holy Roman Empire when pious German emperors stood as guarantors for Christendom.

This is the only pitch that will work. Angela Merkel has risen above her narrow East German outlook and her fiscal platitudes to emerge as the soul-searching Godmother of Europe and the last credible defender of its unity. But even Mrs Merkel can be pushed too far.

114,66

Kommentar

„Grexit“

Die neue Regierung Griechenlands provoziert die übrigen Europäer. Aber wer traut sich, den Geldhahn zuzudrehen?
13.02.2015, von **HOLGER STELTZNER**

Die neue Regierung Griechenlands bringt mit einer Politik der maximalen Provokation alle gegen sich auf. Sogar die angeblich verbündeten Italiener finden es nicht mehr lustig, wenn der griechische Finanzminister seinen italienischen Kollegen wissen lässt, dass Rom auch pleite sei. Kaum hatte in der Nachtsitzung am Donnerstagmorgen Bundesfinanzminister Schäuble den Raum verlassen, **kassierte sein Kollege aus Athen die gemeinsam beschlossene unverbindliche Erklärung zu Griechenland wieder ein**, um noch mehr finanzielle Zugeständnisse zu fordern. Wie eine Gruppe Halbstarcker toben sich die Griechen in Brüssel aus. Einerseits versetzen sie damit das bemüht kollegiale Aufsichtspersonal der Erziehungsanstalt Eurogruppe in Angst und Schrecken. Andererseits sorgen sie für einhellige Ablehnung. Warum machen sie das? Offenbar sind sie sicher, dass die Euroländer weiterzahlen, egal, was passiert.

Die griechische Regierung setzt den Wahlkampf auf europäischer Bühne fort. Erst wird so getan, als wolle Berlin aus Griechenland eine Schuldenkolonie machen. Dann wird behauptet, man brauche keine neuen Kredite. Erst wird versprochen, dass man seine Anleihen zurückzahlen wolle. Dann wird den Anlegern zugerufen, man sei bankrott. Unterdessen werden fleißig Ressentiments geschürt. Während der rechtsradikale Teil der Regierung über das vierte Reich schwadroniert, legt der linksradikale Teil im eigenen Parteiblatt einer Karikatur von Schäuble in Wehrmachtsuniform geschmacklose Zitate in den Mund: „Wir bestehen darauf, Seife aus eurem Fett zu machen. Wir diskutieren nur über Düngemittel aus eurer Asche.“

Das zerstörte Vertrauen ist aber nicht einmal der größte Verlust. Schlimmer ist die verlorene Glaubwürdigkeit, wenn die Eurogruppe so mit sich spielen lässt. Aber wer traut sich, den Geldhahn zuzudrehen? Die Brückenfinanzierung, die Griechenland von der Eurogruppe verlangt, kommt in Wahrheit doch längst von der Europäischen Zentralbank. Die gerade von neun auf 60 Milliarden Euro angehobene Notfallliquidität wurde in dieser Woche heimlich wegen zunehmender Kapitalflucht **um fünf Milliarden erhöht**. Die Losung „Scheitert der Euro, scheitert Europa“ ist so falsch wie wenig hilfreich. Zu Glaubwürdigkeit findet Europa nur zurück, wenn es auf das halbstarke Gebaren selbstbewusst reagiert und auf den Notausgang „Grexit“ deutet.

114,67

De plus en plus de seniors travaillent en France

Par [Cécile Crouzel](#) Publié le 13/02/2015 à 06:00



Les carrières se sont allongées en France. Néanmoins, le taux d'emploi des 60-65 ans est deux fois plus important en Allemagne.

En dix ans, le nombre de seniors qui travaillent a considérablement augmenté: selon une [étude](#) des services du ministère du travail publié jeudi, 45,6% des 55-64 ans étaient en emploi en 2013, contre 37% en 2003. C'est une des conséquences majeures des réformes successives des retraites. A vrai dire, la progression s'est surtout faite sur les 55-59 ans, qui sont désormais 67,5% à travailler. Dans cette tranche d'âge, le [taux d'emploi](#) est en France supérieur de près de 3 points à la moyenne européenne.

En revanche, chez les 60-65 ans, il est inférieur de 11 points à celui de nos voisins: en 2013, à peine 23,3% des seniors français de ces générations étaient toujours en poste. C'est deux fois moins qu'en Allemagne. Dans de nombreux pays en effet, l'âge de départ à la retraite est plus élevé que dans l'Hexagone et tourne autour de 65 ans.

Sur les dernières années, la tendance n'était pas au resserrement de l'écart entre la France et ses voisins européens. En 2012, une des premières décisions du gouvernement Ayrault a été d'élargir les [conditions de départ à la retraite pour carrière longue](#). Résultat, 52.000 personnes de plus sont parties en retraite anticipée en 2013. Ce qui a eu un impact sur les chiffres globaux: le taux d'activité (qui agrège les personnes en poste et au chômage) sous-jacent des 55-64 ans n'a presque pas augmenté cette année-là.

Globalement donc, les réformes des retraites ont provoqué un allongement de la carrière des seniors. Dans l'immense majorité, ces derniers ont conservé un travail, comme le montre la hausse du taux d'emploi. Le report de l'âge de départ à la retraite n'a pas provoqué l'explosion du chômage promise par certains syndicats. **Le taux de chômage des 55-64 ans (7% fin 2013) est resté inférieur à celui des autres tranches d'âge.**

Forte hausse du chômage

Néanmoins, les seniors n'ont pas été épargnés par la crise: de début 2008 à fin 2013, leur taux de chômage a grimpé de 3,2 points, contre une augmentation 2,8 points pour l'ensemble des actifs. L'habitude, en cas de difficultés, de se séparer d'abord des salariés les plus âgés, reste bien ancrée en France... Pour cela, les entreprises utilisent beaucoup les [ruptures conventionnelles](#). Pis, une fois sans emploi, les seniors ont plus de difficulté à retrouver un poste. Fin 2013, 59% d'entre eux étaient au chômage depuis plus d'un an, une proportion nettement plus haute que pour l'ensemble des chômeurs (42%).

Les seniors sont également plus nombreux que les autres actifs à travailler à temps partiel. Ainsi, 36% des femmes de plus de 55 ans ne sont pas à plein temps: ce sont typiquement des assistantes maternelles et des employées de maison.

114,68

The Opinion Pages | EDITORIAL

Making the Ukraine Cease-Fire Stick

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD FEB. 13, 2015



President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, President François Hollande of France and President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine. Credit Maxim Shipenkov/European Pressphoto Agency

A “glimmer of hope” but “no illusion” was the inauspicious way Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, described the Ukraine [cease-fire](#) she and President François Hollande of France brokered in talks in Minsk, Belarus, with Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine. **Ms. Merkel certainly deserves a lot of credit for her determined shuttling among Kiev, Moscow, Munich, Washington and Minsk in the urgent search for a resolution of the biggest security crisis to confront Europe since the end of the Cold War.**

The last cease-fire negotiated in Minsk, in September, quickly unraveled, and the new one is very limited, leaving hard problems to be settled in coming weeks and months. **And in the end, it is still for Mr. Putin to decide whether this is to be a real step toward peace or just another cynical feint in his campaign to dismember Ukraine.**

Mr. Putin won a lot in Minsk. The fact that the cease-fire is to start on Sunday — and not immediately, as the Ukrainians wanted — gives the Ukrainian separatists a couple more days to press their siege on Debaltseve, a key rail hub where thousands of Ukrainian troops are surrounded, and in their attack on the Black Sea port of Mariupol. If the cease-fire does take hold, which is far from certain, both sides are to pull their heavy weapons out of range of each other. **Then the deal requires both sides to withdraw “foreign” fighters and equipment, though Mr. Putin has never acknowledged the obvious presence of Russian forces and weapons in eastern Ukraine.**

On the political side, the agreement says Ukraine can recover full control over its border with Russia by the end of 2015, after local elections in rebel-held areas and constitutional changes that would give these areas considerable autonomy. **The degree of self-rule for pro-Russian regions of eastern Ukraine is at the core of any sustainable settlement, but the negotiations will take place while Russia remains free to move men and equipment over the border.**

In short, the deal is a bitter pill for Mr. Poroshenko. But he was right to accept it, and Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande were right to press it. The conflict has already taken 5,400 lives and has displaced hundreds of thousands, and it has ravaged Ukraine’s most industrialized regions.

Ukraine, moreover, is an economic mess, with inflation running at about 30 percent and the currency in sharp decline. Coinciding with the conclusion of the Minsk negotiations, **the International Monetary Fund announced it would grant a new lifeline to Ukraine. But to get the money, Ukraine needs to start carrying out internal reforms, and for that, it needs a respite from conflict.**

Russia, too, finds itself in tough economic straits as a result of economic sanctions and the fall in oil prices. Mr. Putin finds himself increasingly ostracized in the West and potentially facing not only more sanctions but a Ukraine armed with lethal Western weaponry. One reason Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande may have embarked on their peace mission last week, apart from increased fighting in Ukraine, was **a growing clamor in the United States Congress to send lethal arms to Ukraine. That would be an irresponsible and dangerous move in the current situation, but it added urgency to the Europeans' mission.**

What remains incontrovertible is that Ukraine is Mr. Putin's war. Mr. Putin has been offered a far better deal than he deserves. Now it is imperative for the West to keep his feet to the fire; **there should be no easing of sanctions until he demonstrates a willingness to live by the agreements reached in Minsk. And if he does not, there should be no doubt of more sanctions.**

114,70

EUROPE | CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Paris Aims to Embrace Its Estranged Suburbs

By **MICHAEL KIMMELMAN** FEB. 12, 2015

Photo



In La Grande Borne, the unemployment rate among young adults is close to 40 percent. **Credit** Benjamin Girette/Ip3 Press

GRIGNY, France — Paris is about to get bigger, much bigger. Next year, assuming plans move ahead, the city and a ring of inner suburbs will be joined, in an effort to redress a century's worth of urban decisions that have exacerbated the country's gaping cultural divide.

The new Métropole du Grand Paris, or Metropolis of Greater Paris, will include nearly seven million people, more than triple the population now living in the central city. It will swallow rich suburbs to the west. But it should also provide better access to jobs and to business hubs and, if it really works, a greater sense of belonging for millions of immigrant families who live in poverty and isolation on the city's southern, northern and eastern fringes. Resources would be redistributed, in particular those dealing with housing. The complexion of Paris would change.

France is scrambling to remedy the inequities highlighted by the [Charlie Hebdo attack](#), troubles that have unraveled the nation's social fabric and alienated Muslim and migrant youths, radicalizing a few. Urban renewal and remapping the capital are a start.

But France must also reckon with its abiding racism, which pushed poor and unwanted citizens out from central Paris in the first place. Those people came to towns like this, in the second ring of suburbs, close to Orly airport, an entry point for generations of North African immigrants who are now part of the melting pot in Grigny.

The trip here from central Paris takes an hour by commuter train, the glitter and glory of Montmartre and the Louvre giving way to the silence of a concrete railroad station below a housing project. Across a highway, a second project hunkers behind prisonlike walls: La Grande Borne, [Amedy Coulibaly](#)'s former home. Mr. Coulibaly is the terrorist who murdered a police officer in the street and then four hostages at a kosher supermarket.

One recent afternoon, the mayor of Grigny, Philippe Rio, oversaw a graduation ceremony at a community center in La Grande Borne, handing out diplomas to a dozen adults who had finished a job-training program. Unemployment nears 40 percent among young adults here; businesses in the office parks lining the highway on the other side of the wall don't do much hiring locally. There is one small bakery to serve La Grande Borne's 16,000 residents. The mayor cited a report showing France now spends 47 percent more on elementary school students in Paris than on those in poor suburbs like this.

As much as any struggling suburb, this one shows how urban development across decades, even centuries, has failed millions of immigrant families and contributed to what France's prime minister, Manuel Valls, recently denounced as "territorial, social, ethnic apartheid." His remark provoked a lot of hand-wringing in France. But, as all sorts of French planners, architects, historians and political scientists point out, a legacy of belonging and exclusion, center and periphery, inside and outside, is baked into the very layout of Paris and of places like Grigny, which has nice old houses and woods but is a de facto warehouse for tens of thousands of mostly poor, disenfranchised Muslims.

In essence, Paris Métropole promises a new regional council to coordinate housing, urban planning and transit for a greater Paris. The idea evolved from a proposal by Nicolas Sarkozy, who as president imagined business hubs and a [high-speed train](#) linking them to the city's airports. That morphed into a more complex rail system serving poorer suburbs.

Pierre Mansat has spent years helping to put the plan together. He said the other morning that taxes on businesses, and, France hopes, billions more from Europe, will pay for Paris Métropole. Who knows whether right-wing and left-wing politicians from suburbs and city neighborhoods will actually cooperate, but Mr. Mansat stressed that "it's above all about creating a new image of Paris as more inclusive, integrated, fluid."

“People in poor suburbs will belong to the same city as people in the Seventh Arrondissement,” he said. “This is a profound change.”

Belonging is a complex issue. “Young people in Grigny have grandparents who were part of the colonial empire,” said Pascal Blanchard, a social historian. “Now their parents live in the suburbs on the edge of society, in what is basically a continuation of the colonial situation, and they’re stuck there with no jobs, no hope. We keep pouring money into urban improvements, talking about new train stations and about restating French values. But the problem is skin color. And you can’t change that by changing buildings or getting everybody to sing the ‘Marseillaise.’ ”

Mr. Blanchard isn’t the only one who links discrimination to bricks, mortar and Paris’s urban development. The poor suburbs where riots erupted in 2005 once made up the medieval forest of Bondy, whose villagers Parisians at once feared and abused like serfs. When Napoleon III hired Baron Haussmann to remake the capital into a modern metropolis of boulevards and cultural palaces, Parisians from inner slums were driven out, to the edge of town.

A nowhere land, the “zone,” was a military buffer beyond the wall, where the modern ring road, the immense Périphérique, completed during the 1970s, now makes a kind of concrete moat, cutting the suburbs off from the city. In Parisian potboilers from a century ago, the zone was a noirish freak show, the stinking, chaotic realm of garbage dumps, criminals, ragpickers and the sick.

Then the wall came down after the First World War, and immigrants, many of them Italian, moved into new apartment blocks built just outside the city. The zone became a suburban place of opportunity, growth. By the 1920s, its population reached 50,000. After the Second World War, that figure doubled as more waves arrived from North Africa, occupying the Grands Ensembles, immense housing projects conceived under Charles de Gaulle, among them La Grande Borne.

Designed by Émile Aillaud, with 3,600 apartments La Grande Borne opened during the 1960s to shelter tenants evicted from proletarian districts in Paris. Mr. Aillaud consulted psychologists who said children needed trees and privacy, so he organized the complex as a low-rise ensemble of elegantly curved buildings enclosing secretive green patches. He wanted the architecture to provide variety and character.

But when the economy tanked in the 1970s, the layout became a disaster, impossible to police. Things only got worse during the 1980s. President François Mitterrand saw the future in cars and single-family houses that leapfrogged poor suburbs for new settlements. Residents who could still afford to leave places like the Grands Ensembles fled, abandoning them to mostly poor immigrants.

They had little say over their fate. French government is top-down. Community activism is a foreign concept. When Lionel Jospin became the country’s Socialist prime minister during the 1990s, he obliged wealthier suburbs to construct subsidized housing or pay stiff fines. Some opted for fines. After Mr. Jospin, French leaders undid employment programs and community policing initiatives that had made some headway. The mayor of Grigny, one of the few Communists left, told me his town hasn’t had a full-time police station since 2002.

Parisians note that 13 percent of city residents today live below the poverty line, 20 percent in subsidized housing. Paris isn’t only a wealthy playground for tourists. But historic preservation has made it tougher to diversify neighborhoods. Officials promise 30 percent subsidized housing by 2030. Billions pour into renovating housing blocks and retrofitting barren suburban neighborhoods with streets, shops, parks and transit. But with limited results.

“It’s part of the French Republic idea that as citizens we’re all race-blind and equal,” says Marie-Hélène Bacqué, a professor of sociology and urban studies at the University of Paris. “So the country even prohibits official surveys according to race or ethnicity. How can we begin to deal with problems like the poor suburbs if we won’t face basic facts?”

As Nicolas Grivel, director general of ANRU, the state agency for urban renewal, put it: “We need to change the transport system and the government of greater Paris. But we also have to do away with the psychological ring around the city.”

Mr. Rio, the Grigny mayor, said he still believes that can happen: “This city and its urban development must become a laboratory for the republic.” He told me he met the previous day with France’s president, François Hollande, and said he stressed the same thing.

“I told him we need to do better in places like Grigny,” he said, “because this is a concentration of all the problems now facing France.”

MAIN FOCUS

Ceasefire for Ukraine agreed at Minsk summit

The negotiating partners at the [Ukraine summit](#) in Minsk agreed on a potential peace plan for eastern Ukraine on Thursday. A ceasefire will take effect on Sunday and the withdrawal of heavy arms from Donbass will begin. With this result both sides have demonstrated that they want peace, some commentators write. For others Russian President Vladimir Putin is the main beneficiary of the deal.

Sme - Slovakia

All sides want peace

The results of the Minsk talks have far exceeded expectations as far as Bloomberg View correspondent Leonid Beršidskij is concerned. In a commentary piece for the liberal daily Sme he writes: "Angela Merkel admitted after the talks that she has no illusions and that the ceasefire is a fragile one. The fervent Ukrainian patriots may see the deal as a betrayal. The separatists and the Russians who pull the strings will be hungry for more territorial gains and stronger guarantees that Ukraine won't enter Western alliances. But if the weapons are silenced it will give Ukraine the chance of a peaceful solution and Putin an economic reprieve. And the EU would [foil the efforts](#) of the hardliners in the US. ... These are all successes for which the participants deserve to be congratulated. Even if the ceasefire doesn't hold, the talks made it clear that there is a strong will to achieve a durable solution." (13/02/2015)

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All available articles from [» Leonid Beršidskij](#)

Corriere della Sera - Italy

Minsk strengthens Europe's foreign policy

Europe is finally taking on the role of a global player, the liberal-conservative daily Corriere della Sera writes, and calls the talks in Minsk a success: "Merkel and Hollande, courageous representatives of an EU that remains divided even with a war raging right on its doorstep, have prevented the negotiations from failing. Thanks to the chancellor and the president Europe has emerged from the Minsk summit more influential and more self-confident. ... It will take strong political will on the part of the four participants and also the US for the agreements to be implemented. In the meantime Minsk has been generous to the Kremlin chief and met the news of the [annexation of the Crimea](#) with a deafening silence. But it would be a mistake to talk of winners and losers today. The game has only just kicked off." (13/02/2015)

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All available articles from [» Franco Venturini](#)

Financial Times - United Kingdom

Putin grants himself a tactical pause

The agreement reached at the Minsk summit won't stop the conflict in Ukraine because the Russian president's main objective remains the re-establishment of a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the conservative daily fears: "The Minsk II agreement will only succeed if Mr Putin has decided to tone down his confrontation with Ukraine and the west. But there is no sign he is willing to do so. Many factors, including Russia's [economic crisis](#) and the ferocious anti-western campaign now being waged in the Russia media, suggest that the Kremlin leader's ambitions stretch beyond Ukraine and that he strives to reassert a Russian sphere of influence in eastern Europe. ... It would be wise to assume that Minsk II is little more than a tactical pause." (12/02/2015)

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Libération - France

Russia benefits from ceasefire

The Minsk ceasefire mainly strengthens Russian President Vladimir Putin's position, the left-liberal daily Libération laments: "On the one hand the new text doesn't make any mention of the word 'Crimea', meaning the region is to all extents and purposes abandoned to Russia, while a federalised Ukraine with an eastern flank under Russian influence, even if it too is not specifically mentioned, is fully established in spirit. Hence the balance of power remains in Putin's favour. It was enough to watch and hear the European leaders. Most of them remained guarded, Angela Merkel first and foremost, who stressed that she harboured no illusions for the future. Every day of peace is welcome, there can be no doubt about that. Unless, that is, it allows the one with the advantage on the ground to reinforce his position." (12/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, French\)](#)

Tages-Anzeiger - Switzerland

Another frozen conflict

The Minsk agreement condemns Ukraine to the same scenario Russia has imposed on other countries in its vicinity, the daily Tages-Anzeiger criticises: "Once again a country has been put in a 'neither here nor there' situation through the externally-imposed freezing of an unresolved conflict: neither East nor West, neither European Union nor Eurasian Union. This is already the case in Georgia with the frozen conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in [Moldova](#) with Transnistria, in Armenia and Azerbaijan with Nagorno-Karabakh. In these neighbouring countries Moscow has put all its effort into preserving a state of tension to keep itself in the game in the hopes of increasing its clout. Russia wants to be taken seriously on the world stage and to be on an equal footing with the US. In reality, however, Moscow has only highlighted how unattractive it is even in Ukraine: only by resorting to the crude force of arms has it been able to prevent the country from determining its own future." (13/02/2015)

[» full article \(external link, German\)](#)

Večernji List - Croatia

Putin gets what he wants again

The result of the Minsk peace talks is fragile and reminiscent of the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conservative daily Večernji List criticises: "One can hardly expect an end to the bloodbath in Ukraine with the ceasefire that's been agreed on. Putin has once more got what he wants with this agreement, in this case autonomy for eastern Ukraine. But the question is whether that's good for Ukraine and whether the agreement will hold. Because autonomy for Luhansk and Donetsk would mean that the Russians have a firm foothold in the country. ... All of this is reminiscent of the unfortunate division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the conqueror got the biggest slice of the pie and a land was created that [remains dysfunctional](#) even today." (13/02/2015)

[» to the homepage \(Večernji List\)](#)

114,73

The Greek Debt Strategy Is Crazy, But Shrewd

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/13/2015 12:36 -0500

With everyone making nice - apart from Dijsselbloem - ahead of the weekend, we thought some reality checks were in order...

Submitted by [Dominique Dassault](#) via [GlobalSlant.com](#),

This whole Greek debt “face-off” with the rest of Europe is so comical. First of all, as previously mentioned, there is NO way that Greece will EVER pay off all of its debt. And its ability to even service [interest payments] its debt is questionable.

So, really, if you are a creditor to Greece what are you to do? **You are definitely going to get “stiffed”.** The question = **Can you recover even some of your principal? In this case probably not a lot.**

Amazingly, Greece has all the leverage in these negotiations. Really? Yes they do and the following quote sums it all up...“If you owe a bank one thousand dollars and cannot pay it back, then YOU have a problem; but if you owe a bank one million dollars and cannot pay it back, then the BANK has a problem”. In this case the Euro-Zone is the bank...and they are owed > \$315B. Greece is the poor little client with no practical chance of repaying any of this debt.

The Euro-Zone is well aware of this predicament. The worst case scenario for them is Greece “flipping them the bird” as they wave goodbye to the euro. The write-downs would be massive, capital would have to be raised to replace it, the economic disruption to all of Europe would be substantial and other large creditor countries to the Euro-Zone [Italy and Spain] may be tempted to copy Greece’s move and just “bolt” from the EU.

And...the future of the Euro-Zone could actually be in peril and that is dangerous to the entire global economy. The Euro-Zone’s leaders are sure to be receiving phone calls from their free world counterparts.

The Euro-Zone’s position towards Greece and its new political leaders...just stay the course, pay your bills and do not “rock the boat”...you were the one’s stupid enough to take all of this money and squander it while we were stupid enough to give it to you. Somehow...some way...we’ll get through this economic predicament.

To Greece’s new leaders the Euro-Zone’s position is a non-starter. Apparently day to day life in Greece, for the average working “stiff, sucks...and surely must initiate doubts about whether life could really be any worse if Greece were to voluntarily exit the euro. The massive budget cuts and austerity measures imposed on a population accustomed to socialism do not seem to work. That is why the prior government was voted out and the new, younger regime has taken the reins. Their basic message to the Euro-Zone [the political platform that got them elected] was to reject the previous government’s debt inducing policies and ask for a massive change in strategy. Of course, the Euro-Zone leaders initially told them to “piss-off”.

But...alas...Greece’s leaders have a brilliant idea to solve all of these lingering problems and, of course, it has to do with money printing. Greece has suggested that the Euro-Zone’s central bank [ECB] simply purchase most of Greece’s near term [5 years] maturity debt and actually deliver the proceeds back to Greece.

Greece’s message to the Euro-Zone amounts to...since you are starting an indefinite debt monetization program in just two short months...why not include us in the money printing party too even though our ability to repay our obligations is essentially zero? Hey...we’ll even pay for the paper and ink...with the money you’ve already given to us.

Everybody wins... no write-offs for the Euro-Zone, a little breathing room for Greece, the euro depreciates even more [an objective of debt monetization] and when Greece, inevitably defaults, the ECB can just print more money for them, once again, to defer the inevitable pain.

“In your face” Euro-Zone. Greece outsmarted you at the negotiating table and you will likely acquiesce to their creative requests...in all of your money printing shame...or is it just a dubious honor?

HOW ABSURD HAS ALL OF THIS REALLY BECOME? I SUPPOSE NOT ABSURD ENOUGH...YET.

114,74

Manuel Valls part en guerre contre les dérives de l'islam

[HOME](#) [ACTUALITE](#) [POLITIQUE](#)

Par [Francois-Xavier Bourmaud](#) Publié le 13/02/2015 à 18:27



Le premier ministre entend lancer une concertation destinée à lutter contre l'influence des Frères musulmans et des salafistes en France.

Manuel Valls engage le combat contre les dérives de l'islam. Un mois après son discours devant l'Assemblée nationale, dans lequel il avait assuré que la France était en guerre «contre le terrorisme, le djihadisme et l'islamisme radical», le premier ministre a annoncé jeudi devant le Sénat une série de consultations sur l'avenir de l'organisation du culte musulman en France. Ces rencontres seront dirigées par le ministre de l'Intérieur, Bernard Cazeneuve, également ministre des Cultes. Le Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM) y participera mais sera loin d'être en position de force. Douze ans après sa création, le constat de son échec est partagé jusqu'à la présidence de la République où François Hollande lui-même estimait la semaine dernière que cette instance n'avait «pas la capacité suffisante de faire prévaloir un certain nombre de règles, de principes, partout sur le territoire».

Par le nombre de sujets qu'elle aborde, la réorganisation de l'islam en France relève du casse-tête. Il y a d'abord [la question du financement](#). Elle se cristallise sur la construction des mosquées, elle va en réalité bien au-delà. «Comment accepter que l'islam de France reçoive des financements d'un certain nombre de pays étrangers, quels qu'ils soient? C'est une première question qui doit être posée. Et si on la pose, eh bien cela veut dire qu'il faut prendre un certain nombre de mesures pour, demain, empêcher ces financements, notamment quand ils confortent un certain nombre de comportements», a fait valoir Manuel Valls. En France, des polémiques régulières surgissent sur le financement de lieux de culte par certains pays arabes, et notamment du Golfe.

Partant, se pose aussi la question des prêches proférés dans ces mosquées. Selon le premier ministre, il faut ainsi «s'inquiéter de l'influence des [Frères musulmans](#), s'inquiéter de l'influence d'un certain nombre de groupes salafistes qui se retrouvent dans un certain nombre de quartiers». Or cette mouvance ultraorthodoxe a gagné du terrain dans les mosquées, jusqu'à contrôler aujourd'hui une centaine de lieux de culte sur 2300.

D'où la demande de François Hollande à son premier ministre de [travailler sur la formation des imams](#). Le sujet est sensible dans les mosquées mais aussi dans les prisons où s'opère le basculement djihadiste. Aujourd'hui, 180 aumôniers musulmans «officiels» opèrent dans les lieux de rétention, un chiffre largement en deçà des besoins aux yeux des experts.

«Comment accepter que l'islam de France reçoive des financements d'un certain nombre de pays étrangers, quels qu'ils soient ?»

Manuel Valls

Problème, en dehors d'organisations méconnues ou opaques, le corps des imams n'a pas de représentation officielle. «Les musulmans ne cherchent pas une instance représentative - ça, c'est le vœu des autorités -, ils souhaiteraient une instance purement religieuse qui puisse rendre des avis et trouver des arguments pour

répondre en toute légitimité à la radicalisation de certains jeunes», explique à l'AFP M'hammed Henniche, secrétaire général de l'Union des associations musulmanes de Seine-Saint-Denis. Pour le gouvernement, le chantier est immense. Il est aussi politique.

Certes Manuel Valls a appelé à ne pas faire de cette question «un enjeu électoral» susceptible d'alimenter les divisions du pays. Mais l'élan républicain né des [attaques terroristes contre Charlie Hebdo et le supermarché Hyper Cacher](#) a aussi eu son revers. Au PS, on dénonce un renforcement de l'islamophobie dont se nourrit le vote Front national. Il est apparu dans le Doubs à l'occasion d'une élection législative partielle lorsque la candidate du FN s'est qualifiée au premier tour et a échoué de peu au second. À droite comme à gauche, on redoute de voir les élections départementales puis régionales de cette année se traduire par une nouvelle poussée de l'extrême droite.

Or l'offensive du gouvernement contre l'islamisme radical demande du travail et du temps, ce que les électeurs ne sont pas forcément prêts à l'accorder. Au bout du compte, c'est toute la question de la compatibilité de l'islam avec la démocratie qui est posée. Il y a encore deux ans, le sujet avait provoqué une polémique à gauche, lorsque Manuel Valls avait soulevé la question à l'occasion d'un séminaire gouvernemental. «Il a franchi un cap hallucinant», avait alors déploré un ministre. L'exécutif n'en est plus là. Désormais, il tente de tracer une frontière républicaine entre l'islam «tolérant, universel, et bienveillant» défendu par Manuel Valls et l'islamisme radical pourfendu par le même.

114,76

We Europeans must face up to our own security challenges

Natalie Nougayrède

The crisis in Ukraine has reopened the post-cold war settlement, but the United States cannot be relied on forever to guarantee peace

.....
Friday 13 February 2015 06:00 GMT

The return of war to the European continent has come as a profound, if delayed, shock to the west. No one, just a year ago, could have imagined that it would come to this. **A Europe struggling with its financial and economic woes is caught off guard by Ukraine's turmoil and Russia's role in that.** Now, we have the immediate flashpoint in eastern Ukraine, [which the Minsk declaration announced](#) by the leaders of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia, aims to address. And then there is the long view, the wider picture to be grasped: **and that concerns Europe's future and its long-term security.**

For what we are witnessing is a truly a defining moment for how the continent may look like in the 21st century, in a context where the transatlantic bond is significantly weakened. The key question revolves around **how Europe will deal in the future with ensuring a stable security architecture on its territory, capable of preventing more bloodshed and thus ensuring it can defend its interests in a changing world.** There are far more, and far deeper, unknowns here than in how the ceasefire will hold out in eastern [Ukraine](#).

For years, [Europe](#) built its common project with **a Kantian view of the world**

For years, Europe built its common project with a Kantian view of the world – the Venus syndrome (with the US as Mars), as described by Robert Kagan: a continent incapable of envisaging war because for so long it lived under the postwar US security umbrella. Without the transatlantic link enshrined by [Nato](#), Europe has no defense and security policy of its own to speak of. The EU may have forces in the Balkans, in Africa, even off the coast of Somalia, but it has neither a doctrine nor any deployable joint forces capable of ensuring the safety of Russia's neighbors if the worst-case scenario was to unfold.

So far, Europeans have not given themselves the financial resources to do that, and money is short at a time of economic recession and budget-slashing. So American involvement in Europe is still very much the thing to watch.

But it is striking that as European leaders met in Minsk, the Obama administration formally submitted to Congress a proposal for authorizing military force against Islamic State (Isis) anywhere in the world (not explicitly limiting the effort to Iraq and Syria). This is in tune with the recently released US national security strategy.

This roadmap does not cast US leadership in terms of containment, even if [Russia](#) is back as a threat. It is essentially focused on a global vision whereby security is achieved through partnerships. As outlined recently by Susan Rice, Obama's national security adviser, **the list of US priorities comes in the following order: terrorism, nuclear proliferation, pandemic diseases, climate change, trade and global growth, equality, Africa, China, the Middle East.** The US openly identifies Asia as a region which will define the course of the 21st century. **Obama's final years in office are going to be ever more "globally" focused, not Europe-centred.**

This puts the Europeans in an awkward place: possibly for the first time since the second world war, they will have to sort the continent out more or less on their own. **"But there is Nato!"**, many will say. Nato has indeed beefed up some of its capabilities in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis.

But the fact that debates continue about Nato's ability to enact Article 5 of its treaty (the all-for-one, one-for-all security guarantee set in place for its members) is testimony to how shaky the transatlantic bond has come to be perceived.

Equally, much has been said about the divisions between Europeans and Americans over the Ukraine crisis – for example, over arms shipments to Ukraine. The main point of agreement has that there would be no western military intervention in defense of Ukraine, which is not a member of Nato. And Europe and the US have coordinated tightly in forging sanctions against Russia, **although some say European unity on sanctions was only reached under US pressure**. Others point to the role of the continent's strong-woman, **Angela Merkel**. It was also hard not to notice that sanctions were only really agreed after the downing of flight MH17 (298 dead, two-thirds of them European), which horrified public opinion. **But overall, Europe's own divisions have been glaring and will almost certainly continue to be.**

A post-American Europe must define itself and the principles it wants to uphold

These factors have influenced the Russian strategizing. With all the attempted mind-reading over Vladimir Putin's psychology, one thing can be said for sure: **Russia is playing the long game**. This was spelled out yet again by its foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in a speech in Munich a week ago. "The events of the past year [in Ukraine] have confirmed the validity of our warnings regarding deep, systemic problems in the organization of European security." Russia, he added, had long proposed a common economic and humanitarian space, stretching "from Lisbon to Vladivostok, a space based on the principles of equal and indivisible security". That is very true. **Since 2008, the year of the outbreak of war in Georgia, Russia has been trying to push a security framework that would give Moscow a veto over the strategic choices of European states as well as some of Nato's actions. In a nutshell, a dilution of the transatlantic alliance.**

If you follow this logic, it is likely that the Ukrainian crisis was brought to boiling point by Russia not just because of Putin's paranoia over democratic revolutions that might inspire Russians one day, but because it gets everyone scrambling to try for an answer to Russia's bigger and older strategic demands over European security.

That is the chapter that has now been reopened, **40 years after the Helsinki Final Accords and 25 years after the Paris Charter, which laid the foundations for a peaceful post-cold war order in Europe**. Europeans must seriously tackle this question – **not just ponder whether Merkel is the right person to lead them**. Roughly put, **a post-American Europe must define itself and the principles it wants to uphold.**

This also counts because in the long run, Europe is not the only issue. After the second world war and into the 1970s, organizations and rules were set up to ensure the continent's security. Europe is the only part of the world affected by the war that has benefited from such overarching arrangements.

In Asia, there are alliances but multiple territorial claims, and no regional security organization. **What happens in Europe raises questions not only about our wellbeing and stability, but in an interconnected global environment, about world governance as a whole.**

What Putin obtains in his attempts to get Europeans to compromise over Ukraine's independent strategic choices, including its links with the EU, will be followed closely by China and others. **By violating European security rules, he is hoping to renegotiate them.**

On this, the Minsk agreement has opened the way to talks, but without delivering any answers.

114,78

In Thirst For War, Sen. Inhofe Releases Fake Photos Of Russian Troops In Ukraine

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/13/2015 22:25 -0500

Submitted by [Mike Krieger](#) via [Liberty Blitzkrieg](#) blog,

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee first viewed the graphic pictures in December. Sen. Jim Inhofe (R., Okla.) then obtained the photos and worked to independently verify and confirm the authenticity of the photos, before providing them exclusively to the Free Beacon.

Inhofe said he hopes the images act as a wake up call to the Obama administration and American people, who largely have been spared from seeing the graphic violence inflicted upon Ukraine by the Russian-backed separatists...

Following publication of this story, serious questions have been raised about the authenticity of some of the photographs provided by Sen. Jim Inhofe (R., Okla.). Several images of the Russian convoys appear to have been taken in 2008, during Russia's conflict with Georgia. Given the similarities between the earlier images and those provided by the senator's office, the Washington Free Beacon is investigating further and will update as necessary.

Sen. Inhofe said in a statement: "The Ukrainian parliament members who gave us these photos in print form as if it came directly from a camera really did themselves a disservice. We felt confident to release these photos because the images match the reporting of what is going on in the region. I was furious to learn one of the photos provided now appears to be falsified from an AP photo taken in 2008.

– From the Washington Free Beacon's article: [Updated: Provenance of Photos Showing Atrocities Questioned](#)

Wondering just how similar the images were?



This is absolutely incredible. Incredible.

First of all, I don't claim to have any idea about what is happening in Ukraine. Many people out there feel obligated to pick a side, but I can promise you that 99% of them don't actually have a clue. I don't think there are many "goods guys" on either side of this fight, and my assumption is that both sides are lying as much as possible. It's a very sad situation, but very few people really knows what's going on. That's why I don't comment on it much.

I wish I could say the same thing for United States Senators, you know, the people who actually play an important role in deciding when the country goes to war (that is, when Obama decides to consult them).

In his best attempt to impersonate war crazed Senator John McCain, Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma released photographic proof of Russian solders in Ukraine in order to push forward his bill to provide U.S. arms to Ukraine. Or so he thought...

The [Washington Free Beacon](#) [reported](#):

Inhofe's bill to arm the Ukrainians is sponsored by at least 16 other leading Republicans, including Sens. Ted Cruz (Texas), John Cornyn (Texas), Marco Rubio (Fla.), and Tom Cotton (Ark.).

The bill would authorize the United States to send lethal weaponry and require Obama to provide Congress with a "comprehensive strategy" to support Ukraine going forward.

The new evidence could help bolster the case on Capitol Hill for a [new piece of legislation](#) that would enable the United States to provide lethal military aid to the Ukrainians, who have been asking America for such support for months.

The pictures were taken between Aug. 24 and Sept. 5 in the midst of a Russian-backed incursion into Eastern Ukraine. The fighting has only grown more bloody in the ensuing months, as hundreds more Russians enter the country, according to congressional sources briefed on the conflict.

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Inhofe said he hopes the images act as a wake up call to the Obama administration and American people, who largely have been spared from seeing the graphic violence inflicted upon Ukraine by the Russian-backed separatists.

There's just one slight problem here. Some of the photos are totally fake, and are actually from Russia's 2008 conflict with Georgia. More from the Washington Free Beacon:

UPDATE 3:11 P.M.: Following publication of this story, *serious questions have been raised* about the authenticity of some of the photographs provided by Sen. Jim Inhofe (R., Okla.). **Several images of the Russian convoys appear to have been taken in 2008, during Russia's conflict with Georgia.** Given the similarities between the earlier images and those provided by the senator's office, the Washington Free Beacon is investigating further and will update as necessary.

Sen. Inhofe said in a statement: "The Ukrainian parliament members who gave us these photos in print form as if it came directly from a camera really did themselves a disservice. We felt confident to release these photos because the images match the reporting of what is going on in the region. I was furious to learn one of the photos provided now appears to be falsified from an AP photo taken in 2008. This doesn't change the fact that there is plenty of evidence Russia has made advances into the country with T-72 tanks and that pro-Russian separatists have been killing Ukrainians in cold blood."

This is simply unbelievable, and further proof that U.S. "leadership" has absolutely no idea what they are doing. Very dangerous. [The Daily Caller](#) put it quite well:

Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) released photographs Thursday of what he says is confirmed Russian military action against Ukraine. He gave them "exclusively" to the Washington Free Beacon.

Except there's just one problem — some of the photographs given to WFB from the 80-year-old senator date back to 2008 from the AP and aren't exclusive at all.

The WFB points out that the photographic evidence could be pivotal in convincing Congress to back legislation that would give military assistance to the Ukrainians. They say Inhofe worked "independently" from Congress to verify the authenticity of the photographs.

Independently, meaning his office forget to do basic online image searches.

Inhofe, of course, bashes President Obama, saying he's "slow to recognize" what is happening around the world.

But maybe it's a certain Oklahoma senator who needs to take a class at the local Apple store.

You can't make this stuff up. Further proof to not believe anything the government says, and to not start anymore wars.

* * *

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2015-02-13/qe-and-zirp-are-deflationary>

114,80

QE and ZIRP Are Deflationary...

Submitted by [Phoenix Capital Research](#) on 02/13/2015 11:57 -0500

The Fed and other Central Banks have shifted away from focusing on growth to focusing on **inflation**.

The explanation here is as follows: they've failed to create growth, debt deflation is their worst nightmare, so the best they can hope for is **inflation** to make debt servicing easier.

However, by leaving interest rates at zero, the Fed has unleashed its worst fear: deflation... particularly deflation in consumer spending and consumer psychology... the lifeblood of the US economy.

It sounds totally counter-intuitive, but let's consider the following.

If you are retired or close to retired, your primary concern is having enough money to enjoy retirement and possibly leave a little something for your children/grandkids.

Since you will no longer be working (hopefully), your money will come from interest income on the pool of capital you have accumulated by now.

If you'd saved \$1 million, and interest rates are 4%, you've got interest income of \$40,000 per year. That's not bad at all if you've paid off your house and accomplished the other items associated with "the American Dream."

However, if you've saved \$1 million and interest rates are 0.25% as they are today, your interest income is **\$2,500 per year**.

This is HIGHLY deflationary because you are making next to nothing, which means that in order to survive you have to **spend your savings**.

This reduces your total capital, as well as the potential for greater future interest income (the amount of capital you have to produce interest income down the road is shrinking).

If this scenario, you're not going to go out and start living high on the hog. You are going to start being more frugal and careful with your expenses because money is not coming in at the pace you'd hoped.

Consequently, your spending goes down and you enter a kind of "capital hibernation." You're not going to start plunging your money into risky investments because you are more **averse to loss of capital** than potential gains.

Again, your primary focus is on monthly payouts on interest income, NOT capital gains. How many 60+ year old day traders are there really? How many individuals dream of working their whole lives just so they can retire and start gambling in the stock market?

The answer is next to none. The Fed, by cutting rates lower and engaging in QE, has crippled the potential returns for the Baby Boomer generation. This has killed off consumer spending (baby boomers are the single largest pool of capital in the US) and hampered anything resembling an economic recovery.

And all it's done is result in active investors taking on more and more leverage to increase returns. Today the financial system is even more leveraged than it was in 2007.

And we all know what came after that.

If you've yet to take action to prepare for the second round of the financial crisis, we offer a FREE investment report ***Financial Crisis "Round Two" Survival Guide*** that outlines easy, simple to follow strategies you can use to not only protect your portfolio from a market downturn, but actually produce profits.

<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21643245-russia-ukraine-germany-and-france-agree-halt-shooting-deeper-issues-are-left-untouched>

114,81

Ukraine

A tentative ceasefire

Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France agree to halt the shooting, but deeper issues are left untouched

Feb 12th 2015 | MOSCOW | [Europe](#)



THE pens were on the table in Minsk, Belarus's capital, for the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine to sign an agreement to end a year-long war fuelled by Russia and fought by its proxies. But on February 12th, after all-night talks, they were put away. “No good news,” said Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine’s embattled president. Instead there will be a ceasefire from February 15th. A tentative agreement has been reached to withdraw heavy weaponry.



Russian timeline: The road to 2015

But Russia looks sure to be able to keep open its border with Ukraine and sustain the flow of arms and people. The siege of Debaltseve, a strategic transport hub held by Ukrainian forces, continues. Russia is holding military exercises on its side of the border. Crimea was not even mentioned.

Meanwhile the IMF has said it will lend Ukraine \$17.5 billion to prop up its economy. But Mr Putin seems to be relying on a familiar Russian tactic of exhausting his negotiating counterparts and taking two steps forward, one step back. He is counting on time and endurance to bring the collapse and division of Ukraine and a revision of the post-cold war world order. This is not a conflict that can be resolved in Minsk.

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2015-02-13/us-suicidal-strategy-ukraine>

114,82

The US' Suicidal Strategy On Ukraine

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/13/2015 18:55 -0500

Submitted by Chris Martenson via Peak Prosperity,

Ukraine is back in the news cycle and for good reason. The previous cease-fire has broken, fighting is intensifying, and the western-supported and installed leadership in Kiev is losing the campaign. At this point, the West's choice is to either double down and bet even more on a badly failing set of policies, or admit it has lost this round and seek to deescalate the situation.

Meanwhile, Europe has finally woken up to the risks and seems to be ready to carve out a different path than the US. A lot hinges on the apparent 'truce' deal between Russia and Europe's leaders this week.

As the President Hollande of France [put it on Feb 7th](#), "*If we don't find not just a compromise but a lasting peace agreement, we know perfectly well what the scenario will be. It has a name, it's called war.*" **Of course - since the deal's signing, shelling has continued with more deaths.**

He's not simply referring to an escalation of the factions fighting within Ukraine. He's warning about the real deal: a wider conflict that could easily spread into Europe, and possibly, the embroil powers across the world.

A Recipe For Unrest

[As I've written previously](#), the West, especially the US, was instrumental in toppling the democratically-elected President of Ukraine back in February 2014. US officials were caught on tape plotting the coup, and then immediately supported the hastily-installed and extremist officials that now occupy the Kiev leadership positions.

In short, the crisis in Ukraine was not the result of Russia's actions, but the West's. Had the prior President, Yanukovich, not been overthrown, it's highly unlikely that Ukraine would be embroiled in a nasty civil war. Relations between Russia and the West would be in far better repair.

Russia, quite predictably and understandably, became alarmed at the rise of fascism and Nazi-sympathetic powers on its border. Remember the repeated statements by Kiev officials recommending extermination of the Russian speakers who make up the majority living in Eastern Ukraine. Were a parallel situation happening in Canada, for example, I would fully expect the US to be similarly and seriously interested and involved in the outcome.

The only people seemingly surprised by this predictable Russian reaction towards protecting its people and border interests are the neocons at the US State Department who instigated the conflict in the first place. In my experience, these are dangerous people principally because they seem to lack perspective and humility.

Ukraine's Civil War

Going Poorly For The Regime

Looking at the state of things, it's not going well militarily for the Kiev regime. Huge losses and persistent reports of low morale among Ukrainian troops tell the tale: Kiev is losing badly.

Let's begin with the reports of the fighting in Ukraine which have recently intensified:

Ukraine bloodshed intensifies ahead of peace summit

Feb 11, 2015

Kiev (AFP) - Intense fighting in Ukraine, including a devastating rocket strike on Kiev's military headquarters in the east, killed at least 37 people on Tuesday, the eve of a four-way peace summit.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said rockets for the first time hit the military's command centre in Kramatorsk, the government's administrative capital in the region, well behind the frontlines and far from rebel positions.

The latest fighting also saw rebels seek to encircle railway hub Debaltseve and Ukrainian forces launch a counter-offensive around the strategic port of Mariupol.

(Source)

The rebels have encircled and ruined a number of Kiev forces over the past several months in what are called 'cauldrons', where the encircled forces are slowly ground down and destroyed. This [appears to have finally happened](#) in Debaltseve, which would be just another in a long string of heavy losses for Kiev.

The losses in prior cauldrons have been staggeringly high, with many analysts concluding that Kiev has been underreporting losses by as much as 90%.

I cannot vouch for all of these sources. But the following is a typical example of reporting coming from the front lines of the Ukraine conflict, which directly contradicts the official Kiev war reports:

Ukraine hides devastating losses as Russia-backed fighters surge forward

Jan 25, 2015

ARTYOMOVSK, Ukraine – An ashen-faced man in a loose-fitting military uniform shuffles past a blood-soaked stretcher propped against the wall. Slowly stirring a cup of tea, he watches **Ukrainian military officials announce the day's casualties – one killed and 20 wounded.**

"Don't believe what they tell you," he says, checking the door is closed before continuing.

"There are many, many more. At least 280 were injured in just one day last week and 30 or 40 killed. There were many more killed this week, Debaltseve and Konstantinovka are the worst cities now. I take 18 wounded to Kharkiv myself every day."

The man, who didn't want to be named, is a medic in Ukraine's overstretched, under-resourced army. Clearly traumatized, he speaks quietly and hesitantly, barely audible over the low rumble of artillery fire from the outskirts of town.

His words confirm Ukraine's worst-kept secret - that the Ukrainian army is drastically understating its casualties. But only now is the scale of that understatement starting to become clear.

On Jan. 22, the director of Kostiantynivka hospital told Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe monitors that in the last two weeks that the number of soldiers admitted has **"increased dramatically, with figures comparable to those in August and September 2014."**

Between Aug. 10 and Sept. 3, when Russian troops first entered Ukraine in support of a beleaguered rebel force on the brink of defeat, the **Kyiv Post estimates at least 200 servicemen were killed.**

Many of the recent casualties are coming from areas around the besieged town of Debaltseve, a strategic rail junction between Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, where thousands of Ukrainian soldiers are struggling to prevent being surrounded and cut off from Ukrainian lines.

The town's defenders – and its civilian population - have faced an incessant artillery bombardment from three sides since Russian-backed rebels launched a massive offensive all along the front line last week.

(Source)

I have read enough first-hand reports to suspect that this article is pretty close to the truth. The contradicting numbers in the statements from the Kiev regime about losses are very hard to believe.

Part of what plagues Kiev's forces is the age-old problem of fielding an unmotivated force. Not everybody is excited to be fighting against people from within their own country. Moreover, training is poor, equipment and ammunition are in poor shape and supply, and pay is often late in coming if it comes at all. This is a very usual litany of problems that have plagued struggling armies through the centuries.

On the other side of the battle lines, you have people fighting for their homes, their families and their ethnic community, which the Kiev regime has promised to exterminate if and when it's given the chance.

Dubious Reporting

It's interesting to contrast foreign reporting with US reporting on the conflict:

As fighting deepens in eastern Ukraine, casualties rise and truce is all but dead

Jan 20, 2015

MOSCOW — **Intensifying battles, mounting death tolls and new accusations of Russian interference in eastern Ukraine** have marked some of the worst fighting between government troops and pro-Russian separatists since last summer, rendering a months-old cease-fire agreement effectively defunct.

The two sides have been trading heavy fire at the Donetsk airport, a prize that, though more symbolic than strategic, has been at the center of punishing recent attacks that have reduced much of the facility to rubble. **Each side has claimed control of the airport at various points,** and militia and army fighters there continued to launch strikes against each other over the past several days.

The U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey R. Pyatt, bolstered Ukraine's accusations Tuesday, saying the United States was alarmed by what he called a Russian-provoked military escalation, coupled with the arrival of large quantities of weaponry from Russian territory, according to the Russian Interfax news service.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin told reporters Tuesday that pro-Russian separatists were **"taking advantage" of the military's compliance to seize "very substantial territory – more than 500 square kilometers."**

(Source)

Let's decode this piece of writing from the Washington Post and provide some essential context that is, regrettably, missing far too often from US media sources when reporting on the Ukraine conflict.

To begin, there's the [assertion once again](#) that Russia has been supplying "large quantities" of weapons to the separatists. While this may or may not be true, not one shred of satellite or other imagery or any other evidence has been provided by the US to support that charge.

In this day and age it is *literally not possible* to move large amounts of heavy weaponry across open land without satellites and/or drones taking pictures of them.

Furthermore, in this case the charges are being levied by one Geoffrey Pyatt, the infamous US ambassador to Ukraine who was caught on tape discussing the imminent coup of then-President Yanukovich. He also famously tweeted out [a crudely doctored photo](#) purporting to show that the missile attack on MH-17 came from the separatists -- evidence that was quickly defrauded by the intelligence community.

Why the Washington Post would report anything from Pyatt as worthy of our serious consideration given his blighted track record so far is a complete mystery to me. It would be like recommending your friend to a doctor you knew had committed gross malpractice multiple times.

Next, the separatists are not 'taking advantage' of a one-sided lull in the fighting to claim territory. They have been winning battle after battle. What they have taken advantage of is the poor training and lackluster military strategy undertaken by Kiev's forces.

It should also be noted that the above article presents the status of the conflict as an even match. There's no indication that one side is winning or losing.

This is par for the course with US media reports these days and it's really a disturbing indication that the shoddy journalistic ethics on display during the horrendously mis-reported weapons of mass destructions lies that led to the most recent US attack on Iraq are still with us today.

It's quite sad, really. Because when it comes to an issue as important as a potential conflict with Russia, the US owes it to itself to get the facts right. The stakes are worthy of that.

As a final point about the shortcomings of the Washington Post piece above concerns the heavily contested Donetsk airport. Five days prior to the above article's publication, the airport had been clearly reported by other outlets to have already been lost by Kiev forces:

Russia-backed separatists seize Donetsk airport in Ukraine

Jan 15, 2015

Russian-backed separatists announced that they have captured the shattered remains of the Donetsk airport terminal in eastern Ukraine and plan to claw back more territory, further dashing hopes for a lasting peace agreement.

The airport, on the fringes of the rebel stronghold of Donetsk, has been at the centre of bitter battles since May. Control over it was split between the separatists and Ukrainian forces, who had held onto the main civilian terminal. Reduced to little more than a shell-strewn wreck, the building is of limited strategic importance but has great symbolic value.

An AP reporter saw a rebel flag hoisted over that building Thursday, although fighting still appeared to be ongoing. Ukraine insisted government troops were holding their positions at the airport.

(Source)

Instead of the airport being up for grabs as the WaPo article implies, it has had the rebel flag flying over it as of five days ago. It's clearly in the hands of one side, the separatists'. That's a huge difference, and is just one more example of heavily slanted writing that passes for news in the US these days.

But leaving the shoddy reporting aside, the main summary here is that the intense fighting in Ukraine has resulting in mounting losses for Kiev.

All of which provides the context for this week's hurriedly-brokered 'peace summit' that will involve France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine.

Splitting Away

Europe has begun the process of splitting away from the US on the matter of Russia and Ukraine.

What's interesting is that an emergency meeting is being convened amongst several of the top leaders in the world, but looks who's suspiciously absent from the talks:

Merkel and Hollande's surprise Moscow visit raises hopes of Ukraine deal

Feb 5, 2015

The leaders of Germany and France abruptly announced a summit with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow on Friday in response to overtures from the Kremlin, raising hopes of a breakthrough in the year-old Ukraine conflict.

The sudden and unusual decision by the chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the president, François Hollande, to travel to Moscow, with the French leader talking of decisions of war and peace, increased the stakes in the crisis while also raising suspicions that the Kremlin was seeking to split Europe and the US. Putin was said to have made "initiatives" to the European leaders in recent days.

Merkel and Hollande met the Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, in Kiev on Thursday evening but left without making any comment.

EU diplomats and officials said that growing US talk of arming Ukraine was pushing the Russians and Europeans towards a diplomatic deal, with both sides keen to avoid weapons deliveries but also to keep the US on the sidelines of the diplomacy.

(Source)

Note the progression of what transpired, which we can piece together from this and other articles. US Secretary of State John Kerry was in Kiev meeting with the president and prime minister of Ukraine, but did not attend similar meetings with Hollande and Merkel held on the same day.

Then Hollande and Merkel jet straight off to Moscow for high level talks.

Missing in action from the Germany-France-Ukraine-Russia talks is John Kerry, President Obama, or any other ranking US official. This speaks volumes about where we are in this narrative.

When the US started down this path of confrontation with Russia, which remains a complete strategic mystery to nearly all thoughtful observers, there were two large possible outcomes: isolating Russia and fracturing its growing ties with Europe, or accidentally fracturing the strong ties between the US and Europe.

Oops. Looks like we've opened Door #2.

I didn't know how serious it was until I read this:

Kerry Insists 'There Is No Split' With Europe on Russia, Ukraine

Feb 8, 2015

MUNICH — Secretary of State John Kerry on Sunday denied any divisions between the U.S. and Europe over how to handle Russia, as Germany announced another high-level summit aimed at stemming the crisis in Ukraine.

Kerry told a security conference in Munich that he wanted to "assure everybody there is no division, there is no split" between Washington and its European allies amid the crisis in Ukraine.

"We are united, we are working closely together," he told the conference following meetings with his French and German counterparts. "We all agree that this challenge will not end through military force. We are united in our diplomacy."

(Source)

It's not terribly hard to read through that diplomatic double-speak here. The US is "united in our diplomacy" with Europe, even though the US was apparently not invited to be part of the biggest gathering of heads of state on what could be the flash point for a major regional war.

Nice try, John.

There's a saying that news is never official until it's denied. Well, I guess that makes it official: there's an emerging split between the US and Europe over the matter of Russia and Ukraine. And it's about time.

The key issue, apparently, is that the US, true to form, is ready to send in military arms to the Ukraine regime, and Europe thinks that's a bad idea for multiple reasons. I could not agree more.

After all, when has the US arming one side of a regional conflict led to regional peace and a good outcome for the citizens of any particular area? If you can't think of any recent examples, neither can I. The track record of late is nothing short of being a complete disaster for the people of the various countries involved. Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, and Nicaragua come to mind.

But the people of Ukraine have to be kicking themselves right about now. Not only did they fall for the rosy promises of change and hope peddled by the West, they also believed the West would be a better partner for them than Russia. Worse, instead of finding a way to have both as partners, they adopted the West's idea that it had to be one or the other. And now their country is being rent apart.

Why We Should Care, Deeply

So what? the average American might ask. *Ukraine is half a world away. Who cares what happens there?*

Putting aside the humanitarian reasons for not prolonging or intensifying a regional conflict, **we risk not just only America's century-long ties with western Europe, but possibly the next world war.** We are pushing our agenda and armaments right up against the Russian border -- for reasons that are still completely opaque at this time -- and **Russia, understandably, will simply not stand for that.**

In [Part 2: America Vs Russia: What's At Risk](#), we explore in depth what's truly at risk here, why a lasting peace agreement in Ukraine is highly unlikely to happen anytime soon, and the biggest risks concerned citizens in the West should prepare for right now.

[Click here to access Part 2](#) of this report (*free executive summary; [enrollment](#) required for full access*)

The view from the Kremlin

Putin's war on the West

As Ukraine suffers, it is time to recognise the gravity of the Russian threat—and to counter it

Feb 14th 2015 | [From the print edition](#)



HE IS ridiculed for his mendacity and ostracised by his peers. He presides over a free-falling currency and a rapidly shrinking economy. International sanctions stop his kleptocratic friends from holidaying in their ill-gotten Mediterranean villas. Judged against the objectives Vladimir Putin purported to set on inheriting Russia's presidency 15 years ago—prosperity, the rule of law, westward integration—regarding him as a success might seem bleakly comical.

But those are no longer his goals, if they ever really were. Look at the world from his perspective, and Mr Putin is winning. For all his enemies' machinations, he remains the Kremlin's undisputed master. He has a throttlehold on Ukraine, a grip this week's brittle agreement in Minsk has not eased. Domesticating Ukraine through his routine tactics of threats and bribery was his first preference, but the invasion has had side benefits. It has demonstrated the costs of insubordination to Russians; and, since he thinks Ukraine's government is merely a puppet of the West (the supposed will of its people being, to his ultracynical mind, merely a cover for Western intrigues), the conflict has usefully shown who is boss in Russia's backyard. Best of all, it has sown discord among Mr Putin's adversaries: among Europeans, and between them and America.

His overarching aim is to divide and neuter that alliance, fracture its collective approach to security, and resist and roll back its advances. From his tantrums over the Middle East to his invasion of Georgia and multiple misadventures in Ukraine, Mr Putin has sometimes seemed to stumble into accidental disputes with the West, driven by a paranoid fear of encirclement. In hindsight it seems that, given his outlook, confrontation may have been inevitable. Either way, the contest he insists on can no longer be dodged. It did not begin in poor Ukraine and will not end there. Prevailing will require far more resolve than Western leaders have so far mustered.

What the Kremlin wants

Last year Mr Putin lopped off Crimea, redrawing Europe's map by force. The war he hallucinated into reality in eastern Ukraine has killed thousands. Even if the ceasefire scheduled for February 15th holds (unlikely, on past form), he seems certain to get what he wants there: a wretched little quasi-state in the Donbas, which he can use to stall and warp Ukraine's development. Yet these incursions are only his latest bid to bludgeon former Soviet states into submission, whether through energy blackmail, trade embargoes or war. For Mr Putin the only good neighbour is a weak one; vassals are better than allies. Only the wilfully blind would think his revanchism has been sated. Sooner or later it may encompass the Baltic states—members of both the European Union and NATO, and home to Russian minorities of the kind he pledges to "protect".

The EU and NATO are Mr Putin's ultimate targets. To him, Western institutions and values are more threatening than armies. He wants to halt their spread, corrode them from within and, at least on the West's fragile periphery, supplant them with his own model of governance. In that model, nation-states trump alliances, states are dominated by elites, and those elites can be bought. Here, too, he has enjoyed some success. From France to Greece to Hungary he is cultivating parties on Europe's far right and left: anyone who might lobby for Russian interests in the EU, or even help to prise the union apart (see [article](#)). The biggest target is NATO's

commitment to mutual self-defence. Discredit that—by, for example, staging a pro-Russian uprising in Estonia or Latvia, which other NATO members decline to help quell—and the alliance crumbles.

Mr Putin's stranglehold on his own country means he has time and freedom for this campaign. As he has amply demonstrated, he has no qualms about sacrificing Russians' well-being to satisfy his coterie's greed or to further his geopolitical schemes. He persecutes those who protest. And in the echo chamber his propaganda creates, the nationalism he peddles as a consolation for domestic woes is flourishing.

What is to be done?

The first task for the West is to recognise the problem. Barack Obama has blithely regarded Russia as an awkward regional power, prone to post-imperial spasms but essentially declining. Historians will be amazed that, with Ukraine aflame, the West was still debating whether to eject Russia from the G8. To paraphrase Trotsky, Western leaders may not have been interested in Mr Putin, but Mr Putin was interested in them.

The next step is to craft a response as supple as the onslaught. Part of the trouble is that Mr Putin plays by different rules; indeed, for him, there are no inviolable rules, nor universal values, nor even cast-iron facts (such as who shot down flight MH17). There are only interests. His Russia has graduated from harassing ambassadors and assassinating critics to invasions. This is one of his assets: a readiness to stoop to methods the West cannot emulate without sullyng itself.

The current version of this quandary is whether, if the latest ceasefire fails, to arm Ukraine. Proponents think defensive weapons would inflict a cost on Mr Putin for fighting on. But anyone who doubts his tolerance of mass casualties should recall his war in Chechnya. If arms really are to deter him, the West must be united and ready to match his inevitable escalation with still more powerful weapons (along, eventually, with personnel to operate them). Yet the alliance is split over the idea. Mr Putin portrays the war as a Western provocation: arming Ukraine would turn that from fantasy to something like fact, while letting him expose the limits of Western unity and its lack of resolve—prizes he cherishes. If fresh Russian aggression galvanises the alliance, arming Ukraine will become a more potent threat. Until that point, it would backfire.

A better strategy is to eschew his methods and rely on an asset that he, in turn, cannot match: a way of life that people covet. If that seems wishy-washy beside his tanks, remember that the crisis began with Ukrainians' desire to tilt towards the EU—and Mr Putin's determination to stop them. Better than arms, the West must urgently give Ukraine as much aid as it needs to build a state and realise that dream (and as much advice as it takes to ensure the cash is not misspent or stolen). The IMF deal announced on February 12th should be only a start. Mr Putin wants Ukraine to be a lesson in the perils of leaning West. It should instead be an exemplar of the rewards.

Just as urgently, those former Soviet countries that have joined Western institutions must be buttressed and reassured. If the case for sending arms to the Donbas is doubtful, that for basing NATO troops in the Baltics is overwhelming, however loudly Mr Putin squeals. Western leaders must make it clear, to him and their own people, that they will defend their allies, and the alliance—even if the struggle is covert and murky.

And it isn't only its allies who appreciate the West's virtues. So do many Russians, including shameless Putinists who denounce the West's decadence but exploit its schools and stockmarkets. It is long past time for every Russian parliamentarian and senior official to join the sanctions list. Far from being relaxed as, after Minsk, fellow-travellers may suggest, sanctions must be tightened—and sanctions-busting curtailed (see [article](#)). In the end, they will prove a stronger lever than weapons.

At the same time, the West should use every available means to help ordinary Russians, including Russian-sympathisers in the Baltics and Ukraine, learn the bloody, venal truth about Mr Putin. It should let them know that Russia, a great nation dragged down a terrible path, will be embraced when it has rulers who treat the world, and their own people, with respect not contempt, however long that takes.

114,89

Parti musulman : un pas de plus vers la communautarisation de la France

HOME FIGARO VOX VOX SOCIETE Par [Alexandre Devecchio](#)

Publié le 13/02/2015 à 20:26

Thibault de Montbrial est avocat au Barreau de Paris et Président du Centre de Réflexion sur la Sécurité Intérieure (CRSI).

Alors que la récente Union des démocrates musulmans, qui veut promouvoir le halal et autoriser le voile à l'école, annonce qu'elle devrait présenter des candidats dans quelques cantons, Manuel Valls veut des mesures pour empêcher le financement de l'islam de France par «un certain nombre de pays étrangers». Quel est approximativement le montant de ce financement? Peut-on parler d'une véritable ingérence?

Thibault de Montbrial:

Il est aujourd'hui notoire qu'un flux financier important venu de l'étranger finance certaines mosquées et associations musulmanes. Pour autant, il est par définition impossible d'en connaître le montant ainsi que la provenance exacte, même si l'on pense spontanément à des pays du Golfe et à d'autres du Maghreb. Bien que l'extranéité de ces fonds pose en soi un certain nombre de questions, il ne s'agit d'ingérence au sens formel que dans le cas où ces financements servent à des projets associatifs et/ou religieux qui viennent au soutien du prosélytisme de mouvances qui revendiquent des comportements contraires aux lois de la République.

À cet égard, la création de l'Union des démocrates musulmans est extrêmement inquiétante. Voilà en effet un parti qui assume sa construction sur une ligne communautariste et la revendication de comportements manifestement propres à une pratique prosélyte de l'islam, si l'on en croit ses premières communications.

Or il existe aujourd'hui d'extrêmes tensions entre les communautés, qui puisent leurs racines dans un communautarisme galopant depuis plusieurs années et ont contribué à faire éclore une génération de jeunes français qui font aujourd'hui la guerre à la France au nom d'une vision radicale de l'islam.

Ce constat très alarmant doit conduire d'urgence les théologiens musulmans français à développer une interprétation moderne et éclairée de leur religion, en harmonie avec les règles de vie républicaine.

En clair, la création de ce parti constitue un grand pas dans une direction extrêmement dangereuse.

Ces financements servent-ils simplement à construire des mosquées ou cachent-ils des visées politiques?

Le financement d'un parti politique par des fonds étrangers est strictement interdit en France. Aucun candidat à une élection quelle qu'elle soit ne peut recevoir directement ou indirectement des contributions ou aides matérielles d'un Etat étranger ou d'une personne morale de droit étranger (art. L. 52-8 du Code électoral). Si l'Union des démocrates musulmans acceptait de tels fonds, il s'exposerait donc à ce que son candidat tête de liste soit condamné pénalement à 3.750 euros d'amende et/ou un an de prison (art. L. 113-1 du Code électoral).

S'agissant plus largement des financements étrangers de certaines mosquées ou des associations fondamentalistes, leur visée est par essence politique puisque ces mouvances de l'islam ne distinguent pas entre ce qui relève du spirituel et du séculier.

Le salafisme se développe en France. Selon les sources, il compte environ 15 à 20.000 adeptes. Les mouvances radicales de l'islam sont désormais présentes au-delà des quartiers. Certaines communautés s'installent en effet à la campagne ...

Certains financements alimentent-ils des filières terroristes?

À ma connaissance, il n'a pas été rapporté à ce jour la preuve judiciaire du financement direct par l'étranger de filières terroristes sur le territoire français.

Il va néanmoins de soi qu'un volet financier concerne chacune des enquêtes actuelles relatives aux filières terroristes.

Manuel Valls a déclaré «il faut combattre le discours des Frères musulmans dans notre pays, il faut combattre les groupes salafistes dans les quartiers». Dans quelles mesures ces groupes sont-ils implantés en France?

Le salafisme se développe en France. Selon les sources, il compte environ 15 à 20.000 adeptes. Les mouvances radicales de l'islam sont désormais présentes au-delà des quartiers. Certaines communautés s'installent en effet à la campagne, comme l'a remarquablement illustré l'émission «Secrets d'info» diffusée le 23 janvier 2015 sur France Inter. Aujourd'hui, quasiment tous les départements français sont touchés, ce qui n'était pas le cas il y a encore un an.

On ne peut que constater qu'aucune voix ne fait autorité aujourd'hui en France pour parler au nom de nos compatriotes musulmans.

Avec le recul, le CFCM a-t-il été un échec?

Aucune instance ne dispose aujourd'hui d'une légitimité incontestable pour représenter les musulmans de France, tant il existe de mouvances différentes.

Je participais mercredi dernier, aux côtés notamment du recteur de la mosquée d'Evry et de l'imam de Drancy, à un débat organisé par la LICRA de Paris au cours duquel ces questions ont été abordées. Les débats ont été vifs entre les intervenants et des imams présents dans la salle sur la question de la représentativité du CFCM.

On ne peut que constater qu'aucune voix ne fait autorité aujourd'hui en France pour parler au nom de nos compatriotes musulmans.

Nicolas Sarkozy a émis l'idée d'une révision de loi de 1905 dans l'objectif de créer un concordat entre la république et l'islam de France. Que cela vous inspire-t-il?

Cette idée a été avancée par Gérard Darmanin, député du Nord. Elle n'est pas mauvaise mais suppose un certain nombre d'avancées préalables.

Le terme «concordat» en lui même (emprunté à l'Eglise catholique), signifie «accord passé entre le Saint-Siège et un Etat particulier». L'appliquer à l'islam supposerait par analogie un interlocuteur unique disposant d'une légitimité indiscutable pour représenter les musulmans de France.

Pour que ce soit possible, il faut dans un premier temps que des voix musulmanes incontestables appellent à une interprétation moderniste et séculière des textes fondamentaux de cette religion, car cela n'aurait pas de sens de discuter avec des partisans d'un islam politisé dont les valeurs me semblent incompatibles avec celles de notre pays.

Afin d'envisager un dialogue constructif, **il faudrait donc a minima que l'islam de France s'organise, se structure, et que les dérives extrémistes puissent être clairement censurées hors toute ambiguïté.**

114,91

Ukraine points towards the start of a tumultuous new era in world politics

Dmitri Trenin

As Vladimir Putin achieves his minimal goal in Minsk, Russia is isolated from Europe and the US but spreading its reach to new alliances



Flanked by François Hollande and Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin shakes hands with Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko during the Minsk negotiations. Photograph: Andrei Stasevich/AP

Sunday 15 February 2015 03:04 GMT

After the [ceasefire negotiated in Minsk](#), a peace settlement in eastern Ukraine remains distant. Most of the points in the agreement, including Ukraine's constitutional reform and the resumption of Kiev's control over the entire Ukrainian-Russian border, will probably never be implemented. The most one can hope for is that the conflict is frozen and people stop dying. Even that, however, cannot be taken for granted, as continued fighting ahead of the ceasefire's formal entry into force suggests.

If the truce sticks, it will be the first negotiated arrangement in a newly divided Europe, leaving Russia almost alone on the east, with much of the rest of Europe supporting Ukraine. This split can grow much worse if the [conflict in Donbass](#) continues. But even if it stops, reconciliation is not on the cards. This means that in the foreseeable future there will be no common security system on the continent of Europe, no commonly agreed-upon norms and no rules of behaviour. The world disorder has entered the recently most stable and best-regulated part of the globe: Europe.

The idea that a combination of western sanctions and the low oil price can bring a change in Kremlin policies, or a change in the Kremlin itself, has so far not been borne out by the facts. Putin remains defiant, the elites do not turn against him, and his popularity among the bulk of the Russian people, despite the hardships they have begun to feel, is at record levels. These people are not ignorant of the dangers a continued conflict over [Ukraine](#) can pose to them, but lay the blame for these on Kiev, Washington and the European leaders. Putin, whether as war leader or a peacemaker, is their champion.

At Minsk, he has achieved his minimal goal. Kiev has conceded the failure of its efforts to wipe out the Donbass rebels backed by Moscow. If the ceasefire becomes permanent, the "people's republics" will be physically safe and can start turning themselves into functioning entities on the models of [Transnistria](#). Russia will need to supply them with more than weapons and humanitarian assistance, straining its resources even more, but there's hardly an alternative. For Putin, and most Russians, these are "our people".

Yet, in Minsk, Putin reaffirmed Russia's official position that Donbass should remain part of Ukraine. This is not a concession. Within a formally unified Ukraine, Donetsk and Lugansk are a protected centre of resistance to the political leadership in Kiev. The situation in the rest of the country permitting, they can expand their influence beyond Donbass and link up with those who, a year after the triumph of the Maidan, have become disillusioned with their government, which is woefully unable to tame corruption and improve the lives of ordinary Ukrainians. Indeed, if the truce in the east of the country holds, the future of Ukraine will depend on how it manages reform and popular discontent.

Russia has not so much “lost Ukraine”, as, at least for the time being, its European option. The recent joint trip of chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) and president François Hollande to Moscow, which paved the road to Minsk, is a rare top-level visit to Russia by western leaders these days. The German-Russian relationship, a mainstay of Europe’s post-cold war stability, has dangerously frayed. With politics adversarial and history divisive, the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War has led to controversies, with a number of politicians in Poland, the Baltic states and Ukraine seeking to minimise the Soviet Union’s contribution to the defeat of Nazism or accusing the Soviets of crimes to exonerate those who sided with Hitler against Stalin.

Thus, as a result of the Ukraine conflict, the gulf between Russia and the [European Union](#) is wide, deep and growing. The Russian government does not expect the lifting of EU sanctions for a long time and, even then, it is hard to expect business as before. Putin’s idea of a “greater Europe from Dublin to Vladivostok”, which he was seeking to sell to the European, particularly German business community, only five years ago, is being replaced by the reality of Russia’s increasing closeness to China and the rise of what can be called a “greater Asia from Shanghai to St Petersburg”. When Putin reviews the Victory Day military parade on 9 May, his most honoured guest will be the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, with Barack Obama and most other western leaders boycotting the celebration.

De facto expelled from the G8, in confrontation with the United States and with its European option closed, Russia is not isolated elsewhere. Apart from China, it is trying to expand ties to India, which is also joining this year the [Shanghai Co-operation Organisation](#). When Putin hosts the twin summits of Brics and SCO in Ufa in July, he will be in the chair of the two most prominent clubs of the non-western world. Thanks to China’s economic and financial might, and Russia’s international experience, these clubs have a potential for evolving into serious organisations capable of providing a measure of financial and political leadership.

It is not all symbolism. In a dramatic move, Russia has dropped Gazprom’s pet project, the South Stream, in favour of a gas pipeline running through Turkey to meet the EU on the Greek border. Turkey, a Nato member and US ally, is strengthening economic links to Russia. So is, albeit more quietly, South Korea, another key US ally. Prime minister Shinzo Abe of Japan has not given up on his vision of a normalised and economically vibrant relationship with [Russia](#).

In the Middle East, Russia has intensified its outreach to Iran and Egypt, while keeping active relations with Israel and courting Saudi Arabia, not to count its involvement in Syria, of course. From Latin America to south-east Asia to Pakistan, Russia has been looking for customers for its newly revived defence industry.

Ukraine is not the centre of the geopolitical universe, neither is Russia central to the future of the globe. Yet, Ukraine and the global crisis over it point to the start of a new period in world politics. Great powers – Russia overtly, China covertly – are challenging the US-dominated order. Nationalism, on the rise in places from Turkey to India to Japan, leads to a further erosion of that order. Attempts to degrade and destroy Islamic State have yielded only partial, reversible results.

Having lost Russia as a partner and gained Ukraine as a new responsibility, Europe is uncertain what to do. Germany has provided a modicum of diplomatic leadership to the EU as a whole, but the larger issue of strategic goals and how to achieve them has not been properly addressed. [Europe](#), an island of stability and peace for the last quarter-century, is rejoining the world.

Dmitri Trenin is director of the Carnegie Moscow Centre

http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-weekend-interview-on-the-road-to-putinlandia-1423871952?mod=rss_Opinion?mod=hp_opinion

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On the Road to Putinlandia

Petro Poroshenko, the president of Ukraine, surveys the damage done by Russia and asks for ‘a miracle’ of U.S. arms.

By

BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY

The meeting was scheduled for that very evening—the evening before the Minsk summit this week—in Petro Poroshenko’s office at the presidential palace in Kiev.

But the moment my colleague Gilles Hertzog and I arrive at the Kiev airport and step on the...

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Elisabeth Lévy

«La France peut être une chance pour l'islam comme elle l'a été pour les juifs»

Par [Alexandre Devecchio](#) Publié le 13/02/2015 à 21:55



FIGAROVOX/GRAND ENTRETIEN - Charlie Hebdo, marche du 11 janvier, liberté d'expression : à l'occasion de la sortie du dernier numéro de *Causeur* intitulé , *Islam de France est-il trop tard ?*, Elisabeth Lévy répond aux questions de FigaroVox.



Elisabeth Lévy est journaliste et directrice de la rédaction du magazine «Causeur». Dans son numéro de Février, le magazine revient sur les attentats qui ont frappé la France et s'interroge sur le rapport entre Islam et République.

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR: ALEXANDRE DEVECCHIO [@AlexDevecchio](#)

FigaroVox: Le nouveau numéro de Causeur s'intitule Islam de France est-il trop tard?. Selon vous, tout est foutu?

Elisabeth Lévy: Si je pensais que c'est foutu je serais en train de préparer ma valise, pas le prochain Causeur!

Ah bon, vous aussi vous allez faire votre alyah?

Oui, à Melbourne ou en Patagonie. Blague à part, j'ai le sentiment, comme beaucoup de Français, y compris beaucoup de Français de souche récente, qu'il est minuit moins le quart et que, si nous ne changeons pas de discours et de politique très vite, il sera effectivement trop tard: le pays, c'est-à-dire la culture que nous habitons disparaîtra et cèdera la place à un territoire morcelé dont les habitants ne sauront plus imaginer un avenir commun, faute d'une histoire volontairement partagée.

Vous y allez fort, chère Elisabeth! Si on vous comprend, et en paraphrasant Manuel Valls, la France avec les musulmans ne serait plus la France!

Pardon, mais c'est vous qui charriez grave! Je n'ai rien dit de tel! Je crois au contraire que même les Français les plus à cran sur les questions identitaires seraient atterrés s'ils se réveillaient demain dans la France blanche et catholique dont ils sont soupçonnés de rêver. La pluralité des origines et des croyances de nos concitoyens atteste de la capacité du génie national à fabriquer des Français avec n'importe qui. Encore faut-il être d'accord sur les modalités de la coexistence des cultures dont seuls les ravis de la crèche sans-frontiéristes croient qu'elle est un conte de fées. Que la France soit une

nation «multiethnique», ce n'est pas une question, qu'elle soit un pays multiculturel, c'est une autre affaire: l'égalité entre les individus, ne suppose nullement l'égalité des pratiques et des modes de vie sur notre sol. Autrement dit, n'importe quelle citoyenne française jouit des mêmes droits que moi, mais ma minijupe a plus de droits que ta burqa. En conséquence, ce n'est pas «l'islam», et encore moins «les» musulmans, qui menacent l'identité française, mais notre incapacité à énoncer fermement et clairement la règle du jeu: qui s'adapte à qui, quels sont les principes et les règles sur lesquels nous ne transigerons pas, quelles sont les différences qui nous enrichissent et celles que nous refusons...

je connais pas mal de juifs religieux qui préféreraient ne pas voir sur nos murs des dames en petite tenue mais qui ne demandent pas qu'on interdise la publicité pour la lingerie. En France, on peut être choqué, agressé, blessé par l'opinion ou les mœurs des autres : c'est ce qu'Alain Finkielkraut appelle la douleur de la liberté.

Rien que ça! Vous ne croyez pas qu'on en a soupé des séminaires, des débats et des discussions?

D'abord, si vous êtes satisfait par le débat public, vous n'êtes pas difficile - j'y reviendrai. Cela dit, je ne parle pas de débat, je parle de loi et de règles, et aussi de modes de vie. La laïcité, qui impose à tous les citoyens, croyants en premier lieu, une gymnastique mentale permanente. Il faut vivre sur deux pieds, accepter que ce que l'on tient pour une vérité sacrée à la maison soit à l'extérieur un objet de libre examen, donc de critique, voire de moquerie: je connais pas mal de juifs religieux qui préféreraient ne pas voir sur nos murs des dames en petite tenue mais qui ne réclament pas qu'on interdise la publicité pour la lingerie. En France, on peut être choqué, agressé, blessé par l'opinion ou les mœurs des autres: c'est ce qu'Alain Finkielkraut appelle la douleur de la liberté. Il faut vous y faire, vos concitoyens ont le droit de caricaturer votre prophète. Sinon, il existe des tas de pays où on ne court aucun risque de tomber sur Charlie Hebdo... Je ne m'attarde pas sur l'égalité hommes-femmes qui impose de tolérer, même si c'est douloureux, que sa fille ou sa sœur mène la vie qui lui plaît. De même, on n'impose pas ses croyances et son mode de vie, même aux membres de son groupe: on a le droit d'être musulman ou d'origine musulmane et de manger pendant le ramadan. Enfin, il faut évoquer l'antisémitisme, non pas parce qu'il concerne les juifs, mais parce qu'il révèle la difficulté de nombreux musulmans (qui trouvent au minimum qu'«on en fait trop sur la Shoah») à «changer de généalogie» pour reprendre l'expression de Malika Sorel. On en fait peut-être trop et surtout on fait certainement mal: il reste que l'extermination des juifs est un événement central de l'histoire européenne. Vous voulez entrer dans la famille, soyez les bienvenus. Mais alors, cet héritage est aussi le vôtre, ce qui n'a rien à voir avec la culpabilité.

Mais sur tous ces points, la majorité des musulmans de France est d'accord avec vous!

La majorité, j'aimerais en être sûre, un très grand nombre c'est indéniable: ce sont ceux-là que nous devons aider. En attendant, les quelques semaines de lucidité qui ont suivi les attentats nous ont révélé que l'antisémitisme, le complotisme et le rejet de la France étaient bien plus répandus que ce que je croyais moi-même. Certes, l'entre-soi et la progression de la pratique religieuse - qui se traduit par un certain séparatisme de fait - ne sont pas l'apanage des musulmans. Cela me désole que beaucoup de jeunes juifs vivent dans un milieu exclusivement juif. Mais le mélange culturel ne se décrète pas ; le respect de la loi et de la règle commune, si. Or, une certaine interprétation de l'islam, intolérante et teintée de ressentiment, devenue la norme dans nos banlieues, a tendance à transformer le séparatisme en sécession. On n'est pas obligé d'aimer nos valeurs libérales. Mais l'Etat doit garantir à tous ses citoyens le bénéfice de ces valeurs. Un très grand nombre de nos concitoyens musulmans savent ce qu'ils y ont gagné, il nous faut convaincre les autres - ou les obliger à respecter les formes républicaines, au besoin en adoptant l'excellente idée de Malek Boutih, qui propose de mettre «les quartiers» sous tutelle de l'Etat afin d'en finir avec les accommodements déraisonnables concédés par des élus locaux dépassés.

Le jour où l'école sera capable de transmettre à tous ce cadeau qu'est la culture française ce qui suppose d'enseigner un tout petit peu « à la dure », en arrêtant de se demander si Balzac n'est pas discriminatoire pour nos enfants d'immigrés on aura pas mal avancé.

Une partie des élites françaises et des musulmans eux-mêmes n'ont-ils pas été trop longtemps trop soumis face au communautarisme et à l'islamisme? Dans ce contexte, le scénario du livre de Houellebecq vous paraît-il crédible?

Je dirais que Houellebecq est au moins plausible et vous renvoie à un excellent texte de Causeur consacré au duo Plenel/Ramadan. Ce qui est sûr c'est que, comme Zemmour, il frappe là où ça fait mal: sur notre ventre mou. L'origine de notre interminable crise identitaire, ce n'est pas l'islam mais notre incapacité collective à définir ce qui nous rassemble et à le défendre. Ainsi refuse-t-on avec constance qu'un pays puisse avoir une politique migratoire conforme à ses intérêts. Nous aimons l'Autre, se récrie-t-on. Qui oserait dire le contraire? Seulement, quand il arrive que l'Autre, lui, nous aime moins que ce qu'on voudrait, on fait mieux que le comprendre, on l'approuve. On l'applaudit. Pourquoi aimerait-on un pays qui, non content d'avoir commis des crimes effroyables dans le passé, s'acharne à les répéter? Quelques semaines après des attentats islamistes, de quoi débat la France? Du mal qu'elle a fait à ses enfants d'immigrés. De ses promesses non tenues. De ses idées rances. Et bien sûr, de son «islamophobie», au point qu'on finit par penser que l'islamophobie a tué à Paris. Le président nous a appelés à être «fiers d'être français». Avec un mot Manuel Valls a clos la séquence:

«apartheid», le mot a été répété avec gourmandise par des journalistes ravis de tant d'audace. Et le plus consternant est que le Premier ministre l'ait prononcé pour câliner son aile gauche et faire plaisir aux intéressés. Que certains membres d'un parti de gouvernement exigent, comme prix de leur loyauté, que leur chef se livre au dénigrement public de leur pays, ne semble surprendre personne. Pas plus que le fait que l'on caresse une communauté dans le sens du poil en lui expliquant qu'elle est faite de sous-citoyens. Oh oui, je t'ai fait mal... , c'est bon, non? La France a fabriqué Merah, Nemouche et les autres. La faute à l'apartheid. Vous verrez, certains exigeront bientôt qu'on organise «Vérité et Réconciliation» pour leur demander pardon d'avoir si mal accueillis leurs parents.

Dans ce dossier, vous vous insurgez contre «le lamento de la relégation». Sans tomber dans l'idéologie victimaire, ces attentats doivent-ils néanmoins nous conduire à nous interroger sur notre propre modèle de civilisation? Le fait que l'islam soit si attractif pour une partie de la jeunesse, y compris pour ceux qui ne sont pas de culture musulmane, ne vous interpelle-t-il pas?

Bien sûr, mais ce n'est pas en leur apprenant l'arabe qu'on va régler le problème. Le jour où l'école sera capable de transmettre à tous ce cadeau qu'est la culture française - ce qui suppose d'enseigner un tout petit peu «à la dure», en arrêtant de se demander si Balzac n'est pas discriminatoire pour nos enfants d'immigrés - on aura pas mal avancé. Mais le plus important, c'est d'arrêter d'entretenir la jeunesse, notamment musulmane, dans l'illusion qu'on lui devait quelque chose qu'on ne lui a pas donné. Rien n'est plus délétère que ce ressentiment, encouragé et légitimé par le discours public. Est-il si insupportable d'envisager que les intéressés aient une part de responsabilité dans ce qui leur arrive? Si beaucoup ont du mal à trouver leur place dans la société française, est-ce exclusivement à cause du racisme congénital des Français? Oui, c'est difficile de trouver du boulot et c'est plus difficile pour la jeunesse immigrée. Comment peut-on oublier les milliards investis dans la politique de la ville, l'arsenal juridique qui sanctionne le racisme et les discriminations, les repentances diverses et variées? Personne n'est colonisé en France. En réalité, les pleureuses professionnelles et les donneurs de leçons qui adorent se battre la coule sur la poitrine des autres méprisent nos concitoyens musulmans en les supposant incapables d'intégrer le monde des Lumières. Pour ces humiliés, disent-ils, l'islam est la dernière source de dignité. C'est aimable pour tous ceux dont la dignité réside dans leur contribution au bien commun. Cette condescendance parée de générosité me révolte.

Que l'on combatte le FN, fort bien, mais quand j'entends les mêmes dénoncer les « intentions funestes de ce parti pour la démocratie » et traiter de racistes tous ceux qui demandent à l'islam de France fasse son aggiornamento, je me demande qui est dingue.

Vous affirmez que la France peut être une chance pour l'islam. Mais le pays des Lumières a-t-il aujourd'hui autre chose à proposer qu'un suicide collectif? La grande manifestation du 11 janvier qui aurait pu devenir dans l'imaginaire collectif l'équivalent du sacre de Reims ou de la Fête de la Fédération a été réduite à un slogan: «Je suis Charlie». Vous-êtes-vous sentie Charlie?

Tant qu'«être Charlie» signifiait qu'on était prêt à se battre pour défendre la possibilité du monde commun et des libertés qui vont avec, sans aucun doute. Et puis je l'avoue, je me fais facilement avoir par ces moments de fusion collective sur fond de drapeau tricolore et de Marseillaise. Très vite, il est devenu clair que cette unanimité ne faisait que masquer de profonds malentendus. La gauche et les médias sont revenus à leur ritournelle habituelle: le FN, voilà l'ennemi! Que l'on combatte le FN, fort bien, mais quand j'entends les mêmes dénoncer les «intentions funestes de ce parti pour la démocratie» et traiter de racistes tous ceux qui demandent à l'islam de France fasse son aggiornamento, je me demande qui est dingue. Oui, la France pourrait être une chance pour l'islam comme elle a été une chance pour les juifs. Dire cela, ce n'est pas insulter les musulmans, mais simplement les inviter à réaliser la synthèse entre le public et le privé, le laïque et le religieux, l'individu et le groupe, que beaucoup d'autres ont faite avant eux. C'est en leur mentant qu'on les insulte. **Cependant, le plus rigolo, c'est Plenel : d'après lui, rien ne serait arrivé si on n'avait pas laissé Finkelkraut dire qu'il y a un problème avec l'islam. En somme, il aurait suffi de ne jamais nommer le problème pour qu'il n'existe pas. Et on continue à lui parler comme s'il était raisonnable...**

On pouvait penser que le choc des attentats allait décoller certains regards, que le réel ne pouvait plus être reporté à une date ultérieure, pour reprendre la formule de Philippe Muray. Un mois plus tard qu'en est-il?

Eh bien justement, il est de nouveau reporté sine die. Et c'est la seule chose qui pourrait finir par me décourager. Voilà des années que certains débats sont interdits: en apparence ils ont lieu, mais tout point de vue contraire à la doxa est d'emblée criminalisé. On vous laisse parler en agitant la clochette «Attention, salaud!» Du coup, les mots n'ont plus de sens: par exemple, il est communément admis que la proposition «être contre l'immigration» (ou pour une réduction drastique des flux migratoires) est synonyme de «être raciste». C'est totalement stupide d'un point de vue logique, mais peu importe, le journaliste standard le répètera comme il a répété que si on était contre le mariage homo on était contre l'égalité. Cette fois, le journaliste standard a décidé, enchanté de sa trouvaille, que l'existence d'un apartheid en France était une vérité scientifique et que les attentats islamistes n'avaient rien à voir avec l'islam. On est en train de monter d'un

cran dans la censure: on n'interdit pas seulement des opinions mais des réalités déplaisantes. Ainsi Arno Klarsfeld est-il mis en examen pour avoir dit: «Une partie des jeunes de banlieue est antisémite». Cela aurait dû au moins nous faire hurler de rire, et j'attends l'audience avec impatience au cas où la Justice se donnerait le ridicule de statuer sur le droit d'affirmer que la pluie mouille. Cependant, le plus rigolo, c'est Plenel: d'après lui, rien ne serait arrivé si on n'avait pas laissé Finkelkraut dire qu'il y a un problème avec l'islam. En somme, il aurait suffi de ne jamais nommer le problème pour qu'il n'existe pas. Et on continue à lui parler comme s'il était raisonnable...

Mais vous ne voudriez pas qu'on autorise l'expression du racisme ou de l'antisémitisme?

Certes, mais pour autant, je suis atterrée par les condamnations à des peines fermes pour «apologie du terrorisme». En France, on ne va pas en prison pour ses idées, même si elles sont atroces. Et je préférerais qu'on arrête les aspirants-terroristes plutôt que les grandes gueules. Que Dieudonné soit condamné quand il va trop loin (c'est-à-dire souvent...) et surtout qu'on l'oblige à payer ses amendes). Mais je ne veux pas qu'on l'empêche de parler. Je veux vivre dans un monde où je peux être heurtée par les propos des autres. La loi qui pénalise les délits d'opinion doit être appliquée avec sagesse. Or, je le répète, aujourd'hui, certains nous somment de ne pas voir ce que nous voyons. Eh bien moi, je ne renoncerai jamais au droit de voir - ni d'ailleurs à celui de parler et de penser.

114,98

Religion, Europe and Denmark

Shooting at cartoonists, again

Feb 15th 2015, 15:31 BY B.C.



THE terrorist shootings in Denmark are the latest skirmish in Europe's ongoing contest between freedom of expression and radical Islamists, and as with January's attacks in Paris, they targeted both the press and the Jewish community. On Saturday afternoon, one person was killed and three police officers wounded when a gunman opened fire on a free-speech debate at a Copenhagen cafe (pictured) hosted by a controversial Swedish cartoonist, Lars Vilks. Hours later, a Jewish man was killed and another two police were injured near a synagogue. Today, police said they had killed the presumed perpetrator of both attacks after he opened fire on them.

Denmark is where this battle, part physical and part moral, got started a decade ago, after a Danish newspaper's publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad led to riots. This is unsurprising, since the country presents an extreme case of western Europe's paradoxical religious order. Christianity is historically privileged but practised in a serious way by only a small minority. Islam is numerically small but followed more passionately, at least by a substantial minority of its adherents; Muslims are quite sharply divided over how to interpret their faith. Judaism is even smaller and feels increasingly vulnerable. A substantial share of the population is either completely indifferent, or mildly hostile, to religion in all forms.

Mr Vilks, who escaped yesterday's assault unhurt, has been involved in the conflict for years. He received multiple death threats after publishing a sketch in 2007 that depicted Muhammad as a donkey. Scandinavia in general has been the object of Islamist ire ever since the start of the so-called Danish cartoons affair in September 2005, when the Copenhagen newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* carried 12 drawings of Islam's prophet; they were then republished by a Norwegian newspaper.

The cartoons affair had some dramatic immediate effects. In early 2006, there were protests across the world, with up to 200 people reported killed. This wasn't a spontaneous outburst of rage, but a well-orchestrated one. A delegation of Muslims from Denmark had toured the heartlands of their faith, drawing attention to the sketches. As boycotts of Danish products were proclaimed in many Islamic countries, the government called it the country's gravest foreign-policy crisis since 1945. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (later, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC) condemned the drawings and redoubled its efforts to establish the principle that blasphemy should be barred by law. *The Economist* [argued](#) that Western leaders were doing a poor job of defending free speech.

Over the next few years, some mildly reassuring things happened. An alternative voice for Danish Islam emerged, the centre-right politician Naser Khader who condemned the anti-cartoon activists as an unrepresentative minority who were bent on making political capital. One of the most active anti-cartoon campaigners, Ahmed Akkari, had a [change of heart](#) and said he had become a believer in free speech. (It's slightly worrying that he now finds Greenland a more comfortable place to live than Denmark.) Even the OIC, under American pressure, has soft-pedalled its efforts to persuade the UN to criminalise blasphemy.

This weekend's events, coming hard on the heels of last month's terrorist attacks in Paris, could reignite passions. But one of Denmark's most passionate free-speech advocates, who happens to be of Muslim heritage himself, is adamant that now would be the worst possible time for politicians to slacken, even by careless use of language, their determination to protect liberty of expression.

Jacob Mchangama, a lawyer and founder of a human-rights think-tank called Justitia, told me it would be a disaster if his country were to grow faint-hearted in its defence of free speech. "There can be no truce in the struggle between secular democracy and extremism," he says.

Above all, politicians should avoid the trap of saying or implying that violence was really the fault of provocateurs, or that religious insult was to be equated with physical injury. Giving in to that sort of relativism would be letting down those followers of Islam who were brave enough to stand up for free speech, and indulging in a sort of "bigotry of low expectations", said Mr Mchangama, whose paternal forebears were Muslims from the Comoros Islands. A good point.

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FEB 13, 2015 10

Putin's European Fifth Column *(Merkel's Austerity Diktat makes Putin stronger...???)*

BERKELEY – If the world should have learned one thing from the recent months of tensions between Russia and the West, it is that Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategic ambition and skill should never be underestimated. It is in this light that the West should view Putin's recent overtures to some within the European Union.

Putin may or may not truly believe that last year's anti-Russian uprising in Ukraine was the direct result of interference by the United States and the European Union. But there can be no doubting his awareness of the role that European ideals – and the possibility of EU membership – has played in motivating the struggle in Ukraine and constraining his actions.

The popular desire to join Europe's community of democratic states was a key force behind the collapse of right-wing dictatorships in Greece, Spain, and Portugal in the 1970s. It also played a critical role in the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. And it certainly contributed to the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich – a key Putin ally – in 2014. Indeed, the existence of a European model continues to guide and encourage those pursuing transparent, democratic governance in many post-communist countries.

There is no question that Putin would benefit from the EU's demise. Europe's attractiveness as a model of democratic governance would be greatly weakened. Aspiring EU member states would turn elsewhere. **Indeed, some current EU members, such as Hungary, where Euroskepticism and illiberal sentiment are already widespread, might be tempted to follow Putin down the path toward authoritarian rule.** And countries in the region would be more exposed to Russian pressure and the temptations of Russian patronage.

Putin knows this, which is why **the Kremlin has been reaching out to Euroskeptic parties and groups from both extremes of the political spectrum.** In some cases, Russia may have actually provided **financial assistance** to these groups. In November, for example, **Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's far-right National Front, acknowledged that her party received a  9 million (\$11 million) loan from a Russian state-owned bank.**

Meanwhile, Russian oligarchs have been purchasing European newspapers, including *The Independent*, *The Evening Standard*, and *France-Soir*. **The French newspaper *Lib ration* recently highlighted the extent of pro-Putin connections in French academia, think tanks (on both the left and the right), media, and business networks.** And the state-owned energy giant Gazprom [has been suspected](#) of bankrolling anti-fracking activism in Lithuania and Romania.

Putin's efforts appear to be bearing fruit. Despite the ongoing tensions between Russia and the West – or perhaps because of them – **Putin enjoys remarkable support among some European intellectuals and politicians.** The Kremlin's portrayals of the uprising in Ukraine as a fascist coup, and of Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for Ukrainian separatists as defensive, have been reproduced through a dense network of Putin supporters – **including the Princeton University professor [Stephen F. Cohen](#), Czech President [Miloš Zeman](#), Hungarian Prime Minister [Viktor Orbán](#), the German leftist [Matthias Platzeck](#), and the Dutch rightist [Geert Wilders](#) – and media outlets.**

Putin's narrative may be reminiscent of Soviet propaganda. But that has not prevented it from being embraced by many at a time when the European project is already under great stress from the continent's economic crisis.

A battle of values is looming. In one corner is the **EU, standing for democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and institutionalized international cooperation**; in the other stands **Putin, representing authoritarianism, intolerance, and the use of force and intimidation as instruments of foreign policy.**

Unfortunately, the European establishment is not doing enough to counter Moscow's anti-European, divide-and-rule offensive. That is particularly true in **Berlin, where the German government continues to promote austerity in the eurozone** in the face of anemic economic growth and widespread unemployment.

If Putin has indeed set out to destroy the EU, such an approach is the best way to help him. Europe is in desperate need of growth, and achieving it will require bold leadership from the EU's most important member state, Germany, and its most important leader, Chancellor Angela Merkel. The German public must be made to understand what is at stake – **and why continuing on the current path could end up delivering the EU into Putin's hands.**

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The War Next Door: Can Merkel's Diplomacy Save Europe?

By SPIEGEL Staff



Chancellor Angela Merkel has often been accused of hesitancy. But in Minsk this week, she committed herself to helping find a way to quiet the weapons in Ukraine. The result was a cease-fire. But it is fragile and may ultimately be disadvantageous for Ukraine.

The problem has four syllables: Debaltseve. German Chancellor Angela Merkel can now pronounce it without difficulties, as can French President François Hollande. Debaltseve proved to be one of the thorniest issues during the negotiations in Minsk on Wednesday night and into Thursday. Indeed, the talks almost completely collapsed because of Debaltseve. Ultimately, Debaltseve may end up torpedoing the deal that was worked out in the end.

Debaltseve is a small town in eastern Ukraine, held by 6,000 government troops, or perhaps 8,000. Nobody wants to say for sure. It is the heart of an army that can only put 30,000 soldiers into the field, a weak heart. Until Sunday of last week, that heart was largely encircled by pro-Russian separatists and the troops could only be supplied by way of highway M03. Then, Monday came.

Separatist fighters began advancing across snowy fields towards the village of Lohvynove, a tiny settlement of 30 houses hugging the M03. The separatists stormed an army checkpoint and killed a few officers. They then dug in -- and the heart of the Ukrainian army was surrounded.

The situation in Debaltseve plunged the Ukrainian army into a desperate, almost hopeless, position, as the negotiators in Minsk well knew. Indeed, it was the reason the talks were so urgently necessary. Debaltseve was one of the reasons Merkel and Hollande launched their most recent diplomatic offensive nine days ago. The other reason was the American discussion over the delivery of weapons to the struggling Ukrainian army.

Debaltseve and the weapons debate had pushed Europe to the brink of a dangerous escalation -- and the fears of a broader war were growing rapidly. A well-armed proxy war between Russia and the West in Ukraine was becoming a very real possibility. A conflict which began with the failure of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the protests on Maidan Square in Kiev, and one which escalated with Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation of the Crimea Peninsula, has long since become the most dangerous stand-off Europe has seen in several decades. It is possible that it could ultimately involve the US and Russia facing each other across a line of demarcation.

A Success

Given the intensity of the situation, Germany and France together took the initiative and forced the Wednesday night summit in Minsk, Belarus. The long night of talks, which extended deep into Thursday morning, was the apex of eight days of shuttle diplomacy between Moscow, Kiev, Washington and Munich. With intense focus during dozens of hours of telephone conversations and negotiations across the globe, the German chancellor helped wrest a cease-fire from the belligerents. It is a fragile deal full of question marks, one which can only succeed if all parties dedicate themselves to adhering to it. Whether that will be the case is doubtful. The Minsk deal is brief respite. Nothing more. But it is a success nonetheless.

During the 17 hours in Minsk's Palace of Independence, there was much at stake. First and foremost, the focus was on demarcation lines and local elections, it was on ending the killing in eastern Ukraine. But there were several larger questions on the table as well, questions focusing on Russia's relationship with Europe and whether it will be possible to avoid an extended conflict with Vladimir Putin's Russia. They were questions focusing on how to deal with an aggressor: Is it wise to make concessions to Putin? And at what point does compromise become appeasement?

Above all were questions of international diplomacy: What is diplomacy capable of? Is the threat of violence necessary to make diplomacy work? What is the correct path: American weapons deliveries or European diplomacy? And, perhaps most crucial of all, the focus was on European emancipation: Is Europe able to solve its own conflicts without help from the United States?



DER SPIEGEL

Map of Ukraine Conflict Zones

The exertions of Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier make it clear that Germany has recognized its responsibility in Europe and in the world. One year ago, German President Joachim Gauck demanded that German foreign policy become more assertive in addressing international conflicts. It is a plea that Merkel and Steinmeier have answered in recent weeks.

The Ukraine crisis has changed German politics and it has changed Merkel as well. The German leader used to dither in the face of tough decisions, but now she is making moves she would have avoided in the past. She has taken the initiative and, contrary to her preferred modus operandi, has embarked on a mission with an uncertain outcome. Her style has also changed. Never before has the chancellor seemed as emotionally engaged as she has in recent days. Her political arguments have rarely been so personal. The Ukraine crisis has changed Merkel's view of reality. Her [foreign policy address](#) delivered at the Munich Security Conference earlier this month was a fierce commitment to realpolitik. The foreign policy idealism she used to purvey was nowhere to be seen.

Polemical Battle of Words

The low point of the Minsk negotiations was reached on Thursday morning. At 8 a.m. local time, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) special envoy Heidi Tagliavini climbed into a car at Vajskovy Street 4 to deliver a piece of bad news. The street is located in the heart of the Belarussian capital, just behind Gorky Park, and is home to the event center Dipservice Hall. Tagliavini had been meeting there with the so-called "Contact Group," which includes representatives from Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE. The leaders of the eastern Ukrainian rebel republics Donetsk and Luhansk were also present.

Tagliavini drove to the Palace of Independence, located on Victory Prospect, where Merkel, Vladimir Putin, François Hollande and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had spent the entire night negotiating. The news that Tagliavini had to tell the leaders essentially destroyed the results of the last 14 hours of negotiations: The rebels no longer wanted to sign the closing document.

The leaders and their delegations had been engaged in talks in the 200-square-meter (2,150-square-foot) ceremonial hall since 6:30 p.m. the evening before. Following their arrival in Minsk, the German and French delegations initially holed up in the German Embassy before then coordinating with the Ukrainians. It is the same pattern that had been followed in the previous days' talks: total consensus between Germany and France followed by close accord with Ukraine before beginning talks with the Russian side.

Talks continued through the entire night, without a break. At times, one of the participants would nod off, head on the table. There was plenty of alcohol available, but Merkel didn't touch it. Participants said that the tone was measured. At one point, it did become loud, with Putin and Poroshenko becoming involved in a polemical battle of words, but they quickly calmed down again. They would occasionally stand up to talk through a particularly thorny issue privately, before coming back and continuing the talks. The personal relationship between the two is a good one and they address each other with the familiar form of "you."

Large groups, smaller groups, two leaders whispering in the corner, coffee, snacks: It went on like that through the entire night. Everyone knew what was at stake and they all, participants reported, seemed to want to reach an agreement.

Protecting the Ukrainians

The Russians took a tough line. They saw themselves as being in a position of strength, partly because of the situation in Debaltseve. The Europeans, for their part, insisted on an immediate cease-fire out of concern for the volatile situation facing the Ukrainian military. The separatists, not surprisingly, wanted to delay the beginning of the cease-fire for as long as possible so as to give themselves time to completely conquer Debaltseve. Poroshenko, too, seemed to prefer a delayed cease-fire -- apparently not fully understanding the situation facing his military. The Europeans were trying to protect the Ukrainians from themselves.

The European duo had already pried an important concession out of the Russian president in Moscow during the week prior to Minsk: The elections in the separatist areas will only be held within those areas behind last September's demarcation line. The hundreds of square kilometers separatists have since taken will not be considered as part of their territory. Kiev managed to assert itself on another issue as well: Direct talks with the separatists, as Moscow had been demanding, will not take place. Putin, though, got the upper hand in a different area: The border between Russia and the separatist-held regions in eastern Ukraine will be observed neither by the Ukrainians nor by international forces. This issue will only be revisited after the elections, if at all.

Even before the arrival of Tagliavini, the talks had already twice threatened to collapse. Particularly contentious is the withdrawal of heavy weaponry. In the end, agreement was reached that all heavy weapons would be withdrawn from the firing lines. For the Ukrainians, the firing line refers to the front where it now stands. For the rebels, it is the front line from last September. The result is a broad buffer zone, a zone that broadens to 140 kilometers (87 miles) for heavy rocket launchers. That means that the separatists will have to withdraw their equipment deep into the territories they hold, in some cases almost to the Russian border.

That is the deal that was presented to the separatists in Dipservice Hall early in the morning. Not long later, Tagliavini returned with their rejection of the agreement. Were the talks all for naught?

The negotiators refused to give up. They returned to the vast hall inside the Palace of Independence and continued talking. Merkel, Hollande, Poroshenko and Putin retired to a smaller room off the main hall, where Putin was informed that everything now depended on him. It was a point at which the collapse of the talks was a very real possibility. Putin withdraws to an office that had been set up especially for him on the third floor of the palace to telephone with the separatist leaders waiting in Dipservice Hall. The Germans and French did not learn what exactly he said to the two -- Igor Plotnitsky of the Luhansk Republic and Alexander Zakharchenko of the Donetsk Republic. But two hours later, the pair agreed to the cease-fire. At 11 a.m. local time, the marathon negotiations came to an end.

Two documents were prepared. The first was a declaration from the national leaders present. The other was the Contact Group paper regarding the implementation of the first Minsk Agreement, which was signed five months ago. Even the name of the document was the object of extended and bitter debate. Kiev and the Europeans insisted that it make reference to the first Minsk deal reached last September.

Once the talks were finished, there was no press conference held. Just before noon, Merkel, Hollande, Putin and Poroshenko left the Minsk palace. "We are hopeful," is all the German chancellor would say of the result of the long night of talks.

Indeed, there is nothing left for the world to do but hope that the cease-fire really does take effect along the entire front. The world must hope that this deal lasts longer than the first Minsk agreement did -- forever if possible. The world must hope that the government troops trapped in Debaltseve really do lay down their weapons and don't try to fight their way free. The world must hope that free elections are held in the separatist areas and that the elected politicians negotiate a fair autonomy agreement with Kiev, one that re-establishes Ukraine's unity.

Buying Time

Should both sides adhere to the cease-fire, time will be won. That isn't much, but it is a far cry from nothing. Everyone can get together and work to ensure that the hopes listed above become facts in the near future -- for the people of Ukraine but also for the rest of the world. Overshadowing everything, after all, is a possible conflict between the US and Russia, both nuclear powers.

The Minsk deal also bought valuable time for US President Barack Obama. He recently stood up to the hawks in Washington and rejected the idea of delivering weapons to Ukraine. But during Merkel's visit to the American capital on Monday, he told her that were the Minsk talks to fail, he would no longer be able to contain the weapons delivery discussion. It came across almost as an ultimatum.

Internally, Vice President Joe Biden had previously thrown his support behind supplying Ukraine with weapons, as had Secretary of State John Kerry. Plans for such military assistance had also long since been developed. During a visit to Kiev two weeks ago by Obama advisors, Poroshenko's people presented a list of equipment they wanted, including surface-to-air missiles, radar units and medical equipment. The American NATO General Philip Breedlove believes that missile defense systems are absolutely essential to defend against Russian artillery and also believes Ukraine should be provided with drones.

But the Ukrainians are currently unable to operate such high-tech equipment. They would have to receive extensive training from American advisers. That, though, would essentially make the US a party to the conflict, as Obama well knows. Which is why he was hesitant following his talks with Merkel, saying only that which American presidents always say in such moments: "What I've asked my team to do is to look at all options."

On Wednesday evening, Obama spoke with Putin by phone for 90 minutes. "That really helped," say Merkel's people, adding that they believe it was important to Putin to have the US president take such an interest in the issue.

'Captured Loot'

American weapons deliveries, on the other hand, don't impress Putin one bit. On the contrary: Were US weapons and military trainers to turn up in Ukraine, the Russian people, 85 percent of whom already support Putin, would unanimously stand behind their president, one Kremlin insider, who

does not belong to the hawkish camp, says. "Plus, we would be happy to see American weapons quickly fall into the hands of the separatists as captured loot."

Putin, the Kremlin insider says, believes he is in a strong position. "The later the Western states and the Ukraine are prepared to agree to a really stable compromise, the weaker their negotiating position will be," the insider says.

That analysis might not be far off. Ukraine government troops could indeed collapse if the fighting continues. Morale within the army is not nearly as strong as it is among the separatists.

The Ukrainian army was unprepared for the war in the east. Whereas Russia completely modernized its military recently, Ukraine scrapped or sold off much of the equipment it had inherited when the Soviet Union collapsed and radically reduced the size of its military, dismissing two-thirds of its soldiers. The weapons now being used by Ukrainian troops fighting in the east are far inferior to those possessed by the separatists.

At the beginning of the war, the Ukrainian army had some 130,000 troops according to the most optimistic estimates, with half of them fulfilling their compulsory military service. Now, many young men are doing their best to avoid conscription altogether by heading overseas. The National Guard has a further 35,000 men in uniform. They mostly man checkpoints and guard infrastructure.

President Poroshenko is thus dependent on the help of militias, those voluntary units that fight in the service of oligarchs or out of their own interests. But they often don't follow orders from Kiev, making them difficult to control and unfit for use in strategic operations.

According to a report delivered recently to the Chancellery in Berlin by Germany's foreign intelligence service, the BND, the Ukrainian army is slowly disintegrating, demoralized by the separatist advances and short on personnel. Even arms deliveries from the West, the BND believes, would be more likely to overwhelm the Ukrainian army than it would to make it a more effective fighting force.

Increasingly Unsettled

Furthermore, the grim state of the country's economy threatens to destabilize Poroshenko's government. The Ukrainian currency, the hryvnia, fell to a new historic low on Wednesday. Just a few weeks ago, the rate was 18 hryvnia to the euro, now it is 30. The country is increasingly unsettled.

The chief public prosecutor has already fallen. He proved unable to recover the billions of dollars that former President Viktor Yanukovich smuggled out of the country to Switzerland, Luxembourg and the US. Furthermore, reform programs for the judiciary and public administration are making little progress. Frustration among the public at large is growing with some in Kiev even talking about a "new Maidan," a reference to the protests that drove Yanukovich out of office (and out of the country) one year ago. "If nothing changes in Ukraine, then everything will explode in four to six months," says Mikheil Saakashvili, the former president of Georgia and supporter of the new Kiev leadership.

Aid from the International Monetary Fund and other donors is aimed at preventing such an explosion from taking place. In the next four years, Ukraine is to receive around €40 billion euros -- but the program includes "extremely strict conditions," say senior Berlin officials with concern. Among them is an increase in gas prices for private consumers as well as an unpopular pension reform aimed at cutting government spending. Berlin is worried that support for the government could rapidly disappear should too much be demanded too quickly. Chancellor Merkel has thus charged her economic policy advisor Lars-Hendrik Röller with encouraging the IMF to exercise political caution. "The aid program cannot be allowed to destabilize Ukraine domestically," said one government official in Berlin.

Russia has likely already achieved its minimum goal, that of preventing Ukraine from joining NATO or the European Union. The deal agreed to in Minsk includes a kind of veto right for separatist areas in eastern Ukraine on important fundamental issues. That right would apply to membership in military alliances and to membership in economic blocks such as the EU or Putin's Eurasian Economic Union. Furthermore, the constitutional reform, as called for by the Minsk deal, can only be undertaken with the agreement of the pro-Russian secessionist areas.

Russia is also hopeful that the agreement reached in Minsk will put an end to the spiral of sanctions that have been imposed on the country by the West. Just on Monday, the EU agreed to intensify the penal measures once again by adding more names to the list of those forbidden from entering the EU and more accounts to the list of those that have been frozen. That idea, though, has now been shelved for the time being. "The Minsk agreement gives us an opportunity to not impose new sanctions," said Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn. He said that removal of sanctions already in place will only be addressed once the cease-fire has proven to be stable and Moscow does in fact withdraw its heavy weaponry.

Global Importance

Indeed, only then will we know if Chancellor Merkel has landed an important diplomatic coup. For her, Thursday morning in Minsk marked the end of eight days during which her diplomatic talent was tested its fullest. They were eight days with little sleep and trips to eight cities: Kiev, Moscow, Munich, Washington, Ottawa, Berlin, Minsk and Brussels. That may sound like global politics, but it was really a last-ditch effort to maintain order in Europe, a mission of global importance.

Last Saturday saw Merkel holding a speech in Munich's Bayerische Hof hotel at the Security Conference. The topic was, of course, Ukraine. Her talk was frequently interrupted by applause -- her skepticism of arms deliveries to Ukraine was particularly well received. One person in the audience, though, didn't clap. He sat in the first row with a dour expression on his face, empty eyes and his hands clasped in his lap. It was Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

While his country was being torn apart by war and his soldiers were dying, the German chancellor was explaining to the world why nothing could be done. At least not with force of arms. "I cannot imagine a single scenario in which better equipment for the Ukrainian army would lead President Putin to be so impressed to believe that he might lose militarily," she said. That, she added, was reality.

Reality is a word that Merkel used often while in Munich. Putin's superiority is a reality, she said, and Syrian President Bashar Assad is a reality as well. "You have to deal with reality as it is," Merkel said.

It was a commitment to absolute realpolitik. Merkel has long been considered the queen of pragmatism and she has often been accused of lacking convictions and being willing to sacrifice long-term goals for short-term opportunities and power tactics. But that didn't apply to foreign policy. In that field, people have long said that she was a real idealist. Her commitment to freedom and to a "values-guided foreign policy" seemed credible given that she grew up behind the Iron Curtain.

But in the Ukraine crisis, Merkel is infusing her biography with completely new meaning. She is now drawing parallels between Ukraine and the construction of the Berlin Wall. Until recently, East Germany served as justification for her commitment to freedom and human rights -- a commitment that had to be defended on the battlefield at times. Now, though, East Germany is serving as an illustration that there are situations where nothing can or should be done. Even the Americans weren't prepared to use military means to protect the people of East Germany in 1961, Merkel said in Munich. "I don't blame them," she added. It was simply realistic.

Last Resort

The path from the Merkel who, as leader of the opposition, cited the Western community of values in justifying her support for George W. Bush's Iraq invasion to the Merkel who refuses to supply arms to Ukraine because, as she says, the conflict cannot be solved militarily, is a long one. Merkel's "values-guided foreign policy" also meant that the use of military means as a last resort could not, and should not, be excluded.

"Anyone who rejects military action as a last resort weakens the pressure that needs to be maintained on dictators and consequently makes a war not less but more likely," Merkel wrote in a 2003 [contribution](#) for the *Washington Post*, that ran under the headline, "Schröder Doesn't Speak for All Germans." "Responsible political leadership must on no account trade the genuine peace of the future for the deceptive peace of the present."

Now, she is calling for patience and political stamina. Sometimes, her logic would seem to hold, you have to accept present injustices, remain true to your principles and hope for a better future. "Nobody knew when the Cold War was going to end," she said. East Germans had to wait 28 years after the construction of the Berlin Wall for better times to come.

Realpolitik focuses on power and powerlessness. It's about realizing what you can achieve with what means and when it might be smarter to admit your own lack of power. Realpolitik has no illusions, it is bitter and, sometimes, it is brutal.

Some see Merkel as being weak. US Senators in particular have voiced criticism of her approach, even uttering the unflattering word "appeasement," a reference to the Munich Agreement of 1938, which handed part of Czechoslovakia to Adolf Hitler's Nazis. Those who want to avoid war at all costs, make a war not less, but more likely. Merkel's response was the Berlin Wall -- history versus history.

On Monday, Merkel met in Washington with Barack Obama and her message could be summed up in a single word, one which is also a crucial element of realpolitik: patience. She wanted the US to show patience before intervening in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, with arms shipments, for example. You have to keep "trying again and again" with Putin, she said. "That's why we're politicians," she said. And she sounded passionate.

She is afraid of a proxy war over Ukraine between the nuclear powers of US and Russia. To prevent that, she has divided up the conflict into a multitude of technical details, with each appearing grotesquely minimal in comparison with what could ultimately happen. "Where there is a complete lack of trust, you can fight to the death about anything," one of her advisors said during the US trip. Merkel's answer is: Then you have to find a solution to each point of conflict, one after the other.

Taking a Chance

Obama wasn't of a mind to reject her approach. If at all, he only wanted to deliver arms in the eventuality that the Minsk summit failed. Obama told Merkel that he is happy about every problem that doesn't land on his desk. Indeed, he is a president who gives Merkel room, and a chance, to make her own foreign policy, a European foreign policy.

"We Europeans have to take risks sometimes too," she told a small group of reporters during the hectic week. It was, she noted, primarily the Americans who brought the wars in the Balkans to an end, by force of arms.

In Ottawa, Merkel spoke with the Canadian prime minister. Then she flew back to Berlin for the funeral of ex-German President Richard von Weizsäcker, continuing on to Minsk for all-night talks and then to Brussels. Where does she now stand after this week of traveling and talking? She took a chance, she tried something. That, already, is something. She wanted to prevent the war in eastern Ukraine from further escalating. And she resisted American calls for arming the Ukrainian army.

Had the talks in Minsk failed completely, Merkel would not have looked good, particularly from the American perspective. Many in the US would have smiled wryly and said that the Europeans simply can't hack it and that they need their big brother to solve the problem.

After Minsk, though, such a reaction would be out of place, even though things could look very different in a couple of days. For the moment, though, Merkel can celebrate a small success. The weapons are to fall silent.

The Merkel who spent much of last week in the air was a different Merkel from the one who can often be seen here in Germany. It was a Merkel who forges ahead and who risks failure. It was also a Merkel who did exactly what Germans expect from her: Fight for peace, search for compromise with the Russians and resist the Americans. All of that conforms nicely to the present mood in Germany.

Along the way, she also patched up relations with France, restoring the German-French axis by including Hollande. That is good for Europe.

Skill and Persistence

Merkel and Hollande laid the cornerstone for their diplomatic initiative at the end of January in Strasbourg, where they dined together in the restaurant Zuem Ysehuet. They spent over three hours together, over lamb and venison, and spoke about the tradition of German-French friendship, about Ukraine and about new Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. Their host at the dinner was European Parliament President Martin Schulz.

The idea for a joint Ukraine mission came from Merkel, but she knew that she could only exert enough pressure on Putin if Hollande joined as well. Still, the world will likely see it as her success. Or her failure.

But the price of the chancellor's realpolitik is a high one, and Ukraine is paying it. Merkel already told the Ukrainian president weeks ago that the West wasn't prepared to go to war for the country. Now, though, it has become clear that the West is willing to accept Ukraine's partition. Ukraine hasn't just lost the Crimean Peninsula, it has now also lost territories in the east.

Officially, Merkel has continued repeating two mantras: The first is that there is no military solution. The second is that Ukraine's territorial integrity will not be sacrificed. They are both lovely sentences, but they are unfortunately not reconcilable. If the West doesn't intend to protect Ukraine's territorial integrity with military means, then that integrity exists only on paper.

The Chancellery has continued to insist that a modern-day Yalta conference -- whereby Ukraine is divided up between Russia and the West -- is not in the cards. And it was conspicuous that Merkel's file folder that she had with her during the negotiations didn't contain a single map. The chancellor, Berlin officials say, is uninterested in taking part in negotiations over the precise route of the demarcation line between the separatist areas and those areas under Kiev's control. But no matter where the line ultimately runs, it will divide a region ruled by Kiev and one under the influence of Moscow. The West will accept that Moscow will define at least part of Ukraine as being within its sphere of influence.

It is always good when the weapons go quiet, but Merkel has achieved little beyond that. Separatist leaders along with a determined Putin, who knows that the West is not prepared to spill the blood of its soldiers to defend Ukraine's integrity, have shown her the limits of her influence. But the European order is not constructed in Berlin alone. What was achieved in Minsk has little to do with Merkel's power. It has more to do with her political skill and her persistence.

By Nikolaus Blome, Matthias Gebauer, Christiane Hoffmann, Dirk Kurbjuweit, Christian Neef, René Pfister, Matthias Schepp, Christoph Schult and Holger Stark

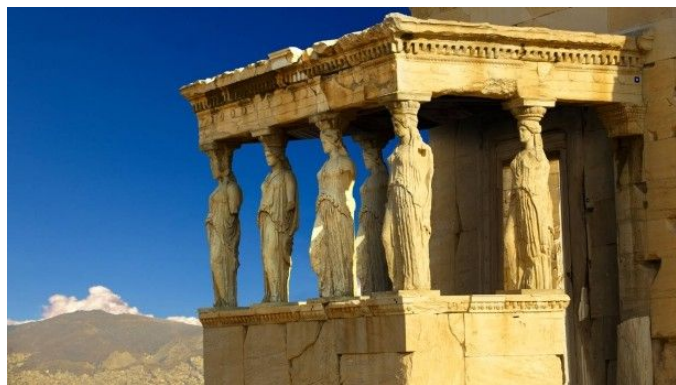
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Das Ende der Troika

Sie hatten noch so viel vor

Nun soll die Troika schuld sein an Griechenlands Krise. Sind da wirklich nur hochbezahlte Eierköpfe mit Kontrollzwang am Werk? Und wenn ja, wäre das so schlimm?

16.02.2015, von MICHAEL MARTENS



© INTERFOTO  Können noch lange warten: Karyatiden auf der Akropolis

Es war eine Sturzgeburt. Im Frühjahr 2010 musste plötzlich alles ganz schnell gehen in der Eurozone. Griechenland stand, wie heute immer noch, vor dem Staatsbankrott und brauchte sehr schnell sehr viel Geld – fürs Erste einhundertzehn Milliarden Euro. Die stets hilfsbereiten Steuerzahler der Eurozone legten zusammen. Allerdings stellten ihre Staaten Bedingungen an ihren neuen Megaschuldner in Athen. Sie wollten kontrollieren, dass die griechische Regierung Ausgaben kürzt und den Staat reformiert, damit der eines Tages seine Schulden zurückzahlen kann. Aus dieser Not heraus wurde die Troika geboren. Das Trio aus dem Internationalen Währungsfonds, der EU-Kommission und der Europäischen Zentralbank sollte zu eine Art Nebenregierung und zu einem Rechnungshof mit ständiger Interventionsvollmacht werden. Die Hauptaufgabe: festlegen, was mit den Hilfgeldern getan werden darf und was nicht.



Autor: Michael Martens, Jahrgang 1973, politischer Korrespondent für südosteuropäische Länder mit Sitz in Istanbul. Folgen:..

Von Beginn an wurde viel gespottet über diese neue Konstruktion. Die Troika, das seien doch nur einige hochbezahlte Eierköpfe mit Business-Administration-Studium in Harvard oder an der London School of Economics, die alle paar Monate nach Athen reisen, im Luxushotel „Grand Bretagne“ oder im „Hilton“ einchecken, ihre Expertenlaptops aufklappen und Zahlenkolonnen in Exceltabellen hämmern, um auszurechnen, wie es um Griechenland steht. So behaupten es bis heute Naivlinge. Und in der Sache haben sie sogar recht. Die Troika, das sind einige hochbezahlte Eierköpfe mit Business-Administration-Studium in Harvard oder an der London School of Economics, die alle paar Monate nach Athen reisen, im Luxushotel „Grand Bretagne“ oder im „Hilton“ einchecken, ihre Expertenlaptops aufklappen und Zahlenkolonnen in Exceltabellen hämmern, um auszurechnen, wie es um Griechenland steht. Mit anderen Worten: Die Troika ist das Beste, was Griechenland passieren konnte.

Neue Sichtweise nach Wahlsieg von Alexis Tsipras

Doch nun ist sie nach kurzem, schwerem Leiden von uns gegangen. Das europäische Sündenbockspringen nach dem Wahlsieg von Alexis Tsipras und seinem „Bündnis der radikalen Linken“ in Griechenland hat nämlich zu der Entscheidung geführt, dass die Troika schuld zu sein habe an der griechischen Misere. In der Darstellung von Tsipras und seines Finanzministers Giannis Varoufakis wirkt es so, als sei die Troika 2010 gewaltsam in ein blühendes Land eingedrungen und habe es in ein ruiniertes, am Boden liegendes Gemeinwesen verwandelt. Zwar wäre die Troika nie entstanden, wenn Griechenland nicht schon vorher ein ruiniertes, am Boden liegendes Gemeinwesen gewesen wäre und Hilfe gebraucht hätte.

Doch weil Tsipras und Varoufakis verkündet haben, keinesfalls die „katastrophale“ und „barbarische“ Sparpolitik der Troika fortführen zu wollen, scheint man sich in der EU wenigstens mit einer Umbenennung, womöglich auch mit einer neuen Zusammensetzung des Triumvirats der Spar- und Reformkommissare abgefunden zu haben. „Wir müssen das nicht mehr Troika nennen, weil das in Griechenland ein bisschen belastet ist. Da kann man ja Rücksicht drauf nehmen“, sagt Wolfgang Schäuble. Auch andere Finanzminister der Eurozone meiden das böse Wort seit kurzem. „Troika“ ist wie „Neger“ – war früher üblich, aber heute sagt man so nicht mehr. Die Troika heißt jetzt „Expertengruppe“ oder „die Institutionen“. Die griechische Regierung kann das als Erfolg verkaufen.

Kaum jemand wusste, was die Troika genau tat

Aber auch im übrigen Europa sind nicht alle unglücklich darüber. Die EU-Kommission und ihr Chef Jean-Claude Juncker waren ohnehin nie Fans der Troika, weil sie nicht wollten, dass der Internationale Währungsfonds mit im Boot sitzt, wenn Europa seine Lecks abdichtet. Und bei der Europäischen Zentralbank in Frankfurt sind auch nicht alle überzeugt von der eigenen Rolle in der Troika – die Zentralbank der Eurozone soll schließlich Geldpolitik machen, nicht Länder sanieren.

Doch was hat die Troika eigentlich all die Jahre getan in Athen? Jürgen Habermas hat diese Frage in einem ansonsten ziemlich windschief am Kern der Sache vorbeigeschriebenen Artikel in der Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung treffend zugespielt. Im November 2011 schrieb er von den „ungreifbaren Arkanverhandlungen“, die in der griechischen Hauptstadt stattfänden. Da ist etwas dran. „Arkandisziplin“, so steht es im Fremdwörterduden, ist „die Geheimhaltung von Lehre und Brauch einer Religionsgemeinschaft vor Außenstehenden“. Es ist tatsächlich bemerkenswert, dass fast niemand weiß, was genau die Troika macht – obwohl es in Athen bei zwei Hilfspaketen und mehreren Schuldenschnitten um viele hundert Milliarden Euro ging.

Kaum bekannt: die wichtigsten Akteure der Euro-Krise

Die drei Verhandlungsführer der Troika sind in der Öffentlichkeit kaum bekannt. Der Däne Poul Thomsen sowie die Deutschen Klaus Masuch und Matthias Mors gehören seit einem halben Jahrzehnt zu den wichtigsten Akteuren der Euro-Krise, aber kaum jemand kennt auch nur ihre Namen. Thomsen leitete bis vor kurzem die Delegation des Internationalen Währungsfonds, Masuch ist Chef der Zentralbankdelegation, Mors Verhandlungsführer für die EU-Kommission. Sie arbeiten weitgehend abgeschirmt von und unerreichbar für die europäische Öffentlichkeit, über deren Geld sie wachen sollen. Seit Jahren kommen sie im Auftrag der Kreditgeber alle paar Monate nach Athen, um zu überprüfen, ob die Regierung Ausgaben gekürzt und Strukturreformen verabschiedet hat. „Review mission“ nennt sich das bei der Troika. Wenn eine solche Mission ansteht, rücken bis zu vier Dutzend Kontrolleure in Athen an. Die Zentralbank und der Währungsfonds kommen mit etwa zehn bis zwölf Mitarbeitern, bei der EU-Kommission ist die Delegation noch etwas größer.

Fiskalspezialisten, Steuerrechtsexperten, Schuldenfragfähigkeitsanalysten und andere hochbezahlte Sachverständige bevölkern dann die Zimmer des „Grand Bretagne“, in dem schon Winston Churchill abstieg, um griechischen Regierungen die Leviten zu lesen. Auch eine Person griechischer Nationalität arbeitet für die Troika und fordert griechische Politiker und Beamte im Namen der Geldgeber zu Reformen und Kürzungen auf. Da es auf dem bisherigen Höhepunkt der Krise mehrere Troikas gab, wurden beim Währungsfonds, der EZB und der EU Arbeitsgruppen gebildet: Das Athen-Team, das Lissabon-Team, das Dublin-Team, das Zypern-Team. Ein Troika-Experte, der sowohl in Irland als auch in Griechenland Erfahrungen sammelte, erinnert sich: „Die Iren haben lang und zäh verhandelt, das können sie. Die ziehen einen über den Tisch, wenn man nicht aufpasst. Aber wenn etwas vereinbart war, haben sie sich daran gehalten. Man konnte sich darauf verlassen.“ Wenn es in Irland doch einmal Verzögerungen gab, griff der Generaldirektor des Finanzministeriums zum Telefon und entschuldigte sich, dass es mit einer bestimmten Reform eine Woche länger dauern werde, weil noch einige Klauseln zu klären seien.

Schlechte Erfahrungen in Griechenland

Die schlechtesten Erfahrungen machte die Troika in Griechenland. Immer wieder schlugen Troika-Juristen Alarm, weil fest vereinbarte Reformgesetze durch zusätzliche Paragraphen verwässert worden waren. In anderen Fällen wurde Gesetze in den Behörden verschleppt. „Aber was sollten wir da machen? Wir können ja nicht hinter jeden Beamten einen Aufpasser stellen“, klagt ein Mitarbeiter der Troika. Einmal hatten Troika und Regierung ein Gesetz zur Bekämpfung der Jugendarbeitslosigkeit beschlossen. Unternehmer sollten Jugendlichen zum Berufseinstieg niedrigere Löhne zahlen dürfen – in Ausnahmefällen, übergangsweise. Erfahrungen aus anderen Staaten hatten gezeigt, dass so mehr Jugendliche eingestellt und zumindest einige zum normalen Gehalt übernommen würden. Doch die Regierung fürchtete die Kritik der Gewerkschaften. So wurde das Gesetz in letzter Minute um einen Artikel erweitert, der alle Unternehmen ausschloss, die in den zwei Jahren zuvor Mitarbeiter entlassen hatten oder im kommenden Jahr keine Beschäftigungsgarantie für ihre gesamte Belegschaft abgeben konnten. Damit war das Gesetz tot. So etwas geschah öfter.

Intern wehrt sich die Troika auch gegen den Vorwurf, ihre Forderungen hätten die sozialen Härten der Krise verstärkt. Es seien vielmehr die Athener Regierungen gewesen, die zugunsten privilegierter Schützlinge einfache Bürger stärker belastet hätten. „Wir haben immer wieder erlebt, wie Pharmagroßhändler der Allgemeinheit vorgezogen wurden, wenn es um Einsparungen im Gesundheitswesen ging“, sagt ein Beteiligter. „Weil die Regierung die Großhändler schonen wollte, wurde der Rest der Bevölkerung so lange belastet, bis genügend Geld eingespart war.“ Dagegen habe man nichts machen können. „Wir sind eben keine Diktatoren oder Besatzer, wie es immer gesagt wird. Wir können der Regierung nicht vorschreiben, wie sie spart.“

Fassungslos sah die Troika mit an, wie Haris Theocharis, der für die Bekämpfung der Steuerhinterziehung zuständige Generalsekretär des Finanzministeriums, im vergangenen Jahr aus dem Amt geekelt wurde. Nicht nur bei der Troika ist man davon überzeugt, er habe gehen müssen, weil er den Superreichen zu genau auf die Finger schauen wollte. „Der Fall ist ein Beispiel von vielen für politische Interventionen in der Steuerverwaltung. Theocharis ist zu vielen Oligarchen auf die Füße getreten“, sagt einer, der den Fall aus der Nähe miterlebt hat.

Die katastrophale Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der Troika hat dazu geführt, dass solche Details kaum bekannt sind. Weitgehend unwidersprochen konnte das Europaparlament daher in einem Prüfungsbericht auch die „mangelnde demokratische Kontrolle“ der Troika kritisieren. Die Troika müsse künftig durch das Europaparlament überwacht werden, lautete die Forderung. Fragt sich nur, warum die Parlamentarier nationaler Parlamente noch der Vergabe von Milliardenkrediten zustimmen sollten, wenn sie die Kontrolle über deren Verwendung Leuten überlassen müssen, die nicht dafür haften.

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Kommentar

Griechische Revolvertaktik

Am Montag verhandelt Griechenland mit den Euro-Staaten. Die Regierung will sich an keine Vereinbarung halten und erpresst die Partner mit der Drohung des Euro-Ausstiegs. Wer nachgibt, treibt radikalen Parteien Wähler zu.

16.02.2015, von **HOLGER STELTZNER**

Das nennt man Chuzpe: Die neue griechische Regierung fordert mehr Geld, will sich an keine Vereinbarung halten und erpresst die Partner, indem sie sich selbst den „Grexit-Revolver“ an den Kopf hält. Zählt nur der Wählerwille Griechenlands? Oder haben auch die Wähler in den Geberländern eine Stimme? Dort stimmten gewählte Parlamentarier nur unter Auflagen für die Kredite. Es ist eine Unverschämtheit, wenn die neue Regierung so tut, als seien die Kredite dem Land aufgedrängt worden. Das Gegenteil ist der Fall.

Im Jahr 2010 wollte angesichts gigantischer Defizite niemand mehr Athen Kredit geben. In der Not sprangen die EU-Staaten und der Währungsfonds ein. Auch das Gerede von einer brutalen Vollbremsung durch Sparpolitik führt in die Irre. Griechenlands Schulden sind gestiegen, nicht gefallen. Die Notkredite halfen, die Anpassungen zu strecken. Auch Griechenland kann nicht ewig mehr Geld ausgeben, als es einnimmt. Und es hat kein Recht, von anderen Steuerzahlern Geld zu fordern, nur weil es seine Ausgaben partout nicht anpassen will.

Falsch ist auch die Behauptung, die harten Reformen hätten Griechenland nicht vorangebracht. Die preisliche Wettbewerbsfähigkeit ist stärker als in Portugal, Spanien und Irland gestiegen, was nur zum Teil auf den weichen Euro zurückzuführen ist. Doch leider wurde der Reformprozess von der alten Regierung gestoppt.

Die neue Regierung dreht das Rad sogar zurück, etwa bei der Grundsteuer. Warum sollen eigentlich die Balten, die harte Anpassungen ohne Hilfe hinter sich haben, die von Athen geforderten Mehrausgaben finanzieren? Es darf kein frisches Geld für Athen geben, solange die Vereinbarungen nicht erfüllt werden. Noch ein Schuldenschnitt verbietet sich, wenn das Land in der Währungsunion bleiben will. Das würde die Liquiditätssituation ohnehin kaum verbessern, weil die Laufzeiten der meisten Kredite extrem lang und die Zinsen fast null sind.

Ohne Einigung wird der „Grexit“ wahrscheinlicher

Wenn es keine Einigung im Schuldenstreit gibt, steigt die Wahrscheinlichkeit für den Abschied vom Euro, den „Grexit“. Darauf reagieren die Griechen. Schon seit längerem bringt die reiche Elite ihr Vermögen außer Landes. Nun holen auch Kleinsparer ihr Geld von der Bank, um es zu bunkern.

Der Kapitalabfluss gefährdet griechische Banken; die Notenbank stützt sie. Das erlaubt die Europäische Zentralbank, indem sie Notfallliquidität in Höhe von bislang 65 Milliarden Euro zur Verfügung stellt. Zusätzliche Kredite erhält Griechenland über das Zahlungsverkehrssystem Target. Hier beobachtet das Ifo-Institut den stärksten Anstieg seit der Finanzkrise. Allein im Januar sind die Target-Forderungen der Bundesbank gegenüber der EZB um 55 Milliarden Euro angestiegen. [Zu den offiziellen Staatsschulden Griechenlands von 315 Milliarden muss man also noch Schattenkredite von wohl mehr als 100 Milliarden Euro hinzuzählen.](#)

Eine ähnliche Konkursverschleppung über die EZB gab es 2012 schon in Zypern. Ohne politische Legitimation warf die Zentralbank auch damals die Notenpresse an. Später waren die Parlamente der Geberländer gezwungen, die faulen Kredite zu übernehmen.

So könnte der Ausstieg aussehen

Besser als eine Wiederholung des bösen Schuldenspiels wäre ein Ende mit Schrecken. Ein Ausstieg Griechenlands aus der Währungsunion könnte laut Commerzbank etwa so aussehen: Die EZB dreht nach Androhung den Liquiditätshahn zu. Um liquide zu bleiben und um den Zusammenbruch der Banken zu vermeiden, bleiben der griechischen Regierung nur noch der Ausstieg aus dem Euro und die Einführung einer neuen Drachme. Vorübergehend müssen Banken geschlossen und der Kapitalverkehr kontrolliert werden. Die Notenbank druckt eigenes Geld für die Banken und den Staat.

Die neue Drachme wertet kräftig ab. Im Inland würden alle Guthaben und Forderungen auf die Drachme umgestellt. Die Kredite des Währungsfonds müssten bedient werden, auch mit Blick auf neue Hilfen. Zur Kasse gebeten würden die Steuerzahler der Geberländer. Die Forderungen des Euro-Krisenfonds, der Euroländer und der EZB wären verloren.

Kurzfristig dürfte die griechische Wirtschaft stark schrumpfen. Die Abwertung verteuerte Importwaren, Unternehmen mit Auslandsschulden gerieten unter Druck. Der Lebensstandard in Griechenland würde sinken. Auf lange Sicht jedoch dürfte das Land von der Drachme profitieren, weil es preislich wieder wettbewerbsfähig wäre. Ein „Grexit“ würde die Märkte durchschütteln, aber den Euro nicht sprengen. Denn Europas Banken haben ihre Forderungen gegenüber Athen fast auf null reduziert.

Wahrscheinlicher als ein „Grexit“ ist jedoch, dass Euroland sich wieder erpressen lässt. Unter Rettungspolitikern ist die politische Angst stärker ausgeprägt als die ökonomische Vernunft. Die sollten aber nicht länger so tun, als sprengte der Euroabschied des kleinen Griechenland, das sich mit gefälschten Zahlen in die Währungsunion gemogelt und die Regeln nie anerkannt hat, ganz Europa in die Luft. Und sie sollten sich nicht über die politischen Folgen beklagen. Denn ihre „Rettungspolitik“ treibt den radikalen Parteien immer mehr Wähler zu. Für die Wahlhilfe werden sich Podemos in Spanien, der Front National in Frankreich oder die Wahren Finnen auf ihre Art bedanken.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/a-flawed-plan-b-for-greece-1424044274>

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A Flawed Plan B for Greece

Little common ground exists for Greece and the eurozone to commit to reach a new long-term deal

By

SIMON NIXON

It is a mark of the gulf that still separates Greece and the rest of the eurozone that an agreement last week simply to engage in “technical discussions” was hailed as a step forward in the search for a solution to the country’s debt crisis.

It was certainly a climb-down by the new Greek government, which had previously ruled



Le Point.fr

Franz-Olivier Giesbert, jeudi 19 février 2015

Giesbert : islamisme et islamophobie

Par Franz-Olivier Giesbert

Pour FOG, "si la France veut rester la France, ce sera à l'islam de s'adapter à la République, non à la République de s'adapter à l'islam".

Plus les islamistes ensanglantent notre Vieux Continent, plus on leur trouve des raisons de le faire. C'est l'étrange paradoxe des dernières semaines. Au lieu de considérer le phénomène **pour** ce qu'il est - une sorte de purulence religieuse -, les Diabolus de la bien-pensance recherchent ses origines dans le social, voire, ô le vilain mot, le sociétal, avec une compassion affectée.

Longtemps, nos instructeurs civiques autoproclamés se sont ingénies, en professionnels de l'évitement, à ne pas nommer les choses. Il faudra dire un jour tout le mal qu'ont fait à la cause du "vivre-ensemble" des mots comme "stigmatisation" ou "amalgame", censés arrêter les discussions et faire taire tout le monde. Aujourd'hui, les mêmes clercs n'ont rien appris, qui s'obstinent à ne pas voir la vérité et, au lieu de l'aider à faire face, servent à la communauté musulmane le discours convenu de la victimisation.

Il faut avoir l'esprit aussi déformé que le leur pour imputer à des enfances difficiles, aux inégalités sociales ou au déficit de diversité des attentats qui visent simultanément la liberté d'expression et la communauté juive, à Copenhague comme à Paris. C'est pourtant bien ce que font nos moralistes patentés. Écoutez-les faire leur mea culpa, c'est ma faute, ma très grande faute, en se frappant la poitrine, comme si nous étions nous-mêmes responsables de tout ce sang coulé.

Chaque jour, il nous faut donc traverser le pont aux ânes des crétineries : si nous en sommes là, par exemple, ce serait faute d'avoir réglé le conflit du Proche-Orient, qui se serait importé chez nous. On se frotte les yeux. C'est à peu près aussi intelligent que de dire que, sous le IIIe Reich, les juifs n'ont eu que ce qu'ils méritaient. De quoi donc les Juifs de France sont-ils coupables ? Au rythme où vont les choses, on nous expliquera bientôt que les victimes des attentats l'avaient cherché. D'ici à ce qu'on demande aux caricaturistes de *Charlie* de mettre un bémol à leur mauvais esprit...

Que Manuel Valls ait fait grincer des dents, c'est bon signe : sa formule d'"islamofascisme" est tout à fait appropriée, encore qu'on lui préférera, comme on l'a déjà écrit ici, celui d'islamisme, tant Daesh rappelle à s'y méprendre les tueurs SS de Himmler, avec sa volonté de terroriser à jamais ses ennemis, fussent-ils sans défense, comme les vingt et un Coptes égyptiens que ses militants décérébrés viennent de décapiter au couteau en Libye.

Le terrorisme intellectuel ne peut plus rien, désormais, contre la vague de barbarie qui nous submerge et que rien ne semble pouvoir arrêter. À en croire les sophistes contemporains, elle favoriserait même l'islamophobie, qu'ils ont érigée en hideuse variante du racisme. Pensez, ils rêvent même de la criminaliser ! En attendant, ils comptabilisent avec plus de soin les actes islamophobes que les actes antisémites, qui, hélas, deviennent banals en France.

Un formidable tour de passe-passe sémantique que cette invention de l'islamophobie : s'appuyant sur l'inculture générale qui ne cesse de faire des progrès, elle permet d'interdire toute critique contre l'islam, religion qu'on n'a pas le droit de mettre en question sous peine d'être suspecté de tout, surtout du pire.

La christianophobie est un mot qui, lui, n'a pas droit de cité dans le langage usuel. Elle correspond pourtant bien à une réalité et on ne se lassera jamais de répéter qu'entre 150 et 200 millions de chrétiens sont persécutés à travers le monde, notamment dans les pays arabes. Quand ils ne sont pas purement et simplement assassinés par des sectes islamiques comme Boko Haram au Nigeria.

Pourquoi personne n'entend-il les cris des chrétiens martyrisés ? Apparemment, leur tragédie n'est pas politiquement correcte. Dans un excellent livre au titre évocateur, *Les hommes en trop* (1), Jean-François Colosimo a tout dit sur le chemin de croix des chrétiens d'Orient : ils sont bien plus maltraités en terre d'islam que les musulmans le sont chez nous.

Le déni est notre grande maladie nationale. Paralysés par un impensé raciste, une culpabilité diffuse et une méconnaissance du fait religieux, nous n'avons pas pris la mesure de ce qui est en jeu. Éradiquer un mal qui est dans les têtes, cela ne se fera pas en un jour, en tout cas pas en remplaçant les barres de HLM dans les banlieues ni en subventionnant davantage encore l'islam de France. Le problème est ailleurs : dans les dérives folles et sectaires d'une religion ; il s'agit maintenant de les canaliser.

Si l'État se mêle demain de la formation de nos imams, pourquoi ne paierait-il pas aussi celle des prêtres, des rabbins, des pasteurs, des moines bouddhistes ou taoïstes ? Et quid de la laïcité ? Et de la loi de 1905 ? En tout état de cause, **si la France veut rester la France, ce sera à l'islam de s'adapter à la République, non à la République de s'adapter à l'islam.**

© 2015 Le Point.fr. Tous droits réservés. Islamist attacks are becoming routine on the Continent.

Islamist violence visited Denmark twice on the weekend, underscoring Europe's new terrorist normal. Homegrown or immigrant Muslim terrorists targeting innocents and the Western way of life are becoming a feature of Continental life.

The alleged assailant didn't choose his victims at random. First he fired dozens of rounds at a cafe in Copenhagen during a debate on free speech, killing one and wounding three. Police believe the same man attacked a synagogue hours later, killing a Jewish civilian guard and maiming two...

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/11415108/Why-Labour-is-wrong-and-Britain-should-not-be-like-France.html>

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Why Labour is wrong and Britain should not try to be more like France

Chuka Umunna, the shadow business secretary, has said that Britain should aim towards higher productivity like France or Germany. But do the statistics paint a proper picture?

By Peter Spence, Economics Correspondent 1:28PM GMT 16 Feb 2015

One of Labour's leading lights has said that Britain should aim to be more productive, like its European peers. But is the UK's economy lagging behind the continent?

Chuka Umunna, the shadow business secretary, [told BBC Radio 4's Today programme](#): "We have got to deal with the productivity problem in this country."

He added: "It takes on average a British worker to Friday to do what equivalent workers in Germany and France will complete by the end of Thursday afternoon."

It's true that data show France was well ahead of its continental peers on productivity in 2013. This meant that workers produced more per hour than in any other major European country, according to Eurostat.

In the UK, hourly output was only slightly above the eurozone as a whole. Workers in the UK generated €39.2 (£29.1) of value for each hour they put in, compared with France's €45.6.

The numbers contrast strongly with other data, which show that the UK has outperformed the currency bloc since the crash.

Mr Umunna has used the data to illustrate what he described as a problem with "the nature of the work" in the UK. He said: "Too much of our work is low paid, it isn't secure, we don't have high skilled jobs."

In fact, the UK does employ people in high and low paid roles. Our peers employ far fewer of the latter, which has inflated their average productivity numbers.

Across the continent, high unemployment rates mean that far fewer people are in work than in the UK than elsewhere.

And, because there are fewer jobs to go around in France, employers have a greater choice of potential applicants. They can choose to hire the most productive, while less effective workers don't get a look in.

Productivity statistics also fail to capture when people are choosing to retire or do unpaid work.

In the UK, we retire late, [according to Eurostat](#). Men stop working at 63.7, while in France they retire at 59.7. Women in the UK work until 63.2, while across the channel they only keep going until they're 60.

Part-time roles are more popular. These roles are often less productive than full-time ones. However, there's no differentiation in the productivity calculations.

As a result, the high share of part-time workers drags down the UK's productivity figures.

The data are also a product of how many hours a week some full-time staff put in. After a certain amount of hours, the returns from whatever you do are likely to fall. This phenomenon is known as diminishing returns.

If shops were only allowed to open for one hour a week, their productivity would rise as everyone scrambled to buy their grocers during the short window available. But no-one would really say it was better than having them open for longer hours.

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Greece And Euroland's Crumbling McMansion Of Debt

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/16/2015 11:30 -0500

Submitted by Charles Hugh-Smith of *OfTwoMinds* blog,

All the gimmicks lenders press on borrowers to maintain the artifice that the loan is being serviced are financial frauds.

Sometimes the best way to summarize a complex situation is with an analogy. The Greek debt crisis, for example, is very much like the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007-08.

As you might recall, service workers earning \$25,000 annually got \$500,000 mortgages to buy McMansions in subprime's go-go days. The applicant fudged a bit here and there on income and creditworthiness, and lenders reaping huge profits from originating and selling mortgages were delighted to ignore prudent underwriting standards and stamp "low-risk" on the mortgage because it was quickly sold to credulous investors.

The bank made its money in transaction and origination fees, and passed the risk of default on to investors who accepted the fraud that the loan was low-risk.

The loan was fundamentally imprudent and risky because the borrower was not qualified for a loan of such magnitude. But since the risk was distributed to others, the banks ignored the 100% probability of eventual default and skimmed the profits upfront.

Greece was the subprime borrower, and its membership in the euro gave the banks permission to enter the credit rating of Germany on Greece's loan application. Though anyone with the slightest knowledge of Greece's economy knew it did not qualify for loans of such magnitude, lenders were happy to offer the loans at interest rates close to those of Greece's northern neighbors, and then sell them as low-risk *sovereign debt* investments.

In effect, the banks were free-riding the magical-thinking belief that membership in the euro transformed risky borrowers into creditworthy borrowers.

It's as if the \$25,000/year worker wrote in a rich cousin's sterling credit score on his mortgage application. The lender and applicant conspired to fudge the numbers to lower the apparent risk of the loan. In the case of Greece, Greece and the lenders each fudged the numbers; there was no real penalty for doing so, and the rewards for doing so were substantial.

Marginal borrowers eventually default, and sure enough, both the subprime borrower and Greece soon defaulted. Life isn't perfect; people lose their jobs, get divorced, have medical emergencies, etc., and recessions lower GDP and national income.

Prudent lenders make allowances for these risks. But lenders who make big money originating loans and offloading them to others have no incentive to be prudent; rather, they have every incentive to make as many loans as they can, as quickly as they can, to maximize their profits.

Faced with massive writedowns, the lender has two choices: it can loan the defaulting borrower more money, with the explicit guarantee that the borrower will use the money to pay interest on the original mortgage. The total loan amount goes up, but the loan stays on the books at full value.

Or the lender can roll the mortgage into a lower-interest loan, effectively entering *partial forbearance*: the promised return on the mortgage plummets, but as long as the borrower makes small monthly payments, the loan stays on the books at full value.

Both of these strategies have been deployed in Japan for decades to keep impaired debts on the books at full value.

The last choice is to turn the mortgage into a zombie loan: the loan is neither written off nor listed as being in default: it enters a zombie state, not in good standing but not in default, either. The mortgage can stay in this netherworld for years, as the lender waits for the market to rise enough that the house can be sold without the lender absorbing a huge loss on the mortgage.

Unfortunately for buyers of sovereign debt, there is no house that can be sold to pay down the debt. Lenders can demand the debtor-nation sell off its assets to make good on the loans, but there is little recourse should the debtor-nation refuse.

When the borrower can barely make the monthly payment, he becomes a zombie. The loan principal barely budges, and so the future is unending penury. The borrower can cut expenses--bike to work, only eat beans and rice, only buy thrift-store clothing, etc.--but this austerity doesn't change anything: he still can't afford the loan.

This is why austerity is a fake solution: no matter what the guy earning \$25,000 a year does, he will never be able to pay down the \$500,000 mortgage.

Meanwhile, the poorly constructed McMansion is falling apart. The loan didn't boost the borrower's productivity, or create a new income stream; the borrowed money was squandered on something that did nothing for the borrower that something much, much cheaper could have done just as effectively.

What did Greece get for its \$300+ billion in debt? Did it transform the lives of all citizens for the better, fix all its dysfunctional systems, and build an economy for the 21st century? No; the borrowed money simply masked the dysfunctional systems and allowed the Status Quo kleptocracy to reap fortunes.

Greece's lenders want to keep the imprudently issued loans on the books at full value. They followed the strategy of loaning Greece more money, but only to make the interest payments. Now there is fevered talk of some version of *partial forbearance*: rolling the debt into new loans, perhaps writing off a chunk of the debt, etc.

None of this changes the fundamental fact that Greece was unqualified to borrow that much money. No matter what the guy earning \$25,000 a year does, he will never be able to service the \$500,000 debt in a way that frees him from zombie servitude to the lender.

So the hapless subprime borrower with the crumbling McMansion and Greece both have the same choice: decades of zombie servitude to pay for the crumbling structure, or default and move on with their lives.

All the gimmicks lenders press on borrowers to maintain the artifice that the loan is being serviced are financial frauds. They are simply new frauds piled on the initial fraud of issuing a visibly imprudent loan. The borrower was not creditworthy and the lender should never have offered him loans of that magnitude and at that low interest rate. The losses belong to the lenders, period.

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2015-02-16/world-war-3-big-prize-europes-gigantic-debt-minefield>

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World War 3, The Big Prize, & Europe's Gigantic Debt Minefield

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/16/2015 20:50 -0500

Submitted by [James H. Kunstler](#) via [Kunstler.com](#),

In case anyone didn't get ISIL's message from their latest video in which 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians have their heads sawn off, here it is: "We're executioners, not warriors." Those gouts of blood spilled on a Libyan beach amount to ISIL's welcome mat to the mass execution of the Euro-American west. The dignity of a funeral is not even on the program.

What we've got now with apocalyptic Jihadism spreading clear across the region from Pakistan to Morocco, and Europe blandly ignoring it across the Mediterranean, is an epochal face-off that will change the world. It comes at an odd moment in history, namely as the massive oil wealth of the Middle East and North Africa enters decline. It was that oil wealth that provoked a population spike in a desolate corner of the planet the past century. Now there is a huge over-supply of young men there with nothing to do but act out their angry psychodrama over having no future. When a whole peoples' prospects for a decent life on Earth dwindle to zero, is it any wonder that they become preoccupied with end-times visions of feasts and virgins awaiting in an after-life?

Partly what you're seeing over **there is an internal fight to control what's left of the treasure.** That battle has already had the strange consequence of disabling the oil production capacity in places like Iraq and Libya, where there is still a lot of oil, but not enough political stability to allow the complicated business of extraction and transport to take place. What's more there has also been tremendous damage to the oil infrastructure in these places, some from deliberate sabotage, some from shelling and bombing, and a lot from sheer neglect and deferred maintenance. Oil refineries and transport terminals are very delicate machines that require constant loving care.

It's self-evident now that ISIL would like to control as much of the remaining oil wealth as possible — though I doubt they have the competence to run it for long even if they appear to control the terrain. The Euro-American west always has the option of completing the destruction with bombs and missiles, but then they would also be destroying their own future oil supplies and hence their modern industrial economies.

The Big Prize, of course, is the grand fortress of Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is surrounded by Islamic maniacs now, with Yemen recently fallen to the south, the ever-hostile Iranian Shi'a across the Persian Gulf, disintegrating Iraq and Syria to the north, and the festering human compost heap of Egypt and then Libya across the Red Sea. And, of course, along the saddle of the Levant there is Israel with all its enemies and problems. Arabia has a new King, 79, rumored to be weak in the head. The oil revenue is way down and the population still grows, and too many young men have nothing to do but marinate in Wahhabist fantasies. **If Saudi Arabia falls apart, it's game over for modern life as the West has known it (and much of Asia now, too).**

The USA, meanwhile, has managed to embroil itself in a completely unnecessary and idiotic struggle over Ukraine, a place of no real strategic importance to us. And in doing so we've managed to alienate perhaps the one nation with the will and the motivation to oppose Jihadism, namely Russia, with its vast southern border facing the immensity of Islamic Central Asia.

Europe, meanwhile, is preoccupied playing games with itself over money. Today is supposedly crunch time for Greece. The so-called Troika — the European Central Bank, The European Union bureaucrats, and the International Monetary Fund — still expects Greece to continue to pretend to pay back its debt. That's been the meaning of "austerity" until now. But **Europe is a gigantic debt minefield that no one can really walk across.** Other parts of it than Greece are just waiting to blow up, and will, and it's unclear whether Europe is even paying attention to the blood-red welcome mat that was laid out in Libya last weekend. *The true meaning of "austerity" will become clear when Europe finds itself forced to fight World War Three at the same time that its banking system implodes.*

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What Russia wants

From cold war to hot war

Russia's aggression in Ukraine is part of a broader, and more dangerous, confrontation with the West

Feb 14th 2015 | BRUSSELS, LONDON AND MOSCOW | [From the print edition](#)



THE pens were on the table in Minsk, Belarus's capital, for the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine to sign a deal to end a year-long war fuelled by Russia and fought by its proxies. But on February 12th, after all-night talks, they were put away. "No good news," said Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's president. Instead there will be a ceasefire from February 15th. A tentative agreement has been reached to withdraw heavy weaponry.

But Russia looks sure to be able to keep open its border with Ukraine and sustain the flow of arms and people. The siege of Debaltseve, a strategic transport hub held by Ukrainian forces, continues. Russia is holding military exercises on its side of the border. Crimea was not even mentioned.

Meanwhile the IMF has said it will lend Ukraine \$17.5 billion to prop up its economy. But Mr Putin seems to be relying on a familiar Russian tactic of exhausting his negotiating counterparts and taking two steps forward, one step back. He is counting on time and endurance to bring the collapse and division of Ukraine and a revision of the post-cold war world order.

Nearly a quarter-century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West faces a greater threat from the East than at any point during the cold war. Even during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Soviet leaders were constrained by the Politburo and memories of the second world war. Now, according to Russia's chief propagandist, Dmitry Kiselev, even a decision about the use of nuclear arms "will be taken personally by Mr Putin, who has the undoubted support of the Russian people". Bluff or not, this reflects the Russian elite's perception of the West as a threat to the very existence of the Russian state.

In this view Russia did not start the war in Ukraine, but responded to Western aggression. The Maidan uprising and ousting of Viktor Yanukovich as Ukraine's president were engineered by American special services to move NATO closer to Russia's borders. Once Mr Yanukovich had gone, American envoys offered Ukraine's interim government \$25 billion to place missile defences on the Russian border, in order to shift the balance of nuclear power towards America. Russia had no choice but to act.

Even without Ukraine, Mr Putin has said, America would have found some other excuse to contain Russia. Ukraine, therefore, was not the cause of Russia's conflict with the West, but its consequence. Mr Putin's purpose is not to rebuild the Soviet empire—he knows this is impossible—but to protect Russia's sovereignty. By this he means its values, the most important of which is a monopoly on state power.

Behind Russia's confrontation with the West lies a clash of ideas. On one side are human rights, an accountable bureaucracy and democratic elections; on the other an unconstrained state that can sacrifice its citizens' interests to further its destiny or satisfy its rulers' greed. Both under communism and before it, the Russian state acquired religious attributes. It is this sacred state which is under threat.

Mr Putin sits at its apex. "No Putin—no Russia," a deputy chief of staff said recently. His former KGB colleagues—the Committee of State Security—are its guardians, servants and priests, and entitled to its riches. Theirs is not a job, but an elite and hereditary calling. Expropriating a private firm's assets to benefit a state firm is therefore not an act of corruption.

When thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets demanding a Western-European way of life, the Kremlin saw this as a threat to its model of governance. Alexander Prokhanov, a nationalist writer who backs Russia's war in Ukraine, compares European civilisation to a magnet attracting Ukraine and Russia. Destabilising Ukraine is not enough to counter that force: the magnet itself must be neutralised.

Russia feels threatened not by any individual European state, but by the European Union and NATO, which it regards as expansionist. It sees them as "occupied" by America, which seeks to exploit Western values to gain influence over the rest of the world. America "wants to freeze the order established after the Soviet collapse and remain an absolute leader, thinking it can do whatever it likes, while others can do only what is in that leader's interests," Mr Putin said recently. "Maybe some want to live in a semi-occupied state, but we do not."

Russia has taken to arguing that it is not fighting Ukraine, but America in Ukraine. The Ukrainian army is just a foreign legion of NATO, and American soldiers are killing Russian proxies in the Donbas. Anti-Americanism is not only the reason for war and the main pillar of state power, but also an ideology that Russia is trying to export to Europe, as it once exported communism.

Anti-Westernism has been dressed not in communist clothes, but in imperial and even clerical ones (see [article](#)). "We see how many Euro-Atlantic countries are in effect turning away from their roots, including their Christian values," said Mr Putin in 2013. Russia, by contrast, "has always been a state civilisation held together by the Russian people, the Russian language, Russian culture and the Russian Orthodox church." The Donbas rebels are fighting not only the Ukrainian army, but against a corrupt Western way of life in order to defend Russia's distinct world view.

Mistaken hopes

Many in the West equate the end of communism with the end of the cold war. In fact, by the time the Soviet Union fell apart, Marxism-Leninism was long dead. Stalin replaced the ideals of internationalism, equality and social justice that the Bolsheviks had proclaimed in 1917 with imperialism and state dominance over all spheres of life. Mikhail Gorbachev's revolution consisted not in damping down Marxism but in proclaiming the supremacy of universal human values over the state, opening up Russia to the West.

Nationalists, Stalinists, communists and monarchists united against Mr Gorbachev. Anti-Americanism had brought Stalinists and nationalists within the Communist Party closer together. When communism collapsed they united against Boris Yeltsin and his attempts to make Russia "normal", by which he meant a Western-style free-market democracy.

By 1993, when members of this coalition were ejected by pro-Yeltsin forces from the parliament building they had occupied in Moscow, they seemed defeated. Yet nationalism has resurfaced. Those who fought Yeltsin and his ideas were active in the annexation of Crimea and are involved in the war in south-east Ukraine. Alexander Borodai, the first "prime minister" of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, who fought with anti-Yeltsin forces, hails Mr Putin as the leader of the nationalist movement in Russia today.

Yet for a few years after Mr Putin came to power he built close relations with NATO. In his first two presidential terms, rising living standards helped buy acceptance of his monopoly on state power and reliance on ex-KGB men; now that the economy is shrinking, the threat of war is needed to legitimise his rule. He forged his alliance with Orthodox nationalists only during mass street protests by Westernised liberals in 2012, when he returned to the Kremlin. Instead of tear gas, he has used nationalist, imperialist ideas, culminating in the annexation of Crimea and the slow subjugation of south-east Ukraine.

Hard power and soft

Mr Putin's preferred method is "hybrid warfare": a blend of hard and soft power. A combination of instruments, some military and some non-military, choreographed to surprise, confuse and wear down an opponent, hybrid warfare is ambiguous in both source and intent, making it hard for multinational bodies such as NATO and the EU to craft a response. But without the ability to apply hard power, Russia's version of soft power would achieve little. Russia "has invested heavily in defence," says NATO's new secretary-general, a former Norwegian prime minister, Jens Stoltenberg. "It has shown it can deploy forces at very short notice...above all, it has shown a willingness to use force."



Mr Putin drew two lessons from his brief war in Georgia in 2008. The first was that Russia could deploy hard power in countries that had been in the Soviet Union and were outside NATO with little risk of the West responding with force. The second, after a slapdash campaign, was that Russia's armed forces needed to be reformed. Military modernisation became a personal mission to redress "humiliations" visited by an "overweening" West on Russia since the cold war ended.

According to IHS Jane's, a defence consultancy, by next year Russia's defence spending will have tripled in nominal terms since 2007, and it will be halfway through a ten-year, 20 trillion rouble (\$300 billion) programme to modernise its weapons. New types of missiles, bombers and submarines are being readied for deployment over the next few years. Spending on defence and security is expected to climb by 30% this year and swallow more than a third of the federal budget.

As well as money for combat aircraft, helicopters, armoured vehicles and air-defence systems, about a third of the budget has been earmarked to overhaul Russia's nuclear forces. A revised military doctrine signed by Mr Putin in December identified "reinforcement of NATO's offensive capacities directly on Russia's borders, and measures taken to deploy a global anti-missile defence system" in central Europe as the greatest threats Russia faces.

In itself, that may not be cause for alarm in the West. Russian nuclear doctrine has changed little since 2010, when the bar for first use was slightly raised to situations in which "the very existence of the state is under threat". That may reflect growing confidence in Russia's conventional forces. But Mr Putin is fond of saying that nobody should try to shove Russia around when it has one of the world's biggest nuclear arsenals. Mr Kiselev puts it even more bluntly: "During the years of romanticism [ie, detente], the Soviet Union undertook not to use nuclear weapons first. Modern Russian doctrine does not. The illusions are gone."

Mr Putin still appears wedded to a strategy he conceived in 2000: threatening a limited nuclear strike to force an opponent (ie, America and its NATO allies) to withdraw from a conflict in which Russia has an important stake, such as in Georgia or Ukraine. Nearly all its large-scale military exercises in the past decade have featured simulations of limited nuclear strikes, including one on Warsaw.

Mr Putin has also been streamlining his armed forces, with the army recruiting 60,000 contract soldiers each year. Professionals now make up 30% of the force. Conscripts may bulk up the numbers, but for the kind of complex, limited wars Mr Putin wants to be able to win, they are pretty useless. Ordinary contract soldiers are also still a long way behind special forces such as the GRU Spetsnaz (the "little green men" who went into Crimea without military insignia) and the elite airborne VDV troops, but they are catching up.

Boots on the ground

South-east Ukraine shows the new model army at work. Spetsnaz units first trained the Kremlin-backed separatist rebels in tactics and the handling of sophisticated Russian weapons. But when the Ukrainian government began to make headway in early summer, Russia had regular forces near the border to provide a calibrated (and still relatively covert) response.

It is hard to tell how many Russian troops have seen action in Ukraine, as their vehicles and uniforms carry no identifiers. But around 4,000 were sent to relieve Luhansk and Donetsk while threatening the coastal city of Mariupol—enough to convince Mr Poroshenko to draw his troops back. Since November a new build-up of Russian forces has been under way. Ukrainian military intelligence reckons there may be 9,000 in their country (NATO has given no estimate). Another 50,000 are on the Russian side of the border.

Despite Mr Putin's claim last year that he could "take Kiev in two weeks" if he wanted, a full-scale invasion and subsequent occupation is beyond Russia. But a Russian-controlled mini-state, Novorossiia, similar to Abkhazia and Transnistria, could be more or less economically sustainable. And it would end Ukraine's hopes of ever regaining sovereignty over its territory other than on Russian terms, which would undoubtedly include staying out of the EU and NATO. Not a bad outcome for Mr Putin, and within reach with the hard power he controls.

The big fear for NATO is that Mr Putin turns his hybrid warfare against a member country. Particularly at risk are the Baltic states—Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania—two of which have large Russian-speaking minorities. In January Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO's previous secretary-general, said there was a "high probability" that Mr Putin would test NATO's Article 5, which regards an attack on any member as an attack on all—though "he will be defeated" if he does so.

A pattern of provocation has been established that includes a big increase in the number of close encounters involving Russian aircraft and naval vessels, and snap exercises by Russian forces close to NATO's northern and eastern borders. Last year NATO planes carried out more than 400 intercepts of Russian aircraft. More than 150 were by the alliance's beefed-up Baltic air-policing mission—four times as many as in 2013. In the first nine months of the year, 68 "hot" identifications and interdictions occurred along the Lithuanian border alone. Latvia recorded more than 150 incidents of Russian planes entering its airspace.

There have also been at least two near-misses between Russian military aircraft and Swedish airliners. This is dangerous stuff: Russian pilots do not file flight plans. They fly with transponders switched off, which makes them invisible to civil radar. On January 28th two Russian, possibly nuclear-armed, strategic bombers flew down the English Channel, causing havoc to commercial aviation. Such behaviour is intended to test Western air defences, and was last seen in the cold war. Mr Stoltenberg calls it "risky and unjustified".

Since 2013, when Russia restarted large-scale snap military exercises, at least eight have been held. In December the Kremlin ordered one in Kaliningrad, an enclave that borders Lithuania and Poland, both NATO members. It mobilised 9,000 soldiers, more than 55 navy ships and every type of military aircraft. "This pattern of behaviour can be used to hide intent," says General Philip Breedlove, NATO's most senior commander. "What is it masking? What is it conditioning us for?"

A huge problem for NATO is that most of what Russia might attempt will be below the radar of traditional collective defence. According to Mr Stoltenberg, deciding whether an Article 5 attack has taken place means both recognising what is going on and knowing who is behind it. "We need more intelligence and better situational awareness," he says; but adds that NATO allies accept that if the arrival of little green men can be attributed "to an aggressor nation, it is an Article 5 action and then all the assets of NATO come to bear."

For all the rhetoric of the cold war, the Soviet Union and America had been allies and winners in the second world war and felt a certain respect for each other. The Politburo suffered from no feelings of inferiority. In contrast, Mr Putin and his KGB men came out of the cold war as losers. What troubles Mr Stoltenberg greatly about Mr Putin's new,

angry Russia is that it is harder to deal with than the old Soviet Union. As a Norwegian, used to sharing an Arctic border with Russia, he says that "even during the coldest period of the cold war we were able to have a pragmatic conversation with them on many security issues". Russia had "an interest in stability" then, "but not now".

Meddling and perverting

Destabilisation is also being achieved in less military ways. Wielding power or gaining influence abroad—through antiestablishment political parties, disgruntled minority groups, media outlets, environmental activists, supporters in business, propagandist "think-tanks", and others—has become part of the Kremlin's hybrid-war strategy. This perversion of "soft power" is seen by Moscow as a vital complement to military engagement.

Certainly Russia is not alone in abusing soft power. The American government's aid agency, USAID, has planted tweets in Cuba and the Middle East to foster dissent. And Mr Putin has hinted that Russia needs to fight this way because America and others are already doing so, through "pseudo-NGOs", CNN and human-rights groups.

At home Russian media, which are mostly state-controlled, churn out lies and conspiracy theories. Abroad, the main conduit for the Kremlin's world view is RT, a TV channel set up in 2005 to promote a positive view of Russia that now focuses on making the West look bad. It uses Western voices: far-left anti-globalists, far-right nationalists and disillusioned individuals. It broadcasts in English, Arabic and Spanish and is planning German- and French-language channels. It claims to reach 700m people worldwide and 2.7m hotel rooms. Though it is not a complete farce, it has broadcast a string of false stories, such as one speculating that America was behind the Ebola epidemic in west Africa.

The Kremlin is also a sophisticated user of the internet and social media. It employs hundreds of "trolls" to garrison the comment sections and Twitter feeds of the West. The point is not so much to promote the Kremlin's views, but to denigrate opposition figures, and foreign governments and institutions, and to sow fear and confusion. Vast sums have been thrown at public-relations and lobbying firms to improve Russia's image abroad—among them Ketchum, based in New York, which helped place an op-ed by Mr Putin in the *New York Times*. And it can rely on some of its corporate partners to lobby against policies that would hurt Russian business.

The West's willingness to shelter Russian money, some of it gained corruptly, demoralises the Russian opposition while making the West more dependent on the Kremlin. Russian money has had a poisonous effect closer to home, too. Russia wields soft power in the Baltics partly through its "compatriots policy", which entails financial support for Russian-speaking minorities abroad.

Mr Putin's most devious strategy, however, is to destabilise the EU through fringe political parties (see [article](#)). Russia's approach to ideology is fluid: it supports both far-left and far-right groups. As Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss put it in "The menace of unreality", a paper on Russian soft power: "The aim is to exacerbate divides [in the West] and create an echo-chamber of Kremlin support."

Disruptive politics

Far-right groups are seduced by the idea of Moscow as a counterweight to the EU, and by its law-and-order policies. Its stance on homosexuality and promotion of "traditional" moral values appeal to religious conservatives. The far left likes the talk of fighting American hegemony. Russia's most surprising allies, however, are probably Europe's Greens. They are opposed to shale-gas fracking and nuclear power—as is Moscow, because both promise to lessen Europe's dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Mr Rasmussen has accused Russia of "sophisticated" manipulation of information to hobble fracking in Europe, though without producing concrete evidence.

There is circumstantial evidence in Bulgaria, which in 2012 cancelled a permit for Chevron to explore for shale gas after anti-fracking protests. Some saw Russia's hand in these, possibly to punish the pro-European government of the time, which sought to reduce its reliance on Russian energy (Gazprom, Russia's state-controlled gas giant, supplies 90% of Bulgaria's gas).

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The only way for Greece is out of the eurozone

[Simon Jenkins](#)

Greece's new government must bite the bullet, declare itself bankrupt and break free from the eurozone – only then can its economy and society recover

Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis discusses the breakdown in talks with his eurozone counterparts.

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Pray for plan B. However many times Greece's new leaders swear there is none – pacifying their terrified bankers – they must know what to do if [last night's debt renewal disarray continues](#). They must take the plunge, bite the bullet, face the music, lance the boil. Only by ending the terrible mistake that was Greece's eurozone membership can its economy hope to recover.

Of course Germany was right. People who borrow money should repay it. People who join currency and credit unions should obey the rules. Greece freely joined the eurozone. It must knuckle under. Greece was right too. It was lent money recklessly by Europe's payday loan sharks – mostly German banks – who knew it could not repay. It is bankrupt and with 25% unemployed cannot hope to cover its debts. Bankruptcy is an honourable capitalist concept. [Greece](#) is bankrupt and must reschedule, which means reduce, its debts.

But even rescheduling does not solve the problem of a hopelessly uncompetitive and dependent economy. Greece could prosper only on handouts from an external benefactor, as in Ulster's case from London. Athens has none.

It could stumble on as a vassal state of Berlin, perhaps joined by Spain, Portugal and others, but that way the whole of [Europe](#) sinks into stagnation – just to save the skins of German bankers.

Greece must declare itself genuinely bankrupt. It should convert its debts into junk or long-term “Russian bonds”. It should leave the euro and restore a heavily devalued drachma. This will be humiliating, painful and called “unthinkable” by right-thinking pundits. It will send a shudder through other ailing eurozone members. While parallels are never exact, Iceland is a case in point. But the pain will be swift and soon be over.

In a year's time we will know the outcome of “Grexit”. It will have seemed the obvious, the inevitable, move. The tourist industry and other exports will boom. Greece will be “bouncing back”. The country's government and business will be attracting capital which, in the eurozone, would touch them only at crippling interest rates. Everyone will agree that Greece should never have joined the euro in the first place. Thank goodness it voted in a government with a plan B.

Varoufakis hat recht, aber die falsche Taktik

Der griechische Finanzminister hat die Regeln missachtet, gedroht und geprahlt – und verloren. Jetzt ist er verbrannt und der Grexit für Griechenland die einzige Konsequenz. Eine klassische Tragödie.

Von Thomas Straubhaar



Foto: AFPSeine Masche zog nicht. Finanzminister Janis Varoufakis dürfte seinem Land keinen Gefallen getan haben

Es war die richtige Strategie, aber die vollständig falsche Taktik, die Janis Varoufakis wählte. Der griechische Finanzminister hat recht. Ein zu strikter Austeritätskurs greift zu kurz. Griechenland braucht beides mit Verstand und Vernunft: eine Wachstumsperspektive und eine Sparpolitik. Erstere erfordert tiefgehende institutionelle Reformen, ein gutes Steuersystem und ein intaktes Rechtssystem.

Letztere benötigt weitreichende strukturelle Anpassungen, um die internationale Wettbewerbsfähigkeit griechischer Betriebe zu verbessern. Zusammen rechtfertigen sie gemeinsame Anstrengungen und finanzielle Unterstützung der Geldgeber aus den übrigen Euro-Ländern. So weit die Strategie. Bei der taktischen Umsetzung allerdings hat sich Griechenland komplett verkalkuliert.

Der Spieltheoretiker Varoufakis hat keine Gelegenheit ausgelassen, die Gegenspieler mit seiner Kompromisslosigkeit, seinen Forderungen und seinem Auftreten bis aufs Äußerste zu provozieren. Dabei hat er grob fahrlässig missachtet, was in jedem Lehrbuch zum Standardwissen der Spieltheorie gehört. Nämlich, dass es bei politischen Konflikten nicht um einmalige Spiele geht.

Entscheidend ist, dass sich alle an die Regeln halten

Politik ist kein Duell um Sieg oder Niederlage, das im tragischen Falle auch zwei Verlierer kennt. Noch weniger hat sie mit einem "Chicken Game" halbstarker Jugendlicher zu tun, bei dem es darum geht, über eine Mutprobe zu entscheiden.

Vielmehr geht es in der Politik wie im Skat um ein Spiel, das viele Runden dauert. Ein Sieg in einer Runde entscheidet lange noch nicht, wer am Ende des Abends Gewinner sein wird. Mal hat die eine, mal der andere gute Trümpfe. Entscheidend jedoch ist, dass sich alle an gemeinsame Regeln halten.

Genauso ist es in der Politik. Man trifft sich immer wieder und muss über lange Zeit und viele Verhandlungen Vertrauen aufbauen, dass sich beide Seiten an getroffene Vereinbarungen halten. Wer immer wieder Regeln bricht, verliert jede Glaubwürdigkeit, dass er sich das nächste Mal an seine Versprechungen hält. Das verlorene Vertrauen ist der Kern der griechischen Tragödie.

Es gibt mehrere Gründe, wieso die griechische Konfrontationstaktik Schiffbruch erleiden musste. Zwei sind besonders gewichtig:

Erstens konnte die Troika inhaltlich nicht nachgeben, weil jedes Entgegenkommen eine Einladung zu weiter reichenden Nachforderungen bedeutet. Es wäre die Belohnung einer Salamtaktik gewesen, bei der die eine Seite für die Wurst sorgt, die von der anderen Seite scheinbar verzehrt wird, bis nichts mehr da ist – der Appetit auf mehr aber unverändert bestehen bleibt.

Zweitens bedeutet Nachgiebigkeit gegenüber einem provokativen Konfrontationskurs das Ende jeglicher auf Verhandlungen und dem Respekt vor getroffenen Vereinbarungen basierenden Politik.

Es würde das Signal ausgesendet, dass Länder, die völlig überrissene, provokative und kollisionsorientierte Forderungen aufstellen, am Ende dafür noch belohnt werden. So wäre es für populistische Parteien in Madrid, Paris, Rom oder Lissabon ein Leichtes, die Massen zu mobilisieren.

Die Botschaft würde lauten, dass man nur provokant genug mit dem Feuer spielen muss, um in den Genuss von Erleichterungen und fremder Hilfe zu kommen. Es wäre eine Ohrfeige für alle, die sich in Spanien, Portugal oder Italien Mühe geben, Vereinbarungen und Verträge einzuhalten. Es würde die Kooperationswilligen demoralisieren und die konfliktstachelnden Scharfmacher stärken. Übrigens auch in den Geberländern.

Eine [griechische Extrawurst](#) wäre den Menschen in Italien, Spanien, Portugal oder Frankreich nicht zu erklären – in Deutschland, Finnland oder den Niederlanden erst recht nicht. Die Wählerinnen und Wähler im Norden könnten weder verstehen noch akzeptieren, wie die Politik mit ihrem Geld umgeht.

Protestbewegungen und eine zunehmende Polarisierung der Politik wären die Folgen. Es wäre das Ende einer Stabilitätspolitik und der Anfang einer Politik der Rechtsunsicherheit in allen Euro-Ländern.

Lasst sie ziehen



Foto: picture alliance / SCHROEWIG/RD Thomas Straubhaar ist Professor für Volkswirtschaftslehre an der Universität Hamburg und derzeit Fellow der Transatlantic Academy in Washington

Das sich nun abzeichnende Ende mit Schrecken ist eine Tragödie. Die Folgen eines Grexit sind kaum kalkulierbar. Die Risiken sind gewaltig. Aber einem Spieler zu vertrauen, der bewährte Regeln missachtet und offenbar überzeugt ist, dass es "nur" um die Entscheidung geht, wer die nächste Runde, nicht aber das Spiel insgesamt gewinnt, führt definitiv zu noch höheren Kosten für alle.

Es ist an der Zeit, das falsche Spiel abzurechnen und jene ziehen zu lassen, die gemeinsame Regeln und Verhaltensweisen mit Füßen treten.

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What is wrong with France?

L'essai de Laurent Cohen-Tanugi qui porte ce titre aborde avec courage et lucidité cette question lancinante que beaucoup de Français et d'observateurs de la France se posent depuis des années. Au fil des 120 pages en petit format publiées chez Grasset, ce sont tous les aspects de la société qui défilent. Le diagnostic est sévère, impitoyable, et n'épargne aucune des classes dirigeantes du pays. Même si l'on devine des préférences, ce n'est pas un livre partisan, et le regard d'un Français qui partage son temps entre son cabinet parisien et son enseignement à Stanford University en Californie, est décapant.

En faire un résumé ne ferait pas justice à la complexité de l'analyse. Je m'arrêterai sur sa dimension internationale, cette manière désespérée dont un pays d'une richesse inouïe se refuse à évoluer en tenant compte de la nouvelle réalité mondiale.

« *Un homme politique français préférera toujours inaugurer la moindre pissotière dans sa circonscription plutôt que de se rendre à une conférence internationale, quel qu'en soit l'intérêt* » déclarait Jean Francois-Poncet à l'auteur. Mais cet isolement ne se limite pas à la classe politique peuplée d'individus qui n'ont aucune expérience internationale et dont les dirigeants ont une maîtrise de l'Anglais tellement limitée qu'elle rend leurs rapports avec les étrangers formels et traduits. Le même sérail produite les dirigeants dans le secteur privé. « *La France est une des nations les plus singulière et les plus autocrates d'Europe* ».

Une société qui refuse la critique constructive ne peut progresser, et donc régresse. Le reste du monde n'attend pas et n'attendra pas que la France se mette en route. Les medias ne sont pas épargnés par Laurent Cohen-Tanugi. « *L'analyse critique pertinente reste une denrée rare hors des colonnes de quelques éditorialistes* ». C'est une forme de pensée unique qui continue à ravager l'intelligentsia qui, à quelques exceptions près, continue à se concentrer sur la France.

Récemment le Monde a commencé une série intitulée « Les jeunes doivent-ils quitter la France pour réussir ? ». Depuis plusieurs semaines, les commentaires sont accablants sur l'enseignement et l'accueil que les entreprises françaises réservent à leurs jeunes recrues. Le diagnostic de l'auteur est tellement lucide qu'il conclut en énumérant ce dont les enseignants doivent doter les étudiants : « *attitude positive envers l'avenir et autrui, créativité, sens critique, libre questionnement, utilisation des connaissances, initiation aux langues étrangères, au travail collectif, aux mécanismes économiques, aux sciences et aux technologies* ».

C'est la dépendance des entreprises, même privées, du système étatique qui décrédibilise le discours aux entreprises étrangères. Le discours d'Emmanuel Valls à Shanghai était le bon message, mais il ne correspondait pas à la manière dont les investisseurs étrangers sont traités en France. « *C'est une parfaite désinvolture, voire un mépris affirmé qui s'affiche lorsque nos gouvernants ... envoient au monde des signaux diamétralement opposés, en faisant prévaloir l'idéologie ou d'insignifiants arbitrages sur la compétence et la crédibilité... en affichant un souverainisme économique et un protectionnisme dépourvus de la moindre subtilité* ».

On eut aimé que l'auteur termine sur ce diagnostic, si sombre soit-il. Eut-ce été intolérable de laisser le lecteur face à cette douloureuse réalité sans lui offrir de solutions ? Je ne crois pas que la France soit capable de se réformer si elle n'est pas prête à accepter de regarder en face sa réalité. « *Il semble manquer à la France d'aujourd'hui, à son personnel politique, à ses dirigeants économiques, à ses acteurs sociaux, à ses journalistes, une colonne vertébrale de responsabilité, d'éthique politique, d'esprit critique, d'exigence et de rigueur intellectuelle et morale, bref la vertu au sens romain du terme.* »

L'étape première est de renoncer à la couche épaisse du déni qui rend la remise en question impossible et traite la critique de trahison. Il est temps de prendre conscience de prendre conscience de « *l'écart entre le dynamisme de la présence française à l'étranger et l'immobilisme morose qui règne sur le sol national.* »

Juncker, sors de ton bunker!

Il a juridiquement raison mais politiquement tort

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Jean-Claude Juncker, le nouveau président de la Commission européenne, a le mérite de ne pas être un ectoplasme politique. Ce qui permet de le détester plutôt que de le mépriser comme c'était souvent le cas pour son prédécesseur. Ses interventions sont parfois abruptes, mais au moins elles sont claires. À propos du résultat des élections en Grèce et des demandes de négociations du nouveau gouvernement, interrogé par le Figaro il a déclaré : « *Dire que tout va changer parce qu'il y a un nouveau gouvernement à Athènes, c'est prendre ses désirs pour des réalités* ». Ce n'est pas très gentil pour ceux qui, comme moi, ont des bouffées de tendresse pour Tsipras et son ministre des finances, tout de charisme décontracté arborant une calvitie évidemment destinée à rappeler que l'on ne peut pas tondre un œuf. Douche froide de Jean-Claude Juncker : « *Il ne peut y avoir de choix démocratique contre les traités européens* ». Houle de rage sur les réseaux, souverainistes montant sur leurs grands chevaux, Marine Le Pen buvant du petit lait. Le problème est que le Président de la Commission a raison.

Ce genre de phrase et les réactions qu'elle suscite fait irrésistiblement penser à celle proférée en 1981 après la victoire de la gauche. André Laignel jeune député socialiste avait notamment déclaré à l'adresse d'un membre de la nouvelle minorité : « *vous avez juridiquement tort parce que vous êtes politiquement minoritaire* ». Sur le plan des institutions démocratiques et de leur fonctionnement cette pétition était irréfutable. En démocratie représentative, le peuple est souverain. Dès lors qu'il donne une majorité à des représentants, ceux-ci sont chargés d'élaborer la loi qui devient celle de tout le monde. Et ce qu'une majorité a fait, une nouvelle majorité peut le défaire (Novus rex, nova lex). Même la Constitution, loi fondamentale qui organise les compétences respectives des différents organes de l'État, n'y échappe pas même si les règles d'adoption sont plus exigeantes (majorité qualifiée). Mais, renforcée ou pas, la majorité est toujours la majorité.

En 1981, notre pays était souverain et l'ensemble des questions concernant le gouvernement de la France relevait de la délibération démocratique entre les citoyens français. 36 ans plus tard ce n'est plus le cas et André Laignel aurait tort aujourd'hui. C'est Jean-Claude Juncker qui a raison. Et qui peut dire à Tsipras en substance : « *vous avez juridiquement tort même si vous êtes politiquement majoritaire (chez vous)* ».

Toute la construction européenne depuis le début des années quatre-vingt-dix s'est faite à partir d'abandons de souveraineté des États au profit d'abord de la Communauté puis de l'Union. Mais, le dispositif adopté ne consiste pas à transférer certaines parties de la souveraineté nationale à un organisme supranational ayant capacité de soumettre directement à la délibération démocratique des citoyens de l'Union Européenne les questions relevant de ses nouvelles compétences.

Pour deux raisons essentielles. Tout d'abord les transferts de souveraineté, ont été effectués par la signature de traités à valeur constitutionnelle. Précédée par des révisions des constitutions nationales permettant ces abandons. Ce qui relevait auparavant dans chacun des états de la délibération démocratique est aujourd'hui ossifié dans une constitution. L'indépendance de la banque centrale, la soumission du financement des états aux

marchés financiers, la notion de « *concurrence libre et non faussée* » comme cœur du fonctionnement de toute l'économie et bien d'autres encore sont aujourd'hui quasiment immuables. Le Parlement européen élu au suffrage direct tous les 6 ans, n'a aucune compétence constitutionnelle.

Alors, et c'est la deuxième raison, la Constitution Européenne peut être révisée mais uniquement par la modification des traités. Et pour cela Il faut rassembler l'unanimité des états qui composent l'Union ! Comme elle a été portée tranquillement et discrètement à 25 membres, ceux qui aimeraient voir émerger « *une autre Europe* » par la voie juridique ne sont pas sortis des ronces.

Le processus de la construction européenne, n'a pas arrangé notre pauvre constitution de la Ve République. Défigurée par près de vingt-deux révisions successives en vingt-cinq ans, elle organise le fonctionnement des pouvoirs publics français dans des conditions qui n'ont plus rien à voir avec celles de 1958. Alors, on l'accuse de la rage et on propose d'en changer.

En oubliant que le problème est bien celui posé par Jean-Claude Juncker. L'Union Européenne n'est pas un dispositif de démocratie représentative. L'Espagne, après la Grèce pourra donner la majorité à Podemos aux Cortes, la France élire Jean-Luc Mélenchon, la situation sera la même. Celle de la Grèce incapable de supporter sa dette, réclamant une remise (un coup de rabot) impossible à accorder. Ce serait la ruée, Italie Espagne Portugal (et France ?) venant demander la même chose. Alors, comme le dit Frédéric Lordon l'alternative de Syriza et simple : « *passer sous la table où la renverser* ».

La renverser ? Le système construit a verrouillé un modèle économique sans marge de manœuvre, et plaqué sur des pays et des situations qui n'ont rien à voir. Il a instauré une monnaie unique-totem dont il est difficile de nier les effets délétères. Il a créé une bureaucratie bruxelloise choyée de près de 60 000 personnes qui ne peut avoir qu'un objectif, sa reproduction. Mais il rencontre aujourd'hui un obstacle dont la Grèce est un symptôme fort : le retour du politique. Manifestement, les peuples ne veulent plus de cette Europe. Partout, l'eurosepticisme progresse. La dénonciation du populisme et le mépris social qui l'accompagne ne mèneront pas loin. En Grèce, ce sont un peu plus de 30 % des électeurs qui ont élu Syriza. Les sondages lui donnent désormais 70 % de soutien dans la population. Pour une raison simple. Ce pays et ce peuple présentés comme des mendiants viennent de retrouver un peu de fierté. Et ça Monsieur Juncker... Pour l'instant vous avez juridiquement raison, mais probablement politiquement déjà tort. On sait depuis Hobbes que c'est l'autorité du souverain (en l'occurrence le peuple) et non la vérité de ses décisions qui fait la loi (*voluntas non veritas facit legem*). Ce que l'on appelle trivialement le rapport de force politique.

Et puisque je viens de m'adresser à Jean-Claude Juncker, j'aurais aussi un petit message pour Messieurs Tsipras et Vafourakis.

« Ne lâchez rien. Vous avez été choisis par le peuple grec pour le conduire dans le combat contre l'Union Européenne, sa bureaucratie, son cynisme et sa servilité vis-à-vis de la finance. Elle vient de vous adresser un ultimatum insolent. Vos mandants sont les citoyens grecs, mais désormais pas seulement. Vous représentez beaucoup plus. Les Italiens, les Espagnols, les Portugais qui souffrent de cette Europe, les Français bafoués dans leur vote en 2005, trahis après le 6 mai 2012, et bien d'autres encore. Ils vous regardent. »

« *Celui qui est désigné doit marcher. Celui qui est appelé doit répondre. C'est la loi. C'est la règle. C'est le niveau des vies héroïques, c'est le niveau des vies de sainteté.* »

C'est du Péguy. Pardonnez-moi cette grandiloquence, mais le moment la mérite.

Et puis soyez sympas, j'ai tellement envie de voir ça.

114,124

SCHULDENSTREIT

Merkels teure Griechenland-Rechnung

Autor:

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Kanzlerin Merkel hat einst beteuert, die Griechen-Rettung werde die Deutschen nichts kosten. Das ist nach den geplatzten Verhandlungen kaum mehr zu halten. Top-Ökonomen haben nur noch wenig Hoffnung für Griechenland.



Merkel

Angela Merkel am 22.7.2011 zu den Hilfen für Griechenland: „Was wir in diesen Zeiten aufwenden, bekommen wir um ein Vielfaches zurück.“

(Foto: Reuters)

Berlin Nach den gescheiterten Verhandlungen zur Lösung der griechischen [Schuldenkrise](#) könnte das Land im schlimmsten Fall in die Pleite rutschen – und als Folge daraus sogar aus dem Euro ausscheiden. Die Hilfsmilliarden, die Athen bis dato am Leben hielten, wären damit verloren. Selbst wenn noch in letzter Minute eine Einigung zwischen Athen und den internationalen Geldgebern gefunden würde, kämen auf die Geldgeber hohe Kosten zu.

Insgesamt stehen 240 Milliarden Euro Hilfen auf dem Spiel. „Für Deutschland stehen 70 Milliarden Euro im griechischen Feuer“, sagte der Präsident des Steuerzahlerbunds, Reiner Holznapel, dem Handelsblatt (Online-Ausgabe). Ein Umstand, der aus Holznapels Sicht eigentlich niemanden überraschen dürfte. „Es war von Anfang klar, dass mit der milliardenschweren Stützung Griechenlands Zeit gekauft wurde“, betonte er. „Dabei war bereits mit dem Bruch der No-Bailout-Klausel offensichtlich, dass das Konzept der Euro-Retter, die griechische Schuldenmisere mit noch mehr Schulden bekämpfen zu wollen, nicht aufgehen kann.“

Die Bundesregierung hatte dagegen nie ernsthaft damit gerechnet, dass sich die Dinge irgendwann so entwickeln, dass die jetzt diskutierten Horrorszenarien als Optionen in Frage kommen könnten. Im Gegenteil: Sie erklärte immer wieder, die Griechen-Rettung werde deutsche Steuerzahler nichts kosten.

Sätze wie dieser von Kanzlerin Angela Merkel (CDU) vom 16. Oktober 2010 kommen jetzt wie ein Bumerang zurück: „Alle Experten bestätigen“, erklärte Merkel damals, „dass Griechenland und auch Irland die Schuldenlasten, also Zins und Tilgung, auf Dauer schultern können.“ Und auch am 22. Juli 2011 versicherte die Kanzlerin in der „Bild-Zeitung“: „Was wir in diesen Zeiten aufwenden, bekommen wir um ein Vielfaches zurück.“

Als Griechenland-Optimist gab sich auch Finanzminister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU), als er am 19. Mai 2010 sagte: „Natürlich gehen wir davon aus, dass jeder seine Schulden auch zurückzahlt.“

Noch deutlicher formulierte Unions-Fraktionschef Volker Kauder (CDU), als er am 30. April 2010 versprach: „Es wird kein Steuergeld aus dem Haushalt fließen. Im Gegenteil: Durch die Verzinsung der Darlehen entstehen sogar noch Einnahmen.“

Und der frühere CDU-Chefhaushälter Norbert Barthle glaubte schon am 13. April 2010, noch zehn Tage bevor Griechenland das erste Hilfsprogramm beantragte, dass die Hilfen „für den Bund ein gutes Geschäft“ seien - wegen der hohen Zinsen, die Athen zahlen müsse.

Dass Merkel falsch lag, habe sich „bereits mehrfach bestätigt“, sagte der Fachbereichsleiter Wirtschafts- und Fiskalpolitik am Centrum für Europäische Wirtschaftspolitik (CEP), Matthias Kullas, dem Handelsblatt (Online-Ausgabe). So habe es im Jahr 2012 einen Schuldenschnitt für Griechenland gegeben, da die Schuldenlast nicht mehr tragfähig gewesen sei.

Zudem seien die Laufzeiten der Kredite, die Griechenland insbesondere von den Euro-Staaten erhalten hat, verlängert und Zinsen gesenkt worden. „Dieser weitere faktische Schuldenschnitt war notwendig, da die Schuldenlast nicht mehr tragfähig war“, betonte Kullas.

Die Lage hat sich seitdem aber nicht grundlegend gebessert. Nach den geplatzten Verhandlungen steht es Spitz auf Knopf für die Hellenen. Euro-Gruppen-Chef Jeroen Dijsselbloem appellierte an die griechische Regierung, doch noch einzulenken. Man hoffe, dass Athen um eine Verlängerung des Ende Februar auslaufenden Hilfsprogramms bitte, sagte Dijsselbloem in Brüssel, wo an diesem Dienstag die Finanzminister der 28 EU-Staaten tagen. Damit könnte den Euro-Partnern ein gewisser Handlungsspielraum gewährt werden.

Griechenlands Finanzminister Yanis Varoufakis äußerte sich zurückhaltend. Er sagte lediglich, der nächste Schritt werde ein verantwortlicher sein. In Europa wisse man, wie man trotz anfänglicher Uneinigkeit zu einer Lösung komme. Die Euro-Gruppe hat Griechenland eine Frist bis Ende der Woche gesetzt, um einen Antrag auf eine sechsmonatige Verlängerung des Programms zu stellen.

Der Präsident des Deutschen Instituts für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), Marcel Fratzscher, hat vor diesem Hintergrund nur noch wenig Hoffnung für Griechenland. „Es deutet vieles darauf hin, dass die griechische Regierung ein Scheitern der Verhandlungen und damit einen Staatsbankrott absichtlich herbeiführen will“, sagte Fratzscher dem Handelsblatt (Online-Ausgabe). Ein Grexit sei zwar eine Entscheidung, die Athen alleine treffen müsse. Das Verhalten der griechischen Regierung zeige aber, „dass sie gewillt ist, einen Euro-Austritt zu akzeptieren“.

Athen signalisiert aus Fratzschers Sicht eine „klare Blockadehaltung“ in den Verhandlungen. „Entweder ist die griechische Regierung unfähig, oder extrem clever in ihrer Verhandlungsführung“, sagte der DIW-Chef.

Der Präsident des Münchner Ifo-Instituts, Hans-Werner Sinn, hält allenfalls eine „Zwischenlösung“ für Griechenland für möglich. „Ich glaube, dass die Zeit der Realitätsverweigerung seitens der Politik nun zu Ende geht“, sagte Sinn dem Handelsblatt (Online-Ausgabe). „Da die Staatengemeinschaft auch bei einer Einigung nicht so viel Geld zuschießen wird, wie zur Sicherung der griechischen Finanzen nötig wäre, kann ich mir als Zwischenlösung am ehesten eine Phase mit Kapitalverkehrskontrollen wie in Zypern vorstellen.“

Auf mittlere Sicht hält Sinn den Grexit für „unerlässlich, weil Griechenland auch mit Schuldenerlassen und immer wieder neuen Krediten im Euro-Raum nicht zurechtkommt“.

Der Wormser Wirtschaftsprofessor Max Otte hat erwartet, dass es ein harter Verhandlungspoker werden würde. „Die harte Haltung beider Seiten lässt aber den Grexit nun denkbar werden, so dass ich die Wahrscheinlichkeit mit 25 Prozent beziffere“, sagte Otte dem Handelsblatt (Online-Ausgabe). Er hält aber noch eine Einigung für möglich. Der griechische Premier Alexis Tsipras habe „eine offene Flanke“. Er wolle, dass Griechenland in der Euro-Zone bleibt. „Und der Euro ist in Griechenland populär, da er dem Land nach 2005 erst einmal einen Konsumboom beschert hatte“, so Otte.

Ein weiterer Schuldenschnitt Griechenlands würde Deutschlands Staatskasse zwar nicht akut belasten, dafür aber in einigen Jahren. Denn die Kredite sollen erst in zehn Jahren und später zurückgezahlt werden. Würde Athen eine Senkung seiner Schuldenquote von 175 auf 90 Prozent der Wirtschaftsleistung aushandeln, könnte dies Deutschland nach Berechnungen des Kieler Finanzökonomen Jens Boysen-Hogrefe bis zu 40 Milliarden Euro kosten.

Bei einem Austritt Griechenlands („Grexit“) aus der Euro-Zone und einer Staatspleite drohen weitere Verluste. Das Risiko Deutschlands beläuft sich auf 70 bis 80 Milliarden Euro. Wieviel verloren ginge, kann niemand sagen. Genauso wenig sind die Folgekosten insgesamt abzuschätzen, wenn die Euro-Zone in starke Turbulenzen geriete:

Fast alle Schulden Griechenlands entfallen inzwischen auf öffentliche Kreditgeber. Die Forderungen der deutschen Banken einschließlich der Staatsbank [KfW](#) gegenüber Griechenland beliefen sich im September 2014 noch auf 23,468 Milliarden Euro.

Von den Banken-Forderungen aus dem ersten Griechenland-Rettungsprogramm entfallen allein 15,17 Milliarden Euro auf die [KfW](#), über die Kredite Deutschlands aus dem ersten Hilfspakets abgewickelt wurden. Aus diesen Krediten kassierte der Bund aber auch Zinsen.

Aus dem zweiten Hilfspaket, dem Rettungsfonds EFSF, wurden 144,6 Milliarden zugesagt, wovon bis Ende November 141,9 Milliarden ausgezahlt wurden. Der deutsche Anteil beträgt 36,8 Milliarden Euro. Die deutsche Haftung berechnet sich nach dem deutschen Kapitalanteil an der Europäischen Zentralbank (EZB) in Höhe von rund 26 Prozent des Gesamtkapitals.

Die EZB hat griechische Staatsanleihen erworben. Wie viele derzeit in der EZB-Bilanz stehen, ist nicht bekannt. Schätzungen gehen von insgesamt 27 Milliarden Euro aus, wovon Deutschland über die Bundesbank für rund 7 Milliarden Euro haftet. Dies würde sich sofort bemerkbar machen, da der Bund der Bundesbank trotz Risikorückstellungen wohl unter die Arme greifen müsste.

Verluste drohen auch im europäischen Zahlungsverkehrs-System „Target 2“. Die Target-Verbindlichkeiten der griechischen Zentralbank gegenüber der EZB belaufen sich auf etwa 37 Milliarden Euro. Über den deutschen Kapitalanteil bei der EZB von derzeit rund 26 Prozent bezieht sich das deutsche Haftungspotenzial somit auf 10 Milliarden Euro.

Summa summarum stehen damit nach den Berechnungen des Steuerzahlerbunds derzeit deutsche Steuergelder von bis zu 71 Milliarden Euro im Feuer. Das sind rund 850 Euro für jeden Einwohner Deutschlands. Das ist mehr als Griechenland allen seinen privaten Gläubigern weltweit schuldet (rund 65 Milliarden Euro beziehungsweise 20 Prozent aller griechischen Staatsschulden.)

Griechenland hätte dieses Szenario abwenden können, wenn es die verabredeten Strukturreformen umgesetzt hätte. „Denn wer als Staat über keine funktionierende Steuerverwaltung verfügt, kann auch nicht ausreichend Geld einnehmen. Das ist eine Achillesferse der Griechen“, sagte Steuerzahlerbund-Chef Holznagel. Die Griechen, kritisiert er, hätten die teuer erkaufte Zeit nicht richtig genutzt.

Ein „Kardinalfehler“ war aus Sicht Holznagels, nicht schon bereits 2010 einen „ehrlichen und radikalen Schuldenschnitt“ anzugehen. „Damals hätte es voll die privaten Gläubiger getroffen. Aber ein Schuldenschnitt jetzt, träfe fast ausschließlich die Steuerzahler“, erklärte Holznagel. Auch wenn die Aussichten auf Rückzahlung der Kredite gegen Null tendierten, habe die Bundesregierung nun aber „die Pflicht gegenüber den deutschen Steuerzahlern, unser Geld zu retten, zumindest so viel wie möglich“.

Kein einfaches Unterfangen, wie Holznagel einräumt, zumal die Griechen offenbar Ursache und Wirkung verwechselten. „Sie sollten ehrlich zu sich selbst sein und erkennen, dass sie zu lange exzessiv auf Pump gelebt und den Staat zum Absturz gebracht haben“, sagte er. Wer dennoch der helfenden Hand, nämlich den Euro-Partnern, den schwarzen Peter zuschiebe, verkenne die Realitäten. „Fakt ist“, so Holznagel, „dass die griechischen Eliten versagt haben und jetzt die Konsequenzen tragen müssen, ob mit oder ohne Euro.“

Der frühere EU-Kommissionspräsident Romano Prodi schließt einen Austritt Griechenlands aus der Euro-Zone unterdessen nicht aus. Der Italiener hält diese Option auch deshalb für realistisch, weil er deutlicher als viele andere EU-Politiker zugibt, dass die Hilfsmilliarden ohnehin verloren sind. „Jeder weiß doch, dass Griechenland seine Schulden niemals zurückzahlen wird“, sagte Prodi kürzlich in einem Interview mit dem „Tagesspiegel“.

CEP-Experte Kullas pflichtet Prodi bei. Ob die Schuldenlast tragfähig ist, hänge insbesondere von zwei Faktoren ab: Dem Primärüberschuss im Haushalt und dem Wirtschaftswachstum. Er habe jedoch „große Zweifel“, ob Griechenland die Vorgaben beziehungsweise Annahmen der „Institutionen“ (ehemals Troika) tatsächlich erreichen werde, da sie doch „recht sportlich“ seien.

Ein Primärüberschuss im griechischen Haushalt über einen längeren Zeitraum könne nur dann erfolgreich erzielt werden, wenn dies von der Regierung und der Bevölkerung gewollt werde. Hiernach sehe es aber in Griechenland momentan nicht aus. „Zudem sind die Steuereinnahmen Griechenlands im Zuge der Wahl bereits gesunken, was das Erreichen des Primärüberschusses zusätzlichen erschweren wird“, erläuterte Kullas.

Eine weitere wichtige Annahme zur Schuldentragfähigkeit ist das Wirtschaftswachstum. Konkret bedeutet dies, dass die griechische Schuldenlast nur dann tragfähig ist, wenn die griechische Wirtschaft deutlich wächst. „Auch hier habe ich Zweifel, dass die griechische Wirtschaft das notwendige Wirtschaftswachstum tatsächlich erreicht“, sagte Kullas.

Erstens hemme die gegenwärtige Unsicherheit über die zukünftige Entwicklung Investitionen, was sich negativ auf das Wirtschaftswachstum auswirke. Zweitens führe die jetzige Regierung wachstumssteigernde Reformen

nicht durch. Und drittens werde aus Angst vor einem Euro-Austritt oder einer Besteuerung viel Geld ins Ausland gebracht. Die Kapitalflucht hemme das Wirtschaftswachstum.

Kallas ernüchterndes Fazit: „Ich denke nicht, dass Griechenland in der Lage oder Willens ist, seine Schulden zurückzuzahlen.“ Er denke vielmehr, dass ein weiterer Schuldenschnitt in Form von abermaligen Zinssenkungen und Laufzeitverlängerungen kommen werde. „Wahrscheinlich werden deutsche Politiker auch dann noch behaupten, dass Griechenland alles zurückzahlen wird.“

Faktencheck: Rettet Europa Griechenland - oder nur die Banken?

Der griechische Finanzminister Varoufakis sagt: "Die Deutschen sollten wissen, dass sie mit ihrem Geld nicht Griechenland, sondern die Banken gerettet haben." Die SPIEGEL-Dokumentation macht den Faktencheck. Bei wem sind die Milliarden wirklich gelandet?

Bei vielen Deutschen ist das Urteil über die Griechen klar: Sie hätten jahrelang über ihre Verhältnisse gelebt und sich allerlei soziale Segnungen geleistet, ohne die entsprechenden Steuern einzuziehen. Die Mischung aus Korruption und Verschwendung konnte auf Dauer nicht gut gehen, heißt es hierzulande. An ihrer wirtschaftlichen Misere seien sie daher selbst schuld.

Die Griechen könnten sich glücklich schätzen, dass starke Partner sie vor der Staatspleite bewahrt haben, geht das Argument weiter. Da ein unkontrollierter Bankrott Griechenlands die ganze Eurozone zu gefährden schien, bewilligte die Troika aus EU, Europäischer Zentralbank (EZB) und Internationalem Währungsfonds (IWF) 2010 und 2012 umfangreiche Hilfspakete - mit einem Volumen von insgesamt rund 240 Milliarden Euro.

Dass die griechische Regierung nun gegen die vereinbarten Sparauflagen rebelliert, wird als Zeichen der Undankbarkeit gesehen. Doch viele Griechen sehen den Nutzen gekürzter Renten und entlassener Staatsangestellter nicht. Während die Arbeitslosigkeit in Europa wieder sinkt (im Mittel auf elf Prozent), beträgt sie in Griechenland weiterhin 26 Prozent, [das ist der höchste Stand innerhalb der Eurozone](#).

Auch deshalb will die neue Regierung von Ministerpräsident Alexis Tsipras [nicht länger demütig bittend verhandeln](#). Sie will sich befreien und eine Lockerung der Sparauflagen erzwingen.

Hat Varoufakis recht?

Wir können hier die vielen Aspekte der [Griechenland-Krise](#) nicht entwirren, aber wir können das Problem anhand eines Beispiels einmal gegen den deutschen Strich bürsten.

Der griechische Finanzminister [Giannis Varoufakis](#) vergleicht die Troika-Kur mit "CIA-Folter", die Durchsetzung der Sparauflagen [mit einem "fiskalischen Waterboarding"](#).

Das empört in Deutschland verständlicherweise, und wir halten ihm entgegen, Griechenland werde nicht mit Wasser überschüttet, sondern mit Geld.

Varoufakis darauf im SPIEGEL: "Die Deutschen sollten wissen, dass sie mit ihrem Geld nicht Griechenland, sondern die Banken gerettet haben". "Das Geld wurde eingesetzt, um Banken, insbesondere in Deutschland und Frankreich, vor weiteren Verlusten zu bewahren."

In seinem neuen Buch* führt er aus:

"Unter dem Vorwand, Griechenland retten zu müssen, wurden hohe Verluste aus den Büchern der Banken auf die schwachen Schultern der griechischen Steuerzahler verschoben in dem vollen Bewusstsein, dass die Kosten, weil die griechischen Schultern zu schwach dafür waren, auf Deutschland, die Slowakei, Finnland, Portugal und so weiter überschwappen würden.

Natürlich gab es keine Rettung Griechenlands und keine Solidarität mit den verschwenderischen Griechen. Der griechische Staat erhielt Kredite in Höhe von 240 Milliarden Euro, damit über 200 Milliarden Euro Steuergelder an die Banken und verschiedene Hedgefonds fließen konnten. Diese Milliarden bekam Griechenland unter der Bedingung drastischer Sparauflagen, die die Einkommen der Menschen um ein Viertel reduzierten, weshalb es sowohl für die öffentliche Hand wie für den privaten Sektor in Griechenland unmöglich wurde, ihre alten und neuen Kredite zurückzuzahlen."

Das durchaus athenkritische "Handelsblatt" beurteilte ["die wahren Gründe der griechischen Tragödie"](#) einmal ähnlich: Letztlich bedeuteten die staatlichen Rettungsaktionen für die Finanzbranche, dass die Risiken, die in den Bilanzen der privaten Banken schlummerten, vom Staat übernommen wurden.

Grundlage dieser Einsicht war die EZB-Studie ["The Janus-Headed Salvation"](#), in der Jacob Ejsing und Wolfgang Lemke zeigten, dass es vor allem die Bankenrettung und ihre Folgen gewesen seien, die Griechenland in Not brachte.

Eine dezidierte Aufschlüsselung der Verwendung der Troika-Hilfen auf Basis offizieller EZB- und EFSF-Quellen haben zum Beispiel [die Globalisierungskritiker von Attac zusammengetragen](#).

77 Prozent der Hilfen gingen an Finanzsektor

Das Ergebnis: Von den bis Mitte 2013 nach Griechenland geflossenen knapp 207 Milliarden Euro sind gut 77 Prozent direkt (58,2 Milliarden für Bankenrekapitalisierung) oder indirekt (101,3 Milliarden für Gläubiger des griechischen Staates) an den Finanzsektor geflossen. Für den Staatshaushalt blieben aus den Rettungsprogrammen weniger als ein Viertel.

Auch Professor Michael Hüther, Direktor des arbeitgebernahen Instituts der deutschen Wirtschaft, [erkennt das Argument grundsätzlich an](#), gibt aber zu bedenken: "Mit den Krediten wurde verhindert, dass die Banken in eine noch tiefere Funktionskrise geraten. Insofern kann man zwar vordergründig argumentieren, es ginge nur um eine Stützung von Banken. Im Kern geht es um die Sicherung von Infrastruktur."

Bleibt die Frage: Wenn es denn weniger um die Griechen als um das europäische Finanzsystem geht, warum nimmt die Troika nunmehr ein Scheitern der Gespräche in Kauf?

Der Grund ist denkbar simpel: Viele europäische Kreditinstitute haben sich längst von ihren griechischen Papieren getrennt. Statt einstmals 272 Milliarden Euro sind es laut BIZ derzeit nur noch 34 Milliarden Euro. Daher können Banken in Deutschland oder Frankreich nicht mehr so leicht in Schieflage geraten, wenn sich in Griechenland die Krise verschärfen sollte.

Fazit: Varoufakis' These lautet, dass die Troika-Hilfen kein Akt der Solidarität europäischer Bürger und Steuerzahler mit dem griechischen Volk waren, sondern ein Akt der Selbsthilfe des europäischen Finanzsektors zu Lasten der EU-Bürger. Diese These lässt sich nicht einfach von der Hand weisen. Grund genug, um die Selbstgerechtigkeit deutscher Wutbürger in Frage zu stellen.

* **Yanis Varoufakis mit Stuart Holland und James Galbraith:** "Bescheidener Weg zur Lösung der Eurokrise", Verlag Antje Kunstmann, erscheint am 25. Februar 2015

Schäuble über Griechenland unter Zeitdruck: "Am 28. Februar, 24.00 Uhr, is over"

Wolfgang Schäuble sieht im Schulden-Showdown Griechenland am Zug: Die Regierung in Athen muss sich bald entscheiden, ob sie überhaupt Hilfen will, sagt der deutsche Finanzminister.

Brüssel - Bundesfinanzminister [Wolfgang Schäuble](#) (CDU) hat von Griechenland klare Aussagen über weitere Hilfen gefordert. "Niemand der Kollegen hat bisher verstanden, was Griechenland am Ende wirklich will", sagte Schäuble nach einem Treffen der EU-Finanzminister in Brüssel. "Die entscheidende Frage ist und bleibt, dass Griechenland sich entscheiden muss, will es eigentlich dieses Programm oder will es das nicht." Schäuble äußerte sich zudem über die letztmögliche Frist für eine Zustimmung des Bundestags. Diese könne "sicher auch noch am Freitag, den 27. Februar" erfolgen. Am 28. Februar sei es dafür aber zu spät. Im Blick auf das auslaufende Rettungsprogramm sagte Schäuble: "Am 28., 24.00 Uhr, is over." Wenn das Programm nicht ordnungsgemäß beendet werde, trete eine schwierige Situation ein. Allerdings mache es keinen Sinn, darüber zu spekulieren, was dann konkret der Fall sein werde.

In der Griechenland-Frage gebe es eine "völlig einmütige Position in der Euro-Gruppe", sagte Schäuble weiter. Genau genommen meinte er 18 der 19 Finanzminister der Eurostaaten. Unter ihnen ist der Grieche Varoufakis derzeit isoliert, wie das Treffen am Montag zeigte. Dabei war erneut der Versuch gescheitert, [mit Griechenland einen Kompromiss zu finden](#), das eine "technische Verlängerung" seines Hilfsprogramms als "unannehmbar" ablehnt.

Die griechische Regierung macht das Programm der Europartner und des Internationalen Währungsfonds ([IWE](#)) für die Misere in Griechenland verantwortlich. Zugleich pocht sie auf weitere Kredithilfen - im Gegenzug will sie ihre Zusage zu weniger harten Auflagen geben.

Die Euro-Gruppe setzte der Regierung in Athen nach dem Scheitern am Montag [eine Frist bis Ende der Woche](#), um einen Antrag auf Verlängerung des Programms zu stellen.

Eine solche Verlängerung ergebe nur Sinn, wenn Athen die Absicht habe, dieses auch zu erfüllen, sagte Schäuble nun am Dienstag. Griechenland müsse klare, belastbare und glaubwürdige Verpflichtungen abgeben, in einem bestimmten Zeitraum das bestehende Programm abzuschließen. Ohne ernsthafte Begründung, warum das Programm verlängert werden solle, könne er nicht vor das Parlament gehen, sagte Schäuble. "Das hat der deutsche Bundestag nicht verdient."

The Economist explains

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Denmark's "failed" multiculturalism

Feb 17th 2015, 16:14 BY M.S.



LAST weekend's shootings in Copenhagen seemed to imitate those that took place in Paris a month earlier, which also targeted cartoonists who had made fun of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet Denmark has been grappling with such questions for longer. The long-running "Danish cartoons" debate began in 2005 when the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published satirical drawings of Muhammad, leading to protests around the world. To outsiders, it may seem surprising that such a row began in Denmark, which many picture as a free-thinking oasis devoted to generous social-welfare schemes and religious, ethnic, sexual and countercultural tolerance. Yet Denmark experienced a particularly sharp and early version of Europe's debate over multiculturalism and Islam. For years, even liberal Danish politicians have been calling multiculturalism a "failure". Why?

Denmark's lefty image, if it was ever accurate, is at least 15 years out of date. In the late 1990s the Danish People's Party (DPP), founded by Pia Kjaersgaard, began to denounce immigration, multiculturalism and Islam as alien to Danish society and values. The party tapped into fears of rising crime and fed on the resentment of working-class and conservative Danes who felt ignored by the liberal governing elite. From 2001 until 2011 the DPP's support was needed by minority centre-right coalition governments run by the liberals and conservatives. In exchange, the DPP gained partial control of Denmark's immigration policy, which quickly became among the most restrictive in Europe.

Denmark prides itself on an exceptionally open and frank political culture. The new right-wing politicians were willing to be very frank indeed. Ms Kjaersgaard accused Danish Muslims of living at a "lower stage of civilisation, with their own primitive and cruel customs". The party has lost influence since a centre-left government was elected in 2011, but its restrictive immigration and asylum policies have become accepted across the political spectrum. The generosity of the country's social-security net has made people quicker to accuse immigrants of exploiting it. Meanwhile, a highly cohesive and demanding civic culture, which was the basis of Denmark's liberal social-welfare policies, has alienated anyone who finds it hard to conform. This has made the country fertile ground for Islamist recruitment. Over 100 Danish jihadists have gone to Syria and Iraq, one of the highest rates per person in Europe.

It would be a mistake to see Denmark's 50-year-long encounter with immigrants from Muslim countries as a failure, or to treat Danish Muslims as a coherent, problematic group. They hail from Morocco, Somalia, Turkey and Denmark itself; most are simply Danes whose religion is Islam, as Danish as anyone else. For a minority, poor integration policies and a reluctance to conform to local norms have led to isolation, while modern Islamism has provided a new identity to claim and a violent way to assert it. Mainstream society has reacted to that violence by reasserting its own norms and values, widening the gulf. A similar process is playing out in almost every country in western Europe. If Denmark's story is different from those of the Netherlands, Britain, France, Belgium and the rest, it is mainly because Denmark seems to have been a few years ahead of the curve.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/big-question-kcl/11417634/How-should-Europes-Jews-respond-to-Netanyahu-call-for-mass-migration-to-Israel.html>

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How should Europe's Jews respond to Netanyahu call for mass migration to Israel?

Big Question: It is nothing short of insulting for the Israeli prime minister to urge Europe's Jews to embrace an uncertain future in Israel



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Photo: Gali Tibbon/AFP

By Richard Ned Lebow, [King's College London](#) 3:27PM GMT 17 Feb 2015

On Sunday, **Benjamin Netanyahu urged a “mass immigration”** of European Jews to their real “home” in [Israel](#). How should Europe's Jews, of whom I am one, respond?

First, there is no reason to think that Jews are any safer in Israel than in Europe.

Fewer than 50 Jews are thought to have been killed in Europe by terrorists since 1993.

By contrast, between the 1993 Oslo Accords and today, approximately 1,400 Israeli civilians have been killed by terrorists.

If security is a goal, Jews are better off in Europe, although they must cope with some kinds of harassment – defacing gravestones, for example – that are rare or non-existent in Israel.

Secondly, Mr Netanyahu's appeal to Jews to make **aliyah – return to Israel** – comes in the aftermath of terror attacks in [France](#) and [Denmark](#). Since independence it has been an unwavering policy of Israel never to cut and run. Why should its prime minister urge this course of action on European Jews?

What is at stake has nothing to do with Jewish security. Nationalists everywhere pursue totalizing strategies. They desperately want people to identify with their project and define themselves in terms of it.

Nationalists are threatened by multiple identities, nuance in thought, and sympathy for others – all of which have all long been pronounced qualities of diaspora Jews.

Most diaspora Jews identify both with Israel and their home country, or multiple home countries as in my case, and many are unhappy with the direction of Israel's foreign policy.

Their acceptance and success as citizens of these countries has been hard-fought and, in Europe, built on the ashes of Shoah. It is nothing short of insulting for Israel's leader to tell them to give this all up for a new and uncertain future.

It is, however, perhaps not surprising that the first prime minister to be born in Israel has no understanding or respect for non-Israeli Jews.

Diaspora Jews have been critical for Israeli independence and economic development, and in many ways, Israel continues to gain from them. One important contribution, ignored in the contemporary discourse, is the multiple nature of their identities and commitments.

This is a feature of all humans in the modern era; we delude ourselves into thinking that we have, or could have, unitary and consistent identities.

We have multiple identifications that derive in large part from our affiliations, social roles, relationship to bodies and our histories. They rise and fall as a function of context and priming, and generate different behavioral and ethical imperatives.

To the extent we recognize this psychological truth we are likely to question the binaries that divide us from other people. We only share some of the identifications in any “in group” and often share some with members of those labeled as the “out group.”

The most destructive binaries are those created by nationalists who attempt to essentialize a people or state. Mr Netanyahu and others like him around the world must be exposed and opposed.

[Richard Ned Lebow](#) is a professor of International Political Theory at King's College London

Female genital mutilation

The cruellest cut

As overall crime continues to drop, attention turns to FGM

Feb 14th 2015 | [From the print edition](#)

ON FEBRUARY 6th police arrested a British woman at Heathrow Airport for conspiring to commit female genital mutilation. She had been about to board a flight to Ghana with an eight-year-old girl. It is but one sign of heightened official vigilance. Progress in tackling FGM over the past two years has been “beyond our expectations”, says Janet Fyle of the Royal College of Midwives.

An estimated 137,000 women in Britain have suffered FGM, which involves the removal of the external female genital organs or the sewing up of the vagina or both. It has been illegal in Britain since 1985, but its prevalence has grown with immigration. Girls are often sent abroad to have it done—an act that became illegal in 2003.

The issue has risen to prominence partly because of activists such as Fahma Mohamed, a Bristol teenager who led a campaign last year urging the then education secretary, Michael Gove, to write to all teachers about the dangers of FGM. He was eventually persuaded to do so. A parliamentary report in July accused politicians, the police, schools and hospitals of overlooking the practice. The prime minister, David Cameron, together with UNICEF, hosted a “Girl Summit” last summer, at which his government pledged more training for teachers and doctors to identify and help girls at risk. Theresa May, the home secretary, in December launched a consultation on how to compel people to report FGM to the police.

This has proved controversial. Most activist and professional groups support mandatory reporting (though it is not the law for other forms of child abuse). But the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health wrote to the home secretary in January calling it a “blunt legislative instrument” and saying there is “no credible or conclusive” evidence that it would better protect children. It cited the mother of a victim of FGM who was scared to come forward for fear of police intervention. Deborah Hodes, a doctor who runs Britain’s first specialist paediatric FGM clinic at London’s University College Hospital, says that medical staff already raise the alarm when they see it. She warns of the danger of creating a hierarchy of child abuse in which FGM is the worst.

Some also worry that the government is now focused on prosecution more than prevention—not that it has been a zealous or effective prosecutor. On February 4th a doctor was found not guilty of performing FGM on a young mother in a London hospital. He said he had only stitched the woman, who had undergone FGM as a child in Somalia, to prevent bleeding after she gave birth. Prosecutions are important, says one activist, but by the time you are in court “you have already lost”, because the girl has already suffered FGM. The priority is now to persuade men to say they will not marry a girl who has undergone it, says Mrs Fyle.

Activists are already hearing anecdotal evidence from immigrants in Britain that the practice is becoming less prevalent. They also claim some progress is being made back in the immigrants’ home countries. But, with around 125m women having suffered FGM worldwide, these are only small victories.

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Obama tells Muslims: don't let Isis *hijack* your religion and identity

Islamic State does not speak for you and 'we are not at war with Islam', declares US president at counter-extremism summit

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Thursday 19 February 2015 07.07 GMT

Muslims in the US and around the world have a responsibility to fight the idea that terrorist groups like Islamic State speak for them, Barack Obama has declared in his most direct remarks yet about any link between [Islam](#) and violent extremism.

"We are not at war with Islam," Obama said. "We are at war with people who have perverted Islam."

In the first of two speeches to a counter-extremism summit in Washington, the president reiterated his determination to avoid letting the agenda [become characterised as a battle against Islam](#), saying this would be playing into the hands of Isis and other terrorist groups.

"They propagate the notion that America, and the west generally, is at war with Islam; that's how they recruit, that's how they try to radicalise young people," he said.

"Just as leaders like myself reject the notion that terrorists like Isil genuinely represent Islam, Muslim leaders need to do more to discredit the notion that our nations are determined to suppress Islam."

For weeks the [Obama administration](#) has sidestepped the question of whether deadly terror attacks in Paris and other western cities amount to "Islamic extremism", wary of offending a major world religion or lending credibility to the "war on terror" waged by George Bush.

But as he hosted the summit at the White House, the president said some in Muslim communities had bought into the notion that Islam was incompatible with tolerance and modern life.

While putting the blame on Isis and similar groups — Obama said the militants masqueraded as religious leaders but were really terrorists — the president also appealed directly to prominent Muslims to do more to distance themselves from brutal ideologies, calling it the duty of all to "speak up very clearly" in opposition to violence against innocent people.

Obama acknowledged it was a touchy subject but insisted it was critical to tackle the issue "head-on".

"We can't shy away from these discussions," he said. "And too often folks are understandably sensitive about addressing some of these root issues, but we have to talk about them honestly and clearly."

The president differentiated militant groups from the "billion Muslims who reject their ideology". Isis was killing far more Muslims than non-Muslims, he said, and called for the world community to elevate the voices of those who "saw the truth" after being radicalised temporarily.

Obama acknowledged many Muslims in the US had a suspicion of government and police and felt they were unfairly targeted — confounding efforts to strengthen co-operation between law enforcement and Muslim communities. He praised Muslims who have served the US and other capacities for generations.

“Of course that’s the story extremists and terrorists don’t want the world to know: Muslims succeeding and thriving in America,” Obama said. “Because when that truth is known it exposes their propaganda as the lie that it is.”

Obama has long tried to shift his administration’s terror rhetoric away from what he saw as the hyperbolic terminology used by his predecessor, George Bush, particularly Bush’s declaration in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that the US was engaged in a “war on terror”.

On Wednesday Obama said: “If we’re going to prevent people from being susceptible to the false promises of extremism, then the international community has to offer something better and the United States intends to do its part.”

Issuing such a direct challenge to Muslims to disown the ideology of extremist groups marked a clear departure from the restrained, cautious language Obama and his aides have used to describe the situation in the past.

In the days after last month’s shootings at a satirical French newspaper that had caricatured the prophet Muhammad, Obama avoided calling the attack an example of “Islamic extremism” and instead opted for the more generic “violent extremism”. Recently the White House also struggled to explain whether the US believed the Afghan Taliban to be a terrorist organisation.

The refusal to directly assess any Islamic role in the terrifying scenes playing out in Europe, the Middle East and Africa has drawn criticism from those who say Obama has prioritised political correctness over a frank acknowledgement of reality. National security hawks, in particular, have argued that Obama’s counterterrorism strategy couldn’t possibly be successful if the president was unable or unwilling to confront the true nature of the threat.

Yet the argument over terminology has increasingly become a distraction, including this week as Obama gathered law enforcement officials, Muslim leaders and lawmakers for a three-day summit on violent extremism.

Obama echoed the concern over the [killings in Chapel Hill, North Carolina](#), though he did not directly address the question of the murderer’s motive, preferring to emphasise the solidarity of other Americans.

“Most recently, with the brutal murders in Chapel Hill of three young Muslim Americans, many Muslim Americans are worried and afraid and I want to be as clear as I can be: as Americans of all faiths and backgrounds, we stand with you in grief and we offer our love and we offer our support,” he said.

Obama is due to speak again on Thursday when delegates from about 65 countries gather for the summit’s closing session at the state department.

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Russia a threat to Baltic states after Ukraine conflict, warns Michael Fallon

Defence secretary claims Vladimir Putin could repeat tactics used to destabilise Ukraine in Baltic members of the Nato alliance

Press Association

Thursday 19 February 2015 00.21 GMT Last modified on Thursday 19 February 2015 01.09 GMT

Russian president Vladimir Putin could repeat the tactics used to destabilize [Ukraine](#) in Baltic members of the Nato alliance, the defence secretary has warned.

[Michael Fallon](#) said Nato must be ready for Russian aggression in “whatever form it takes” as he acknowledged tensions between the alliance and Moscow were “warming up”.

His comments came after prime minister [David Cameron](#) called on Europe to make clear to Russia that it faces economic and financial consequences for “many years to come” if it does not stop destabilising Ukraine.

Ukrainian forces pulled out from the strategically important town of Debaltseve after fierce fighting, which had continued despite the ceasefire agreed following international talks.

Six Ukrainian servicemen were killed during the withdrawal, the country’s president Petro Poroshenko said.

Fallon, who said he was worried about Putin, acknowledged the Russian leader could attempt a repeat of the covert campaign used in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine against other former Soviet bloc countries such as Latvia, [Lithuania](#) or Estonia.

That could involve irregular troops, cyber attacks and inflaming tensions with ethnic Russian minorities in nations seen as part of the country’s “near abroad” by Moscow.

He said there was a “real and present danger” that such tactics could be used.

The defence secretary said: “Nato has to be ready for any kind of aggression from Russia, whatever form it takes. Nato is getting ready.”

Fallon said he was “worried about his [Putin] pressure on the Baltics, the way he is testing Nato”.

This month two long-range bombers flew down the Channel off the coast of Bournemouth in an indication of Moscow’s sabre-rattling.

“It is the first time since the height of the cold war that has happened and it just shows you the need to respond each time he does something like that.”

Fallon, who was speaking to journalists accompanying him on a trip to Sierra Leone, **said it was not a new cold war with Russia because the situation is already “pretty warm”.**

The Times reported that he said: “You have tanks and armour rolling across the Ukrainian border, and you have an Estonian border guard being captured and not yet still returned.

“When you have jets being flown up the English Channel, when you have submarines in the North Sea, it looks to me like it’s warming up.”

His warnings about Russian ambitions came after Cameron warned [Europe](#) could not turn a “blind eye” to the Kremlin’s actions.

Cameron said in Ukraine “effectively one country is challenging the territorial integrity of another country”.

“Those Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine, they are using Russian rocket launchers, Russian tanks, Russian artillery, you can’t buy this equipment on eBay, it hasn’t come from somewhere else, it’s come from Russia and we know that,” he said.

“So we have to be very firm and strong about the sanctions and say to Vladimir Putin: ‘What you are doing is unacceptable and it will have economic and financial consequences for many years to come if you do not desist with your behaviour’.”

Speaking during a visit to West Sussex, Cameron underlined his intention to keep pressure on [European Union](#) partners to maintain the sanctions regime against Russia despite the ceasefire agreement.

Cameron said: **“Of course there’s a temptation for every European country just to say ‘Let’s go on trading exactly as we have done with Russia, let’s leave responsibility for what is happening in Ukraine to someone else and let’s turn away’.**

“I am afraid that would be a terrible mistake and Britain has been leading the argument in Europe saying Russia’s behaviour in Ukraine has been completely unacceptable and consequences must follow that in terms of sanctions.”

Giesbert : islamo-nazisme et islamophobie

Par Franz-Olivier Giesbert

Pour FOG, "si la France veut rester la France, ce sera à l'islam de s'adapter à la République, non à la République de s'adapter à l'islam".

Plus les islamistes ensanglantent notre Vieux Continent, plus on leur trouve des raisons de le faire. C'est l'étrange paradoxe des dernières semaines. Au lieu de considérer le phénomène pour ce qu'il est - une sorte de purulence religieuse -, les Diafoirus de la bien-pensance recherchent ses origines dans le social, voire, ô le vilain mot, le sociétal, avec une compassion affectée.

Longtemps, nos instructeurs civiques autoproclamés se sont ingénies, en professionnels de l'évitement, à ne pas nommer les choses. Il faudra dire un jour tout le mal qu'ont fait à la cause du "vivre-ensemble" des mots comme "stigmatisation" ou "amalgame", censés arrêter les discussions et faire taire tout le monde. Aujourd'hui, les mêmes clercs n'ont rien appris, qui s'obstinent à ne pas voir la vérité et, au lieu de l'aider à faire face, servent à la communauté musulmane le discours convenu de la victimisation.

Il faut avoir l'esprit aussi déformé que le leur pour imputer à des enfances difficiles, aux inégalités sociales ou au déficit de diversité des attentats qui visent simultanément la liberté d'expression et la communauté juive, à Copenhague comme à Paris. C'est pourtant bien ce que font nos moralistes patentés. Écoutez-les faire leur mea culpa, c'est ma faute, ma très grande faute, en se frappant la poitrine, comme si nous étions nous-mêmes responsables de tout ce sang coulé.

Chaque jour, il nous faut donc traverser le pont aux ânes des crétineries : si nous en sommes là, par exemple, ce serait faute d'avoir réglé le conflit du Proche-Orient, qui se serait importé chez nous. On se frotte les yeux. C'est à peu près aussi intelligent que de dire que, sous le IIIe Reich, les juifs n'ont eu que ce qu'ils méritaient. De quoi donc les Juifs de France sont-ils coupables ? Au rythme où vont les choses, on nous expliquera bientôt que les victimes des attentats l'avaient cherché. D'ici à ce qu'on demande aux caricaturistes de *Charlie* de mettre un bémol à leur mauvais esprit...

Que Manuel Valls ait fait grincer des dents, c'est bon signe : sa formule d'"islamo-fascisme" est tout à fait appropriée, encore qu'on lui préférera, comme on l'a déjà écrit ici, celui d'islamo-nazisme, tant Daesh rappelle à s'y méprendre les tueurs SS de Himmler, avec sa volonté de terroriser à jamais ses ennemis, fussent-ils sans défense, comme les vingt et un Coptes égyptiens que ses militants décapités viennent de décapiter au couteau en Libye.

Le terrorisme intellectuel ne peut plus rien, désormais, contre la vague de barbarie qui nous submerge et que rien ne semble pouvoir arrêter. À en croire les sophistes contemporains, elle favoriserait même l'islamophobie, qu'ils ont érigée en hideuse variante du racisme. Pensez, ils rêvent même de la criminaliser ! En attendant, ils comptabilisent avec plus de soin les actes islamophobes que les actes antisémites, qui, hélas, deviennent banals en France.

Un formidable tour de passe-passe sémantique que cette invention de l'islamophobie : s'appuyant sur l'inculture générale qui ne cesse de faire des progrès, elle permet d'interdire toute critique contre l'islam, religion qu'on n'a pas le droit de mettre en question sous peine d'être suspecté de tout, surtout du pire.

La christianophobie est un mot qui, lui, n'a pas droit de cité dans le langage usuel. Elle correspond pourtant bien à une réalité et on ne se lassera jamais de répéter qu'entre 150 et 200 millions de chrétiens sont persécutés à travers le monde, notamment dans les pays arabes. Quand ils ne sont pas purement et simplement assassinés par des sectes islamiques comme Boko Haram au Nigeria.

Pourquoi personne n'entend-il les cris des chrétiens martyrisés ? Apparemment, leur tragédie n'est pas politiquement correcte. Dans un excellent livre au titre évocateur, *Les hommes en trop* (1), Jean-François Colosimo a tout dit sur le chemin de croix des chrétiens d'Orient : ils sont bien plus maltraités en terre d'islam que les musulmans le sont chez nous.

Le déni est notre grande maladie nationale. Paralysés par un impensé raciste, une culpabilité diffuse et une méconnaissance du fait religieux, nous n'avons pas pris la mesure de ce qui est en jeu. Éradiquer un mal qui est dans les têtes, cela ne se fera pas en un jour, en tout cas pas en remplaçant les barres de HLM dans les banlieues ni en subventionnant davantage encore l'islam de France. Le problème est ailleurs : dans les dérives folles et sectaires d'une religion; il s'agit maintenant de les canaliser.

Si l'État se mêle demain de la formation de nos imams, pourquoi ne paierait-il pas aussi celle des prêtres, des rabbins, des pasteurs, des moines bouddhistes ou taoïstes ? Et quid de la laïcité ? Et de la loi de 1905 ? En tout état de cause, si la France veut rester la France, ce sera à l'islam de s'adapter à la République, non à la République de s'adapter à l'islam.

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Jeunes des banlieues : leur culture et la nôtre

Comme je regrette le temps de l'intégration...

Publié le 20 février 2015 à 9:00 dans Politique Religion Société
Mots-clés : [Banlieues](#), [Charlie Hebdo](#), [École](#), [intégration](#), [Islam](#)



« Islam de France, est-il trop tard ? » C'est la question cruciale que [Causeur nous invite à nous poser ce mois-ci](#). Pour que l'harmonie entre les dissensus qui font le charme et le fond musical de cette publication soit complète, il faut bien sûr un chacal puant qui sorte de sa tanière et hurle aux grands cimetières sous la lune : « Oui, oui, il est trop tard, bien trop tard ! » Ce chacal, ce sera moi.

J'ai rencontré la haine au milieu des années 90, professeur de lettres dans un collège du quartier sensible de Châtenay-Malabry, à très large majorité d'enfants d'immigrés. La haine a eu peur de moi qui sais la tenir à distance par un subtil mélange de charme et de méchanceté, mais elle sourdait par mille réflexions que j'entendais en sourdine et par la révolte de quelques élèves intenable et trop francs pour la cacher. La dernière année de ma présence, le Conseil général des Hauts-de-Seine reconstruisit à grands frais ce vieux collège de briques. Le lendemain du jour où on inaugura la restauration, la belle verrière qui couronnait l'entrée principale fut caillassée à mort. Deux centimètres de vitres cassées et d'illusions perdues dans le hall.

Je pensais : « Quand même, c'est extraordinaire, "ils" passent les monts et les mers dans le seul but de venir nous haïr. » Ils ne venaient pas pour travailler, il y avait déjà beaucoup de chômage, contre lequel les gouvernements de Mitterrand luttèrent par de magnifiques mantras magiques : « Je me battrais sur la crête des trois millions de chômeurs », disait je ne sais plus quel premier ministre qui se croyait encore devant les Vosges en 1914. Le libéralisme était déjà hors-la-loi en France.

J'avais tort. « Ils » n'étaient pas venus pour nous haïr. Ce sont leurs parents qui étaient venus et eux, mes élèves, qui nous haïssaient. Fatal décalage générationnel. J'imagine que les parents étaient contents de fuir la misère du bled, contents d'être convenablement nourris, logés, soignés par la France. Mais eux, ils s'étaient éveillés à la vie parqués dans des HLM (plutôt charmantes et plantées de grands arbres dans le cas de Châtenay-Malabry), avec une couleur de peau soit légèrement différente soit franchement différente de celle des naturels du pays, et peu de chances de réussir économiquement dans un pays où le non-travail avait été décrété par la gauche. Bref, ils ont trouvé dans leur berceau la différence entre « nous » et « eux ». Bien sûr, ils ont choisi « nous ». Qui n'aurait fait de même ? J'ai eu de la sympathie pour mes élèves, j'ai compris leur ressentiment, leur amertume, leur peu d'enthousiasme à être Français. Je n'ai pas excusé pour autant le caillassage de la verrière et

je n'avais strictement aucune solution à leur proposer. Briser l'« apartheid » et installer une famille avenue Foch, une autre avenue Mozart, une troisième rue Guynemer, dans l'immeuble de M. et Mme Kouchner ? Je ne pense pas que les prix de l'immobilier parisien aient permis ce gigantesque déménagement des banlieusards.

J'ai cru qu'il était civique de tirer des sonnettes d'alarme. J'ai parlé de ces « châteaux de la haine » qui ceinturaient nos villes dans des dîners d'amis. J'ai écrit des *Lettres d'avant la guerre civile de 2003* (voyez comme c'est pessimiste, un chacal!) et je les ai envoyées aux éditeurs. Bide total ! Les dîneurs en ville étaient horrifiés, les éditeurs me rejetaient avec mépris, ne voulant pas « favoriser la lepénisation » des esprits. C'était une époque que les moins de cinquante ans ne peuvent pas connaître, où sévissait une réponse qui fermait la bouche à toutes les inquiétudes : « Mais enfin, ils vont s'intégrer, comme les Italiens-Polonais-Espagnols-Portugais avant eux ! » Vous étiez un salaud et un imbécile de ne pas réciter vous aussi ce petit exorcisme. En 2005, le dernier à avoir prononcé cette ânerie était un ancien premier ministre devenu depuis peu membre du Conseil d'Etat. Oh, comme je regrette le temps des « ils vont s'intégrer comme les Italiens-Polonais-Espagnols-Portugais » ! Comme je regrette le temps des cerises ! C'était ma jeunesse, voyez-vous.

Avez-vous remarqué que plus personne n'ose argumenter avec cette ânerie ? Cette ânerie qui présume que les choses se répètent infiniment à l'identique, que l'Histoire n'existe pas, qu'Hérodote n'a jamais existé, qu'il n'a jamais été enquêter (*historein*) chez les Egyptiens et les Scythes, qu'il n'y a jamais d'évolution, que nous en sommes toujours à nous caillasser à coups de silex entre Néandertals et Cro-Magnons ? Vous ne croyiez pas aux Italiens-Polonais-Espagnols-Portugais, donc vous étiez abject, nauséabond, infréquentable, impubliable.

Mauvaise étoile aussi que l'antilibéralisme forcené qui ravage la France depuis si longtemps et apparaît trop souvent à mon gré sous des signatures que pourtant j'apprécie dans *Causeur*. Dans une société du plein emploi, je dirais même dans une société capitaliste féroce (histoire d'aggraver mon cas), les banlieusards auraient trouvé un emploi. Ils rentreraient le soir, contents d'avoir gagné leur vie et trop fatigués pour ouvrir sur internet des sites prohibés par le Ministère de l'Intérieur. J'ai passé deux mois aux Etats-Unis, j'étais parti avec la vague crainte d'un Grand Remplacement par les Hispaniques et je reviens rassuré. Tocqueville est ma lecture de chevet et je n'aimerais pas trop qu'on me gâche la démocratie à l'américaine. Eh bien, bonne nouvelle, les Hispaniques s'intègrent très bien, ils travaillent dur, ils parlent de plus en plus anglais au fur et à mesure de leur ascension sociale, et finissent même par refuser l'espagnol ! Le plein-emploi et le patriotisme intègrent tout le monde et, si la machine à fabriquer des Français est en panne, la machine à fabriquer des Américains fonctionne à plein régime. Le chacal admire les States, il est vraiment perdu de vices.

La dernière étoile, la plus mauvaise, est bien sûr l'islamisme. Déjà il jetait sa lumière mauvaise sur le Châtenay-Malabry des années 90. La réislamisation était en marche, les élèves tombaient dans les pommes les après-midis de ramadan, les autres mois ils suspectaient les plats de la cantine et j'ai même connu un Jean Dupont ou Paul Durand qui jeûnait pour faire comme les copains. Depuis, il s'est peut-être converti.

Immense béance anthropologique. Des Occidentaux solitaires, libéraux et libertaires, trop dévorés par le démocratismes et l'égalitarisme pour croire à autre chose qu'à leur nombril. Une minorité de foi et souvent de mœurs orientales, soudée par l'Oumma, rassurée par la simplicité rustique de ses croyances, drapée dans la fierté de se débattre dans un milieu qu'elle croit hostile, persuadée d'être en état de légitime défense. Comme le dit Alain Finkielkraut, les hommes ne sont pas interchangeables, il ne suffisait pas de les laisser passer la frontière et puis de leur donner des papiers pour qu'ils se sentent tout-à-coup d'excellents Français.

Allez, pour vous remonter le moral, un petit coup de Baudelaire, cadeau du chacal. Imaginez que c'est récité par Fabrice Luchini :

« Tantôt sonnera l'heure où le divin Hasard, Où l'auguste Vertu, ton épouse encore vierge, Où le repentir même, oh la dernière auberge, Où tout te dira : Meurs, vieux lâche, il est trop tard! »

Die argentinische Tragödie

Das südamerikanische Land ist an einem Tiefpunkt angelangt. Der Linkspopulismus, der Teile Lateinamerikas ins Unglück stürzt, verbreitet sich auch in Europa.

20.02.2015, von NIKOLAS BUSSE

Was derzeit in Argentinien geschieht, hat mit Rechtsstaatlichkeit nicht viel zu tun. Ein Staatsanwalt, der den größten Anschlag in der Geschichte des Landes aufklären sollte, wird erschossen aufgefunden. Die Staatspräsidentin wartet nicht etwa die Ermittlungen ab, sondern präsentiert ihre eigenen Erklärungen: Erst behauptet sie, es sei Selbstmord gewesen, dann redet sie von Mord durch den Geheimdienst. Die Justiz kann nach einem Monat noch nicht sagen, wie der Staatsanwalt umkam, will aber auf der Grundlage seiner Arbeit Anklage gegen die Präsidentin wegen Strafvereitelung im Amt erheben – was die Regierung einen versuchten „Justizputsch“ nennt. Das Volk demonstriert und ist nach Umfragen überzeugt davon, dass der Fall nie aufgeklärt wird.



Autor: Nikolas Busse, Jahrgang 1969, stellvertretender verantwortlicher Redakteur für Außenpolitik. Folgen: _

Mit diesem Skandal ist das südamerikanische Land, das sich stets seine europäische Tradition zugute gehalten hat, an einem Tiefpunkt seiner politischen Entwicklung angelangt. Cristina Kirchner steht in einer langen Reihe von Präsidenten, die die öffentlichen Institutionen ausgehöhlt haben. Politik hat in Argentinien nur noch am Rande mit Streit um die besten Lösungen fürs Gemeinwohl zu tun. Sie ist zu einem großen Geschäft verkommen, in dem sich die Machtcliquen bereichern, das Recht beugen und die Verwaltung in Korruption halten; die Medien werden kontrolliert oder offen bekämpft. Nach der Militärdiktatur haben die Argentinier zu oft die falschen Leute gewählt, Amtsmissbrauch und Vetternwirtschaft sind durch das gesamte föderale System hindurch verbreitet.

Tragisch ist, dass es Argentinien schon einmal sehr viel besser ging. Vor hundert Jahren gehörte es zu den reichsten Ländern der Welt, die eleganten Viertel in Buenos Aires zeugen bis heute vom Wohlstand und der Hochkultur dieser Zeit. Öl, Gas, Land im Überfluss, eine der exportstärksten Agrarwirtschaften, eine gut ausgebildete Mittelschicht und eine entwickelte Industrie sollten eigentlich auch heute noch genug sein, um vierzig Millionen Einwohnern ein gutes Leben zu ermöglichen. Aber die schlechte Regierungsführung würgt die Entwicklung immer wieder ab. Unter Kirchner hat die Inflation vierzig Prozent erreicht (was die Regierung leugnet, die Menschen aber täglich spüren), sie hat Zuflucht zu Importsubstitution und Kapitalverkehrskontrollen genommen. Im Zeitalter der offenen Weltwirtschaft ist das eine ökonomische Geisterfahrt.

Die Bürger, die ihr Geld noch nicht ins Ausland geschafft haben, investieren es neuerdings in Autos, weil sie wenigstens da noch auf einen Werterhalt hoffen. Für harte Währungen wie Dollar und Euro blüht der Schwarzmarkt. Die Armutsviertel in den großen Städten wachsen, ebenso die (Drogen-)Kriminalität. Argentinische Wohnungen und Häuser werden heute mit Gitterstäben gesichert wie Gefängnisse. Entführungen, Überfälle und Morde beherrschen die Nachrichten. Als vor einem Jahr die Polizei streikte, wurden innerhalb weniger Tage ganze Einkaufsviertel geplündert. Wird es im Sommer zu heiß, fällt selbst in der Hauptstadt tagelang der Strom aus.

Viele Argentinier, vor allem in den gebildeten Schichten, machen für diese Entwicklung „Cristina“ verantwortlich, wie die Präsidentin im kumpelhaften Tonfall des Landes allerorten genannt wird. Das ist sicher nicht falsch, denn unter dem Ehepaar Kirchner (der vorige Präsident war ihr verstorbener Ehemann) wurde die Herrschaft autokratisch und planwirtschaftlich. Zur Eindämmung der enormen Geldentwertung, die auch ein großes soziales Problem ist, fuhr die Regierung nicht etwa die Finanzierung des Haushalts durch die Notenpresse zurück, sondern zwang die Händler dazu, die Preise für einen Teil der Lebensmittel einzufrieren. Und statt das Schuldenproblem endlich zu lösen, das die Wirtschaft seit nunmehr vierzehn Jahren belastet, macht sie Stimmung gegen ausländische „Geierfonds“ und leiht sich Geld aus China.

Die Wurzeln dieses Niedergangs reichen weit zurück. Der Schriftsteller Mario Vargas Llosa hat sie kürzlich mit der Bemerkung beschrieben, Argentinien sei eines Tages vom peronistischen Fieber befallen worden. In der Tat hat die Dominanz dieses politischen Denkens, das auf Verstaatlichungen, Protektionismus, Umverteilung und Nationalismus setzt, dem Land über die Jahrzehnte vermutlich mehr geschadet als alle anderen Unzulänglichkeiten seiner Gesellschaft, zu denen vor allem eine Gleichgültigkeit für die beschämende Armut der Unterschicht gehört. Kirchner hat sich stets als Verbündete des venezolanischen Sozialisten Hugo Chávez und seiner kubanischen Freunde verstanden, der sein Land allerdings noch schneller und gründlicher ruinierte als sie das ihre. Der neue Präsident, der im Oktober gewählt wird, wird wahrscheinlich wieder ein Peronist sein.

Argentinien liegt von Europa zehntausend Kilometer entfernt. Das bedeutet nicht, dass uns sein Schicksal nicht interessieren sollte. Der Linkspopulismus, der das Land und andere Teile Lateinamerikas ins Unglück gestürzt hat, findet auch in Europa immer mehr Zuspruch, siehe Spanien oder Griechenland.

Schuldenkrise

Wirtschaftsweise: „Grexit“ könnte Euroraum stärken

Vier deutsche „Wirtschaftsweise“ warnen die Griechen vor fatalen Fehlern im aktuellen Schuldenstreit. Die Regierung in Athen irre sich, wenn sie glaube, dass Griechenland unverzichtbar sei für die Währungsunion.

20.02.2015, von PHILIP PLICKERT



© DPA  Schnee in Athen

Ein Euro-Ausscheiden Griechenlands, der Grexit, würde den Währungsraum nicht zwingend schwächen, sondern könnte ihn stärken, sagen vier deutsche „Wirtschaftsweise“. „In der aktuellen Situation könnte ein Grexit – letztlich unbeabsichtigt – sogar das Gegenteil bewirken. Er könnte die Glaubwürdigkeit des heutigen institutionellen Rahmenwerks stärken und so die Integrität des Euro-Raums festigen, statt außerhalb Griechenlands Chaos auszulösen“ schreiben die Mitglieder des deutschen Sachverständigenrats Lars Feld, Christoph Schmidt, Isabel Schnabel und Volker Wieland sowie der Generalsekretär des Rates, Benjamin Weigert. Ihr Beitrag ist unten in voller Länge publiziert.



Autor: Philip Plickert, Jahrgang 1979. Redakteur in der Wirtschaft, zuständig für „Der Volkswirt“. Folgen:

Ihre Warnung ist eindeutig: „Griechenland hat eine Regierung gewählt, deren Handlungen die Situation deutlich zu verschlimmern drohen“, schreiben sie. Die griechische Regierung habe eine „fehlerhafte Analyse der wirtschaftspolitischen Alternativen und eine falsche Einschätzung der internationalen Verhandlungssituation.“



Artikel.Text

© BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK, BLUE SILVER, F.A.Z.  Animation: Was bedeutet eigentlich „Grexit“?

Die vier Wirtschaftsprofessoren wenden sich gegen die Aussage vieler Politiker in der südeuropäischen Peripherie, dass die „Austeritätspolitik“ in Griechenland gescheitert sei. Es habe in der vor fünf Jahren in Griechenland ausgebrochenen Haushalts- und Finanzkrise keine andere Möglichkeit bestanden als eine harte fiskalische Konsolidierung. Das wirtschaftliche Gesamtbild in Griechenland sei damals „katastrophal“ gewesen – und nicht etwa die Sparpolitik habe es katastrophal gemacht. Die Wirtschaftsweisen warnen vor einer Abkehr des Kurses, der Konsolidierungspolitik mit Strukturreformen verknüpft. Wenn die anderen Euro-Regierungen dies in den Verhandlungen mit Griechenland zuließen, drohe eine politische Radikalisierung in anderen Krisenländern. Populistische Parteien würden dann vermeintlich einfache Wege aus der Krise und Scheinlösungen fordern. Dies wäre fatal für den Euroraum.

Hier der Beitrag in volle Länge:

Griechenland: Makroökonomische Anpassung unvermeidlich

Von Lars P. Feld, Christoph M. Schmidt, Isabel Schnabel, Benjamin Weigert und Volker Wieland

„Die Austeritätspolitik ist gescheitert“ – so lautet das Mantra vieler Kommentatoren in Politik und Medien in Europa, am deutlichsten hörbar im angelsächsischen Raum und in südlichen Teilen des Euro-Raums (etwa Stiglitz (2015) und Wolf (2013)). Dieses Mantra nutzt die neu gewählte griechische Regierung, um die Konditionen für das zweite Rettungspaket vom Jahr 2012 mit den Euro-Partnern neu zu verhandeln. Doch dieses Mantra ist sachlich falsch und ignoriert gerade im Falle Griechenlands die eigentlichen Ursachen der Krise.

Griechenland befand sich am Ende des Jahres 2009 in einer Situation, in der die fiskalische Konsolidierung unausweichlich war und Bestandteil jeder realistischen Politikoption gewesen sein

musste. Im Oktober 2009 verdoppelte die damals neu gewählte griechische Regierung die Prognose für das laufende Budgetdefizit, eine Ankündigung, die starke Turbulenzen an den internationalen Finanzmärkten auslöste. Insgesamt offenbarte sich ein katastrophales gesamtwirtschaftliches Bild: Nach Jahren disziplinloser Finanzpolitik lag das griechische Budgetdefizit bei 15 % des Bruttoinlandsprodukts (BIP) und das Primärdefizit (ohne Berücksichtigung der Zinsaufwendungen) bei 10 %. Die Schuldenstandsquote belief sich auf 127 %, das Leistungsbilanzdefizit lag bei 10 % und die Netto-Auslandsverschuldung erreichte 87 % des BIP.

Angesichts dieses Gesamtbilds gab es nur eine Möglichkeit: Griechenland musste das Haushaltsdefizit schließen und einen Leistungsbilanzüberschuss erzielen, um die aufgelaufenen privaten und öffentlichen Schulden bedienen zu können. Auch ein Schuldenschnitt hätte zum damaligen Zeitpunkt Griechenland nicht vor dieser Anpassung bewahrt, weil das laufende Haushaltsdefizit auch ohne Schuldendienst enorm groß war.

In dieser Situation zeigten sich die europäischen Partner solidarisch mit Griechenland und vereinbarten mit Griechenland ein makroökonomisches Anpassungsprogramm und gewährten Rettungskredite. So konnte Griechenland die notwendigen Anpassungsschritte über einen deutlich längeren Zeitraum strecken (Europäische Kommission, 2012). Die Gewährung der Kredite war dabei an Haushaltskonsolidierung und Strukturreformen geknüpft. Es blieb allerdings der griechischen Regierung selbst überlassen, welche konkreten Reformschritte unternommen und wie die notwendigen Anpassungslasten in Griechenland verteilt werden sollten.

Der Fortschritt und die Einhaltung der mit der griechischen Regierung vereinbarten konkreten Umsetzungspläne wurden von den Euro Partnern überwacht, vertreten durch die sogenannte Troika. Um ein Diktat handelte es sich dabei allerdings nicht, denn es ging vielmehr darum, dass Griechenland die vereinbarten Konsolidierungsschritte und Strukturreformen tatsächlich umsetzt, sodass es auf einen selbsttragenden Wachstumspfad gelangen und die Staatsverschuldung wieder abbauen kann. Aus der Perspektive der (demokratisch legitimierten) Parlamente der Kreditgeber wäre kaum ein anderes Vorgehen denkbar gewesen, als die Kreditgewährung an die Überwachung der Verpflichtungen zu knüpfen.

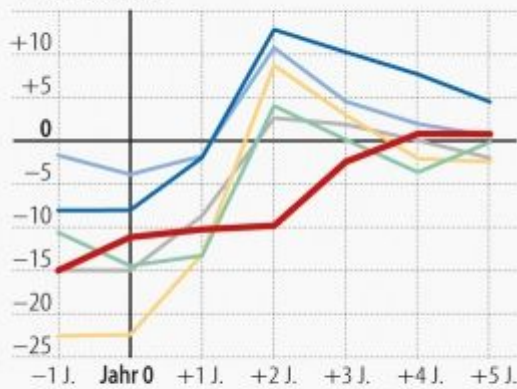
Wie laufen Anpassungen typischerweise ab?

Für eine Volkswirtschaft in der katastrophalen Situation Griechenlands macht es dem Grunde nach keinen Unterschied, ob sie im Euro-Raum verbleibt: In jedem Fall ist die Anpassung unausweichlich, verbunden mit schmerzhaften Einschnitten und starken sozialen Spannungen. Der Anpassungsprozess, den Länder im Falle von Schulden- und Wechselkurskrisen durchlaufen, folgt typischerweise einem ähnlichen Muster. Dabei spielt es keine große Rolle, ob sie erfolgreich in der Lage sind, den festen Wechselkurs zu verteidigen, oder ob sie abwerten können, um so die preisliche Wettbewerbsfähigkeit zu verbessern und die gesamtwirtschaftliche Anpassung zu unterstützen. In allen Fällen kommt es krisenbedingt zu einer abrupten Anpassung der Leistungsbilanz, verbunden mit einem Einbruch der Wirtschaftsleistung, die sich dann nachfolgend wieder erholt (Schaubild). Durchweg steigt die Arbeitslosigkeit sprunghaft an und sinkt erst, nachdem das Wachstum zurückkehrt.

Schmerzhaftes Anpassung in Griechenland unvermeidlich

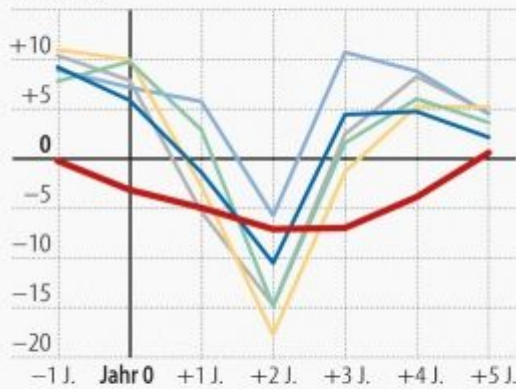
Leistungsbilanzsaldo

in Prozent des BIP



Reales Wirtschaftswachstum

in Prozent



Staaten mit Schulden- und Währungskrise

Griechenland

(Jahr 0=2009)

Südkorea

(Jahr 0=1996)

Thailand

(Jahr 0=1996)

Estland

(Jahr 0=2007)

Lettland

(Jahr 0=2007)

Litauen

(Jahr 0=2007)

Quelle: RWI nach IWF-Daten

F.A.Z.-Grafik Brocker

© F.A.Z.



Besonders interessant ist in diesem Zusammenhang die Anpassung der baltischen Staaten, die ihren festen Wechselkurs gegenüber dem Euro aufrechterhalten konnten. Dabei wurde Lettland ebenfalls von der Europäischen Union und dem Internationalen Währungsfonds finanziell unterstützt und akzeptierte im Gegenzug ein makroökonomisches Anpassungsprogramm (Purfield und Rosenberg, 2010). In jedem dieser Staaten zeigt sich, dass eine schmerzhaftes Anpassungsphase nicht zu vermeiden ist.

Deshalb sollte man die Kombination von finanziellen Hilfen und makroökonomischen Auflagen als das verstehen, was sie ist: Als ein Instrument, um die abrupte Haushaltskonsolidierung und eine drastische Anpassung der Leistungsbilanz – und damit noch größere augenblickliche Härten – zu vermeiden. Genauso ist das Anpassungsprogramm für Griechenland zu verstehen. Während die Konsolidierung der öffentlichen Haushalte über die Zeit gestreckt wurde, sollten strukturelle Reformen dafür sorgen, dass die zuvor durch öffentliche Verschuldung finanzierte Nachfrage durch privatwirtschaftliche Aktivität ersetzt wird. Die Ursache für die schmerzhaften Anpassungen der griechischen Volkswirtschaft ist nicht das Anpassungsprogramm, sondern die disziplinierte Haushaltspolitik der Vergangenheit.

Fortschritte bei der makroökonomischen Anpassung: Das Glas ist halb voll

Im Laufe der vergangenen fünf Jahre hat sich Griechenland erheblichen Reformen unterzogen und große Konsolidierungserfolge erzielt. Dass die griechische Volkswirtschaft trotz dieser bemerkenswerten Fortschritte noch weit von einem selbsttragenden Wachstumsprozess entfernt ist, ist die Folge der enormen Defizite, die zu überwinden waren. Im Herbst 2014 konnte Griechenland endlich einen positiven Primärüberschuss verzeichnen und – in konstanten Preisen berechnet – sogar ein zartes Wachstum. Die detaillierten und gewissenhaften Berichte der Troika zeichnen ein ausgewogenes Bild der bisherigen Reformfortschritte und verbleibenden Defizite. Was Griechenland jetzt am dringendsten bräuchte, wären Zeichen der politischen Verlässlichkeit und nicht der neuerlichen Unsicherheit: Wie sonst wollte man potenzielle Investoren aus dem In- und Ausland davon überzeugen, in Griechenland zu investieren?

Doch leider ist derzeit jegliche Hoffnung auf eine derartige Stabilität von der neu gewählten griechischen Regierung vom Tisch gewischt worden. Es wäre abenteuerlich, die Kapitalflucht aus

Griechenland und die stark steigenden Zinsaufschläge auf griechische Staatsanleihen auf irgendeine andere Ursache zurückführen zu wollen als auf die Ankündigungen und Handlungen der neuen griechischen Regierung.

Warum ein erneuter Schuldenschnitt nicht hilft

Die Tragfähigkeit öffentlicher Schulden hängt in erster Linie von der Bereitschaft der jeweiligen Regierung zur Rückzahlung ab. Die griechische Regierung hat es demnach weitgehend selbst in der Hand, ob sie bereit ist, ihren Verpflichtungen nachzukommen oder nicht. Dabei muss sie nicht zuletzt abwägen zwischen der unmittelbaren Entlastung eines (partiellen) Schuldenschnitts beim Zinsdienst und den negativen Auswirkungen auf die künftigen Möglichkeiten der Schuldenaufnahme am Finanzmarkt. Daher wäre es nur dann sinnvoll, eine staatliche Insolvenz zu riskieren, wenn sich auf diese Weise eine Negativspirale immer größerer Schuldenaufnahme vermeiden ließe.

Bei dieser Einschätzung sind insbesondere zwei Aspekte wichtig: zum einen der bestehende Schuldenstand in Relation zur Wirtschaftsleistung, also die Schuldenstandsquote; zum anderen die Differenz zwischen dem für diese Schulden relevanten Zinssatz und der aktuellen Wachstumsrate. Volkswirtschaften können gegebenenfalls eine sehr hohe Schuldenstandsquote tragen, wenn die Wachstumsrate im Vergleich zum Zinssatz hoch ist. Für Griechenland zeigt sich, dass es keineswegs durch den Schuldendienst erdrückt wird. Dies liegt zum einen an dem erheblichen Schuldenschnitt, den die privaten Gläubiger im März 2012 akzeptiert hatten, und zum anderen an der Umstrukturierung der Schulden durch die öffentlichen Gläubiger im November 2012.

Dabei erweist sich die Bereitschaft der Mitgliedstaaten des Euro-Raums, Griechenland mit Krediten zu versorgen, die erst in Jahrzehnten zu tilgen und mit sehr niedrigen Zinsen verbunden sind, als die wichtigere Maßnahme. Zum Teil wurden dabei Zinszahlungen über Jahre hinweg gestundet. In der Konsequenz genießt Griechenland bei seinem Schuldendienst aktuell sehr günstige Bedingungen. Der durchschnittlich zu entrichtende Zinssatz liegt bei 2,3 %, die jährlichen Zinsverpflichtungen belaufen sich auf etwa 4 % der Wirtschaftsleistung, wobei der Großteil dieser Zinszahlungen sogar bis zu Beginn des kommenden Jahrzehnts aufgeschoben wurde.

Einige derjenigen Mitgliedstaaten, die Griechenland durch Kredite unterstützen, unterliegen selbst deutlich ungünstigeren Konditionen. So weist beispielsweise Italien einen durchschnittlichen Zinssatz von 3,3 % und Zinszahlungen von 4,3 % der Wirtschaftsleistung auf. Daher könnte ein weiterer Schuldenschnitt weder die Situation für Griechenland spürbar weiter entspannen, noch ließe er sich gegenüber den anderen europäischen Mitgliedstaaten rechtfertigen.

Gefahr einer „politischen“ statt finanziellen Ansteckung

Im Vergleich zum Jahr 2010 finden die aktuellen Verhandlungen in einem grundlegend veränderten institutionellen Rahmen statt und in einem anderen ökonomischen Umfeld. Im Jahr 2010 wäre ein Grexit, also ein Ausscheiden Griechenlands aus dem Euro-Raum und die Neueinführung einer nationalen Währung, mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit mit Ansteckungseffekten auf die internationalen Finanzmärkten verbunden gewesen, welche die anderen Mitgliedstaaten erheblich in Mitleidenschaft gezogen hätten. Dies zeigte sich beispielsweise darin, dass selbst das griechische Rettungspaket nicht verhindern konnte, dass kurz darauf Portugal und Irland den Zugang zu den Finanzmärkten effektiv verloren und um finanzielle Hilfen ersucht haben. Die zu dieser Zeit ergriffenen, entschlossenen

Rettungsmaßnahmen demonstrierten den Willen der Euro-Mitgliedstaaten, die Integrität des gemeinsamen Währungsraums zu erhalten.

Heute stellen sich die Umstände allerdings ganz anders dar. Erstens wurde in der Zwischenzeit ein institutionelles Rahmenwerk – insbesondere die Bankenunion und der Europäische Stabilitätsmechanismus (ESM) – geschaffen, das ein starkes Bekenntnis der Mitgliedstaaten zur Integrität des Euro-Raums darstellt. Zweitens sind heute die Mitgliedstaaten des Euro-Raums Griechenlands wichtigste Gläubiger, und der europäische Bankensektor ist in einer besseren Verfassung als im Jahr 2010. Drittens sind diejenigen Volkswirtschaften, die damals noch am stärksten von den Ansteckungseffekten betroffen oder bedroht waren, also Irland, Portugal, Spanien und Italien, in einer besseren wirtschaftlichen Situation: Sie haben in der Zwischenzeit umfassende Maßnahmen der fiskalischen Konsolidierung und strukturelle Reformen durchgeführt.

Viertens hat die Europäische Zentralbank die Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT) angekündigt und Maßnahmen der quantitativen Lockerung beschlossen. Vor dem Hintergrund all dieser Veränderungen ist es recht unwahrscheinlich, dass internationale Investoren die Integrität des Euro-Raums erneut in Zweifel ziehen werden – unabhängig davon, ob Griechenland ein Mitglied des Euro-Raums bleibt oder nicht. Die Drohung eines Austritts durch Griechenland kann somit die anderen Euro-Mitgliedstaaten kaum noch schrecken.

Ungeachtet der veränderten Umstände nutzt die neue griechische Regierung in den aktuellen Verhandlungen aktiv die Drohkulisse eines Austritts, vor allem die Ansteckungseffekte auf die Verhandlungspartner. Dabei könnte sich die griechische Regierung jedoch verspekulieren. In der aktuellen Situation könnte ein Grexit – letztlich unbeabsichtigt – sogar das Gegenteil bewirken. Er könnte die Glaubwürdigkeit des heutigen institutionellen Rahmenwerks stärken und so die Integrität des Euro-Raums festigen, statt außerhalb Griechenlands Chaos auszulösen.

Europa und der Euro-Raum sind auf Verträgen aufgebaut, die von demokratisch legitimierten Regierungen ratifiziert wurden und daher nicht einseitig von neu gewählten Regierungen verändert werden können. Allerdings ist Europa eine Vereinigung souveräner Staaten, sodass jeder Mitgliedstaat jederzeit das Recht hat, die Verträge aufzukündigen, also den Euro-Raum oder die Europäische Union zu verlassen. Eine grundlegende Änderung des makroökonomischen Anpassungsprogramms in dem Sinne, dass der vereinbarte Anpassungspfad verändert wird – damit ist nicht der Maßnahmenmix gemeint – würde nicht nur dazu führen, dass andere Krisenländer eine ähnliche Neuverhandlung forderten. Vielmehr würden die neu geschaffenen oder reformierten Institutionen, die den Euro-Raum künftig festigen sollen, beschädigt und infrage gestellt werden. Es würden Zweifel aufkommen, ob sie in der Lage wären, künftige Krisen zu vermeiden und zu lösen. Eine Währungsunion, deren Mitgliedstaaten eine souveräne Haushalts- und Wirtschaftspolitik verfolgen, kann nur dann stabil bleiben, wenn sie durch bindende Fiskalregeln geprägt ist. Sollten sich die Institutionen, die zu deren Einhaltung eingerichtet wurden, bereits bei ihrem ersten Einsatz als ineffektiv erweisen, wäre die Zukunft des Euro-Raums erheblich gefährdet.

Die aktuellen Ansteckungsgefahren sind daher vor allem politischer Natur. Es ist leicht vorstellbar, was passieren würde, falls die Euro-Mitgliedstaaten tatsächlich der griechischen Argumentation folgten, die Verknüpfung von Haushaltskonsolidierung und Strukturreformen sei der falsche Kurs und müsse aufgegeben werden. Eine weitere Stärkung politischer Strömungen, die genau dies

fordern, ließe sich dann auch in anderen europäischen Ländern kaum vermeiden. So könnten leicht die Versprechungen populistischer Parteien verfangen, die vermeintlich leichte Auswege aus der Krise versprechen, wonach Konsolidierung und marktwirtschaftlich orientierte Reformen vermieden werden können. In der Konsequenz würde das gerade neu gewonnene Vertrauen internationaler Investoren in die Zukunft des Euro-Raums beschädigt. Die Folge wäre eine massive Kapitalflucht aus dem Euro-Raum und eine ernsthafte Bedrohung für dessen Fortbestand.

Wie kann es weiter gehen?

Was sollte Griechenland in dieser Situation tun? Die schlechteste Alternative wäre sicherlich eine Rückkehr zu dem Zustand, den die griechische Volkswirtschaft im Jahr 2010 erreicht hatte. Insbesondere wäre eine erneute Aufblähung der staatlichen Beschäftigung ein mehr als fragwürdiges Rezept. Die griechische Öffentlichkeit wäre gut beraten einzusehen, dass sich die Dinge bei den falschen Weichenstellungen, die sich in den jüngst getroffenen Entscheidungen der neuen griechischen Regierung offenbaren, noch deutlich zum Schlechteren hin verändern könnten. Dies wäre insbesondere dann der Fall, wenn das Land den Euro-Raum verlasse. Statt wehmütig zurückzuschauen, sollte Griechenland jetzt alles daran setzen, den bereits eingeleiteten Aufbau eines funktionierenden Staatswesens und einer funktionierenden Marktwirtschaft fortzusetzen.

Betrachtet man beispielsweise das System der Steuererhebung, dann zeigt sich, dass die bisherigen Reformschritte mit Hilfen der europäischen Partner in die richtige Richtung gewiesen hatten. Die Troika hatte der griechischen Regierung ja keineswegs untersagt, Steuern bei den Wohlhabenden einzutreiben, sondern sie im Gegenteil eher darin unterstützt. Griechenland durchlebt aktuell sehr harte Zeiten. Aber die Tragödie ist eine andere: Griechenland hat eine Regierung gewählt, deren Handlungen die Situation deutlich zu verschlimmern drohen. Es ist zu befürchten, dass sie den absehbaren wirtschaftlichen Aufschwung abwürgen, weil sie auf einer fehlerhaften Analyse der wirtschaftspolitischen Alternativen und einer falschen Einschätzung der internationalen Verhandlungssituation aufbauen.

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EDITORIAL

The Ukraine Humiliation

Putin marches over Merkel, Hollande and Obama.

In the sorry annals of "cease-fires," the recent fiasco in southern Ukraine will have to rank among the most instantly humiliating. For Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko, who was bludgeoned by his friends into accepting it. And for Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande and President Obama, who did the bludgeoning and have since let Vladimir Putin violate it with impunity. Ukraine is paying today in more lost territory, but the NATO alliance may also pay soon enough.

Even before negotiators left the room in Minsk, Belarus, earlier this month, Russian troops and their rebel frontmen accelerated their assault on the rail town of Debaltseve. Mr. Poroshenko protested but the rebels claimed the town wasn't part of the agreement. Ukrainian troops were forced to retreat willy-nilly through a bloody gantlet with an unknown number killed or captured.

"Obviously it's bad to lose," chirped Mr. Putin about the retreat, during a visit to his autocratic ally in Hungary. "But life is life and it still goes on." Unless you were a Ukrainian killed during the non-cease-fire.

The result is that Mr. Putin has again expanded the Russian rump state of Novorossiya inside Ukraine. He may now decide to consolidate those gains and sit tight -- for a while. But that's what the West's Russia-appeasement lobby predicted a year ago after Mr. Putin grabbed Crimea.

Then he moved on Luhansk and Donetsk. After a previous cease-fire in September, his troops and proxies advanced along the Sea of Azov coast toward Mariupol. Sooner rather than later the shelling of that key port city will begin again. Meanwhile, the Pentagon says Russian troops and weapons continue to flow into Ukraine.

But Mr. Hollande is undaunted in his devotion to the illusory cease-fire. "The four leaders agreed to rigorously implement the entirety of the package of measures" agreed to in Minsk, said the office of France's President on Thursday after a conference call with leaders from Ukraine, Russia and Germany. "Violations of the cease-fire observed in recent days were condemned." Note the passive tense, which fits the passive policy.

As for the U.S., Secretary of State John Kerry called Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday and pressed him "to stop Russian and separatist attacks on Ukrainian positions in Debaltseve and other violations of the cease-fire," as spokesman Jen Psaki put it. She added that "we don't consider it [the cease-fire] is dead," so the Ukrainians have that going for them.

Here and there, amid this self-deception, a Western leader is willing to admit to a harsher reality. The latest is Britain's Defense Minister Michael Fallon, who said Thursday that the tactics of deceptive invasion that Russia has used to destabilize Ukraine pose a "very real and present danger" to the Baltic states, which are members of NATO.

"I'm worried about Putin," Mr. Fallon said, according to the London Times. "I'm worried about his pressure on the Baltics, the way he is testing NATO."

He should be worried, all the more so after the latest Minsk humiliation. The cutthroat in the Kremlin wants a Greater Russia that he can dominate. He wants a cowed West that will leave him to it. And after watching Western leaders beg for his mercy after Minsk, he can see a clearer path to getting both.

Frankreich ist und bleibt reformunfähig

Der vielbeschworene Geist nach den Anschlägen von Paris hat sich schnell verflüchtigt. Nicht einmal ein Arbeitsmarktreformchen geht leicht von der Hand. Die Regierung ist erschöpft und flügelahm.

Von Sascha Lehnartz

Sechs Wochen ist es her, da schien ganz Frankreich von einer Woge des Gemeinsinns erfasst. Millionen demonstrierten in Paris unter dem Schock der Anschläge auf die Satire-Zeitschrift "Charlie Hebdo" und einen jüdischen Supermarkt für die Werte der Republik. Die Citoyens wollten ihren Feinden zeigen, dass diese Republik noch immer "eins und unteilbar" sei, wie es seit 1792 heißt. Doch spätestens seit dem vergangenen Dienstag ist es mit der wacker geschauspielerten republikanischen Einigkeit vorbei. Premierminister Manuel Valls musste zum verfassungstechnischen Nothammer greifen, um ein moderat ambitioniertes Reformpaket durch die Nationalversammlung zu prügeln.

Das nach dem Wirtschaftsminister benannte "Gesetz Macron" über "Wachstum, wirtschaftliche Aktivität und Chancengleichheit" enthält unter anderem so revolutionäre Maßnahmen wie die Genehmigung von Fernbussen und die Ausweitung der Sonntagsarbeit von fünf auf zwölf Sonntage im Jahr.

Das Risiko, dass dieser sozialverträgliche Reformkatalog Frankreich in eine neoliberale Start-up-Economy verwandelt, ist eher gering. Er hätte aber durchaus eine gewisse Signalwirkung entfalten können: dass die Regierung Hollande ihren Reformwillen noch nicht vollkommen verloren hat, dass Frankreich nach langem Lavieren und Lamentieren nun doch zumindest in die richtige Spur findet.

111 Stunden Diskussion, 559 Änderungen

Hätte. **Denn von der Notwendigkeit dieser Maßnahmen hat die Regierung nicht einmal ihre eigenen Abgeordneten überzeugen können.** Von jenen der Opposition zu schweigen. Nach insgesamt 82 Stunden Debatten in den zuständigen Kommissionen, nach weiteren 111 Stunden Diskussionen in der Nationalversammlung, nach 559 eingearbeiteten Änderungsanträgen (davon 387 von den Sozialisten) **gab es immer noch 45 sozialistische Parlamentarier, die nicht bereit waren, für das stark abgemilderte Gesetz zu stimmen.**

Angesichts einer drohenden Abstimmungsniederlage **griff Valls in die konstitutionelle Trickkiste. Die Regierung verabschiedete das Gesetz ohne Abstimmung – und stellte im Gegenzug die Vertrauensfrage. Dieses pfiffige Manöver sieht der Verfassungsartikel 49/3 vor.** Es funktionierte. **Am Donnerstagabend trauten sich dann doch nicht genügend sozialistische Abgeordnete, gegen die eigene Regierung zu stimmen – weil sie bei der dann fälligen Parlamentsneuwahl selbst nicht mehr wiedergewählt worden wären.**

Der Nachteil am Artikel 49/3 ist, dass man ihn nur einmal pro Legislaturperiode einsetzen darf. Die Regierung hat damit ihre schärfste Waffe zur Disziplinierung der eigenen Truppe verschossen.

Hollandes Ehrgeiz ist endgültig erschöpft

Für die verbleibenden zwei Jahre bis zur nächsten Präsidentschaftswahl verheißt das wenig Gutes. Eine autoritätsschwache Regierung verfügt nun kaum noch über Mittel, um ihre renitentesten Abgeordneten zu zügeln.

Es deutet deshalb einiges darauf hin, dass mit dem schwachbrüstigen "Gesetz Macron" der reformatorische Ehrgeiz des Präsidenten François Hollande endgültig erschöpft sein dürfte. Da die verabschiedeten Maßnahmen nicht konsequent genug sind, bedeutet es im Klartext, dass Europas zweitgrößte Volkswirtschaft weiterhin nicht auf die benötigte Tourenzahl kommen wird, um die Arbeitslosigkeit und Staatsverschuldung spürbar zu reduzieren.

Frankreich wird in diesem Jahr 44,34 Milliarden Euro allein für Schuldzinsen ausgeben. Nach dem Bildungsetat ist das der größte Posten im Staatshaushalt. Es ist jedoch nicht allein die Regierungspartei, die in Frankreich ein unerquickliches Schauspiel bietet. Während in Umfragen rund 70 Prozent der Franzosen Zustimmung zur Notwendigkeit von Strukturreformen äußern, übt sich die Opposition in einer ebenso ermüdenden wie fruchtlosen Obstruktionspolitik.

In einer bizarr anmutenden Allianz mit den Kommunisten sprachen die Abgeordneten der konservativen UMP und des Liberalen Zentrums einer Regierung das Misstrauen aus, die gerade in Ansätzen jene Reformen verabschiedet hat, über welche die Konservativen unter Nicolas Sarkozy fünf Jahre lang redeten – ohne sie zu beschließen.

Auch die Opposition ist keinen Deut besser

Wäre der republikanische "Geist des 11. Januar" mehr gewesen als heiße Luft, hätte Christian Jacob, der Fraktionsführer der UMP, seine Truppen eingeschworen, aus schierer nationaler Verantwortung ein Reformpaket durchzuwinken, von dem jeder, der so viel wirtschaftlichen Sachverstand hat wie ein trockenes Baguette, weiß, dass Frankreich es dringend benötigt.

Diese Opposition, die sich notwendigen Reformen verweigert, bloß weil sie Opposition ist, ist auch kein Hoffnungsträger. Sie trägt bloß mit dazu bei, das massive Misstrauen, das die Franzosen ihrer politischen Klasse inzwischen entgegenbringen, zu vertiefen.

Frankreichs tristes Dilemma besteht darin, dass es über eine erschöpfte Regierung verfügt, die ihre realitätsfernsten Abgeordneten nicht kontrollieren kann, und über eine bürgerliche Opposition, die außer dem leicht gruseligen Szenario einer Sarkozy-Wiederauferstehung nichts zu bieten hat. Es ist traurig genug mit anzuschauen, wie die beiden großen politischen Blöcke im Nachbarland seit Jahren an der Aufgabe scheitern, die notwendigen politischen Entscheidungen zu treffen, um den Bürgern Frankreichs wieder eine Perspektive zu bieten, die dem Potenzial dieser Nation entspricht.

Wer profitiert, ist Marine le Pen

Noch deprimierender ist nur der Blick auf das, was sich für Europa zusammenbraut, wenn die französische Lähmung anhält. Denn früher oder später wird es Marine Le Pen sein, die aus dem Verdruss der Franzosen über ihre politische Klasse Kapital schlagen wird.

Am Freitag kam Angela Merkel mit François Hollande in Paris zusammen. Sie sprachen über das Übliche: die Ukraine, die G 7, die Griechen und das, was es für Europa so zu tun gibt. **Bei aller berechtigten Kritik an Hollande – man stelle sich einmal ganz kurz vor, was nach ihm drohen könnte.**

Was es für Europa bedeuten würde, wenn sich die Bundeskanzlerin demnächst **mit Marine Le Pen zu treffen hätte, deren Wirtschaftsprogramm in etwa dem von Syriza entspricht.**

Wenn die Kanzlerin dann gelegentlich mit der moskaufinanzierten Madame Le Pen nach Moskau reisen dürfte, um dort mit Putin über das Baltikum zu verhandeln. Es wäre das Ende des Europas, das wir kennen. Und es ist auch der Job französischer Parlamentarier, dies zu verhindern.

Griechenland muss gerettet werden

Der Brüsseler Kompromiss ist gut. Denn Griechenland zu retten, ist europäische Pflicht.

23.02.2015, von **PETER CARSTENS**

Wieder so ein Kompromiss aus Brüssel. Und wieder feinziseliertes Diplomaten-Babylonisch. Aus dem jeder Politiker die Erfolge herauslesen kann, die er zu Hause seiner Öffentlichkeit präsentieren möchte. Und das ist gut.



Autor: Peter Carstens, Jahrgang 1962, politischer Korrespondent der Frankfurter Allgemeinen Sonntagszeitung in Berlin. Folgen:

Es ist gut für Griechenland, für Europa und für uns. Der griechische Finanzminister nannte das „konstruktive Mehrdeutigkeit“ und beschrieb mit dieser schönen Formulierung ein Erfolgsgeheimnis der europäischen Einigung. Griechenlands Regierung bekommt nun mehr Zeit. Ihre Geldgeber werden die finanzpolitischen Zwangsjacken der aktuellen Athener Frühlingsmode anpassen. Dass daraus Flügel würden, mit denen sich eine griechische Koalition aus Links- und Rechtsradikalen in die warmen Lüfte und über alle Verträge und Verpflichtungen aufschwingen könnte, muss trotzdem niemand befürchten.

Griechenland habe wahrscheinlich eine Niederlage erlitten, schrieb ein amerikanischer Wirtschaftsprofessor gestern in der „New York Times“. Aber nur dann, wenn es sie „auch als solche akzeptiere“. Wer so denkt und schreibt – und das tun auch in Europa viele –, hantiert mit Schablonen. Fortschritte bei der Europäischen Einigung haben ihre Grundlage seit Jahrzehnten in einer Kultur des Kompromisses, wenn nicht in einer Kultur des Unbestimmten. Natürlich kann man bei Brüsseler Verhandlungen verlieren: Geld, Ansehen sogar künftige Wahlen. Umgekehrt kann geschicktes Auftreten zu Siegen führen.

Die politische Kunst im geeinten Europa besteht aber darin, eine Niederlage nie vollkommen oder einen Sieg überwältigend erscheinen zu lassen. So macht Putin Politik in der Ukraine. So haben sie die Amerikaner im Irak gemacht. Die europäische Politik der Nachkriegszeit könnte man dagegen unter das weise Motto „Respice finem“ stellen: Bedenke das Ende. Klingt altmodisch. Hilft aber aus falschen Träumen in eine europäische Wirklichkeit, die zu wahren und achten sich wirklich lohnt.

Jeder kann leicht erkennen, welches Leid und welche Zerstörung die Verfechter harter Linien über Europa gebracht haben. Dazu muss man nicht ins neunzehnte Jahrhundert reisen oder bei Adolf Hitler landen: Die Balkan-Kriege mit ihren Hunderttausenden Toten und Geschändeten sind noch nicht lange her, der mörderische Kampf um die Ukraine dauert an. Dem hält EU-Europa seine diplomatischen Mahlwerke entgegen, die Konflikte der Staaten und Gesellschaften zerkleinern, zerbröseln und am Ende in den Staub von gestern verwandeln. Das dauert oft lange, denn Europa ist nicht nur in Landschaft und Kultur vielfältig, sondern auch in Charakteren und Haltungen.

Darüber kann man sich ärgern. Und wahrscheinlich gibt es in Europa derzeit keinen Staat, der sich so destruktiv präsentieren würde wie die griechischen Regierungen der letzten Jahre. Das hat nicht nur die Finanzminister verdrossen. Es hat Europa Geld, Zeit und Nerven gekostet. Die Regierungen der Griechen wechseln. Die griechische Nation bleibt. Deswegen ist es richtig, es auch im Interesse der Griechen mit den jeweiligen Regierungen immer wieder neu zu versuchen.

Politische geht vor ökonomischer Vernunft

Wahrscheinlich wäre es ökonomisch verkraftbar oder vielleicht finanzpolitisch sogar richtig, Griechenland aus dem Euroraum zu komplimentieren. Es würde ein neuer Wind durch Europa wehen. Aber wer Wind sät, muss auch damit rechnen, Sturm zu ernten. Ein „Grexit“ würde Bitterkeit und Wut, ja Hass nach Europa tragen – in einem Ausmaß, wie wir es Gott sei Dank schon lange nicht mehr kennen. Und viel davon würde sich gegen Deutschland richten.

Politik und Finanzwissenschaft sind eben nicht dasselbe: Kanzler Kohl war 1990 von Finanzökonomen dringend geraten worden, die Ostdeutschen bei der Einführung der D-Mark mit den Währungsrealitäten zu konfrontieren. Aber Kohl wollte die Einheit der Deutschen – aber nicht dadurch, dass alle aus dem Osten in den Westen wanderten. Er schlug die ökonomisch vernünftigen, aber politisch irrsinnigen Ratschläge in den Wind. Das Zusammenwachsen der Nation war ihm wichtiger als der Wechselkurs. Mit Europa ist es ähnlich.

Die halbstark auftretende Athener Regierung hat in den letzten Wochen mächtig provoziert – Schäuble und Merkel als Nazis schmähen lassen, die EU-Finanzpolitik als eine Art Holocaust dargestellt und die Verrechnung von Eurokrediten mit Weltkriegsschulden verlangt. Die weltfremden Darbietungen des griechischen Finanzministers haben auch hinter verschlossenen Türen zu einer raschen Solidarisierung der anderen Europäer geführt: Ein Blick in das bedrohlich ernste Gesicht von Wolfgang Schäuble sagte schon alles.

Aber dann begannen Papiere zu zirkulieren, Telefone zu vibrieren; Vorabreden entstanden. Am Ende stand ein Kompromiss, dessen Haltbarkeit ungewiss und dessen Deutung vielfältig ist. Der Brüsseler Kompromiss, der soundsovielhundertste in all den Jahren, ist wieder nur ein Zwischenschritt. Ob am Ende alles gut wird, weiß man nicht. Aber es auf zivilisierte Art bis zum Umfallen zu versuchen ist eine lohnende, eine europäische Sache. Und Pflicht.

114,153

Greece Can Pay Its Debts in Full, but It Won't

The signs for Greece's creditors aren't propitious

Greece and its eurozone creditors are poised for another round of tough negotiations over extending its bailout program, after Germany summarily rejected a request for an extension sent by Athens. Charles Forelle reports. Photo: Getty Images

By **STEPHEN FIDLER**

Updated Feb. 19, 2015 6:59 p.m. ET

[226 COMMENTS](#)

The Greece crisis is reinforcing a cardinal rule of sovereign-debt crises: It isn't whether a government can pay what it owes, it's whether it wants to.

ANALYSIS

The new left-wing government in Greece is seeking to reduce debts it says it can't pay; its finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, has called his own country bankrupt and insolvent. It has initiated negotiations—which continue in Brussels on Friday—with other eurozone governments to reduce the burden its debt represents.

Tensions were high ahead of the Brussels meeting. [German and Greek officials traded barbs throughout the day](#) Thursday after Berlin flatly dismissed Athens's request to extend its bailout program.

WSJ's Stephen Fidler joins MoneyBeat to explain that the Greece crisis is reinforcing a cardinal rule of sovereign-debt crises: It isn't whether a government can pay what it owes, it's whether it wants to. Photo: Getty

Both capitals appeared to be staking out their positions ahead of the talks, underscoring how [ties between the two have frayed](#) since Greece's left-wing Syriza party, led by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, swept to power last month on its promise to scrap the unpopular bailout.

Nobody is claiming—as they might of a bankrupt company—that Greece doesn't have the wherewithal to pay back all its €320 billion-plus (\$365 billion) of foreign debt in full: The assets of the country dwarf that figure.

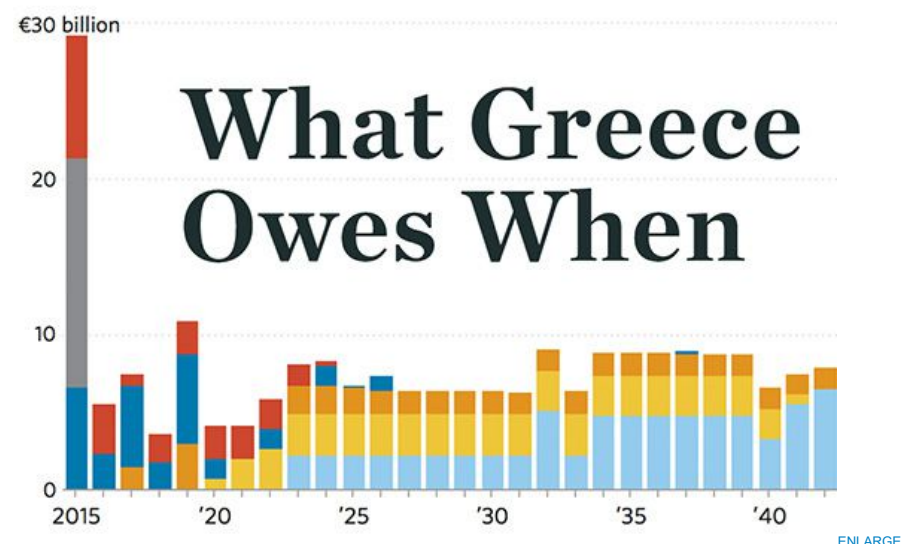
What is in question is whether the Greek government can levy taxes or charges on its people—or can sell assets—sufficient to service its debts and still do all the other things Greeks expect it to do.

Sovereign bankruptcies are different animals from corporate bankruptcies, said Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff in their 2009 book “This Time It's Different.” Lenders simply don't have the same enforceable rights to seize assets from governments as they do with companies and individuals.

However, “in most instances, with enough pain and suffering, a determined debtor country can usually repay foreign creditors,” they said.

The authors cite the example of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who forced Romanians to shiver through freezing winters with little or no heat and made factories close through want of electricity so he could repay the \$9 billion his government owed to foreign banks.

Ultimately, that didn't work out too well for the Romanian leader, who was executed by firing squad in 1989 after a show trial. For other leaders, the penalties may not be so savage. But political careers and sometimes a country's political stability depend on the outcomes.



One reason that Germany—[now Greece's largest creditor](#)—and other members of the eurozone are angry over Mr. Tsipras's aggressive drive to secure more relief is that they believe Greece can repay its debts.

Athens argues that its [debt-servicing schedule](#) will force it to run a so-called primary surplus—a budget surplus before interest payments—equivalent to 4.5% of gross domestic product next year and for the indefinite future. That, it says, is just not politically sustainable.

Nonsense, say its creditors; such budget performances aren't unusual.

In its June 2011 monthly bulletin, the European Central Bank cited four other eurozone countries that did just that or more in recent history: Belgium (1993-2004), Italy (1995-2000), Ireland (1988-2000) and Finland (1998-2003). Even Greece managed it from 1994 to 1999.

In just about all of these cases, countries were pushing debt down to prepare for their entrance into the European Monetary Union.

“If the country was willing to accept these surpluses when preparing for EMU, one should be able to assume that the same policy should be acceptable as the price of staying in the euro,” argues Daniel Gros, director of the Brussels-based Centre for European Policy Studies.

Also, creditors say that Greece's debt-servicing burden isn't excessive, thanks to the concessions its government creditors already made to lower interest rates and extend loan maturities.

According to data from the Greek government, interest payments fell from 7.3% in 2011 to about 4.2% of GDP last year. Thanks to an interest-rate holiday granted by the creditors until 2022, Greece has to find less in cash: A government estimate from last year suggested the expected interest bill in cash would fall to just 2.2% of GDP in 2020.

That isn't high when compared with some other countries.

In 2013, the Portuguese government paid 5% of GDP in interest, Italy paid 4.8% and Ireland 4.4%.

This benign assessment, however, ignores some difficulties. Some years will be more problematic: In 2015 and 2019 the debt-repayment bill will be high, and in 2022 all the forgone interest from the previous 10 years comes due.

Furthermore, the budget surpluses of the 1990s were generated with what was then seen as the optimistic prospect of joining the euro, rather than the unappetizing prospect after a long and very deep recession of making sure foreign creditors are happy.

And that last factor is also relevant. A significant proportion of the debt of most European governments is held by their own citizens. If Italy or Belgium suspend payments on their debts, their own citizens will suffer. There is thus a domestic constituency arguing for government debt to be paid.

For Greece, that isn't the case. The vast majority of its debts are held by foreign governments, which don't get to vote in Greek elections.

Mr. Rogoff cites the following rule of thumb: It is politically difficult for any government to sustain over a long period debt-servicing payments to foreigners of more than about 2% of GDP.

As for almost all sovereign debtors, then, it's about the Greek government's willingness to pay the political price needed to service its debts in full.

In that respect, the signs for Greece's creditors aren't propitious.

The question becomes not really whether they will be repaid in full, but how they won't be: whether it will be through negotiation, or whether this or a future government will take matters into its own hands.

Arm auf dem Papier

Die Löhne steigen, der private Konsum kennt kaum noch Grenzen. Trotzdem soll die Armut in Deutschland so groß sein wie noch nie. Möglich macht das ein statistischer Trick.

21.02.2015, von SEBASTIAN BALZTER

Armut ist keine Erfindung der Statistiker. Es ist deshalb eine Schande, das der Armutsbericht, den der Paritätische Wohlfahrtsverband in dieser Woche vorgelegt hat, genau diesen Eindruck hinterlässt. Nie gab es in Deutschland so viele Erwerbstätige wie heute. Die Löhne steigen dank üppiger Tarifabschlüsse auf breiter Front. Die Unternehmen können sich das leisten, weil sie blendende Geschäfte machen. Der private Konsum kennt kaum noch Grenzen. Trotzdem behauptet der Bericht: „Es gibt keinen Zweifel: Die Armut in Deutschland ist auf Rekordhoch.“

Ein statistischer Trick macht es möglich, dass die Armut auf dem Papier zunimmt, obwohl sich die Lebensverhältnisse in Wirklichkeit seit Jahren günstig entwickeln. Denn als arm gilt für den Armutsbericht per Definition, wer weniger als 60 Prozent des durchschnittlichen Nettoeinkommens zur Verfügung hat. In Deutschland lag die auf diese Weise festgelegte Armutsgrenze für ein Ehepaar mit zwei Kindern im Jahr 2013 beispielsweise bei 1873 Euro im Monat. Ob das noch genug oder schon zu wenig ist für ein menschenwürdiges Leben, hängt von vielen Faktoren ab – vor allem von der je nach Wohnort unterschiedlichen Höhe der Miete. Sicher dürfte aber sein, dass sich nicht jede vierköpfige Familie als arm bezeichnet, die mit 1873 Euro im Monat auskommt.

Die Krux mit dem „relativen Armutsbegriff“

Dass der Armutsbericht auf regionale und individuelle Unterschiede keine Rücksicht nimmt, ist indes nicht sein größter Fehler. Viel schlimmer sind die absurden Folgen, die der sogenannte „relative Armutsbegriff“ für die Abbildung von wirtschaftlicher Dynamik hat. Denn die 60-Prozent-Grenze, eben die relative Definition von Armut, sorgt dafür, dass es immer Armut geben wird, solange es Unterschiede bei den Einkommen gibt. Verdoppeln sich in einer Gesellschaft alle Einkommen, verdoppelt sich nach dieser Interpretation nämlich automatisch auch die Armutsgrenze – und es gelten genauso viele Menschen als arm wie vorher, auch wenn sie plötzlich viel mehr Geld zur Verfügung haben.

So lösen sich allgemeine Wohlstandsgewinne im Handumdrehen auf. Umgekehrt lässt selbst eine äußerst scharfe Wirtschaftskrise nach diesem Modell die Zahl der Armen nicht steigen. Halbieren sich alle Einkommen, sinkt auch die Armutsgrenze entsprechend – und die Zahl der Armen bleibt in der Statistik unverändert. Das geht an der Lebenswirklichkeit vorbei.

Es geht im Armutsbericht also gar nicht um Armut, sondern um Einkommensunterschiede. Auf den ersten Blick mag dieser Ansatz noch nicht einmal ganz abwegig sein: Verhaltensforscher wissen schließlich, dass Menschen ihr eigenes Glück oder Unglück, Erfolg oder Misserfolg nicht für sich genommen, sondern immer im Vergleich mit ihren Freunden, Kollegen, Nachbarn oder Promis bewerten. Problematisch ist es aber, wenn daraus ein Auftrag an die Politik formuliert wird, wie es der Wohlfahrtsverband mit seiner Forderung nach einem höheren Mindestlohn, langfristig aus der Staatskasse geförderten Arbeitsplätzen und mehr Umverteilung zwischen den Bundesländern tut.

Einkommensunterschied wurde zur Armut umgedeutet

An diesem Punkt wird die Vermengung der Begriffe – der Einkommensunterschied ist zur Armut umgedeutet worden – problematisch. Denn dass die Politiker sich etwas einfallen lassen sollen, um den Armen aus ihrer Armut zu helfen, ist nicht nur weitverbreiteter Konsens. Es steht mit dem Sozialstaatsprinzip sogar im Grundgesetz. So viele Unterschiede wie möglich einzuebnen ist jedoch etwas ganz anderes: eine ideologische Position, die zwar Befürworter, aber auch viele Gegner hat.

Der Armutsbericht versucht das zu verschleiern. Den Armen hilft das nicht, im Gegenteil. Denn der Etikettenschwindel hat eine unbeabsichtigte Folge. Wer den Armutsbegriff so inflationär benutzt, entwertet ihn. Plötzlich werden nicht nur die überhöhten Zahlen des Berichts angezweifelt, sondern die Sorgen und Nöte der wirklich Armen. Dafür aber ist Armut – die im Leben, nicht auf dem Papier – eine zu ernste Angelegenheit. Der Wohlfahrtsverband sollte sich eine neue Definition überlegen.

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Poverty in Germany 'at Record High'

BY [HAYLEY RICHARDSON](#) 2/20/15 AT 6:58 PM

Poverty in Germany is at its highest since the reunification of the country in 1990, with 12.5 million residents now classified as 'poor', according to a study by a German welfare organisation.

The report, commissioned by the Joint Welfare Association, identifies Bremen, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania as the states most affected by poverty. Residents determined to be 'poor' were people whose household income fell 60% short of the national average.

It identifies "the unemployed, single mothers and people without education" as being currently at the greatest risk of poverty, while showing pensioners are also experiencing a faster rise in poverty [than any other group](#).

Ulrich Schneider, executive director of Joint Welfare Association, [said](#): "Poverty has never been as high and the regional disunity has never run as deep."

The report urges the federal government to take action to combat poverty and demands a significant tax policy overhaul and changes to the benefits system.

Dr Wolfgang Strengmann-Kuhn, a speaker for the Green parliamentary group in the German Bundestag, agrees. He believes cuts in social security funding are responsible for labour market incomes in the country becoming progressively more unequal, and points the finger at German chancellor Angela Merkel.

"While other countries have introduced tax credits for low income groups, this has not been on the agenda in Germany," he says. "The fight against poverty is not on the agenda of the present government, neither has it been on the agenda of the preceding governments under Merkel."

He says he believes that while Germany is profiting from the low value of the euro - which he attributes to the "crisis in southern Europe" - it is purely the upper-income groups who benefit.

"The poor lag behind because they have been neglected by the Merkel government," he says.

"What is needed in Germany is the introduction of minimum levels in the social security systems, and it is also necessary to make the social insurance system universal."

However, a spokesperson from the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs refutes the claims that Germany has seen a steep rise in poverty. She says poverty is a multidimensional problem and that the study does not take into account the degree of individual needs and merely uses one way of measuring relative income distribution.

"The 'at risk of poverty' rate shows the proportion of people with equivalent income below 60% of the median income. It is not to be equated with poverty in the sense of indigence," she says.

"Other highly important factors such as wealth, health, education, property or other social services are not considered. In addition, the indicator is not very robust due to random fluctuations of the median income. This means that small random fluctuations of the median income may have significant changes in poverty rates."

She also cited Germany's recent introduction of a nationwide minimum wage and a new policy package to reduce long-term unemployment as steps taken to improve the social inclusion of the long-term unemployed.

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2015-02-22/prominent-french-journalist-calls-france-germany-russia-alliance>

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Prominent French Journalist Zemmour Calls For France-Germany-Russia Alliance

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 02/22/2015 16:41 -0500

With the Ukraine civil war - courtesy of the constant prodding of the US State Department - inching ever closer to an all out military confrontation with Russia, and further escalation in terms of western sanctions on the Kremlin, as well as even more acute countermeasures and retaliation by Russia, increasingly more in Europe are asking themselves the question, if not in those exact words, "*if the US said to fuck the EU, then why should the EU align with the US?*"

One person doing just that is prominent and controversial French writer and political journalist [Eric Zemmour](#), who on Friday said that France and Germany, following the historical tradition, should work on forming an alliance with Russia.

"NATO is doing its utmost to present Russia as an enemy of the West and thereby justify its existence," Zemmour wrote in Le Figaro Magazine. "Fortunately, France and Germany in due time blocked Ukraine's accession to NATO, and that's a positive fact," the journalist said.

"Now when they finally coordinated their positions on establishing relations with Moscow, they should not stop halfway and should move towards forming a tripartite alliance with Russia," he said, recalling numerous efforts in the past by "kings, emperors and presidents" of the three countries to set up such an alliance.

As further cited by Tass, such a bloc "will be the only chance for Europe to get rid of the United States protectorate and become, in the words of General de Gaulle, a 'Free Europe'."

"An alliance with Russia is absolutely necessary to fight against Islamists in Syria, Libya, Iraq, Mali, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where these extremists are trying not only to erase all the traces of a Western and Christian presence, but to pave the way for carrying the war into the European territory," Zemmour added.

Sounds crazy? Maybe, but then again just 2 years ago anyone suggesting that a Grexit is inevitable, was branded as a conspiracy theory sociopath and prepped for burning at the Brussels stake. Now, it is all but a done deal.

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Three EU dreams that have turned into nightmares

Europe's greatest acts of make-believe in recent years are coming back to haunt it, says Christopher Booker



Russian-backed separatists firing a mortar towards Ukrainian troops outside the village of Sanzharivka Photo: Maximilian Clarke/AP

By **Christopher Booker** 7:57PM GMT 21 Feb 2015

 [1978 Comments](#)

Three stories that were making daily headlines last week all had one very important thing in common. One was the shambles unfolding over Ukraine. The second was the ongoing shambles over Greece and the euro. The third was the ever-growing flood of refugees from Africa and the Middle East desperately trying to escape to safety in Europe.

Over Ukraine, I cannot recall any issue in my lifetime when the leaders of the West have got it so hopelessly wrong. We are treated to babyish comparisons of President Putin to Hitler or Stalin; we are also told that this crisis has only been brought about by Russia's "expansionism". But there was only one real trigger for this crisis – the urge of the EU continually to advance its borders and to expand its own empire, right into the heartland of Russian national identity: a "Europe" stretching, as David Cameron once hubristically put it, "from the Atlantic to the Urals".

The "expansionism" that was the trouble was not Putin's desire to welcome the Russians of Crimea back into the country to which they had formerly belonged; or to assist the Russians of eastern Ukraine in their determination not to be dragged by the corrupt government in Kiev they despised into the EU and Nato. It was that of an organisation founded on the naive belief that it could somehow abolish nationalism, but which finally ran up against an ineradicable sense of nationalism that could not simply be streamrollered out of existence. We poked the bear and it responded accordingly.

Another of the EU's greatest acts of make-believe was that it could weld all Europe indissolubly together in the straitjacket of a single currency. This was a purely political dream, never in any way rooted in economic reality. The desperate Greeks, their lives and economy reduced to ruins, finally voted for a government that has pledged to put an end to all their misery; but at the same time somehow to cling on to the safety belt of the very thing which had caused it. As with Ukraine, the leaders of the EU are determined to preserve their fantasy intact, even though it is now more obviously than ever colliding with a reality that can allow no sensible outcome.

The third self-serving EU dream that is now being horribly caught out is its asylum policy. Under the Lisbon Treaty, EU member states are bound to welcome asylum seekers. But under other rules, the legal responsibility for them lies with the country where they first enter the EU, which bankrupt countries such as Italy and Greece find impossible. Britain, where most of them in fact hope to end up. And so great are the pressures this dysfunctional policy is now imposing throughout Europe that there is no longer any common will to address a problem which, like those of Ukraine and the euro, seems to have become insuperable.

Three distinct fantasies are finally falling apart on those realities that the EU for so long seemed determined to ignore. From the Dream Stage through the Frustration Stage to the Nightmare Stage, the EU is going through that classic pattern which shapes any attempt to act out a fantasy. We haven't yet reached that final Destruction Stage when the entire fantasy itself crumbles apart. But we are getting nearer.

Auf Wiedervorlage

Ein Griechenland-Gipfel folgt dem nächsten. Spätestens im April werden alle, wirklich alle Streitpunkte zwischen Griechenland und seinen Geldgebern wieder auf den Tisch kommen.
23.02.2015, von WERNER MUSSLER

Erleichterung will sich nach dieser Einigung wirklich nicht einstellen. Die [Eurogruppe hat ihren Streit mit Griechenland in routinierter europäischer Manier in einen Formelkompromiss gegossen](#), der an den fundamentalen ökonomischen Problemen des Landes nichts ändert und Athen lediglich Zeit kauft. Im besten Fall ist es gelungen, die schrille griechische Regierung auf die wirtschaftspolitischen Reforminhalte des bisherigen Hilfsprogramms zu verpflichten, mit denen sich bereits die Vorgängerregierung mehr als schwertat. Doch schon das ist mit einiger Sicherheit ein frommer Wunsch.

Zweifellos zeugt die Behauptung der Regierung Tsipras, sie habe sich in Brüssel du

rchgesetzt, von erheblichem Realitätsverlust. Aber Finanzminister Varoufakis weiß, wovon er spricht, wenn er auf die „konstruktive Mehrdeutigkeit“ des Kompromisspapiers verweist. Denn die inhaltlichen Konflikte mit Athen sind nur übertüncht. Welche der früher vereinbarten Reformen die Regierung zurücknehmen, wie viel sie zusätzlich ausgeben darf, welchen Handlungsspielraum sie generell hat – all das ist nicht geklärt.

Tsipras und Varoufakis haben dazu [selbstbewusste Ansichten](#). Mit ihnen müssen sich nun ausgerechnet jene in Athen in Misskredit geratenen Fachleute auseinandersetzen, die nun nicht mehr „Troika“, sondern „Institutionen“ heißen. Lösen können sie den Konflikt nicht. Vielmehr dürften wirklich alle Streitpunkte wieder auf den Tisch kommen, wenn sich die Eurogruppe spätestens im April abermals mit Griechenland auseinandersetzt.

Die Scharmützel der vergangenen Wochen lassen überdies allzu leicht vergessen, dass die mittel- bis langfristigen Perspektiven für das Land schlecht sind und schlecht bleiben. Das gilt ganz unabhängig vom weiteren Gebaren der Regierung. Selbst wenn sich der Fahrplan für die kommenden vier Monate einhalten lässt und das jetzige Programm zum Abschluss gebracht wird, braucht das Land anschließend fast sicher wieder neues Geld. Dieses Thema ist in Brüssel wohlweislich ausgeblendet worden. Und neue Kredite werden die Eurofinanzminister in ihren Parlamenten wesentlich weniger leicht durchsetzen können als jetzt die vergleichsweise harmlose Verlängerung. Offen bleibt auch die Tragfähigkeit der griechischen Staatsschuld. Alle, wirklich alle bisherigen Streitpunkte der Griechenland-Diskussion bleiben daher auf der Tagesordnung. Dazu gehört auch die Frage, ob dem Land mit einem Ausscheiden aus der Währungsunion nicht am besten gedient ist.

Griechenland fehlen die Grundpfeiler eines Staates

Athen zelebriert seine Salamtaktik, um von den Euro-Partnern mehr Geld zu bekommen. Doch neue Milliarden werden nicht helfen – solange es keinen griechischen Staat gibt, der diesen Namen verdient.

Von Thomas Straubhaar

Dem Euro-Raum ist eine unkalkulierbare Eskalation der Ereignisse zunächst erspart geblieben. Der Austritt Griechenlands aus der Währungsunion findet – zumindest vorerst – nicht statt. Allerdings ist durch den Konfrontationskurs der letzten Wochen nicht ein einziges der alten Probleme gelöst worden. Aber viele neue sind hinzugekommen.

Dass die unverändert bestehende Unsicherheit über die wahren Absichten Athens sich negativ auf die so dringend erforderliche Erholung der griechischen Wirtschaft auswirkt, ist das eine. Dass in Vorwegnahme zu erwartender Änderungen der Steuergesetze [fällig gewordene Steuern nicht bezahlt werden und dem griechischen Fiskus damit noch mehr Mittel als ohnehin schon entgehen](#), ist das andere. Weit schwerer wiegt, dass niemand den Versprechungen aus Athen mehr trauen kann. Zu tief muss das Misstrauen sitzen, dass Unterschriften aus Athen eine begrenzte Gültigkeit haben.

[Was die griechischen Syriza-Kommunisten wirklich wollen](#) und was sie von Treu und Glauben im Allgemeinen und [von Deutschland im Besonderen halten](#), ist aus Athen in den vergangenen Wochen aggressiv und provokant genug formuliert zu hören gewesen.

Deutschland soll noch mehr zahlen

Es geht Ministerpräsident Tsipras und Finanzminister Varoufakis nicht darum, die Voraussetzungen für ein in der Tat unverzichtbares und dringend benötigtes griechisches Wirtschaftswachstum aus eigener Kraft zu schaffen. Vielmehr sollen andere und vor allem Deutschland noch einmal noch mehr bezahlen – als wäre nicht schon mehr als genug und wohl eher zu viel als zu wenig Geld nach Griechenland geflossen.

Was nun in den nächsten Tagen folgen wird, ist voraussehbar. Die griechischen Reformvorschläge werden kaum jene Maßnahmen enthalten, die in Griechenland für strukturelle Veränderungen und eine bessere Wettbewerbsfähigkeit sorgen werden.

Überprüfbare Ziele und messbare Schritte dürften – wenn überhaupt – eher schwammig als konkret formuliert werden. Und sie werden den Erwartungen von EU-Kommission, Europäischer Zentralbank, Internationalem Währungsfonds und den Finanzministern der Euro-Partner zwar in Teilen, aber eben nicht vollständig gerecht werden.

Mit einer Salamtaktik wird der schlaue Spieltheoretiker Varoufakis genau das zu erreichen versuchen, was bisher nicht gelang, aber immer seine Absicht war: Er will das Gesamtpaket in einzelne Teile zerreißen. Dann würde es nicht mehr um ein alles oder nichts gehen, also darum ob Griechenland an beschlossenen Vereinbarungen festhält oder einen Austritt aus dem Euro-Raum provoziert. Vielmehr muss dann Schritt für Schritt jede einzelne Maßnahme von Neuem verhandelt und diskutiert werden und jedes Mal winkt Athen eine neue Chance, von den Kreditgebern Zugeständnisse zu erpressen, die ansonsten nicht gewährt worden wären.

Land hat kein funktionierendes Staatswesen

Somit ist vorgezeichnet, dass Griechenland Europa noch lange in Atem halten wird. Das Tauziehen um eine Verlängerung der Finanzhilfen für Athen wird weitergehen. Und selbst wenn man sich auf gemeinsam getragene Vereinbarungen einigen sollte, folgt danach erst der wirklich schwierige Teil: nämlich deren Umsetzung. Und da besteht wenig Hoffnung.

Griechenland ist nicht illiquide, sondern insolvent. Es hat nicht ein vorübergehendes, sondern ein dauerhaftes Zahlungsproblem. Kurzfristige Finanzhilfen werden daran nichts ändern. Das Einzige, das helfen könnte, wäre mehr Wachstum aus eigener Kraft. Diesem Ziel hat sich Athen in den letzten Wochen aber nicht angenähert. Es hat sich weiter davon entfernt.

Schon lange liegt das griechische Hauptproblem nicht beim fehlenden Geld, sondern darin, dass der griechische Staat nicht in der Lage ist, seine Kernfunktionen wahrnehmen. Es gibt keine funktionierende Verwaltung, kein funktionierendes Steuerwesen, kein funktionierendes Finanzwesen, Eigentumsrechte sind nicht wirklich respektiert, es gibt kein Grundbuch, das seinen Namen verdient – das alles sind Eckpfeiler eines funktionierenden Staates, die in Griechenland entweder überhaupt nicht vorhanden oder unterentwickelt sind.



Foto: picture alliance / SCHROEWIG/RDThomas Straubhaar

Solange das so bleibt, wird sich wenig ändern. Deshalb sollte Athen mit Brüssel nicht über mehr Geld und zusätzliche Hilfen streiten, sondern darüber, wie Europa Griechenland unterstützen könnte, ein europäischen Kriterien genügender Rechtsstaat mit gut funktionierenden Institutionen zu werden.

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"Der Terrorangriff war vielleicht ein Weckruf"

Der Schriftsteller und Essayist Pascal Bruckner hofft, dass sich Frankreich im Angesicht des Terrors wieder auf seine freiheitlichen Werte besinnt. Europa sieht sich einer Doppel-Bedrohung ausgesetzt.

Von [Richard Herzinger](#) Korrespondent für Politik und Gesellschaft

Pascal Bruckner 66, gehörte zu den aus der 68er-Bewegung stammenden "Neuen Philosophen", die in den 1970er Jahren mit Linksradikalismus und Marxismus brachen. In seinem Essay "Das Schluchzen des weißen Mannes" (1984) kritisierte der Schriftsteller und Essayist die Dritte-Welt-Ideologie als Spielart antiaufklärerischen Denkens. Seither polemisierte er in vielen Publikationen gegen die Relativierung westlicher Freiheitswerte im Namen von "Multikulturalismus" und falsch verstandener religiöser Toleranz und warnt seit Jahren vor einer Unterschätzung der Gefahr, die vom Islamismus ausgeht. Nun begründet er seine Hoffnung, dass sich die westlichen Gesellschaften wieder selbstbewusster um ihre freiheitlichen Werte scharen. Bruckner ist auch ein erfolgreicher literarischer Autor. 1992 verfilmte Roman Polanski seinen Roman "Bitter Moon".

Die Welt: Wie fühlt es sich an, in Paris zu leben, wenige Wochen nach dem Terror-Schock?

Pascal Bruckner: Wie im Herzen der Geschichte. Für einige Wochen war Frankreich das Zentrum der freien Welt. Aber die Menschen haben Angst. Jeden Tag erwarten wir, dass etwas Schreckliches passiert. Und wenn es dann Nacht wird, sagen wir: Na, immerhin war heute ein sicherer Tag. Kürzlich gab es eine Schießerei in Marseille, die mehr mit Bandenkrieg und Drogenhandel zu tun hatte. Aber wir wissen, dass es Verbindungen zwischen kriminellen Gangs und islamischen Extremisten gibt. Viele von ihnen beginnen ihre Karrieren als Gangster, landen im Knast und werden zu [Dschihadisten](#). Diese Übergänge sind sehr beunruhigend. Äußerlich lebt man in Paris scheinbar unbeschwert weiter, als wäre nichts gewesen. Tatsächlich aber sind alle verängstigt, besonders ist das der Fall, wenn man Kinder hat.

Die Welt: Und noch mehr, wenn man Jude ist ...

Bruckner: Ja, jüdische Schulen, Synagogen und Gemeindezentren müssen jetzt von schwer bewaffneten Polizisten und Soldaten bewacht werden. Das ist wirklich furchterregend. **Muslimische Jugendliche sind heute die Hauptverbreiter des Antisemitismus in Frankreich. Und das ist nicht dieselbe Art von Antisemitismus wie der frühere eines Jean-Marie Le Pen. Dieser rechte Antisemitismus war verbal, doch die muslimischen Antisemiten wollen schlagen, töten, sie wollen Verhältnisse wie in Teilen des Nahen Ostens hierher importieren.** Deshalb denken viele französische Juden daran, das Land zu verlassen und nach Israel zu gehen. Das aber wäre eine entsetzliche Lösung. Die Juden sind ein Teil Frankreichs.

Die Welt: Wie konnte es so weit kommen?

Bruckner: Es hat frühe Warnzeichen gegeben. **So stellte eine Untersuchung 2004 gravierende Störungen des Lehrbetriebs durch muslimische Schüler und Studenten fest. Man konnte die Geschichte der Shoah nicht mehr unterrichten, man konnte Voltaire nicht mehr unterrichten, da er antimuslimisch sei, man konnte Madame Bovary nicht unterrichten, weil der Islam Ehebruch verbietet. Doch all das wurde unter den Teppich gekehrt.**

Die Welt: Der Aufschrei in Frankreich nach den Terrorangriffen signalisierte eine Wiederbesinnung auf die westlichen Werte. War das ein Strohfeder oder hat es anhaltende Wirkung?

Bruckner: Es ist noch zu früh, um das zu sagen. Ja, es gab diesen Moment der Wut und des Zusammenschlusses aller um die republikanischen Werte. Doch was wird die Oberhand gewinnen – der Stolz oder die Furcht? **Wenn es zu neuen schweren Terrorattacken kommt, werden die Leute so verängstigt sein, dass sie den Forderungen der Dschihadisten nachgeben.**

Die Welt: Glauben Sie wirklich?

Bruckner: Oh ja. **Hinter den Dschihadisten stehen nämlich die Fundamentalisten, und es gibt eine Art verkappte Zusammenarbeit zwischen beiden. Die Fundamentalisten sagen: Wenn ihr unsere Sorgen und Beschwerden nicht akzeptiert, habt ihr die Killer am Hals.**

Die Welt: Wie würde ein solches Nachgeben denn genau aussehen?

Bruckner: Es würde bedeuten, das Verbot der islamischen Verschleierung aufzuheben und eine ganze Reihe von muslimischen Geboten und Verboten zu akzeptieren, wie etwa: **keinen Sportunterricht mehr für Mädchen in den Schulen, keine von beiden Geschlechtern benutzte Schwimmbäder, spezielle Strände für Frauen im Sommer, weibliche Doktoren für weibliche Patienten in den Krankenhäusern. Alles Mögliche also, das darauf hinausläuft, der muslimischen Bevölkerung ein gesondertes Recht zuzugestehen.**

Die Welt: Besteht wirklich die Gefahr, die französische Gesellschaft könnte Derartiges akzeptieren?

Bruckner: Jetzt gewiss noch nicht. **Wenn die Terroristen auch, wie ich fürchte, in einem schon gesiegt haben: Es wird kaum noch religiöse Karikaturen geben. Der Preis dafür ist einfach zu hoch geworden. Dazu kommt, dass sich die extreme Linke alle den oben genannten Forderungen bereits unterworfen hat. Sie ist heute die stärkste Unterstützerin des Islamismus in Frankreich – alles im Namen des Respekts vor fremden Religionen.**

Die westlichen Werte hält sie für imperialistisch und kolonialistisch, und deshalb müssten wir gegenüber den Muslimen Abbitte leisten, indem wir sie tun lassen, was immer sie wollen. Es gibt eine große, beunruhigende Neuaufstellung der Linken und extremen Linken entlang dieses Themas.

Ein Teil der extremen Linken ist es auch, die in Frankreich am stärksten den Antisemitismus schürt – umbenannt in Antizionismus. Marxistische Intellektuelle wie Alain Badiou und Etienne Balibar feuern den Verdacht gegen die Juden an.

Die Welt: Finden sich denn aber unter den französischen Muslimen nicht auch gemäßigte Stimmen? Welche Rolle spielen sie in der Debatte?

Bruckner: Eine sehr wichtige. Es gibt einen Teil der muslimischen Gemeinden, der die Dinge ändern und so leben will wie jeder andere in Frankreich. Darunter sind viele Frauen, die nicht verschleiert gehen und im Haus gehalten werden wollen. Diese Musliminnen und Muslime fordern den säkularen Staat auf, nicht zu kapitulieren.

Viele muslimische Familien sind zudem damit konfrontiert, dass ihre Kinder nach Syrien und in den Irak gehen, um zu kämpfen, und auch sie wenden sich an die Regierung, an den Staat, um sie unterstützen. Es sind übrigens nicht nur muslimische Familien, sondern auch christliche, deren Kinder buchstäblich über Nacht konvertieren und in den Dschihad ziehen.

Die Welt: Wie geht das vor sich? Sie sagten einmal, die Indoktrination erfolge nicht in Moscheen, sondern im Internet.

Bruckner: Ja, denn dort erhält man sozusagen eine Sofort-Erlösung. Es wird den jungen Leuten gesagt: Ihr seid von Gott auserwählt, die Ungläubigen, die Zionisten zu bekämpfen. **In den Vorstädten ziehen Anwerber umher, die den Gläubigen erklären, die Moschee sei zu liberal und sie verkündeten den wahren Islam. Dabei sind viele Jugendliche praktisch analphabetisch, können kaum Arabisch, haben den Koran nicht gelesen. Sie kennen nur den Katechismus, den ihnen die Rekrutierer für den Dschihad vorgeben. Sie werden mit grotesken Versprechungen wie der nach 72 Jungfrauen im Paradies gelockt – als seien Jungfrauen angemessene Sexualpartner für erwachsene Männer!**

Dies ist ein sehr rückständiges Konzept, das aus der Rezeption des Koran gestrichen werden sollte. Doch eine kritische Neulektüre der heiligen Texte, wie sie im Christentum im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert begann, findet im Islam nicht statt. Es gibt zwar einige liberale muslimische Intellektuelle in Frankreich, die sich darum verdient machen, doch sie sind sehr isoliert und werden bedroht.

Die Welt: Gibt es also gar keine Aussicht auf eine Reform des Islam?

Bruckner: Doch, **Tunesien ist ein gutes Beispiel dafür, wie eine muslimische Gesellschaft unter liberalen Vorzeichen aussehen könnte.** Man ist dort dem Fluch des Islamismus entkommen und versucht, eine Balance zwischen Religion und Säkularismus zu halten. Aber es gibt in Tunesien eine Menge kleiner dschihadistischer Gruppen an der Grenze zu Algerien. **Viele tunesische Jugendliche, es dürften bis zu 4000 sein, gehen zum IS nach Syrien,** und wenn sie zurückkommen, könnten sie den Krieg gegen die säkulare Regierung daheim aufnehmen.

Insgesamt muss uns klar sein: Der Kampf gegen den Islamismus wird hart und lang sein. Barack Obama war im Irrtum, als er den **Krieg gegen den Terror für beendet erklärte. Dieser Krieg, bei dem es sich um einen Weltkrieg handelt, beginnt erst.** Vielleicht werden erst unsere Enkel sein Ende sehen. **Der Westen kann ihn jedoch nicht ohne die Unterstützung der Muslime gewinnen.**

Die Welt: In westlichen Gesellschaften scheint die Bereitschaft erodiert zu sein, sich mit den eigenen liberalen Werten zu identifizieren und für sie einzustehen. Warum?

Bruckner: Das ist Resultat eines langen Prozesses, der eine Kombination von Ursachen hat. In Frankreich spielten die Entkolonisierung und die Erkenntnis des Ausmaßes der Kollaboration mit den Nazis im Zweiten Weltkrieg eine Rolle, zudem die Tatsache, dass Frankreich nicht mehr die führende Macht in Europa ist. Dazu kam die wirtschaftliche Krise – **all das hat zu dem Eindruck geführt, das französische Zivilisationsmodell sei auf dem absteigenden Ast.**

Diesem geringen Selbstwertgefühl ist man mit einem gewissen Zynismus begegnet, mit der sarkastischen Haltung, wir seien nun einmal ein zerfallendes Land und wüssten das nur zu gut. **Der Terrorangriff war in diesem Sinne vielleicht ein Weckruf. Wir müssen uns jetzt fragen, ob wir eine Gesellschaft voller Selbstzweifel sein wollen oder ein starkes Frankreich, das um seine Werte herum geeint ist.**

Die Welt: Weltpolitisch ist das Land aber eigentlich sehr präsent, wenn man etwa sein internationales Engagement gegen den Islamismus betrachtet ...

Bruckner: Das stimmt. Französische Soldaten kämpfen in Mali und in Zentralafrika. Sie leisten einen, wenn auch kleineren, Beitrag im Kampf gegen IS in Syrien. Vor allem aber von Mauretanien bis Dschibuti haben wir Tausende Soldaten im Einsatz, die eng mit den lokalen Armeen zusammenarbeiten, besonders mit der des Tschad, die Boko Haram bekämpft. Übrigens hat **Präsident Hollande** durch die Terrorattacken enorm an Statur gewonnen, er wirkt geradezu wie ein neuer Mensch, ein Phönix aus der Asche.

Die Welt: Er galt ja lange als Totalversager ...

Bruckner: **Aber in der Außenpolitik macht er eine starke Figur.** Er ist der proatlantischste Präsident, den wir je hatten, er arbeitet Hand in Hand mit Obama, und er nimmt eine sehr feste Haltung in der Sicherheitspolitik ein. Dafür hassen ihn die radikalen Linken ebenso wie die radikalen Rechten. **Nicht zuletzt übrigens, weil er die Übergabe der Mistral-Hubschrauberträger an Russland verweigert hat – was eine tapfere Entscheidung war.**

Die Welt: Dies bringt uns zu der zweiten großen Herausforderung für Europa. Für wie gefährlich erachten sie den **Putinismus** für die westlichen liberalen Gesellschaften?

Bruckner: Wladimir Putin versucht sich in ein europäisches Land nach dem anderen einzukaufen, wie man an Ungarn und der Slowakei sieht. Er finanziert die rechte Front National in Frankreich über Kredite einer russischen Bank. **Und die Unterstützung für Putin innerhalb Europas nimmt zu, wie man jetzt an Griechenland sieht. Die Griechen haben schon im Balkankrieg den Fehler gemacht, Serbien im Namen christlich-orthodoxer Einheit zu unterstützen. Jetzt sind sie für Putin, der sich das womöglich einiges kosten lassen wird.**

Dazu hat man diese unheilige Allianz zwischen extreme Linken und Rechten. Für französische Linke wie Jean-Luc Mélenchon steht Putins Russland in Kontinuität zur UdSSR, jenem Regime, das den Kapitalismus zu zerstören versuchte. Und im Namen dieser Vergangenheit habe man das heutige Russland zu unterstützen. Extreme Rechte wie Marine Le Pen wiederum pflegen enge Verbindungen zu Putin, weil sie sich davon die Wiederherstellung einer christlichen Welt versprechen, wie sie der Mythologie gemäß einmal bestanden haben sollen.

Die Welt: Hat man im Westen nicht genügend erkannt, dass hinter Putins Macht eine neuartige Ideologie steckt?

Bruckner: **Putin steht für eine Synthese aus Ultrationalismus und Ultrasowjetismus.** Er ist gewiss kein Hitler und auch kein Stalin, aber er stellt eine Gefahr dar, die niemand im Westen unterschätzen sollte. **Und die einzige Sprache, die er versteht, ist Gewalt und Stärke. Ich hoffe deshalb, dass die Nato ihre Bereitschaft deutlich machen wird, Polen, die baltischen Staaten, Moldawien und Rumänien zu verteidigen, die jetzt alle große Angst vor Russland haben.** Es handelt sich hier in der Tat um eine zweite Front für die europäischen Demokratien. **Wir müssen die Islamisten innerhalb und außerhalb unserer Länder bekämpfen, und wir müssen Russland eindämmen.**

Die Welt: Lange glaubte man in Europa, mit den Ideologien sei es vorbei. Jetzt scheinen wir von der enormen Kraft, die sie entwickeln, regelrecht überrollt zu werden.

Bruckner: Ich glaube, **Europa hat drei Fehler gemacht.** Erstens, zu glauben, dass wir am Ende der Geschichte angekommen seien. Doch die Geschichte geht weiter, heftiger als je zuvor, und so tragisch wie zu allen Zeiten. **Zweitens dachten wir, die Nationen überwunden zu haben.** Aber die Nationen sind nach wie vor da und werden nicht verschwinden. **Und drittens ging man davon aus, in Europa spiele die Religion keine Rolle mehr.** Aber die Anziehungskraft des Religiösen erweist sich als ungebrochen.

Die Welt: Gibt es womöglich eine Art anthropologischen Reflex, der dafür sorgt, dass viele die Freiheit, wie sie in liberalen Demokratien herrscht, nach einer gewissen Zeit nicht mehr aushalten und sich nach autoritärer Führung zurückzusehnen?

Bruckner: Das ist durchaus möglich. Denn es ist gar nicht so leicht, in liberalen Demokratien zu leben. Es bedeutet, die Tür zur persönlichen Freiheit zu öffnen und für sich selbst entscheiden zu müssen, welchen Werten man folgt. Womöglich gibt es daher, nach Jahrzehnten der Freiheit und des ständigen Zugewinns an Rechten für Frauen und Minderheiten **in den westlichen Gesellschaften, wieder ein Verlangen nach autoritärer Führung.**

Die Welt: Könnte man dem denn so etwas wie eine liberale Spiritualität entgegensetzen?

Bruckner: **Was Europa fehlt, ist Patriotismus.** Die nationalen Patriotismen sind durch Brüssel abgeschliffen worden. Sie sind aber nicht durch einen übergreifenden Patriotismus der 27 Nationen ersetzt worden, die Europa konstituieren. **Und wir haben als Europäer kein Gewicht auf der weltpolitischen Bühne.** Man sieht das Problem daran, dass es Merkel und Hollande waren, die kürzlich nach Minsk gingen, um mit Putin zu verhandeln, und eben nicht ein Präsident und ein Außenminister Europas. Wir leben in diesem Gefühl, zwischen diesen zwei Legitimitäten hin- und herzutreiben, der nationalen und einer pseudoföderalen.

Die Welt: **Schlechte Aussichten also für Europa?**

Bruckner: **Es befindet sich zweifellos inmitten schwerer Turbulenzen.** Es gibt aber durchaus einen Silberstreif am Horizont. Ich hoffe, dass **die doppelte Bedrohung durch Putin und den Islamismus** uns aufrüttelt, unsere freiheitlichen Werte wieder höher zu schätzen, auf denen wir so lange herumgetrampelt sind. Es ist, wie Friedrich **Hölderlin** sagte: "Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch."

114,164

Putin: France, Germany genuinely want to find compromise over E. Ukraine

Published time: February 23, 2015 19:25

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The leaders of France and Germany genuinely want to find a compromise that would help end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in his latest interview.

Speaking to Rossiya 1 TV channel on the conflict and the breakthrough of the Minsk agreement declared by Kiev, Moscow, Paris, and Berlin, Putin said that *“it seemed to me [the leaders of France and Germany], have a genuine desire to find such compromise solutions that would lead to the final settlement [of the conflict]...”*

He cited the Minsk protocol which includes the decentralization of power in Ukraine and a *“reference explaining what it implies.”* The authors of the reference are *“our German and French partners,”* he said, adding that this speaks of their sincerity in finding a compromise.

“I had the impression that our partners have more trust in us than distrust, and in any case believe in our sincerity,” Putin said on Monday.

114,165

What does Russia's President Putin really want?

By Matthew Chance, CNN Senior International Correspondent in Moscow

Updated 1930 GMT (0330 HKT) February 11, 2015

- A solution to the Ukraine crisis may involve ruling the country out of any future NATO membership, writes Matthew Chance
- For Putin, this crisis is only the latest in a catalog of grievances, says Chance
- Putin's ultimate goal may be to tear up the post-Soviet assumptions about what Russia will tolerate, he says

(CNN)Has Russian President Vladimir Putin gone completely mad? This question is actually being debated in serious circles.

In a telephone conversation with President Obama a few months ago, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is reported to have suggested her Russian counterpart is "living in another world."

[The Ukraine crisis: Everything you need to know](#)

Just last week, a [leaked report commissioned by the U.S. Defense Department](#) in 2008 concluded that the Russian leader may have Asperger's Syndrome, a type of high-functioning autism. The report said it may account for his apparently high degree of control.

A Pentagon spokesman said there was no guidance from the Department of Defense on the report and experts told CNN they were skeptical of the reliability of the Asperger's claim.

For the record, the Kremlin has dismissed the allegation as utter nonsense.

Putin, though, is an enigma.

His unflinching support for rebel separatists in Eastern Ukraine, despite their alleged excesses, has plunged Russia's relations with the West into their worst crisis since the end of the Cold War.

Even in the face of mounting international sanctions that have isolated Russia and helped hobble its fragile economy, Western officials say weapons and manpower continue to flow across the border, although the Kremlin insists it is supplying neither.

Clearly, Putin is determined to get his way in Ukraine.

We already know, essentially, what this means in terms of a peace deal -- a truce was signed last September, although it didn't hold.

The Minsk Protocol agreed that, among other things, autonomy would be granted to Ukraine's southeastern regions. The Russian language would be given official status. A buffer zone would be established along the front lines and heavy weapons would be pulled back from civilian areas.

But Putin may actually want much more.

On an official visit to Egypt this week, the Russian president dropped a large hint -- and not for the first time.

In an [interview with the Al-Ahram newspaper](#) **he rejected Russian responsibility for the crisis in Ukraine.**

"It emerged in response to the attempts of the U.S.A. and its Western allies, who considered themselves winners of the Cold War, to impose their will everywhere," Putin told the newspaper.

"Promises of non-expansion of the NATO to the east have turned out to be hollow statements," he said.

A solution to the Ukraine crisis, then, may involve ruling the country out of any future NATO membership, however unpalatable that may be to some in the West.

Russian diplomats call it guaranteeing Ukraine's "neutral status" -- which sounds much better than "capitulation."

The bigger problem, though, is that this may not end with Ukraine.

For Putin, this crisis is only the latest in a catalog of grievances, which includes the West trampling over Russia's interests from Kosovo to Iraq, to Libya and Syria.

Putin's ultimate goal may be to tear up the post-Soviet assumptions about what Russia will tolerate, and permanently change Russia's relationship with the West.

‘Out of My Mouth Comes Unimpeachable Manly Truth’

What I learned from watching a week of Russian TV.

By GARY SHTEYNGART FEB. 18, 2015

On a cold, sunny New Year's Eve in 2014, I am sitting at the edge of my king-size bed at the Four Seasons hotel in New York, munching through a stack of Wagyu beef slices and demolishing a bottle of pinot noir while watching a woman play a man playing a bearded woman on Russian state television. Standing on a stage lit by gleaming chandeliers before an audience of Russia's elite celebrities, the parodist Elena Vorobei sings to the tune of Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive," in a crude impersonation of Conchita Wurst, the Austrian drag queen who won the 2014 Eurovision song contest. Vorobei is dressed in a sparkling gown, winking cheekily, scratching at her bearded face and swishing her lustrous wig around. "I have a beard!" she belts. At one point she throws out a Hitler salute, a gesture that's meant to evoke Austria, Conchita's homeland. The camera pans the laughing audience, cutting for a moment to a well-known actor-singer-writer-bodybuilder and then to one of the show's M.C.s, Russia's pop king, the also-bearded Philipp Kirkorov (widely assumed to be gay). The men, who are almost all tanned, in sharply cut suits, grin with unconstrained glee. The bejeweled women wear tight, knowing smiles. Everyone sways and claps.

With the exception of fishing, soccer and the Orthodox Church, few things are taken more seriously in Russia than Eurovision. Indeed, much of the sequined musical fare on Russian television looks like an endless Eurovision rehearsal. When Conchita won, back in May, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, an ultranationalist in Russia's Parliament who is roughly equivalent to Michele Bachmann, said her victory meant "the end of Europe." The deputy prime minister and the Orthodox Church issued statements essentially denouncing the collapse of Christian civilization as we know it. On tonight's show, broadcast to millions of Russians, the message is clear: Europe may have rejected homophobia, a value it once shared with Russia, by giving a musical prize to a drag queen, but Russia, like Gloria Gaynor herself, will survive, never to succumb to the rest of the world's wimpy notions of tolerance. A country where gangs of vigilantes who call their cause "Occupy Pedophilia" attack gay men and women on the streets of its major cities will now carry the mantle of the European Christian project.

"I love you, Russia," the bearded singer intones in English at the end of her number. "Russia, I'm yours," she adds in Russian.

Seven more days of this, I think, as I crawl over to the minibar.

You might be wondering why I left my home and family and started watching Russian drag-queen parodies. I am the subject of an experiment. For the next week, I will subsist almost entirely on a diet of state-controlled Russian television, piped in from three Apple laptops onto three 55-inch Samsung monitors in a room at the Four Seasons Hotel in Manhattan. (If I have to imbibe the TV diet of the common Russian man, I will at least live in the style of one of his overlords.) Two of the monitors are perched directly in front of my bed, with just enough space for a room-service cart to squeeze in, and the third hangs from a wall to my right. The setup looks like the trading floor of a very small hedge fund or the mission control of a poor nation's space program. But I will not be monitoring an astronaut's progress through the void. In a sense, I am the one leaving the planet behind.

I will stay put in my 600-square-foot luxury cage, except for a few reprieves, and will watch TV during all my waking hours. I can entertain visitors, as long as the machines stay on. Each morning I will be allowed a walk to the New York Health & Racquet Club on West 56th Street for a long swim. Vladimir Putin reportedly takes a two-hour swim every morning to clear his head and plot the affairs of state. Without annexing Connecticut or trying to defend a collapsing currency, I will be just like him, minus the famous nude torso on horseback.

Ninety percent of Russians, according to the Levada Center, an independent research firm, get their news primarily from television. Middle-aged and older people who were formed by the Soviet system and those who live outside Moscow and St. Petersburg are particularly devoted TV watchers. Two of the main channels — Channel 1 and Rossiya 1 — are state-owned. The third, NTV, is nominally independent but is controlled by Gazprom-Media, a subsidiary of the giant energy company that is all but a government ministry. Executives from all three companies regularly meet with Kremlin officials.

Each channel has a slightly different personality. Channel 1 was the Soviet Union's original channel, which beamed happy farm reports and hockey victories at my parents and grandparents. It features lots of film classics and a raucous health show whose title can be roughly translated as "Being Alive Is Swell!" Rossiya 1 is perhaps best known for a show called "News of the Week," featuring a Kremlin propagandist, Dmitry Kiselev, who once implicitly threatened to bomb the United States into a pile of "radioactive ash." (Sadly, for me, Kiselev is taking this week off from ranting.) NTV is more happy-go-lucky, blasting noirish crime thrillers and comedy shows, like a "Saturday Night Live" rip-off shamelessly titled "Saturday. Night. Show." But during regular breaks for the news, the three networks are indistinguishable in their love of homeland and Putin and their disdain for what they see as the floundering, morally corrupt and increasingly lady-bearded West.

Here is the question I'm trying to answer: What will happen to me — an Americanized Russian-speaking novelist who emigrated from the Soviet Union as a child — if I let myself float into the television-filtered head space of my former countrymen? Will I learn to love Putin as 85 percent of Russians profess to do? Will I dash to the Russian consulate on East 91st Street and ask for my citizenship back? Will I leave New York behind and move to Crimea, which, as of this year, Putin's troops have reoccupied, claiming it has belonged to Russia practically since the days of the Old Testament? Or will I simply go insane?

A friend of mine in St. Petersburg, a man in his 30s who, like many his age, avoids state-controlled TV and goes straight to alternative news sources on the Internet, warns me in an email: "Your task may prove harmful to your psyche and your health in general. Russian TV, especially the news, is a biohazard." I'll be fine, I think. Russians have survived far worse than this. But, just in case, I have packed a full complement of anti-anxiety, sleep and pain medication.

DAY 1

I glance from monitor to monitor, muting the volume on Channel 1, pumping it up on Rossiya 1, lowering it two bars on NTV. On one channel, Asiatic dwarves are shooting confetti at one another. Another screen shows a musical number performed by cadres of athletic dancers celebrating the 33 medals Russia won at the Sochi Olympics. Each line is met with the English refrain “Oh, yeah!” Another channel has two men dressed as giant bears, break dancing.

Russian TV has lovingly preserved all eras of American and European pop culture, and it recombines them endlessly, the more nonsensically, the better. Two frosted-haired individuals — a small bearded man and a middle-aged giantess — belt out a cover of the 1989 Roxette hit “The Look.” On another monitor, the famed Tatar crooner Renat Ibragimov, a dapper elderly man, performs a rousing version of Tom Jones’s 1960s dark pop ballad “Delilah.” If Spinal Tap actually existed, it would be touring its heart out in Vladivostok right now. But no matter what the style of the music, the studio audience goes bananas with the clapping and cheering. I send a few clips to my friend Mark Butler, who teaches music theory and cognition at Northwestern University, to help me understand the Russian style of enthusiasm. “The audience is not clapping solely on two and four, as listeners versed in rock do,” he writes back. “Nor are they ‘one-three clappers’ (the stereotype of people who don’t get rock rhythm). Instead, they are clapping on every beat.”

I remember all this clapping from my early teenage years, at bar and bat mitzvahs in the Russian nightclubs of Queens and Brooklyn, and my constant need to slink away from the applause so I could be shy and alone in the parking lot. The happiest applause, in my memory anyway, belonged to my grandmother and her generation, who seemed amazed to still be walking the earth and to be doing so in the relative wonderland of Rego Park, Queens.

Slightly drunk off a frisky Clos Du Val pinot noir, which I’ve been sipping along with another helping of Wagyu, I can’t help myself. I begin clapping too, mouthing the lyrics “Forgif me, Deelaila, I jas’ kudn take anymorr.” In my high spirits, I take an affectionate look at my surroundings. The Four Seasons is a fine choice of hotel for my task. The lobby is filled with Russians, trendy grandmas sparkling from head to toe in Louis Vuitton and Chanel, guiding their equally gilded granddaughters past an enormous Christmas tree. The view from my room faces the nearly completed 432 Park Avenue, a 96-story luxury condominium building, which will be one of the tallest habitable towers in Manhattan (apartments start at nearly \$17 million). If I had checked in for New Year’s Eve 2015, by which time 432 Park Avenue is expected to be complete, some of the tenants staring back at me would very likely belong to the class of Russian oligarchs who have helped transform the real estate in London, and now in New York, into the priciest on earth.

On NTV’s New Year’s extravaganza, the talk among the presenters turns to politics. The end of the year, after all, is a time to take stock, and stock-taking, whether at the kitchen table or the bathhouse or upon waking up after a night of drinking on some icy railroad platform far from home, is a national tradition. Russia is a country blessed but mostly cursed to endure years of civil war, global upheaval and dissolution of empire so transformative that other countries would have just given up and called it a day: 1917, 1941 and 1991 come to mind as moments when the very nature of Russia changed. In 2014, Russia changed again, or rather, Putin has taken a more definitive turn in his increasingly aggressive, anti-Western style of politics. He has become a conqueror, like the Russian czars he sometimes invokes with pseudomystical reverence in his speeches. In 2014, he concentrated his neo-imperial ambitions on Crimea, a sunny peninsula jutting into the Black Sea.

The year wasn’t supposed to end the way it did. The Sochi Olympics, perhaps the most corrupt in Winter Olympic history, were designed to present Russia as a nation that could compete with the West on its own terms, a nation that could mount an expensive pyrotechnical display while celebrating literary heroes like Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov and Nabokov. The fact that in 2013 a museum dedicated to Nabokov’s work in St. Petersburg was spray-painted with the word “pedophile” by the same sort of people who revile Conchita was not mentioned.

In February, a pro-European revolution swept the Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, a strong ally of Putin’s, from power in Kiev, replacing him with Petro Poroshenko. With Ukraine slipping from the Kremlin’s orbit, Putin sent Russian troops to occupy and later annex Ukrainian Crimea. Putin has said that Crimea is as important for the Russian people as the Temple Mount is for the Jews and Muslims, an opinion that should offend Russians, Jews and Muslims alike. For most people born in the U.S.S.R., myself included, the word Crimea evokes memories of summer vacations gorging on *pelmeni* (a species of dumpling) and getting reacquainted with the sun in decaying hotels and private huts. Think of it as a shabbier Fort Lauderdale with the occasional Chekhov statue. In any case, the loss of Crimea, with its majority-speaking Russian population, has been one of the most acutely felt wounds of the dissolution of the Soviet Union — having Crimea fall outside of Russia’s borders was like cutting off a piece of the Floridian peninsula below Jacksonville — and its reconquest has elevated Putin’s standing far above that of any Russian leader in perhaps a century. But that proved not to be enough for him.

The imposition of Western sanctions against Russian officials after Crimea’s annexation dealt but a glancing blow to the Russian economy. Putin’s next move, his support of pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine’s industrialized Donbass region, led to a war that the United Nations estimates has displaced a million people and resulted in more than 5,000 deaths, and further sanctions from the West. (As of this writing, a cease-fire has been brokered, but it is fragile and may not last.) But it is the collapse of the price of oil, Russia’s main export commodity, that has weakened the regime. As the price of a barrel of Brent crude and the value of the ruble go down, the tenor of propaganda on Russian television goes up.

The presenters of a Pan-Slavic Russian-Ukrainian-Belorussian concert are rattling off a list of Russian pop stars no longer allowed into Ukraine after Putin’s invasion of Crimea. “We don’t have such blacklists,” the M.C. says. “We wish all people love and friendship without any boycotts.”

“They” — meaning Ukraine and the West; according to the Russian media, NATO and the C.I.A. have all but taken over Ukraine’s government, so it’s hard to resist conflating the two — “have oppressed our artists!” another singer says.

“They’re not allowing us to have our own point of view.”

“How can one not love one’s own president? That’s our point of view.”

“On our stage, there are no borders.”

The presenters sound genuinely hurt, and they are speaking for much of their television audience when they complain about the West’s cold shoulder. This is geopolitics as middle-school homeroom. Like an ambitious tween who longs for social success, Russia wants to be both noticed and respected. The invasion of Crimea and the bloody conflict in Eastern Ukraine got the world’s attention,

but now the cool nations are no longer inviting Russia for unsupervised sleepovers, and the only kids still leaving notes on Russia's locker are Kim Jong-un and Raúl Castro.

DAY 2

I miss Putin. He is on a TV sabbatical for most of this week, enjoying the 11-day extended New Year's holiday, swimming up a tsunami in his presidential pool, I'm sure. Putin's face did show up on all three of my monitors around midnight, Moscow time, as he delivered his New Year's address to the country. "Love of homeland is one of the most powerful, elevating feelings," Putin declared, with his patented affectless-yet-deadly-seriousness. The return of Crimea will become "one of the most important events in the history of the fatherland."

For the rest of New Year's Day, Russia falls into catatonic American-movie mode. The state-controlled networks hand themselves over to "Avatar," "The Seven Year Itch" and "The Chronicles of Narnia." Despite the bad blood with Obama, there is simply no way to fill out a day of programming without "Die Hard" or a David Blaine magic show. I enjoy a light snooze interrupted by further beef injections from room service.

The evening news on Rossiya 1 starts off with Ukraine. The anchors of the three networks are a clan of attractive, dead-eyed men and women. They speak in the same unshakable "out of my mouth comes unimpeachable manly truth" tone that Putin uses in his public addresses, sometimes mixing in a dollop of chilly sarcasm. Their patter has a hypnotic staccato quality, like a machine gun going off at regular intervals, often making it hard to remember that they are moving their mouths or inhaling and exhaling oxygen.

Putin's popularity has mostly survived intact despite the ruble's collapse and the gradual pauperization of his subjects. The media helps with a twofold strategy. First, the West and its sanctions are blamed for the economic situation. Second, the nascent Ukrainian democracy is portrayed as a movement of torch-wielding Nazi fascists under direct control of their Western masters. Few Russian families escaped unscathed from Hitler's onslaught, and Nazi imagery, which remains stingingly potent, is invoked frequently and opportunistically, as a way of keeping historical wounds fresh.

On today's news, the so-called Ukrainian Nazi fascists are celebrating the fascistic life of the neo-Nazi Stepan Bandera with a torch-lit Hitlerite parade. Bandera is a complicated figure, a Ukrainian nationalist who flirted with the invading Germans during the Second World War but was ultimately imprisoned by them. Any march through Kiev by Ukraine's Right Sector, a xenophobic, socially conservative right-wing movement that has more in common with Moscow's current regime than either side would like to admit, is catnip to the newscasters. "Instead of celebrating New Year's, they're celebrating the fascist Stepan Bandera," the reporter declares. "It looks like fascist ideology will be the basis of the Ukrainian state."

The leader of Right Sector did run for president of Ukraine in the May 2014 elections. He and his "fascist ideology" received 0.7 percent of the vote. Since the election of Poroshenko, who won by a majority, Ukraine is now easily the most democratic and pro-European republic in the former Soviet Union, excepting the Baltic States. It is, in fact, the anti-Russia. This, of course, drives Russia nuts.

DAY 3

I wake up feeling swollen. Movement is difficult, especially in my lower extremities. Probably just gout. The monitors are turned off at night, but the laptops are still whirling, the satellites still transmitting. I waddle over to my marble bathroom and look at my sleep-creased face.

There's one small consolation in my day: crossing 57th street, moving through crowds of Russian, Asian and South American shoppers who are spending their way across New York, and finally dropping into the saltwater pool at the health club. I try to clear my mind of Russian TV, but the high-decibel pop soundtrack and the booming voices of the news anchors travel with me underwater, haunting my eardrums.

Back in my cage, the morning's Catskill-smoked-salmon-and-egg-white sandwich arrives as I flick on the monitors, one showing the Red Army Choir singing its brains out, another with an advertisement for a 24-karat golden necklace for men that "doesn't just show your material status but your good taste." The thick, gleaming chain — chains, I should say; buy one, get one free — goes for 1,490 rubles, about \$45 at the start of 2014, but about \$25 at the start of 2015 as the ruble continued to plunge.

The news is pretty exciting today. Two reporters for LifeNews, a Russian channel that heavily supports the rebels in Ukraine and is rumored to have ties to Putin's F.S.B. security service, had their camera smashed during a torch-lit parade through Kiev. "Anti-Russian feelings are approaching hysteria," the reporter says.

I look at my watch. A full minute into the piece, and he hasn't mentioned fascism, Nazism, neo-Nazism or the perfidy of the West.

"Torch-bearing parades are associated with Nazi Germany," the reporter says.



On the monitor tuned to NTV, I catch a comedy called “An Ideal Pair.” The programming notes describe the plot: “Zoya is a sportswoman with a male character. That’s why she has trouble with the stronger sex and everyone runs away from her.”

I’m noticing a trend of movies about Russians in their mid-30s who are not yet married, a phenomenon confounding to most Russians who prefer to marry, have 1.61 children and then divorce early in life (according to the United Nations, Russia consistently has one of the highest divorce rates). Like most Russian rom-coms, the movie seems overly long, wordy and ridiculously chaste. Even a mild kiss fades out before anything can happen under the sheets. It’s rare to find a society with a more contradictory approach to sex. A new conservatism, led by the Orthodox Church, is constantly at odds with whatever progressive notions the Soviet Union instilled. Abortion was pretty much the most common form of birth control: The efficacy of Soviet prophylactics left much to be desired. Today, you can barely find explicit sex in a commercial film like “An Ideal Pair,” but watching one of the dance numbers on television makes you want to reach for a body condom just to be safe.

I crack open another bottle of wine and settle back into the world I cannot leave, with the January wind whipping past my lonely skyscraper. On Channel 1, the scandal of the smashed camera in Kiev rages on. There are many close-ups of the injured camera lying in what looks like snow or confetti. Then it’s time for Macaulay Culkin in the original “Home Alone.”

DAY 4

I am crawling through the snow in Kiev searching for my cellphone, which has been stolen by the neo-Nazi fascists. I find it by a wall defaced by a giant swastika, its screen shattered by the torch-bearing Ukrainians. “Allo,” I say in Russian. “Someone please help me. It’s cold out here.” A dead-eyed anchor from Rossiya 1 appears on my FaceTime. “Torch-bearing parades are associated with Nazi Germany,” he declares. I wake up and trundle off to the bathroom, pop some benzos and crawl back into bed. I sleep maybe three hours total. When I’ve occasionally returned to Russia for visits, I’ve sometimes woken up in the middle of the night thinking, What if they closed the borders? What if I’m supposed to live out the rest of my life here? Even though I’m ensconced in a luxury pad in the very epicenter of Manhattan, a similar feeling disturbs my sleep.

Today, I’m a mess. My breast stroke at the club looks more tadpole than frog. Back in my sunlit chamber of horrors, Rossiya 1’s news is on a rampage. A 35-car pile up in New Hampshire. No serious injuries, it seems, but clearly the West is falling apart. Things are even worse across the ocean. “An unpleasant New Year’s present for Prince Andrew,” a reporter says with a honed mixture of seriousness, sarcasm and glee. “Britain is shocked by a sex scandal between the prince and a minor who claims to have been held in ‘sexual slavery.’” Viewers in Yekaterinburg wolfing down their morning kasha are given a rundown of the crimes committed by the British royal family, from Prince Harry wearing a Nazi uniform to Princess Diana’s death “in mysterious circumstances.”

Russians, on the other hand, are leading exemplary nonfascist lives. At the site of the Air Asia disaster, in the Java Sea, “Indonesian authorities are relying heavily on Russian divers and their equipment” to find and recover the doomed plane. In the northernmost reaches of Russia, we meet Aleksey Tryapitsyn, a “salt of the Earth” postman in a tiny village who somehow doesn’t smoke or drink and has been featured in a recent documentary, “The White Nights of the Postman Aleksey Tryapitsyn.” His wife is pretty salt-of-the-earth too. “I’m such an ordinary woman,” she says, “I know how to do everything: shoot a gun, catch ducks.”

The lessons for all Russians, especially spoiled Camembert-addicted Muscovites, are clear: In the difficult days to come, learn to shoot a gun, learn to catch ducks.

Today I have visitors: the Moscow-born writer Anya Ulinich and her friend Olga Gershenson, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I order a meat plate from room service, and we settle in for lunch.

Last night, Anya found out that her cousin was killed in a small town not far from Donetsk, the Ukrainian city that has been a stronghold for pro-Russian fighters. “He was found dead in the lobby of his apartment building,” Anya tells me. “Nobody knows who killed him. There’s no police. It’s just anarchy.”

“I blame Putin roundly for this,” she says. “It used to be a normal town.”

She sighs. We glance from screen to screen. On NTV a man in a leather harness is dancing — well, practically having leather intercourse — with an equally leathery woman in front of two giant gilded statues of gladiators.

“That ballet is kind of cool,” Anya says.

“Yeah, it’s amazing,” Olga adds.

We watch for a while without saying another word.

DAY 5

My psychiatrist agrees to make a rare house call. We try to recreate the customary couch-and-psychiatrist’s-chair arrangement, except I’m in my king-size bed and he’s seated just to the right of me. The monitors are still on. On one, a Ukrainian drug dealer is caught in Moscow, and there are close-ups of his dastardly red Ukrainian passport. On another, two men are passed out on the grass, a spent vodka bottle between them. “There it is,” I say to my doctor. “Russia.”

I shut my eyes and think of what I mean by that.

“In my books, I’ve tried to understand my parents and what they went through in the Soviet Union,” I say. “Maybe this project is another way to get to know them. Times change, regimes change, but the television stays pretty much the same.

“I don’t agree with my parents about politics in the States that much, but we do tend to agree on Putin. That’s true of a lot of Russian-born friends of mine. It’s weird, but Putin brings us together with our parents. It’s nice to know that there’s a source of cruelty in the world that we can identify together.”

“Imagine if my parents had never taken me out of Russia. Where would I be now? All this” — I gesture to the three screens — “would be my permanent reality.”

“You’re in a virtual childhood here,” my psychiatrist says. “These are regressive feelings.”

“Also, the televisions in the Soviet Union used to explode,” I say. “Sixty percent of the house fires in Moscow used to be caused by exploding televisions at one point.”

We’re silent for a bit, as happens often in the course of psychoanalysis.

Still, it’s good to talk.

DAY 6

Oh, the hell with it. I’m just going to start drinking after breakfast. And no more shaving or wearing clothes. The Four Seasons robe will do just fine. A woman with a Russian name on her tag rolls in my coffee and an H & H bagel with whitefish.

“Whitefish and not salmon?” She chastises me as if she were a Channel 1 television anchor and I were Ukraine.

“I’ll get the salmon tomorrow,” I promise her.

I watch a Jerry Springer-style show called “Male/Female.” Today’s topic: Tatyana, a woman from the village of Bolsheorlovskoe, 300 miles from Moscow, wants to find out the paternity of her latest child. A DNA test is administered to scores of the village men, and there are shots of poor Tatyana’s bedraggled neighbors voicing their opinions of her.

“A whore is a whore.”

“You get drunk, come to her house and bang!”

The village itself looks as if it has been banged repeatedly by some coarse muzhik in an ill-fitting Chinese-made sweater. The dwellings are tiny holes with room for a refrigerator, television and a sprinkling of roaches.

There’s a panel of experts, including a lawyer, a psychologist, a painter and a poet with a velvet jacket and a luxuriant, poetic mustache, commenting on Tatyana’s problems. “All Russian couples should have children while sober,” the poet duly notes.

Tatyana herself speaks with a hoarse country warble and is missing many critical teeth. Still, she’s oddly beautiful, and unlike a similar apparition on Jerry Springer, she never fights back even as the hosts and audience humiliate her. She sits there stoically, like a fallen character out of Dostoyevsky. In her own way, she is a model citizen for Putin’s new Russia. She knows to keep her trap shut while being continuously shouted at by persons in authority.

The DNA results are presented, and none of the assembled sad sacks proves to be the father. Tomorrow, Channel 1 will air the second part of Tatyana’s story. More villagers will be brought in for their DNA tests. Tatyana will once again be told she’s a whore.

There’s no way I can watch the news anymore without at least two minibottles of the Absolut, which I wash down with a couple of beers. The monitors are blurring one into the next, and I’m having trouble following the proceedings. On one screen, a man with a gun is being inhumane to others, while on another a woman of cubic-zirconia-grade glitz is singing nonsense. I let myself dissolve into the nonsense and the menace, as if I were a man just returned from a day of hardship at the hands of thieving bosses and thieving traffic cops somewhere in Tomsk or Omsk. What a powerful weapon Putin’s television is. How skillfully it combines nostalgia, malice, paranoia and lazy humor; how swiftly it both dulls the senses and raises your ire.

I bury my face in a hypoallergenic pillow. I need another drink.

But instead of the Absolut, I decide to do something forbidden. I whip out my laptop and log on to the progressive news site www.slon.ru. (Slon means “elephant” in Russian.) My friends in St. Petersburg subsist on these analytical blogs and news sites, the Slates and Salons of Russia. Slon is one of the remaining few that has not been bent to the will of the regime. Two other favorites, Gazeta.ru (*gazeta* means “newspaper”) and Lenta.ru, have lost their impartiality.

The two main headlines on Slon are not about the decline of the euro versus the dollar. They are about the price of Brent crude oil falling below \$57 a barrel. Another article concerns the opposition leader Alexey Navalny’s refusal to continue to live under house arrest (the activist and his brother were convicted of unsubstantiated charges for challenging the administration). Another article is titled “How the Regime Will Fall: A Possible Scenario.”

Tens of millions of Russians, mainly younger and urbane, use social media. I imagine at least a few of them are posting the article on “How the Regime Will Fall” on their timelines or tweeting it out with abandon.

DAY 7

Today is my lastday in virtual Russia. The Christmas tree in the Four Seasons lobby is being disassembled, the ornaments put into boxes labeled “American Christmas ‘We Make the Magic Happen.’” Upstairs in my room, Russian Christmas Eve — Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on Jan. 7 — is just beginning.

I watch the second part of the “Male/Female” exposé of Tatyana, the village temptress. Today on the panel of important people judging Tatyana, instead of a poet, there’s a “showman” or “performer,” with a Barbie doll stuck in the lapel of his studded jacket, his hair styled into a thick pompadour. A redheaded dude in a jacket bearing the single word “Russia” proves to be the father. “Yes! Yes! Yes!” Tatyana screams.

“I would castrate all of these men,” one of the program’s hosts says of the male villagers present in the studio.

Keith Gessen, the Moscow-born novelist and journalist, comes by. I have ordered a mortadella and Spanish jamón platter. “You’re like a Russian person who lives in luxury, but you have to imbibe this trash,” Keith says after examining the three monitors.

Keith follows Russian TV closely, and he has noted a shift in the last few years. “You’re watching the news, but the news is the news. Not from the information they’re giving you but from how they’re presenting the information. You feel like it’s a message being sent to you by the Kremlin.”

As the television drones on about the glory of Russia-backed rebels in Ukraine, he asks me if I’ve heard of the murder of Batman, an especially lawless rebel commander in the Donbass region in Eastern Ukraine.

“Apparently,” Keith tells me, “he was attacked and killed by Russian forces or other rebels because he was out of control.”

I snap open my laptop and take a look at the uncensored Russian websites. Batman’s murder is top news. The New York Times has already posted an article about Batman’s demise. The only places where he’s not mentioned are Rossiya 1, NTV and Channel 1.

After Keith leaves, I focus on the Christmas service, currently reverberating live across two networks. There are blue-eyed women in kerchiefs, bearded priests in gold, gusts of incense. From the proceedings at the ornate Cathedral of Christ the Savior, we suddenly cut to a small, humble church in an equally small and humble town to the south of Moscow.

Dressed in a simple sweater, his gaze steady and direct, Vladimir Putin celebrates the holiday surrounded by several girls in white kerchiefs. In the solemn act of religious contemplation, Putin’s expression is as unknowable as ever. Here he is, the self-styled restorer of the nation. But who is he? We are briefly shown people in the back pews reaching upward, straining to snap a photo of him with their smartphones. We are told that children who are refugees from rebel-held Luhansk are staying on the grounds of the church. The Kremlin has given them “candy and historical books” for the holiday. Are the girls in white kerchiefs standing next to Putin the very same ones who had to flee the violence his regime has backed, if not itself unleashed, in Ukraine?

Putin stands there, the centerpiece of his tableau, a contented man. Therein lies the brilliance of Russian television and why watching a week of it has been so painful. Unless you’re a true believer, its endless din just reminds you of how alone you are in another man’s designs. That man is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. These are his channels, his shows, his dreams and his faith.

On my last visit to Moscow several years ago, a drunken cabdriver from a distant province drove me through the city, nearly weeping because, he said, he was unable to feed his family. “I want to emigrate to the States,” he said. “I can’t live like this.”

“You should try Canada,” I suggested to him. “Their immigration policies are very generous.”

He mock-spit on the floor, as he nearly careened into the sidewalk. “Canada? Never! I could only live in a superpower!”

It doesn’t matter that the true path of Russia leads from its oil fields directly to 432 Park Avenue. **When you watch the Putin Show, you live in a superpower. You are a rebel in Ukraine bravely leveling the once-state-of-the-art Donetsk airport with Russian-supplied weaponry. You are a Russian-speaking grandmother standing by her destroyed home in Luhansk shouting at the fascist Nazis, much as her mother probably did when the Germans invaded more than 70 years ago. You are a priest sprinkling blessings on a photogenic convoy of Russian humanitarian aid headed for the front line. To suffer and to survive: This must be the meaning of being Russian. It was in the past and will be forever. This is the fantasy being served up each night on Channel 1, on Rossiya 1, on NTV.**

A generation from now, Channel 1 news circa 2015 will seem as ridiculous as a Soviet documentary on grain procurement. Young people will wonder at just how much nonsense their parents lived through and how, despite it all, they still emerged as decent human beings. As for me, I am escaping from Russia once more. Three satisfying clicks of three Samsung remotes and my whole week fades to black.

Gary Shteyngart is the author of “Little Failure,” a memoir, and the novels “Super Sad True Love Story,” “Absurdistan” and “The Russian Debutante’s Handbook.”

Musulmans, Le Pen : le président du Crif déclenche une vive polémique

Par [Judith Waintraub](#) Publié le 23/02/2015 à 19:47

«Toutes les violences aujourd'hui sont commises par des jeunes musulmans», a affirmé Roger Cukierman, le président du Conseil représentatif des institutions juives. Dalil Boubakeur, président du CFCM, a décidé en retour de boycotter le dîner annuel de l'institution.

Dans un contexte d'explosion des actes antisémites, François Hollande avait prévu de profiter de la 30^e édition du **dîner du Crif**, lundi soir, pour préciser les axes de son plan contre l'antisémitisme et le racisme. Mais, avant même que les quelque 700 invités du Conseil représentatif des institutions juives de France arrivent à l'hôtel Pullman-Montparnasse, où le dîner avait été déplacé cette année pour des raisons de sécurité, son président, **Roger Cukierman**, s'est retrouvé sous les tirs croisés d'une partie de la gauche, du FN et du Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM).

En cause: ses déclarations lundi matin sur Europe 1. «Le Front national est un parti pour lequel je ne voterai jamais», a-t-il expliqué, en affirmant que «derrière **Marine Le Pen, qui est irréprochable personnellement**, il y a tous les négationnistes, tous les vichystes, tous les pétainistes». **Selon lui, lorsqu'on parle d'antisémitisme, «il faut dire les choses : toutes les violences aujourd'hui sont commises par des jeunes musulmans». «Pas du tout choqué» par le terme «islamofasciste» utilisé à plusieurs reprises par Manuel Valls, et qui, d'après lui, «correspond assez bien à la réalité», le président du Crif a précisé qu'il visait «une toute petite minorité de la communauté musulmane, de l'ordre du 1 pour 1000», contre laquelle il fallait «absolument que les musulmans eux-mêmes se mobilisent».**

Au moment du dîner, alors que les réactions s'étaient succédés dans la journée, Roger Cukierman est revenu sur la polémique. «Le Conseil français du culte musulman nous a informés cet après-midi de sa décision de ne pas assister au dîner», a-t-il affirmé. «J'ai appelé M. Boubakeur (le président du CFCM, ndlr) pour essayer de le faire changer d'avis, je lui ai dit qu'il nous faisait un mauvais procès», a-t-il précisé, avant d'ajouter: «Ce qui compte, c'est le vivre ensemble, juifs et musulmans. Nous sommes sur le même bateau et j'espère que le contact sera rapidement rétabli.»

Des déclarations qui agacent

Plus tôt dans la journée, le premier à réagir avait été Alexis Bachelay, sur LCI. Il avait accusé Roger Cukierman d'«ouvrir la porte au FN» et de se transformer «en allié objectif du Front national»: «Il dédouane le FN de son passé antisémite en disant que Marine Le Pen serait différente de son père, alors qu'elle n'a jamais condamné aucun des dérapages antisémites de son père, avait-il affirmé. Ensuite, il fait un amalgame odieux entre des actes antisémites qu'il attribue exclusivement à une catégorie de personnes qu'il désigne par leur religion. Il ethnicise.»

Le député des Hauts-de-Seine a appelé François Hollande et tous les responsables politiques à «boycotter le dîner du Crif». Sur Twitter, Cukierman a précisé que Marine Le Pen était «irréprochable juridiquement, jamais condamnée pour antisémitisme, mais inféquentable», car elle ne «s'est jamais désolidarisée des propos de son père». **En revanche, il n'a pas jugé utile de préciser que les violences antisémites n'émanaient pas exclusivement de jeunes musulmans, comme on l'a vu au cimetière de Sarre-Union, profané par un groupe dont le meneur se revendique «antifasciste».**

Au Front national, les déclarations de Roger Cukierman ont beaucoup agacé Louis Alliot. «Les leçons d'«inféquentabilité» du communautariste CRIF nous honorent. Mais qui représente-t-il aujourd'hui?» a tweeté le vice-président du FN. Plus outré encore, **Dalil Boubakeur, président du CFCM, avait donc fait savoir qu'il ne participerait pas au dîner, en jugeant «aussi graves qu'infondées les attaques contre la composante musulmane de France».**

114,173

This Is The Biggest Problem Facing The World Today: 9 Countries Have Debt-To-GDP Over 300%

By Tyler Durden

Created 02/23/2015 - 11:20

If anyone has stopped to ask just why global central banks are in such a rush to create inflation (but only controlled inflation, not runaway hyperinflation... of course when they fail with the "controlled" part the money paradrop is only a matter of time) over the past 5 years, and have printed over \$12 trillion in credit-money since Lehman, the bulk of which has ended up in the stock market, and which for the first time ever are about to monetize all global sovereign debt issuance in 2015, the answer is simple, and can be seen on the chart below.

It also shows the biggest problem facing the world today, namely that **at least 9 countries have debt/GDP above 300%**, and that a **whopping 39% countries have debt-to-GDP of over 100%**!

Rank	Country	Debt-To-GDP Ratio %
1	Japan	400%
2	Ireland	390%
3	Singapore	382%
4	Portugal	358%
5	Belgium	327%
6	Netherlands	325%
7	Greece	317%
8	Spain	313%
9	Denmark	302%
10	Sweden	290%
11	France	280%
12	Italy	259%
13	United Kingdom	252%
14	Norway	244%
15	Finland	238%
16	United States	233%
17	South Korea	231%
18	Hungary	225%
19	Austria	225%
20	Malaysia	222%
21	Canada	221%
22	China	217%
23	Australia	213%
24	Germany	188%
25	Thailand	187%
26	Israel	178%
27	Slovakia	151%
28	Vietnam	146%
29	Morocco	136%
30	Chile	136%
31	Poland	134%
32	South Africa	133%
33	Czech Republic	128%
34	Brazil	128%
35	India	120%
36	Philippines	116%
37	Egypt	106%
38	Turkey	104%
39	Romania	104%
40	Indonesia	88%

We have written on this topic on countless occasions in the past, so we will be brief: either the Fed inflates this debt away, or one can kiss any hope of economic growth goodbye, even if that means even more central bank rate cuts, more QEs everywhere, and stock markets trading at +? while the middle class around the globe disappears and only the 0.001% is left standing.

Finally, those curious just how the world got to this unprecedented and sorry state, this full breakdown courtesy of McKinsey should answer all questions.

Change in debt-to-GDP ratio since 2007 by country

Ranked by real economy debt-to-GDP ratio, 2Q14¹

Advanced economy Leveraging
 Developing economy Deleveraging

Rank	Country	Debt-to-GDP ratio ¹ %	Real economy debt change, 2007-14 Percentage points				Financial sector debt change
			Total	Government	Corporate	Household	
1	Japan	400	64	63	2	-1	6
2	Ireland	390	172	93	90	-11	-25
3	Singapore	382	129	22	92	15	23
4	Portugal	358	100	83	19	-2	38
5	Belgium	327	61	34	15	11	4
6	Netherlands	325	62	38	17	7	38
7	Greece	317	103	70	13	20	1
8	Spain	313	72	92	-14	-6	-2
9	Denmark	302	37	22	7	8	37
10	Sweden	290	50	1	31	18	37
11	France	280	66	38	19	10	15
12	Italy	259	55	47	3	5	14
13	United Kingdom	252	30	50	-12	-8	2
14	Norway	244	13	-16	16	13	16
15	Finland	238	62	29	17	15	24
16	United States	233	16	35	-2	-18	-24
17	South Korea	231	45	15	19	12	2
18	Hungary	225	35	15	21	-1	10
19	Austria	225	29	23	6	0	-21
20	Malaysia	222	49	17	16	16	6
21	Canada	221	39	18	6	15	-6
22	China	217	83	13	52	18	41
23	Australia	213	33	23	-1	10	-8
24	Germany	188	8	17	-2	-6	-16
25	Thailand	187	43	11	6	26	21
26	Israel	178	-22	-4	-21	3	-2
27	Slovakia	151	51	28	8	14	-5
28	Vietnam	146	13	10	-1	5	2
29	Morocco	136	20	8	7	5	3
30	Chile	136	35	6	20	9	9
31	Poland	134	36	14	9	13	9
32	South Africa	133	19	18	2	-2	-3
33	Czech Republic	128	37	19	9	9	4
34	Brazil	128	27	3	15	9	13
35	India	120	0	-5	6	-1	5
36	Philippines	116	4	-3	9	-2	-5
37	Egypt	106	-9	9	-18	0	-8
38	Turkey	104	28	-4	22	10	11
39	Romania	104	-7	26	-35	1	-4
40	Indonesia	88	17	-5	17	6	-2
41	Colombia	76	14	1	8	5	3
42	Mexico	73	30	19	10	1	-1
43	Russia	65	19	3	9	7	-4
44	Peru	62	5	-10	11	5	2
45	Saudi Arabia	59	-14	-15	2	-1	-8
46	Nigeria	46	10	7	1	2	-1
47	Argentina	33	-11	-14	1	2	-5

¹ Includes debt of households, non-financial corporations, and government; 2Q14 data for advanced economies and China; 2013 data for other developing economies.

NOTE: Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

SOURCE: World economic outlook, IMF; BIS; Haver Analytics; national central banks; McKinsey Global Institute analysis

Rank	Country	Debt-To-GDP Ratio %
1	Japan	400%
2	Ireland	390%
3	Singapore	382%
4	Portugal	358%
5	Belgium	327%
6	Netherlands	325%
7	Greece	317%
8	Spain	313%
9	Denmark	302%
10	Sweden	290%

114,176

Russian Conscripts May Be Part Of Fighting Force In Ukraine

FEBRUARY 23, 2015 4:49 PM ET

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All Things Considered

4 min 34 sec

Kelly McEvers speaks with AP Moscow Correspondent Laura Mills about her coverage of Russian conscripts being sent to Ukraine.

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KELLY MCEVERS, HOST:

Since those protests in the Maidan, nearly 6,000 people have been killed in fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists. The story is that these separatists are mostly from Ukraine or that if they are from Russia, they're volunteers - sometimes soldiers who go to Ukraine on their own time, like while they're on vacation. Russia denies it sends active-duty soldiers into Ukraine. But Laura Mills of the Associated Press has found a different version of that story. She joins us now from Moscow. Welcome.

LAURA MILLS: Thank you.

MCEVERS: And first, can you explain how the Russian military works? I know that every Russian is required to serve one year in the military, right? Then what?

MILLS: So after a year of mandatory service, you can then become a professional soldier in order to keep fighting. And then you sign up for contract, kind of like in the U.S. - anywhere from three to five years.

MCEVERS: So it's a contract that you sign and that means you're going to continue being in the military. Now how does it work if you're going to go serve abroad? You have to be under one of these contracts, right?

MILLS: Exactly. Conscripts, or these young recruits who are doing their mandatory year of service, legally aren't allowed to serve overseas, whereas in order to serve in any foreign conflicts, you have to have signed a contract with the Russian military.

MCEVERS: So you interviewed a 20-year-old guy named Alexander. He had just finished his first year of mandatory service. Tell us what happened after that.

MILLS: Alexander was about to wrap up his year of mandatory service in October. He's based in a military town near Moscow. And he was just out at the shooting range one day and a commander drove up and said, everybody back to the base. Then they get back to the base and the commander told them - you guys have to go on a trip. He said, ah, it's just a month. Don't worry about it. You'll be going down to Rostov.

MCEVERS: This is a part of southern Russian that borders Ukraine.

MILLS: Yes, and what many activists believe is a sort of springboard for sending troops into east Ukraine - but, you know, Alexander said he had no intention of extending his military service. But he ultimately came back to his commander - he said I don't think that I want to do it. The commander said, well, tough luck. You said that you might go on this trip, so now you're going. And then, basically, when he got sent down to Rostov, he had different commanders there who said they have this piece of paper here saying that you agreed to sign up for the long-term. And you're here for the long haul, whether you like it or not. And if you want to run away, we'll try you for absence without leave, which in Russia carries up to five years in prison. So obviously, a young guy like this who's been intimidated into taking this trip in the first place - he gets really scared. And he ended up staying there basically from the middle of October until the new year. And then he ran away.

MCEVERS: And he's back home now. He so far hasn't been punished by the military. He ended up not going to fight in Ukraine. But some other soldiers did end up going to fight Ukraine. Can you tell us about them?

MILLS: Yeah. Specifically, we spoke to one mother. She lives in Moscow. Her son was serving in a base also not far from Moscow and he was also a recruit. And in the summer she got a text message from him saying, I've arrived in Rostov, which is this region near Ukraine, for military exercises. That was at the end of July. And then she didn't hear from him for about a month.

She was totally desperate, got together with other mothers who had the same problem and couldn't get in touch with their sons. And then finally, when her son reappeared, he confessed to her that he'd actually gone across the border into east Ukraine. He's also a conscript. He said he was forced to sign a document saying that he agreed to cross the border, but there wasn't even a date written in there with the terms of his assignment or the length of his assignment.

And she went to the local recruitment office and said, why have you sent my son who's not legally even supposed to be sent anywhere outside of Russia across the border? And they said, you're making things up. There are no troops in east Ukraine. And that's the only answer to this day that she's had from them.

MCEVERS: So the implication here is that they want some sort of legal cover should it be discovered that some of these soldiers are actually going to Ukraine - that they were going there legally because they signed a contract. But why is this being kept so secret?

MILLS: Because an invasion of east Ukraine, if it were to mean a lot of casualties, would probably not be very popular with the Russian population. There was a recent survey that said that after economic problems, a third of Russians are really terrified of the possibility that their country could be dragged into a war. And it's clear that the government is worried about what the possible consequences of people finding out how many people are dying there could be.

MCEVERS: That's Laura Mills of the Associated Press. She joined us from her base in Moscow. Laura, thank you so much.

MILLS: Thank you.

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Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault

The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin

By [John J. Mearsheimer](#)

FROM OUR [SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2014 ISSUE](#)



A man takes a picture as he stands on a Soviet-style star re-touched with blue paint so that it resembles the Ukrainian flag, Moscow, August 20, 2014. (Maxim Shemetov / Courtesy Reuters)

According to the prevailing wisdom in the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression. Russian President Vladimir Putin, the argument goes, annexed Crimea out of a long-standing desire to resuscitate the Soviet empire, and he may eventually go after the rest of Ukraine, as well as other countries in eastern Europe. In this view, the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 merely provided a pretext for Putin's decision to order Russian forces to seize part of Ukraine.

But this account is wrong: the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrate it into the West. At the same time, the EU's expansion eastward and the West's backing of the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine -- beginning with the Orange Revolution in 2004 -- were critical elements, too. Since the mid-1990s, Russian leaders have adamantly opposed NATO enlargement, and in recent years, they have made it clear that they would not stand by while their strategically important neighbor turned into a Western bastion. For Putin, the illegal overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected and pro-Russian president -- which he rightly labeled a "coup" -- was the final straw. He responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula he feared would host a NATO naval base, and working to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West.

Putin's pushback should have come as no surprise. After all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribe to a flawed view of international politics. They tend to believe that the logic of realism holds little relevance in the twenty-first century and that Europe can be kept whole and free on the basis of such liberal principles as the rule of law, economic interdependence, and democracy.

But this grand scheme went awry in Ukraine. The crisis there shows that realpolitik remains relevant -- and states that ignore it do so at their own peril. U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border. Now that the consequences have been laid bare, it would be an even greater mistake to continue this misbegotten policy.

U.S. and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border.

THE WESTERN AFFRONT

As the Cold War came to a close, Soviet leaders preferred that U.S. forces remain in Europe and NATO stay intact, an arrangement they thought would keep a reunified Germany pacified. But they and their Russian successors did not want NATO to grow any larger and assumed that Western diplomats understood their concerns. The Clinton administration evidently thought otherwise, and in the mid-1990s, it began pushing for NATO to expand.

The first round of enlargement took place in 1999 and brought in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The second occurred in 2004; it included Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Moscow complained bitterly from the start. During NATO's 1995 bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs, for example, Russian President Boris Yeltsin said, "This is the first sign of what could happen when NATO comes right up to the Russian Federation's borders. ... The flame of war could burst out across the whole of Europe." But the Russians were too weak at the time to derail NATO's eastward movement -- which, at any rate, did not look so threatening, since none of the new members shared a border with Russia, save for the tiny Baltic countries.

Then NATO began looking further east. At its April 2008 summit in Bucharest, the alliance considered admitting Georgia and Ukraine. The George W. Bush administration supported doing so, but France and Germany opposed the move for fear that it would unduly antagonize Russia. In the end, NATO's members reached a compromise: the alliance did not begin the formal process leading to membership, but it issued a statement endorsing the aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine and boldly declaring, "These countries will become members of NATO."

Moscow, however, did not see the outcome as much of a compromise. Alexander Grushko, then Russia's deputy foreign minister, said, "Georgia's and Ukraine's membership in the alliance is a huge strategic mistake which would have most serious consequences for pan-European security." Putin maintained that admitting those two countries to NATO would represent a "direct threat" to Russia. One Russian newspaper reported that Putin, while speaking with Bush, "very transparently hinted that if Ukraine was accepted into NATO, it would cease to exist."

Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 should have dispelled any remaining doubts about Putin's determination to prevent Georgia and Ukraine from joining NATO. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who was deeply committed to bringing his country into NATO, had decided in the summer of 2008 to reincorporate two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But Putin sought to keep Georgia weak and divided -- and out of NATO. After fighting broke out between the Georgian government and South Ossetian separatists, Russian forces took control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moscow had made its point. Yet despite this clear warning, NATO never publicly abandoned its goal of bringing Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance. And NATO expansion continued marching forward, with Albania and Croatia becoming members in 2009.

The EU, too, has been marching eastward. In May 2008, it unveiled its Eastern Partnership initiative, a program to foster prosperity in such countries as Ukraine and integrate them into the EU economy. Not surprisingly, Russian leaders view the plan as hostile to their country's interests. This past February, before Yanukovich was forced from office, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the EU of trying to create a "sphere of influence" in eastern Europe. In the eyes of Russian leaders, EU expansion is a stalking horse for NATO expansion.

The West's final tool for peeling Kiev away from Moscow has been its efforts to spread Western values and promote democracy in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states, a plan that often entails funding pro-Western individuals and organizations. Victoria Nuland, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, estimated in December 2013 that the United States had invested more than \$5 billion since 1991 to help Ukraine achieve "the future it deserves." As part of that effort, the U.S. government has bankrolled the National Endowment for Democracy. The nonprofit foundation has funded more than 60 projects aimed at promoting civil society in Ukraine, and the NED's president, Carl Gershman, has called that country "the biggest prize." After Yanukovich won Ukraine's presidential election in February 2010, the NED decided he was undermining its goals, and so it stepped up its efforts to support the opposition and strengthen the country's democratic institutions.

When Russian leaders look at Western social engineering in Ukraine, they worry that their country might be next. And such fears are hardly groundless. In September 2013, Gershman wrote in *The Washington Post*, "Ukraine's choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents." He added: "Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself."

CREATING A CRISIS

Imagine the American outrage if China built an impressive military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico.

The West's triple package of policies -- NATO enlargement, EU expansion, and democracy promotion -- added fuel to a fire waiting to ignite. The spark came in November 2013, when Yanukovich rejected a major economic deal he had been negotiating with the EU and decided to accept a \$15 billion Russian counteroffer instead. That decision gave rise to antigovernment demonstrations that escalated over the following three months and that by mid-February had led to the deaths of some one hundred protesters. Western emissaries hurriedly flew to Kiev to resolve the crisis. On February 21, the government and the opposition struck a deal that allowed Yanukovich to stay in power until new elections were held. But it immediately fell apart, and Yanukovich fled to Russia the next day. The new government in Kiev was pro-Western and anti-Russian to the core, and it contained four high-ranking members who could legitimately be labeled neofascists.

Although the full extent of U.S. involvement has not yet come to light, it is clear that Washington backed the coup. Nuland and Republican Senator John McCain participated in antigovernment demonstrations, and Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, proclaimed after Yanukovich's toppling that it was "a day for the history books." As a leaked telephone recording revealed, Nuland had advocated regime change and wanted the Ukrainian politician Arseniy Yatsenyuk to become prime minister in the new government, which he did. No wonder Russians of all persuasions think the West played a role in Yanukovich's ouster.

For Putin, the time to act against Ukraine and the West had arrived. Shortly after February 22, he ordered Russian forces to take Crimea from Ukraine, and soon after that, he incorporated it into Russia. The task proved relatively easy, thanks to the thousands of Russian troops already stationed at a naval base in the Crimean port of Sevastopol. Crimea also made for an easy target since ethnic Russians compose roughly 60 percent of its population. Most of them wanted out of Ukraine.

Next, Putin put massive pressure on the new government in Kiev to discourage it from siding with the West against Moscow, making it clear that he would wreck Ukraine as a functioning state before he would allow it to become a Western stronghold on Russia's doorstep. Toward that end, he has provided advisers, arms, and diplomatic support to the Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, who are pushing the country toward civil war. He has massed a large army on the Ukrainian border, threatening to invade if the government cracks down on the rebels. And he has sharply raised the price of the natural gas Russia sells to Ukraine and demanded payment for past exports. Putin is playing hardball.

THE DIAGNOSIS

Putin's actions should be easy to comprehend. A huge expanse of flat land that Napoleonic France, imperial Germany, and Nazi Germany all crossed to strike at Russia itself, Ukraine serves as a buffer state of enormous strategic importance to Russia. No Russian leader would tolerate a military alliance that was Moscow's mortal enemy until recently moving into Ukraine. Nor would any Russian leader stand idly by while the West helped install a government there that was determined to integrate Ukraine into the West.

Washington may not like Moscow's position, but it should understand the logic behind it. This is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory. After all, the United States does not tolerate distant great powers deploying military forces anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, much less on its borders. Imagine the outrage in Washington if China built an impressive military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico in it. Logic aside, Russian leaders have told their Western counterparts on many occasions that they consider NATO expansion into Georgia and Ukraine unacceptable, along with any effort to turn those countries against Russia -- a message that the 2008 Russian-Georgian war also made crystal clear.

Officials from the United States and its European allies contend that they tried hard to assuage Russian fears and that Moscow should understand that NATO has no designs on Russia. In addition to continually denying that its expansion was aimed at containing Russia, the alliance has never permanently deployed military forces in its new member states. In 2002, it even created a body called the NATO-Russia Council in an effort to foster cooperation. To further mollify Russia, the United States announced in 2009 that it would deploy its new missile defense system on warships in European waters, at least initially, rather than on Czech or Polish territory. But none of these measures worked; the Russians remained steadfastly opposed to NATO enlargement, especially into Georgia and Ukraine. And it is the Russians, not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them.

To understand why the West, especially the United States, failed to understand that its Ukraine policy was laying the groundwork for a major clash with Russia, one must go back to the mid-1990s, when the Clinton administration began advocating NATO expansion. Pundits advanced a variety of arguments for and against enlargement, but there was no consensus on what to do. Most eastern European émigrés in the United States and their relatives, for example, strongly supported expansion, because they wanted NATO to protect such countries as Hungary and Poland. A few realists also favored the policy because they thought Russia still needed to be contained.

But most realists opposed expansion, in the belief that a declining great power with an aging population and a one-dimensional economy did not in fact need to be contained. And they feared that enlargement would only give Moscow an incentive to cause trouble in eastern Europe. The U.S. diplomat George Kennan articulated this perspective in a 1998 interview, shortly after the U.S. Senate approved the first round of NATO expansion. “I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies,” he said. “I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anyone else.”

The United States and its allies should abandon their plan to westernize Ukraine and instead aim to make it a neutral buffer.

Most liberals, on the other hand, favored enlargement, including many key members of the Clinton administration. They believed that the end of the Cold War had fundamentally transformed international politics and that a new, postnational order had replaced the realist logic that used to govern Europe. The United States was not only the “indispensable nation,” as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it; it was also a benign hegemon and thus unlikely to be viewed as a threat in Moscow. The aim, in essence, was to make the entire continent look like western Europe.

And so the United States and its allies sought to promote democracy in the countries of eastern Europe, increase economic interdependence among them, and embed them in international institutions. Having won the debate in the United States, liberals had little difficulty convincing their European allies to support NATO enlargement. After all, given the EU’s past achievements, Europeans were even more wedded than Americans to the idea that geopolitics no longer mattered and that an all-inclusive liberal order could maintain peace in Europe.

So thoroughly did liberals come to dominate the discourse about European security during the first decade of this century that even as the alliance adopted an open-door policy of growth, NATO expansion faced little realist opposition. The liberal worldview is now accepted dogma among U.S. officials. In March, for example, President Barack Obama delivered a speech about Ukraine in which he talked repeatedly about “the ideals” that motivate Western policy and how those ideals “have often been threatened by an older, more traditional view of power.” Secretary of State John Kerry’s response to the Crimea crisis reflected this same perspective: “You just don’t in the twenty-first century behave in nineteenth-century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped-up pretext.”

In essence, the two sides have been operating with different playbooks: Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics. The result is that the United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine.

BLAME GAME

In that same 1998 interview, Kennan predicted that NATO expansion would provoke a crisis, after which the proponents of expansion would “say that we always told you that is how the Russians are.” As if on cue, most Western officials have portrayed Putin as the real culprit in the Ukraine predicament. In March, according to *The New York Times*, German Chancellor Angela Merkel implied that Putin was irrational, telling Obama that he was “in another world.” Although Putin no doubt has autocratic tendencies, no evidence supports the charge that he is mentally unbalanced. On the contrary: he is a first-class strategist who should be feared and respected by anyone challenging him on foreign policy.

Other analysts allege, more plausibly, that Putin regrets the demise of the Soviet Union and is determined to reverse it by expanding Russia’s borders. According to this interpretation, Putin, having taken Crimea, is now testing the waters to see if the time is right to conquer Ukraine, or at least its eastern part, and he will eventually behave aggressively toward other countries in Russia’s neighborhood. For some in this camp, Putin represents a modern-day Adolf Hitler, and striking any kind of deal with him would repeat the mistake of Munich. Thus, NATO must admit Georgia and Ukraine to contain Russia before it dominates its neighbors and threatens western Europe.

This argument falls apart on close inspection. If Putin were committed to creating a greater Russia, signs of his intentions would almost certainly have arisen before February 22. But there is virtually no evidence that he was bent on taking Crimea, much less any other territory in Ukraine, before that date. Even Western leaders who supported NATO expansion were not doing so out of a fear that Russia was about to use military force. Putin's actions in Crimea took them by complete surprise and appear to have been a spontaneous reaction to Yanukovich's ouster. Right afterward, even Putin said he opposed Crimean secession, before quickly changing his mind.

Besides, even if it wanted to, Russia lacks the capability to easily conquer and annex eastern Ukraine, much less the entire country. Roughly 15 million people -- one-third of Ukraine's population -- live between the Dnieper River, which bisects the country, and the Russian border. An overwhelming majority of those people want to remain part of Ukraine and would surely resist a Russian occupation. Furthermore, Russia's mediocre army, which shows few signs of turning into a modern Wehrmacht, would have little chance of pacifying all of Ukraine. Moscow is also poorly positioned to pay for a costly occupation; its weak economy would suffer even more in the face of the resulting sanctions.

But even if Russia did boast a powerful military machine and an impressive economy, it would still probably prove unable to successfully occupy Ukraine. One need only consider the Soviet and U.S. experiences in Afghanistan, the U.S. experiences in Vietnam and Iraq, and the Russian experience in Chechnya to be reminded that military occupations usually end badly. Putin surely understands that trying to subdue Ukraine would be like swallowing a porcupine. His response to events there has been defensive, not offensive.

A WAY OUT

Given that most Western leaders continue to deny that Putin's behavior might be motivated by legitimate security concerns, it is unsurprising that they have tried to modify it by doubling down on their existing policies and have punished Russia to deter further aggression. Although Kerry has maintained that "all options are on the table," neither the United States nor its NATO allies are prepared to use force to defend Ukraine. The West is relying instead on economic sanctions to coerce Russia into ending its support for the insurrection in eastern Ukraine. In July, the United States and the EU put in place their third round of limited sanctions, targeting mainly high-level individuals closely tied to the Russian government and some high-profile banks, energy companies, and defense firms. They also threatened to unleash another, tougher round of sanctions, aimed at whole sectors of the Russian economy.

Such measures will have little effect. Harsh sanctions are likely off the table anyway; western European countries, especially Germany, have resisted imposing them for fear that Russia might retaliate and cause serious economic damage within the EU. But even if the United States could convince its allies to enact tough measures, Putin would probably not alter his decision-making. History shows that countries will absorb enormous amounts of punishment in order to protect their core strategic interests. There is no reason to think Russia represents an exception to this rule.

Western leaders have also clung to the provocative policies that precipitated the crisis in the first place. In April, U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden met with Ukrainian legislators and told them, "This is a second opportunity to make good on the original promise made by the Orange Revolution." John Brennan, the director of the CIA, did not help things when, that same month, he visited Kiev on a trip the White House said was aimed at improving security cooperation with the Ukrainian government.

The EU, meanwhile, has continued to push its Eastern Partnership. In March, José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, summarized EU thinking on Ukraine, saying, "We have a debt, a duty of solidarity with that country, and we will work to have them as close as possible to us." And sure enough, on June 27, the EU and Ukraine signed the economic agreement that Yanukovich had fatefully rejected seven months earlier. Also in June, at a meeting of NATO members' foreign ministers, it was agreed that the alliance would remain open to new members, although the foreign ministers refrained from mentioning Ukraine by name. "No third country has a veto over NATO enlargement," announced Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO's secretary-general. The foreign ministers also agreed to support various measures to improve Ukraine's military capabilities in such areas as command and control, logistics, and cyberdefense. Russian leaders have naturally recoiled at these actions; the West's response to the crisis will only make a bad situation worse.

There is a solution to the crisis in Ukraine, however -- although it would require the West to think about the country in a fundamentally new way. The United States and its allies should abandon their plan to westernize Ukraine and instead aim to make it a neutral buffer between NATO and Russia, akin to Austria's position during the Cold War. Western leaders should acknowledge that Ukraine matters so much to Putin that they cannot support an anti-Russian regime

there. This would not mean that a future Ukrainian government would have to be pro-Russian or anti-NATO. On the contrary, the goal should be a sovereign Ukraine that falls in neither the Russian nor the Western camp.

To achieve this end, the United States and its allies should publicly rule out NATO's expansion into both Georgia and Ukraine. The West should also help fashion an economic rescue plan for Ukraine funded jointly by the EU, the International Monetary Fund, Russia, and the United States -- a proposal that Moscow should welcome, given its interest in having a prosperous and stable Ukraine on its western flank. And the West should considerably limit its social-engineering efforts inside Ukraine. It is time to put an end to Western support for another Orange Revolution. Nevertheless, U.S. and European leaders should encourage Ukraine to respect minority rights, especially the language rights of its Russian speakers.

Some may argue that changing policy toward Ukraine at this late date would seriously damage U.S. credibility around the world. There would undoubtedly be certain costs, but the costs of continuing a misguided strategy would be much greater. Furthermore, other countries are likely to respect a state that learns from its mistakes and ultimately devises a policy that deals effectively with the problem at hand. That option is clearly open to the United States.

One also hears the claim that Ukraine has the right to determine whom it wants to ally with and the Russians have no right to prevent Kiev from joining the West. This is a dangerous way for Ukraine to think about its foreign policy choices. The sad truth is that might often makes right when great-power politics are at play. Abstract rights such as self-determination are largely meaningless when powerful states get into brawls with weaker states. Did Cuba have the right to form a military alliance with the Soviet Union during the Cold War? The United States certainly did not think so, and the Russians think the same way about Ukraine joining the West. It is in Ukraine's interest to understand these facts of life and tread carefully when dealing with its more powerful neighbor.

Even if one rejects this analysis, however, and believes that Ukraine has the right to petition to join the EU and NATO, the fact remains that the United States and its European allies have the right to reject these requests. There is no reason that the West has to accommodate Ukraine if it is bent on pursuing a wrong-headed foreign policy, especially if its defense is not a vital interest. Indulging the dreams of some Ukrainians is not worth the animosity and strife it will cause, especially for the Ukrainian people.

Of course, some analysts might concede that NATO handled relations with Ukraine poorly and yet still maintain that Russia constitutes an enemy that will only grow more formidable over time -- and that the West therefore has no choice but to continue its present policy. But this viewpoint is badly mistaken. Russia is a declining power, and it will only get weaker with time. Even if Russia were a rising power, moreover, it would still make no sense to incorporate Ukraine into NATO. The reason is simple: the United States and its European allies do not consider Ukraine to be a core strategic interest, as their unwillingness to use military force to come to its aid has proved. It would therefore be the height of folly to create a new NATO member that the other members have no intention of defending. NATO has expanded in the past because liberals assumed the alliance would never have to honor its new security guarantees, but Russia's recent power play shows that granting Ukraine NATO membership could put Russia and the West on a collision course.

Sticking with the current policy would also complicate Western relations with Moscow on other issues. The United States needs Russia's assistance to withdraw U.S. equipment from Afghanistan through Russian territory, reach a nuclear agreement with Iran, and stabilize the situation in Syria. In fact, Moscow has helped Washington on all three of these issues in the past; in the summer of 2013, it was Putin who pulled Obama's chestnuts out of the fire by forging the deal under which Syria agreed to relinquish its chemical weapons, thereby avoiding the U.S. military strike that Obama had threatened. The United States will also someday need Russia's help containing a rising China. Current U.S. policy, however, is only driving Moscow and Beijing closer together.

The United States and its European allies now face a choice on Ukraine. They can continue their current policy, which will exacerbate hostilities with Russia and devastate Ukraine in the process -- a scenario in which everyone would come out a loser. Or they can switch gears and work to create a prosperous but neutral Ukraine, one that does not threaten Russia and allows the West to repair its relations with Moscow. With that approach, all sides would win.

The Roots of the Ukraine Crisis

Putin's Russia is using military might to rewrite the history of the Soviet collapse

Last Wednesday, in a phone conversation with Mustafa Dzhemilev, a leader of the Muslim Tatar minority in the Crimea, Vladimir Putin raised a chilling possibility: According to Ukrainian media reports, he questioned the legality of Ukraine's secession from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Back then, the world also feared war and prolonged conflict between Russia and Ukraine. If the Russian president's current takeover of Ukraine's Crimea region succeeds, it may be followed by Russian efforts to seize other chunks of Ukraine-- and beyond that, perhaps pieces of Moldova and the Baltic states too, which also house substantial numbers of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities.

The roots of today's crisis go back to the last days of the Soviet Union, whose demise Mr. Putin has lamented as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Moscow has long cast an acquisitive eye on Ukraine -- now the second-largest Slavic state, previously a vast part of the Soviet Union and always Russia's uneasy neighbor. The current Ukrainian crisis and Russia's occupation of the Crimea are directly linked to Moscow's project of reintegrating the space of the former Soviet Union into a comprehensive economic, political and military Eurasian Union.

Though the Soviet Union was often called Russia, it was actually a conglomerate of nationalities -- lumped unhappily into 15 different republics -- ruled by Moscow with an iron fist for most of the Soviet period. Russians, who numbered close to 150 million people, constituted only 51% of the Soviet population. The Ukrainians were the second-largest group, with more than 50 million people, accounting for close to 20% of the Soviet population.

When Ukraine voted for independence on Dec. 1, 1991, it sealed the Soviet Union's fate. More than 90% of Ukrainian citizens voted in favor of statehood. Even in the Crimea, which then (as now) had an ethnic Russian majority, 54% voted for independence. In Sevastopol, the Soviet naval base in the Crimea, 57% were in favor. The Russians of Ukraine, in short, voted in large numbers for Ukrainian independence.

The last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, had drawn up a template for a new, looser union, but Boris Yeltsin of the Russian republic and Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine refused to join. On Dec. 8, 1991, in a hunting lodge in the forests of Belarus, Mr. Yeltsin and Mr. Kravchuk dissolved the U.S.S.R. and created a Commonwealth of Independent States to link the former republics. Neither Mr. Gorbachev nor Mr. Yeltsin could imagine a viable union without Ukraine. The Russian leadership, skeptical about bearing the costs of the new Commonwealth, could be persuaded to do so only together with Ukraine. As Mr. Yeltsin told President George H.W. Bush repeatedly, without its fellow Slavs in Ukraine inside the Commonwealth, Russia would be outnumbered and outvoted by the Central Asian republics.

The result was a chain reaction: Ukraine didn't want to be in the union that Mr. Gorbachev envisioned, Russia couldn't imagine a union without Ukraine, and those republics that still wanted to be in the union couldn't imagine it without Russia.

Mr. Yeltsin's advisers saw Russia as an ark -- a vehicle to save their nascent post-Soviet democracy, as well as the power they had won by standing up to the ham-handed plotters who had tried to oust Mr. Gorbachev in the failed coup of August 1991. This stance made good economic sense. During the Russian Revolution, Lenin had claimed that the new Soviet state wouldn't survive without Ukrainian coal, but by 1991, the U.S.S.R.'s greatest riches -- especially its vast mineral resources -- were on Russian soil, not in the republics.

The Soviet Union was different from other empires: Russia, the empire's resource-rich center, could cut off its former colonial possessions in the republics from easy access to those resources. As such, Russia stood to benefit more than any past empire from the loss of its imperial possessions -- as Mr. Yeltsin and his people well knew.

Mr. Gorbachev, hoping to slow the dissolution of the Soviet Union, was eager to exploit the loyalties of the ethnic Russians in the Crimea to undermine Ukraine's drive for independence. To his credit, Mr. Yeltsin refused to do so. Nor did he follow in the footsteps of the ruthless Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic and use force to incorporate Russian minority enclaves that fell outside the new Russian Federation.

But Mr. Yeltsin never gave up hope that the Soviet Union could be revived in a different form that would benefit Russia. His advisers thought that the republics would come back to Russia once it had recovered economically and militarily. In September 1991, Mr. Yeltsin's right-hand man, Gennady Burbulis, told a key aide to Mr. Gorbachev, "We must save Russia and strengthen its independence, separating ourselves from the rest. After that, when it is back on its feet, everyone will rally to it, and the question [of the union] can be resolved again."

Mr. Yeltsin's advisers hoped that the post-Soviet republics would return voluntarily to the Russian fold. He was prepared to fight inside the Russian Federation in places such as the breakaway region of Chechnya, but not to go beyond Russia's borders. He thus prevented the former Soviet Union from turning into Yugoslavia with nukes.

But Mr. Yeltsin's policy of trying to peacefully reintegrate the former Soviet space was reversed by his successor, Mr. Putin, who invaded Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. Mr. Putin's Russia, unlike Mr. Yeltsin's, is using both its newly acquired economic power and its long-standing military might to rewrite the history of the Soviet collapse.

How should the West respond to this major departure in Russian foreign policy -- that is, to Mr. Putin's readiness to achieve his neo-imperial goals by force? Back in 1991, the West did exceptionally well in helping to make the disintegration of its Cold War rival a largely peaceful process. President Bush forged a consensus with Washington's European allies, and the West was able to offer the former Soviet republics both diplomatic recognition and economic cooperation, while also demanding that the new post-Soviet borders be treated as inviolable.

Russia is different today, as are the U.S. and the enlarged European Union. But what prevented military conflict in 1991 might work again. A united front of the U.S. and its Western allies in opposition to any forcible violations of political sovereignty is essential for stopping Russia from annexing the Crimea and trying to revise post-Soviet borders. Backsliding into dreams of Soviet empire isn't something the world can afford just now.

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11412878/Putin-Will-he-go-nuclear.html>

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Putin: Will he go nuclear?

The Ukraine crisis has turned into a potentially apocalyptic nuclear stand-off as President Vladimir Putin primes Russia for conflict with the West. But how scared should we really be?

By Marc Bennetts

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1089 Comments

Earlier this month, as fighting raged in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russian rebels and forces loyal to the Western-backed government in Kiev, Dmitry Kiselyov, the pugnacious, middle-aged journalist who heads Russia's main state news agency, gazed defiantly into a TV studio camera. "What is Russia preparing for?" he asked. As if in reply, the director cut to an ominous backdrop image of an intercontinental ballistic missile emerging from an underground launch silo.

"During the era of political romanticism, the Soviet Union pledged never to use nuclear weapons first," Kiselyov told the audience of Vesti Nedeli, his current affairs show, one of the country's most widely watched programmes. "But Russia's current military doctrine does not." He paused briefly for effect. "No more illusions."

There was nothing out of the ordinary about this reminder that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to a "threat" to its statehood. Since the start of the crisis in Ukraine, which has massive geostrategic importance for Russia, state-controlled TV has engineered an upsurge in aggressive anti-Western sentiment, with Kiselyov as the Kremlin's top attack dog.

Last spring, as Washington warned of sanctions over Russia's seizure of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, Kiselyov boasted about his country's fearsome nuclear arsenal. "Russia is the only country in the world realistically capable of turning the US into radioactive ash," he declared.

Kiselyov's blood-curdling comments will have had the Kremlin's implicit backing, analysts say. "This threat of nuclear war should be taken seriously," said Sergey Markov, a political strategist. "In Russia, we believe that Ukraine has been occupied by the US. And that this occupation is not about democracy, or even money, but that it is the first step in a war against Russia. The US is seeking to undermine our sovereignty, neutralise our nuclear potential, and steal our oil and gas. Under these circumstances, the danger of nuclear confrontation is very real."

Some 5,500 lives have been lost in the almost year-long conflict in Ukraine, where pro-Russian rebels in the east have carved out two self-declared "people's republics". The crisis was sparked by the February 2014 overthrow of Ukraine's pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, in what Kremlin officials say was a coup orchestrated by the US. In addition, President Vladimir Putin has spoken of what he called a "Nato legion" fighting alongside the Ukrainian army.

While there is no proof that Nato forces are in action in Ukraine, US officials have suggested that Washington could supply weapons to Kiev to assist its battered army. The proposal sparked a furious response: Viktor Zavarzin, of Russia's defence committee, warned of the "irrevocable consequences" of such a move.

In turn, the West has accused Russia of providing both troops and weaponry to the rebels, a charge Putin has consistently denied.

A ceasefire thrashed out by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany – the second attempt to bring peace to the devastated region – was set to come into effect today at one minute past midnight.

Amid these tensions, Kiselyov is not the only one pushing the possibility of nuclear confrontation with the West. Russia's Zvezda TV channel, owned by the defence ministry, has also been preparing its audience for the worst. "Russia and the US are on the verge of nuclear war," read a headline on its website last week. The article cited an analyst from the Moscow-based Politika think tank, Vyacheslav Nikonov, which said a nuclear exchange between the two former Cold War-era foes was increasingly likely because the US wanted Russia to "disappear" as an independent country. "This is not in our plans," he said.

Russia has the world's largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, with 8,400 warheads compared with a US total of 7,500. A day after last week's peace talks in Belarus, Russia's nuclear forces staged large-scale exercises, soon after navy nuclear combat drills in the Arctic. All of which causes concern in the West. Michael Fallon, the UK Defence Secretary, said earlier this month that he was worried Russia had "lowered its threshold" for the use of nuclear weapons, while "integrating nuclear with conventional forces in a rather threatening way."

The prospect of nuclear war is also being talked up by pro-Kremlin movements. In a clip posted online last month, a Kalashnikov-wielding member of the Moscow-based, pro-Kremlin National Liberation Movement (NOD) vows global nuclear devastation in the event of the defeat of Russia's interests in Ukraine. "If we lose, we will destroy the whole world," intones a young NOD activist named Maria Katasonova. She sweeps a circle with her arm, and the screen is filled with a virtual image of an explosion as the planet is consumed in an atomic inferno.

"Russians will not sit by and watch as their country's sovereignty is threatened by the US," Katasonova told The Sunday Telegraph last week. "If our country is in genuine danger, we really will use nuclear weapons."

Katasonova is a follower of Alexander Dugin, a hardline nationalist thinker who has called for the destruction of the US. Dugin – described as “Putin’s brain” by the respected US-based Foreign Affairs journal – is something of a fanatic. He combines political activities with occultism, and often speaks of his belief that the world must be “brought to an end”.

So what’s going on? Is Moscow really preparing its people for the unthinkable – nuclear confrontation? Or is all this simply North Korean-style bluff and bluster? How many minutes are left until the Kremlin’s doomsday clock strikes midnight?

“It is, of course, a disgrace and an embarrassment to my country that such things are being said on national television,” said Lev Ponomaryov, a veteran human rights activist and Soviet-era dissident. “But statements about nuclear war are mainly for domestic consumption. In particular, they are directed at the more radical, nationalist members of society – those who have been fighting as volunteers in Ukraine, or support the rebels there.”

While Putin denies that regular Russian troops are fighting in Ukraine, he has hailed the hundreds, if not thousands, of apparent volunteers who have travelled to what the rebels call “Novorossiya” – “New Russia”. A number of these fighters have become folk heroes back home; in particular, Igor Strelkov, the ultra-conservative enthusiast who spent much of last year commanding rebel forces in Ukraine’s Donbass region.

“I think these people frighten the Kremlin even more than they scare me,” said Ponomaryov. “The authorities are afraid that they could one day turn their weapons against them, and the government will do anything to keep them on side.”

State television’s war rhetoric is not confined to the nuclear. In recent days, one Kremlin-run channel has discussed how long it would take for Russian tanks to “reach Berlin”, while in east Ukraine, bloody and bruised government soldiers were abused by a notorious rebel commander in front of Russian television cameras.

But state-run media’s fever-pitch, anti-Western TV programming is not only pandering to the radicals, it is also creating them. “Nationally televised broadcasts, such as those presented by Dmitry Kiselyov, have scared people, and led to increased hostility in society,” said Lev Gudkov, who heads the independent, Moscow-based Levada-Center polling agency. “We have seen a drastic change in the collective consciousness of the Russian people over the last year or so.”

The figures are startling. The number of Russians who believe their country and the US are now mutual enemies has increased tenfold in a year to 42 per cent, according to an opinion poll. The total professing a negative attitude to the US has almost doubled.

The statistics are backed by everyday incidents, from the racist image of a banana-munching President Barack Obama laser-beamed on to the wall of the US embassy in Moscow, to the T-shirts with slogans hailing Russia’s nuclear missiles, on sale across the country.

“Of course I don’t want an atomic war with the West,” said Yegor Denisov, a twentysomething computer programmer. “But we have to defend ourselves from our enemies. And this,” he said, gesturing at the ballistic missile on his newly bought T-shirt, “will help us do that.”

Although state media broadcasts have clearly had a pernicious influence on society, putting the country on a war footing and boosting Putin’s approval ratings, Peter Pomerantsev, a UK journalist who worked in Russian TV in the 2000s, believes they are mainly intended for a Western audience.

“I wouldn’t take these statements about nuclear war literally,” said Pomerantsev, whose book, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, dissects the Kremlin’s media manipulation tactics. Talk of impending nuclear conflict is “one of Putin’s mind-benders”, part of what he called an attempt to convince the West that the former KGB officer is this “crazy, unpredictable” leader whom it would be advisable not to push too far.

But the lines between fantasy and reality can all too often get blurred.

“There is always the danger that games somehow slip into reality – you start off playing with these narratives, and you end up stumbling into a real conflict,” said Pomerantsev.

The Kremlin’s masters of reality have uncorked the atomic genie. It is to be hoped they show the same aptitude when it comes to putting it back in the bottle.

