

Konjunkturausblick auf 2013

Neues Jahr, alte Lasten

03.01.2013 · Europa hat seine Krise noch nicht überwunden. Zumindest in Deutschland deutet aber einiges daraufhin, dass dem Land eine abermalige Rezession erspart bleibt. Eine Analyse.

Von [Philip Plickert](#)



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Hoffnungsträger: Die deutsche Bauindustrie sollte von den niedrigen Zinsen und der Flucht in Sachwerte profitieren.

Das Schlimmste der Euro-Krise liegt hinter uns. Nein, das Schlimmste kommt noch. Beide gegensätzliche Aussagen sind derzeit von Politikern und Ökonomen zu hören, für beide gibt es Gründe. Das Kartell der Rettungspolitiker verbreitet beruhigende Worte, viele Ökonomen und Steuerzahler bleiben aber besorgt über die Kosten der Rettung. In der deutschen Wirtschaft, die unter dem Eindruck der Euro-Krise oft Investitionen verschoben hat, fassen dennoch viele wieder Mut. Konjunkturell könnte der Tiefpunkt, zumindest für Deutschland, im Winterhalbjahr durchschritten werden.

Das Damoklesschwert der Krise scheint zuletzt etwas an Schrecken verloren zu haben. Das geht vor allen auf Mario Draghi, den Präsidenten der Europäischen Zentralbank, zurück, der den Märkten den unbegrenzten Ankauf von Staatsanleihen in Aussicht gestellt hat. Es ist nicht ausgemacht, dass diese Strategie langfristig aufgeht. Die zur Schuldenfeuerwehr mutierte Zentralbank muss höllisch aufpassen, dass sie als monetärer Staatsfinanzier nicht den Reformdruck wegnimmt und die Währung schwächt. Kurzfristig jedoch hat der EZB-Zauber gewirkt. Die Risikoprämien der Südländer sind gesunken. Allerdings gibt es bislang keine Anzeichen für ein Ende der Rezessionen in Südeuropa. Im Gegenteil: Die Industrie ist zum Jahreswechsel auf einen neuen Tiefpunkt gesunken.

Deutschland wird eine Rezession vermeiden können

Deutschland wird eine Rezession aber wohl vermeiden können. Hauptgrund der konjunkturellen Bremsung im vergangenen Jahr war die Investitionszurückhaltung der Unternehmen, die sorgenvoll nach Süden blickten und die Abkühlung der Weltkonjunktur zu spüren bekamen. Die Industrie, besonders die Investitionsgüterhersteller, musste große Einbußen in Südeuropa hinnehmen. **Der Anteil der Eurozone am deutschen Export, der zu Anfang der Währungsunion noch 46 Prozent betrug, liegt inzwischen zehn Prozentpunkte niedriger.** Die Einbußen wurden jedoch durch die sehr starke Nachfrage aus Asien und Amerika überkompensiert, so dass der Außenhandel einen positiven Wachstumsbeitrag leistete.

Die fehlenden Investitionen haben die Binnenkonjunktur ausgebremst. Von Quartal zu Quartal sank die Auslastung der Industrie. Eine Konjunkturstütze ist der Wohnungsbau. Er profitiert von den ausnehmend günstigen Bauzinsen und der Flucht in die Sachwerte. Erfreulich stabil blieb der Arbeitsmarkt. Auch wenn seit einem halben Jahr die Arbeitslosenzahlen saisonbereinigt leicht steigen, **hat die Beschäftigung einen historischen Rekordwert erreicht, und die Reallöhne entwickeln sich etwas stärker.** Das sollte den Konsum stärken.

Stimmungsindikatoren deuten auf Konjunkturwende hin

Rechtzeitig zum neuen Jahr deuten Stimmungsindikatoren auf eine Konjunkturwende hin. Das Ifo-Geschäftsklima ist zwei Mal in Folge stärker als prognostiziert gestiegen. Zwar laufen die Geschäfte aktuell so schlecht wie seit zweieinhalb Jahren nicht, doch in den Chefetagen der Unternehmen zieht wieder verhaltene Zuversicht ein. Allerdings ist dies bislang nicht mehr als eine Bodenbildung.

Die professionellen Konjunkturforscher haben ihre Prognosen für 2013 drastisch gesenkt. Nur noch magere 0,3 bis 0,7 Prozent Wachstum trauen sie der deutschen Wirtschaft zu. Pessimisten sehen das Risiko einer längeren Schwäche, wenn die Kapazitätsauslastung weiter sinkt und Erweiterungsinvestitionen daher ausbleiben. Optimisten hoffen, dass die für Deutschland extrem niedrigen Zinsen der Konjunktur doch wieder Schwung geben müssten. Der Export könnte vom langsam anziehenden Wachstum in den Schwellenländern profitieren. Und nachdem die Vereinigten Staaten haarscharf die Fiskalklippe umgangen haben, ist dort ein moderates Wachstum wahrscheinlich.

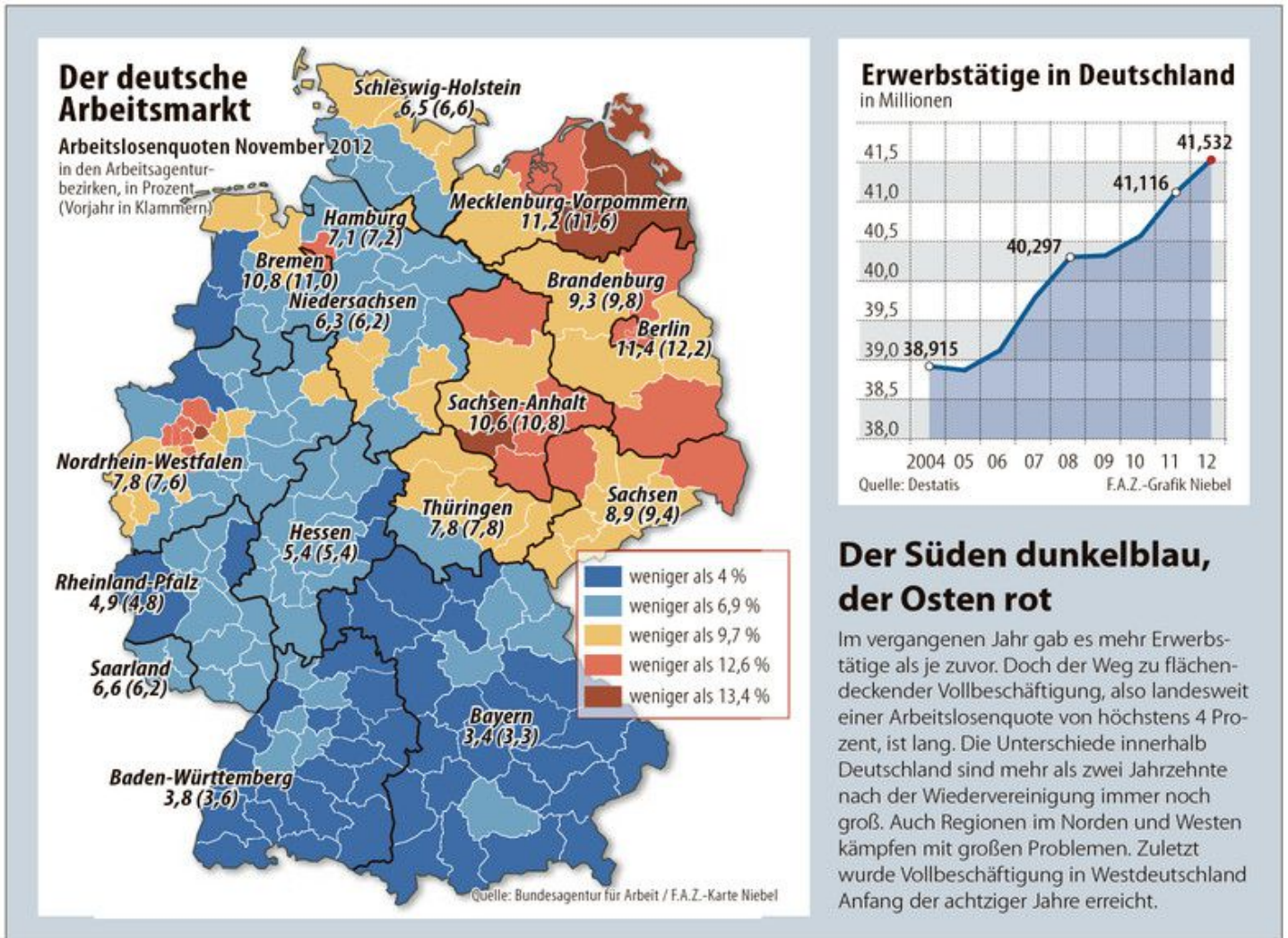
Griechenlands Verbleib im Euro ist nicht gesichert

Allerdings stehen all diese vorsichtig zuversichtlichen Ausblicke unter erheblichen Vorbehalten. Die Unsicherheiten sind gewaltig. Ein Risiko bleibt Griechenland, dessen Verbleib im Euroraum ist nicht gesichert. Die Dauerrezession könnte zum Zerbrechen der Athener Regierungskoalition führen. Kämen dann die Linkspopulisten an die Macht und stoppten die Reformen, müssten die Euro-Retter eigentlich als Konsequenz den Geldhahn zudrehen. Spannend wird die Entwicklung in Italien, es steht in Frage, ob sich dort die reformorientierten Kräfte durchsetzen. Bislang sind die fundamentalen Wettbewerbsschwächen der südeuropäischen Volkswirtschaften erst in Ansätzen korrigiert worden. Es gibt erste Fortschritte, etwa die sinkenden Lohnstückkosten, doch sind das zarte Pflänzchen. Der Weg zu einer richtigen Erholung wird noch lang und steinig.

Fünf Jahre nach Ausbruch der Finanzkrise, als die industrialisierte Welt in den ökonomischen Abgrund schaute, sind viele Grundprobleme nur verschoben worden. Die schwerste Altlast ist die sprunghaft gestiegene öffentliche Verschuldung. Im Durchschnitt des Euroraums nähert sich die Schuldenquote der Marke von 90 Prozent, von der an Ökonomen ein auf Dauer geschwächtes Wachstum sehen. Die Defizite zu senken, ohne durch einen allzu harten Sparkurs die Konjunktur vollends abzuwürgen, ist eine Gratwanderung, bei der es noch manchen Rückschlag geben kann. Europa hat die Krise wohl noch lange nicht hinter sich.

Rekordjahr am Arbeitsmarkt lässt Politik von Vollbeschäftigung träumen

41,5 Millionen Erwerbstätige 2012 / Zuletzt weniger Dynamik / Belebung 2013 erwartet



Nicolas Baverez : « La France, premier risque pour la zone euro »

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR Cyrille Lachèvre et Jacques-Olivier Martin PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR

3 janvier 2013

LE FIGARO. - Quel bilan tirez-vous de 2012 ?

Nicolas **BAVEREZ**. - L'année 2012 a permis de conjurer plusieurs des risques de rupture qui menaçaient l'économie mondiale. Les pays émergents - Chine en tête - ont atterri en douceur sans éclatement de bulles spéculatives. Les États-Unis ont consolidé leur relance en dépit des turbulences d'une élection présidentielle très clivée. Elle repose sur la base saine de la reconstruction de leur appareil productif et, notamment, de l'industrie portée par la baisse des coûts du travail et de l'énergie grâce à l'exploitation des hydrocarbures non conventionnels. Outre-Atlantique, les marges des entreprises se sont fortement redressées ; le financement de l'économie est assuré par des banques et des assurances recapitalisées et restructurées ; l'immobilier est stabilisé ; le patrimoine des ménages a recommencé à croître après cinq années de baisse continue. En Europe, les risques d'éclatement de la zone euro ont été écartés grâce au changement de politique de la BCE. Mais l'Europe comme le Japon demeurent sinistrés en termes de croissance.

Sont-ce les deux zones à risque pour 2013 ?

Pour 2013, il faut d'abord porter une grande attention à la montée des risques géopolitiques en Asie, en Iran et dans le monde arabo-musulman. Sur le plan économique, la détente des risques systémiques va de pair avec le renforcement de certains risques pays. Le cas du Japon est préoccupant. Le Japon est en première ligne dans les tensions avec la Chine dont il est dépendant sur le plan industriel. Par ailleurs, l'activité stagne depuis le début des années 1990 et la dette publique atteint 240 % de son PIB, menaçant de sortir de tout contrôle avec le déficit de la balance des paiements du fait de l'arrêt des centrales nucléaires après la catastrophe de Fukushima et des représailles commerciales chinoises au différend territorial autour des îles Senkaku. L'Europe est le seul des grands pôles de la mondialisation à avoir rechuté dans la récession en 2012 après 2009. Le pire a été évité puisque la menace d'implosion de la zone euro fut conjurée par la réforme des institutions défectueuses du traité de Maastricht. Les chefs d'État ont jeté les bases d'un gouvernement économique de la zone euro, garanti la solidarité financière entre les pays, négocié le traité budgétaire et l'union bancaire. Surtout, sous l'impulsion de Mario Draghi, la BCE s'est érigée en prêteur en dernier ressort en finançant de manière illimitée les banques puis les États. Ultime changement, sous la pression de la crise, la mobilité du travail progresse, comme le montre l'installation de 330 000 jeunes Européens du Sud en Allemagne au cours du premier semestre 2012.

La crise de la zone euro est-elle donc résolue ?

Non, il reste des fragilités et rien n'est acquis. D'abord, la transformation des institutions, des missions et des instruments de la zone euro, notamment pour la BCE, est entrée dans les faits mais n'est pas inscrite dans les textes. Ensuite, la diminution du risque financier laisse entière la crise économique, avec la récession et l'envolée du chômage. La Grèce est ruinée : elle reste dans l'euro au prix du plan de restructuration le plus coûteux et le plus inefficace de l'histoire du capitalisme. Chypre et l'Espagne sont au bord du chaos. Enfin, le risque politique subsiste comme le rappelle la fièvre des marchés provoquée par l'annonce de la candidature de Silvio Berlusconi.

Comment se situe la France dans ce contexte ?

La France constituera, en 2013, le premier risque pour la zone euro et peut-être pour l'économie mondiale. L'année 2013 prend place au confluent de trois crises : six ans après le démarrage du choc le plus grave sur le

capitalisme depuis 1929 ; quatre ans après le début des turbulences sur les risques souverains et la zone euro ; quarante ans après l'amorce du décrochage de la France puisque le dernier excédent budgétaire remonte à 1973 et que notre pays est le seul parmi les nations développées à n'être jamais revenu à l'équilibre de ses finances publiques et au plein-emploi depuis les chocs pétroliers. La France, en 2013, peut connaître un scénario de rupture en raison de l'effondrement de son système productif. Le PIB reste inférieur à son niveau de 2007, la production industrielle a chuté de 12 %, le taux de marge des entreprises touche à 28 % son plus bas historique. Le taux de chômage réel - si l'on intègre les Français recherchant un emploi ou qui ont renoncé à travailler - s'élève à 15 % de la population active. Le tout sur fond d'une dette publique qui atteindra 92 % du PIB, de dépenses culminant à 57 % du PIB, de recettes publiques qui dépasseront la moitié de la richesse nationale. Tout cela aboutit à une prolétarianisation de la France et des Français, qui se traduit par une richesse par habitant sous la moyenne de l'Union européenne.

Ces problèmes existaient déjà en 2012, dans une certaine mesure. Pourquoi sont-ils plus inquiétants en 2013 ?

Parce qu'en 2013, la France sera le premier emprunteur mondial en euro, avec près de 200 milliards, dont 62 % au moins devront être levés auprès d'investisseurs internationaux. Dans le même temps, le déclin de l'appareil productif va s'accroître du fait de sa prise en tenailles entre la compétitivité en termes de qualité de nos voisins du Nord et la compétitivité prix des pays du Sud. Les gains de productivité s'élèvent à 3 % par an en Italie et 8 % en Espagne du fait des réformes tandis qu'ils stagnent en France. Face à une montée en gamme interdite par une économie et une société bloquées, nos entreprises n'auront d'autres choix que de disparaître ou d'aller produire là où le travail est flexible et où les coûts ont diminué, c'est-à-dire dans le sud de l'Europe.

Pourtant, les taux d'intérêt français restent toujours historiquement bas...

Jusqu'à présent, la dette française a été protégée par trois remparts qui se fissurent. Le couple franco-allemand d'abord, essentiel pour les marchés, qui se désagrège avec la mise en scène des différends, faute majeure au plan économique comme au plan politique car la dégradation de la relation entre Paris et Berlin interdit toute sortie de crise durable de la zone euro et toute relance de l'intégration du continent. Ensuite, la diversion que représentait la crise italienne pourrait cesser si les Italiens confortent lors des élections du printemps 2013 les réformes mises en oeuvre par Mario Monti. De même, si l'Espagne arrête de tergiverser et demande l'aide de l'Europe pour restructurer ses banques, la France se trouvera en première ligne face aux marchés. Enfin, la stupéfiante tolérance des Français envers l'impôt est en passe d'atteindre ses limites sous la pression des 65 milliards de prélèvements supplémentaires appliqués depuis 2011 à une économie en croissance zéro.

En 2013, la France cumulera donc la récession, l'aggravation du déficit commercial, l'explosion du chômage et l'incapacité à remplir l'objectif de 3 % du PIB pour le déficit public. Dans ces conditions, on ne peut exclure un choc sur la dette française qui serait dramatique pour notre pays mais aussi pour la zone euro, puisque l'ensemble des mécanismes de solidarité qui reposent sur la double signature française et allemande se trouveraient remis en question.

Quels sont les problèmes fondamentaux dont souffre la France ?

Le coeur du problème français, c'est l'effondrement de l'appareil productif qui reste sous-estimé car il n'est pas limité à l'industrie mais touche l'ensemble des secteurs d'activité, y compris les services et l'agriculture. La compétitivité des entreprises, qui ont subi le choc monétaire du franc et de l'euro forts, le choc social des 35 heures, le choc économique de la récession, le choc financier de l'effondrement du crédit et, désormais, le choc fiscal, est laminée. **Le modèle économique et social qui fait que la France consomme 10 % de plus que ce qu'elle produit en s'endettant à l'extérieur est caduc.** Il explique l'installation d'un chômage permanent qui touche 10 % de la population et livre une partie croissante de la population à la paupérisation et à l'exclusion. **La religion de la dépense publique conforte un modèle étatiste, corporatiste et protectionniste qui alimente le repli économique et la régression politique de la France.** Voilà plus de vingt ans que nous nous ruinons en prenant, au nom de l'exception française, des décisions inverses à celles du monde développé et de nos voisins européens : loi des 35 heures, alourdissement continu du coût et de la réglementation du travail, euthanasie des entreprises, renforcement de la redistribution au détriment de la production, incitation à l'exil des cerveaux, des talents et des créateurs de richesses, emballement des impôts et refus de toute baisse des dépenses publiques. Comme en 1981, la France se coupe du monde développé et prend le contre-pied de l'Europe.

Comme en 1983, elle va droit à l'intervention du FMI si elle ne corrige pas sa trajectoire. Avec un risque politique majeur tant la démagogie déchaînée qui a marqué la campagne présidentielle de 2012, à gauche comme à droite, **n'a absolument pas préparé les Français aux efforts et aux réformes indispensables. En 2013, il n'y aura donc pas loin de la crise économique un risque de crise politique.**

Quelles sont les voies possibles pour résoudre tous ces problèmes ?

La France présente toutes les caractéristiques de l'Europe du Sud, sans les réformes, mais avec les taux d'intérêt de l'Europe du Nord. Elle doit mettre à profit ce paradoxe miraculeux pour reconstituer les marges des entreprises en diminuant le coût du travail et du capital, pour redresser sa croissance potentielle qui est aujourd'hui nulle, pour libéraliser son marché du travail et pour baisser les dépenses publiques.

Comment réduire la dépense publique ?

Faire 60 milliards d'économie en cinq ans, c'est parfaitement possible. À deux conditions. Redéfinir les missions et les compétences de l'État, des collectivités territoriales et de la protection sociale. Basculer les dépenses improductives vers les usages productifs : l'investissement, la recherche et l'innovation. **La seule suppression des 35 heures permettrait d'économiser 24 milliards d'allègements de charges auxquels s'ajoutent les près de 4 milliards de RTT dans la fonction publique.** Les fonds affectés à la formation professionnelle (24 milliards d'euros) sont largement détournés tandis que la politique du logement mobilise de manière inefficace 4 % du PIB contre 1 % en Allemagne. De même, il faut revoir tant le cumul absurde entre RSA et prime pour l'emploi que les quelque 6 000 mesures d'aide aux entreprises. Sans oublier la rationalisation de la carte administrative et la baisse des concours aux collectivités. **Réduire les dépenses n'est jamais facile. Mais de nombreux pays, du Canada à la Suède, ont réussi en dix ans à les diminuer de plus de 10 % du PIB sans compromettre ni la solidarité ni la cohésion nationale.**

Les Français y sont-ils prêts ?

Pourquoi pas ? Les mentalités évoluent très vite sous la pression de la crise. Les Français sont désormais très inquiets de la hausse des impôts et de la dette publique. Ils ont pris conscience de l'importance de l'entreprise, vouée aux gémonies durant de longues années. Ils constatent les ravages de la crise financière dans les pays du sud de l'Europe et les effets positifs des réformes dans les pays du nord de l'Europe. La pression va monter autour de choix clairs : le redressement de la compétitivité ou l'envolée du chômage ; la baisse des revenus ou l'augmentation de la durée du travail ; le refus d'exploiter les ressources en gaz de schiste ou la poursuite de la désindustrialisation ; les impôts ou la croissance.

Le gouvernement a-t-il pris les bonnes mesures ?

Six mois seulement après son arrivée au pouvoir, la gauche a déjà intégré son échec économique, comme le prouve la multiplication des réformes sociétales - du mariage pour tous à l'euthanasie en passant par le vote des immigrés - afin de détourner l'attention de la récession et du chômage, de la paupérisation et de l'exclusion sociale, des déficits et de la dette publics. Le grand choix qui va émerger en 2013 est clair : la réforme volontaire pendant qu'il en est encore temps ; ou la réforme subie sous la pression croisée des marchés financiers, du FMI, de l'Union européenne et de l'Allemagne.

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR Cyrille Lachèvre et Jacques-Olivier Martin

POUR l'économiste et historien Nicolas **Baverez**, la France pourrait subir cette année un choc sur sa dette qui serait tout simplement catastrophique pour l'Europe. Après Jean d'Ormesson et Hubert Védrine, troisième des grands entretiens du Figaro consacrés aux perspectives d'avenir pour 2013.

January 2, 2013

The Next Chernobyl?

By KHOSROW B. SEMNANI and GARY M. SANDQUIST

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH — The showdown over Iran’s nuclear program is likely to accelerate in 2013 as sanctions tighten, Israel threatens military strikes, and the centrifuges keep spinning. While most attention will be focused on the two most oft-discussed sites of uranium enrichment — Natanz and Fordow — a third site on the gulf could prove to be this year’s most dangerous nuclear wild card.

Tucked between two sleepy coastal fishing villages, the Bushehr nuclear power plant has long been seen as the “acceptable” face of Iran’s nuclear program. Built by Russian engineers and monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency, it is already producing electricity, and most nuclear experts agree that it does not merit the same level of concern over weaponization as Iran’s other nuclear sites.

Bushehr, however, could turn out to be the most dangerous piece of Iran’s nuclear puzzle for another reason: haphazard planning and ongoing technical problems mean it could be the next Chernobyl, igniting a humanitarian disaster and explosive economic damage across the oil-rich region.

Technical problems in the past 12 months have raised serious concerns about Iran’s capacity to competently operate the facility. The plant was shut down in October to limit potential damage following the discovery of stray bolts found beneath its fuel cells, the Reuters news agency [reported](#), citing a Russian industry source. Western officials expressed concern about the plant after an I.A.E.A report in November stated that Iran had informed the agency about unexpected fuel transfers. Last week, the emir of Kuwait, Sheik Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, [called upon](#) Tehran to work more closely with the I.A.E.A. “to ensure the safety of the region’s state and its people.”

Meanwhile, Russian scientists have [delayed](#) the transfer of operations to their Iranian counterparts. That is now expected to occur in March.

Also troubling is the fact that Bushehr sits on an [active fault line](#), raising the risks of a Fukushima-type catastrophe. Unless action is taken, the likelihood of an accident is far too high for the international community to ignore.

A Chernobyl-type nuclear meltdown in Bushehr would not only inflict severe damage in southern Iran, but also in the six oil and gas-rich Gulf Cooperation Council countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Indeed, the capitals of those states are closer to Bushehr than Tehran. Nuclear radiation in the air and water would disrupt the Strait of Hormuz shipping, the world’s most important oil choke point. Oil prices would skyrocket. The world economy would face a hurricane.

With prevailing winds blowing from east to west in the gulf, and coastal currents that circle counterclockwise, radiation fallout would contaminate oil fields and desalination plants that provide fresh water for local inhabitants. This would be an unmitigated disaster for the gulf states that rely on desalination plants for water, and would also threaten the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, stationed in Bahrain.

We cannot ignore this simmering problem. While all eyes are fixated on Iran’s other key nuclear sites — Fordow and Natanz — Bushehr requires more attention. The I.A.E.A. should promptly initiate a comprehensive assessment of the safety vulnerabilities at the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Both the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 and the Fukushima accident in 2011 reinforce the reality that the unexpected can occur at nuclear power plants. These events also reinforce the importance of having an integrated emergency response capability in place at local, national and regional levels.

The history of Bushehr is troubling. Begun in 1975 with German engineers, halted after the 1979 revolution, and restarted with the assistance of the Russian Atomic Energy Agency, known as Rosatom, it has been plagued with delays and technical problems from the beginning.

In August of 2010, after several years of delay, the plant became officially operational when fuel rods were transported to the reactor. After no more than six months of operation, the reactor had to be shut down due to problems with the cooling system, which were blamed on German-made components. According to Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the former head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, the problems were design anomalies. He [stated](#) that 24 percent of the parts and equipment used at the Bushehr plant are German, 36 percent Iranian and 40 percent Russian.

This is not how you make a safe nuclear power plant.

Moreover, there are serious questions about the Iranian regime's capability to respond to a major nuclear disaster. Iran simply lacks the civil preparedness capabilities to respond to a tragedy on the scale of Chernobyl or Fukushima.

Iran is the only country operating a nuclear power plant that hasn't signed the [1994 Convention on Nuclear Safety](#). The international community should push Iran to sign the treaty with the same vigor that it pushes Iran to disclose information about its suspected weapons sites. Even countries like Israel, India and Pakistan — none of which [have signed](#) the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty — have signed the Convention on Nuclear Safety.

Treaties are important, of course, but they are not enough. Iran's neighbors should work with the United States and other major powers on rapid response efforts to mitigate a potential disaster. The United Nations should form a Bushehr committee to study problems at the plant and offer technical assistance to minimize the risk of an accident. Moreover, it should design its own emergency response strategy to deal with a possible nuclear accident at Bushehr.

The I.A.E.A. should focus on the safety of the Bushehr plant with the same eye for detail that it uses to detect any weaponization program. Hundreds of thousands of lives depend on it, as do world oil markets, the global economy, and the world's collective security.

***Khosrow B. Semnani** is the author of "The Ayatollah's Nuclear Gamble: The Human Cost of Military Strikes Against Iran's Nuclear Facilities." **Gary M. Sandquist** is professor emeritus of mechanical and nuclear engineering at the University of Utah.*

January 2, 2013

France's Less Joyous New Year's Tradition

By [DAVID JOLLY](#)

PARIS — Many of [France](#)'s New Year's traditions, including Champagne, oysters and foie gras, are popular well beyond the country's borders. But there is another — car burning — that does not travel so well.

New Year's Eve has long been tarnished by the practice, as unruly urban youth set ablaze hundreds of cars and motorcycles to usher in the new year.

Interior Minister Manuel Valls said late Tuesday that 1,193 vehicles had been burned on New Year's Eve, mostly in urban areas, including 209 in the Paris region, though none in the city itself. What might come as a surprise is that the number is not considered by the French government to be particularly high.

“There's been no notable change in cases of arson involving cars and motorbikes in the last few years,” Mr. Valls, a member of President François Hollande's Socialist Party, said at a news conference.

The overall number of vehicles burned was in line with the 1,147 on the night of Dec. 31, 2009, the last time the government announced the figures. More than 40,000 vehicles are burned each year in France, Mr. Valls said Monday on RTL radio, calling it “an intolerable form of violence against property.”

French sociologists over the years have attributed the burnings to things like urban violence, insecurity caused by the financial crisis, and government policy that overlooks relatively poor and marginalized immigrant communities.

Those conditions, of course, apply in many industrialized countries. And yet the arson attacks remain a distinctly French tradition.

The phenomenon began several decades ago in the eastern French city of Strasbourg and the region of Alsace around it, according to Stéphane Pénet, director of nonlife insurance at the Fédération Française des Sociétés d'Assurances, an industry group.

“Now the tradition has been exported to other regions of France,” he said. “It's a stupid tradition.”

The decision to announce the number of arson attacks was itself controversial. Mr. Valls said he was speaking in the name of “the truth due to the French people,” a reference to the decision by former President Nicolas Sarkozy's government three years ago to suppress the data in the hope that it would keep juvenile delinquents in French towns from trying to outdo one another.

During the autumn 2005 riots that rocked some of Paris's more volatile suburbs, more than 8,800 cars were burned. At the time, French television censored images of the car-burning so as not to encourage the practice.

One area that figured in those riots, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis that encompasses parts of Charles de Gaulle Airport, led all regions in cars burned on New Year's Eve, with 83.

Bruno Beschizza, a member of Mr. Sarkozy's U.M.P. party with responsibility for security issues, derided the decision to publicize the data, saying Wednesday in a statement that Mr. Valls “had taken the risk of reigniting the competitions between areas and between rival gangs to see who can burn the most vehicles.”

Not all of the cases are simple arson attacks. Some are joy riders or car thieves covering their tracks. Mr. Pénet said unscrupulous car owners have taken advantage of the phenomenon to cash in on their insurance policies.

“We estimate that less than 20 percent of the vehicles are burned for insurance fraud,” he said, “but it is significant.”

He said about 85 percent of cars carry fire insurance, with an average payout of €5,000 per burned car. With 40,000 cars burned annually in France, that works out to about €170 million per year. While that is a lot of money, Mr. Pénét said, it is but a small part of the €60 billion in payouts French auto insurers make each year. And while it means everyone pays higher premiums, it does not add much to [car insurance](#) in absolute terms, he said.

“It’s very visible in terms of delinquency, as a societal phenomenon,” he said. But from the point of view of the insurers, “it’s not that important in the grand scheme.”

January 1, 2013

Used to Hardship, Latvia Accepts Austerity, and Its Pain Eases

By ANDREW HIGGINS

RIGA, Latvia — When a credit-fueled economic boom turned to bust in this tiny Baltic nation in 2008, Didzis Krumins, who ran a small architectural company, fired his staff one by one and then shut down the business. He watched in dismay as Latvia's misery deepened under a harsh austerity drive that scythed wages, jobs and state financing for schools and hospitals.

But instead of taking to the streets to protest the cuts, Mr. Krumins, whose newborn child, in the meantime, needed major surgery, bought a tractor and began hauling wood to heating plants that needed fuel. Then, as Latvia's economy began to pull out of its nose-dive, he returned to architecture and today employs 15 people — five more than he had before. “We have a different mentality here,” he said.

Latvia, feted by fans of austerity as the country-that-can and an example for countries like Greece that can't, has provided a rare boost to champions of the proposition that pain pays.

Hardship has long been common here — and still is. But in just four years, the country has gone from the European Union's worst economic disaster zone to a model of what the [International Monetary Fund](#) hails as the healing properties of deep budget cuts. Latvia's economy, after shriveling by more than 20 percent from its peak, grew by about 5 percent last year, making it the best performer in the 27-nation European Union. Its budget deficit is down sharply and exports are soaring.

“We are here to celebrate your achievements,” Christine Lagarde, the chief of the International Monetary Fund, told a conference in Riga, the capital, this past summer. The fund, which along with the European Union financed a bailout of 7.5 billion euros for the country at the end of 2008, is “proud to have been part of Latvia's success story,” she said.

When Latvia's economy first crumbled, it wrestled with many of the same problems faced since by other troubled European nations: a growing hole in government finances, a banking crisis, falling competitiveness and big debts — though most of these were private rather than public as in Greece.

Now its abrupt turn for the better has put a spotlight on a ticklish question for those who look to orthodox economics for a solution to Europe's wider economic woes: Instead of obeying any universal laws of economic gravity, do different people respond differently to the same forces?

Latvian businessmen applaud the government's approach but doubt it would work elsewhere.

“Economics is not a science. Most of it is in people's heads,” said Normunds Bergs, chief executive of SAF Tehnika, a manufacturer that cut management salaries by 30 percent. “Science says that water starts to boil at 100 degrees Celsius; there is no such predictability in economics.”

In Greece and Spain, cuts in salaries, jobs and state services have pushed tempers beyond the boiling point, with angry citizens staging frequent protests and strikes. Britain, Portugal, Italy and also Latvia's neighbor Lithuania, meanwhile, have bubbled with discontent over austerity.

But in Latvia, where the government laid off a third of its civil servants, slashed wages for the rest and sharply reduced support for hospitals, people mostly accepted the bitter medicine. Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis, who presided over the austerity, was re-elected, not thrown out of office, as many of his counterparts elsewhere have been.

The cuts calmed fears on financial markets that the country was about to go bankrupt, and this meant that the government and private companies could again get the loans they needed to stay afloat. At the same time, private businesses followed the government in slashing wages, which made the country's labor force more competitive by reducing the prices of its goods. As exports grew, companies began to rehire workers.

Economic gains have still left 30.9 percent of Latvia's population "[severely materially deprived](#)," according to 2011 data released in December by Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency, second only to Bulgaria. Unemployment has fallen from more than 20 percent in early 2010, but was still 14.2 percent in the third quarter of 2012, according to Eurostat, and closer to 17 percent if "discouraged workers" are included. This is far below the more than 25 percent jobless rate in Greece and Spain but a serious problem nonetheless.

"I'm always asking people here, 'How can you put up with this?'" said Juris Calitis, a Latvian-born Anglican chaplain whose family fled Soviet occupation in the 1940s and who returned when the Soviet empire crumbled.

"It is really shocking," added Mr. Calitis, who runs a soup kitchen at his church in Riga's old town. Latvians, he said, "should be shouting in the streets," but "there is an acceptance of hard knocks."

Latvia has certainly had plenty of those, enduring Soviet, Nazi and then renewed Soviet rule, learning that discontent is best kept quiet. After Moscow relinquished control in 1991, decrepit Soviet-era plants shut down, gutting the industrial base. The economy contracted by nearly 50 percent.

The collapse of Latvia's largest bank in 1995 wiped out many people's savings. Latvia then was hit by debris from Russia's financial blowout in 1998. Then came a dizzying boom, fueled by a lending splurge by foreign, particularly Swedish, banks, followed by a catastrophic slump as credit froze when the global financial crisis swept into Europe in 2008.

"Conditions were very tough," recalled Mr. Dombrovskis, but few people resisted his argument that harsh austerity offered the only way out.

In contrast to much of Europe, Latvia today has no tradition of labor activism. "What can you achieve in the street? It is cold and snowing," said Peteris Krigeris, president of the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia. Organizing strikes, he said, is nearly impossible. "It is seen as shameful for people who earn any salary, no matter how small, to go on strike."

Also largely absent are the leftist political forces that have opposed austerity elsewhere in Europe, or the rigid labor laws that protect job security and wage levels. In the second half of 2010, after less than 18 months of painful austerity, Latvia's economy began to grow again. Other European countries "should not miss this point," said the prime minister, noting that the "debate in Europe often goes the opposite way: that austerity destroys growth."

Yet the pain of many ordinary people continues.

"They say the crisis is over, but I don't feel that," said Marika Timma, a mother of three whose husband lost his job in construction when the property bubble burst. Ms. Timma used to work as a cleaner but quit when her wages were cut in half, to just \$168 a month.

Several of her good friends have emigrated to Britain and Ireland to look for work. "They won't be coming back," she said.

Since 2008, Latvia has lost more than 5 percent of its population, mostly young people, to emigration. The recent exodus peaked in 2010, when 42,263 people moved abroad, a huge number in a country of just two million now, according to Mihails Hazans, a professor at the University of Latvia.

Daniels Pavluts, Latvia's economics minister, recently visited Dublin and London and met with émigré associations to encourage his compatriots to come home. Latvia's economy, Mr. Pavluts said, "is now doing well" and "offers a future."

Alf Vanags, director of the Baltic International Center for Economic Policy Studies here, is skeptical. “The idea of a Latvian ‘success story’ is ridiculous,” he said. “Latvia is not a model for anybody.”

A better and more equitable way out of Latvia’s troubles, he believes, would have been a devaluation of the currency, an option closed to Greece and 16 other countries that use the euro. Latvia kept its currency pegged to the euro, putting itself in much the same straitjacket as euro zone nations.

But Latvia’s high pain threshold and unusually open economy set it apart, enabling a relentless squeezing of wages, said [Morten Hansen](#), head of the economics department at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga.

“You can only do this in a country that is willing to take serious pain for some time and has a dramatic flexibility in the labor market,” he said. “The lesson of what Latvia has done is that there is no lesson.”

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: January 2, 2013

Government debt

How much is too much?

Jan 2nd 2013, 16:40 by M.C.K. | CHICAGO

THE popularity of austerity policies has waned over the past several years thanks to [evidence](#) that it may have been counterproductive. But many are still worried by the fact that, relative to national income, government debt is now larger in many countries than at any point since WWII. Moreover, for most nations, government debt is projected to grow relative to income for years to come. This is why policymakers across the rich world have been scrambling to slow the growth of public spending while simultaneously increasing tax revenues. (America's [budget](#) fights should be understood in this context.) Does their urgency make sense? The sovereign bond markets in America, Japan, Britain, and the euro area's "core" do not seem to think so. These governments can borrow cheaply for decades at a time. While it is certainly possible that the markets are wrong, policymakers should probably pay more attention to investors and less to the fear-mongers, especially since economists do not know how much government debt is too much. In fact, there is good reason to think that many countries with their own currencies could become far more indebted without risking trouble. One reason is that many private investors do not own enough sovereign bonds.

It is important to remember that there is an absence of evidence that governments with their own currencies are too indebted. Those who argue otherwise point to the work of Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, the celebrated authors of [This Time is Different](#). Their [paper](#) "Growth in a Time of Debt" claimed that sovereign debt creates a burden on the rest of the economy. (They summarise their points [here](#).) But, as [Robert Shiller](#) and [Paul Krugman](#) have pointed out, Ms Reinhart and Mr Rogoff never explain *how* public indebtedness restrains growth. There may be other forces at work, especially since sovereign debt ratios are usually at their highest after wars and financial crises. In countries with their own currencies, private interest rates are now so low that many investors have been grasping for yield wherever they can find it, such as in [the revived CLO market](#). When he evaluated the evidence, my colleague [concluded](#) that "debt matters, but the precise way that it matters isn't as clear-cut as Reinhart-Rogoff seem to indicate".

Why would private investors want to buy more sovereign debt? A previous [post](#) on the shortage of safe financial assets mentioned how pension plans in many countries need to buy more government bonds to avoid mismatches between their assets and liabilities:

Defined-benefit pension plans usually have liabilities that can be perfectly hedged through purchases of government bonds denominated in local currency. (The exception is if they have to cover healthcare costs.) This makes these funds very easy to manage, in theory. All that would be needed is to have an actuary determine the size of the liability and its duration, which would then be fully funded by buying the appropriate quantity of government bonds. But pension funds almost never do this. Instead, they "underfund" their schemes. To compensate, they buy risky assets, like stocks, that are poor hedges for their liabilities. This has started to change in the wake of the crisis, but most of the world's pension money is still under-invested in sovereign debt.

According to Towers Watson, a consultancy, [pension fund assets](#) are worth more than \$27 trillion (not all of these are owned by defined-benefit plans). This is a large pool of savings but it is not large enough to offset these pensions' liabilities. Many plans were underfunded before the crisis, but the losses of 2008—yet to be recouped—have made things far worse. To close the gap without making risky bets, pension guarantors would need to increase their contributions by a large amount.

Moreover, most pension funds take excessive risks with their asset allocations. As mentioned above, the safest way to manage most pension plans is to invest 100% of the assets in sovereign debt denominated in local currency. The Bank of England, which may run the world's most conservative pension fund for its employees, [spends](#) more than half of its payroll on inflation-indexed gilts. But with the exception of pension funds in Japan and the Netherlands, less than 40% of pension assets are invested in bonds. For example, American pension

funds, which hold assets worth about 107% of America's GDP, allocate just 31% of their portfolios to fixed income. Even this small share includes corporate debt and other relatively risky assets that are not ideal hedges for pension liabilities. It all suggests that many governments could afford to have higher public debt to national income ratios. In fact, governments should probably try to accommodate pension funds as they adjust their portfolios by running larger deficits and increasing their bond issuance.

Individuals may also be under-invested in government fixed income. Most people invest around 60% of their retirement savings in equities, with the rest invested in bonds. But shares are about three times as volatile as government bonds, so the performance of these portfolios is almost entirely determined by the performance of the stock market. This lack of diversification would be desirable if equities had a much higher risk/return ratio than bonds. However, the [Sharpe ratios](#) for bonds and stocks have been basically identical over long periods of time, which suggests that most peoples' portfolios are needlessly biased in favour of shares. To remove this bias, an investor could allocate a much larger slice of her portfolio to government bonds. Sophisticated investors can already purchase "[risk parity](#)" portfolios on the theory that they can significantly improve their risk/return trade-off by applying these ideas. Again, governments could help accommodate these portfolio shifts by increasing their debt issuance.

How much public debt is too much? There is no straightforward answer. However, it seems that many countries may be able to afford to have significantly higher ratios of government debt to national income. Of course, the way in which we calculate these debt/income ratios may also be misleading, which is why a subsequent post will examine some ways to modernise public accounting practices.

Deutschlands Wettbewerbsfähigkeit

Woher kommt das Wunder auf dem Arbeitsmarkt?

03.01.2013 · Viele Länder stecken in wirtschaftlichen Schwierigkeiten, der deutsche Arbeitsmarkt steht wie ein Fels in der Brandung. Liegt das nur daran, dass immer mehr Menschen zu Hungerlöhnen arbeiten müssen? - Was denken Sie?



© dpa Immer dringender gesucht: Fachkräfte

Welch Szenario: In Europa stecken viele Länder in der Wirtschaftsflaute, auch in anderen Teilen der Welt hat die Wirtschaft in der zweiten Hälfte des vergangenen Jahres an Fahrt verloren - der deutsche Arbeitsmarkt zeigt sich hingegen nach wie vor ziemlich robust. Im Schnitt 2,8 Millionen Menschen waren vergangenen Jahr hierzulande offiziell arbeitslos, teilt die Bundesagentur für Arbeit mit. So wenige waren es zuletzt im Jahr 1991 gewesen. Nur einen Tag zuvor meldete das Statistische Bundesamt, dass im Jahr 2012 so viele Menschen wie noch nie in Deutschland erwerbstätig waren: 41,5 Millionen.

Wie kommt das? Sind die in den vergangenen Jahren geschaffenen neuen Stellen nachhaltig gute Arbeitsplätze oder - wie immer wieder vorgeworfen wird - vor allem sogenannte prekäre Beschäftigungsverhältnisse, niedrig bezahlte Arbeit also, deren Bezahlung alleine nicht reicht, um das Leben zu finanzieren?

Hier Interaktive Graphiken

Viel mehr Erwerbstätige

Zum Teil beides, lässt sich zumindest aus einschlägigen Statistiken ableiten. Rasant gestiegen ist in Deutschland seit dem Jahr 2003 die Erwerbstätigenquote. Dahinter verbirgt sich der Anteil der Personen im erwerbsfähigen Alter, der auch tatsächlich erwerbstätig ist. Mehr ist hier besser und die Quote ist von 64 Prozent auf mehr als 70 Prozent im Jahr 2010 gestiegen, zeigen Statistiken des Instituts für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB). Das ist wesentlich auch den Arbeitsmarktreformen zu verdanken, die unter dem Stichwort "Hartz" auf den Weg gebracht worden waren.

Einiges spricht dafür, dass unter den neuen Stellen vielfach auch gut bezahlte sind oder dass mindestens nicht in großem Umfang unbefristete Vollzeitstellen ersetzt wurden durch weniger sichere und schlechter bezahlte Lohnverhältnisse. Die Zahl der Minijobs beispielsweise ist mit Blick auf die zurückliegenden zehn Jahre ungefähr konstant geblieben. Schaut man nur auf die zweite Hälfte der vergangenen Jahrzehnts, ist sie rückläufig.

Befristete Beschäftigung stabilisiert sich

Außerdem stimmt es zwar, dass auf längere Sicht unter den abhängig Beschäftigten mehr Menschen nur befristete Arbeitsverhältnisse bekommen oder in Teilzeit arbeiten. In beiden Fällen ist allerdings seit Mitte der 2000er Jahre eine Stabilisierung eingetreten. Und wenn es um Teilzeitverhältnisse geht, sagt der bloße Blick

auf die Quote noch nicht alles: Nicht wenige Menschen wollen schließlich genau so ein Beschäftigungsverhältnis, für sie ist das keine Notlösung.

Natürlich sind diese Zahlen nur der Blick auf das große Ganze und gibt es zwischen einzelnen Branchen und Regionen innerhalb Deutschlands mitunter große Unterschiede. Das ändert allerdings nichts daran, dass die Aussage, das Wunder auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt erklärt sich mit „Ausbeutung“, schlicht falsch ist. Dass immer häufiger von Fachkräftemangel die Rede ist, ist nur ein Indiz.

„Fracking“

Das Schiefergas spaltet Europa

02.01.2013 · Großbritannien will Vorreiter für das umstrittene „Fracking“ werden. Die Skepsis in Deutschland und anderen Ländern bleibt groß.

Von [Marcus Theurer](#), London



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Fracking-Gegner: Diese Demonstranten fürchten Umweltschäden

In der Bäderstadt Bath geht die Angst um. Lokalpolitiker und Gewerbetreibende fürchten um den Tourismus in dem pittoresken englischen Städtchen, das für seine warmen Mineralquellen bekannt ist. Der Grund: Großbritannien will in Westeuropa Vorreiter bei der Ausbeutung sogenannter unkonventioneller Erdgasvorkommen werden. Kurz vor Weihnachten hat Energieminister Edward Davey ein zeitweiliges Verbot für das nicht nur auf der Insel umstrittene „Fracking“ aufgehoben. Bei dieser Fördermethode werden durch das Bohrloch mit hohem Druck und in großen Mengen Wasser und Chemikalien in das Schiefergestein gepresst, um es aufzusprengen und das Gas zum Fließen zu bringen. Ohne Fracking ist der Schiefergasschatz nicht zu heben. In den Vereinigten Staaten hat diese Methode bereits den Energiemarkt revolutioniert.

Fracking-Gegner in Bath und anderswo befürchten, dass der Chemiecocktail das Grundwasser vergiften könnte. 2011 verursachten zudem erste Probebohrungen in der Nähe des englischen Seebads Blackpool ein leichtes Erdbeben. Doch die Regierung in London hofft vier Jahrzehnte nach dem Beginn des Nordsee-Ölrauschs auf eine zweite Energie-Bonanza: Geologische Gutachten deuten darauf hin, dass im englischen Boden große Schiefergasvorkommen schlummern. Binnen weniger Jahre könnten landauf landab Dutzende von Bohrlizenzen vergeben werden. Finanzminister George Osborne hat „großzügige steuerliche Rahmenbedingungen“ für Investoren angekündigt.

Frankreich hat ein Fracking-Verbot erlassen

Mit ihrer Unterstützung für die Schiefergasindustrie setzt sich die britische Regierung von vielen anderen europäischen Ländern ab. In Deutschland ist die Skepsis groß, Frankreich hat ein Fracking-Verbot erlassen. Bulgarien und Rumänien haben zumindest zeitweilige Moratorien verhängt und damit den amerikanischen Energiekonzern Chevron („Texaco“) ausgebremst. Fracking-Befürworter warnen, die Europäer liefen Gefahr, eine der größten Umwälzungen im globalen Energiegeschäft seit Jahrzehnten zu verpassen. Mit womöglich weitreichenden Folgen: „Europa muss sich darüber im Klaren sein, dass es auch um die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit seiner Industrie geht“, warnte Shell-Chef Peter Voser in einem Gespräch mit dieser Zeitung (F.A.Z. vom 15. Dezember).

Vor allem Nordamerika ist dank niedriger Erdgaspreise zum Schlaraffenland für Industrieunternehmen mit hohem Energiekostenanteil geworden. Auch deutsche Konzerne wie BASF und Bayer blicken deshalb bei Investitionsentscheidungen stärker nach Amerika als noch vor wenigen Jahren. Die Vereinigten Staaten sind das erste Land der Welt, in dem Schiefergasvorkommen im großen Stil ausgebeutet werden. Die Energiekosten

sind dadurch drastisch gefallen: Der Erdgas-Spotpreis in Nordamerika liegt heute um mehr als 70 Prozent unter dem deutschen Gasimportpreis. Inzwischen werden in Amerika mit ähnlichen Fördermethoden auch bislang unerreichbare Ölvorkommen ausgebeutet. Im November prognostizierte die Internationale Energieagentur (IEA), die Vereinigten Staaten könnten in den kommenden Jahrzehnten weitgehend unabhängig von Öl- und Gasimporten werden.

In Deutschland und anderen europäischen Ländern geht es dagegen in der Debatte um das Schiefergas bisher nicht um den Wirtschaftsstandort, sondern um den Umweltschutz. Das Umweltbundesamt fordert unter anderem ein Fracking-Verbot in Wasserschutzgebieten. Die Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe (BGR) bilanzierte zwar im Mai in einem Gutachten, die Umweltrisiken des Fracking seien „gering“ und bei gründlicher Planung gut beherrschbar. In Nordrhein-Westfalen genehmigt die rot-grüne Landesregierung dennoch kein Fracking.

Auch in Schleswig-Holstein beschloss der Landtag Mitte Dezember einen Fracking-Bann. In Niedersachsen, wo schon heute fast das gesamte deutsche Erdgas mit konventionellen Methoden gefördert wird, ist die Politik dagegen aufgeschlossener: Der amerikanische Energieriese Exxon-Mobil („Esso“) hat gerade gemeinsam mit Shell einen Antrag auf eine weitere Bohrung eingereicht. Auch Wintershall und andere Unternehmen wollen das Potential in Deutschland ausloten.

Der britische Energieökonom Dieter Helm von der Universität Oxford hält die europäischen Umweltschutzvorbehalte gegenüber dem Schiefergas für widersinnig. „Wir brauchen in Europa ein striktes Aufsichtsregime, sonst wird die Schiefergasförderung hier keine Akzeptanz finden“, sagt Helm. „Aber wenn wir das Schiefergas komplett blockieren, dann schaden wir der Umwelt massiv“, befürchtet Helm. „Der Kohlebergbau ist sehr viel umweltschädlicher als die Schiefergasförderung.“ Vor allem aber verweist der Energieexperte aus Oxford darauf, dass das vergleichsweise emissionsarme Erdgas dem Klimaschutz diene. In den Vereinigten Staaten verdrängt das Erdgas in der Stromerzeugung bereits die sehr viel schmutzigere Kohle.

Wie groß die Schiefergasvorkommen in Europa tatsächlich sind und ob sie rentabel gefördert werden können, ist bisher noch unklar. Das lässt sich erst mit zahlreichen Probebohrungen klären. Die Prognosen allerdings sind vielversprechend: Die Energieagentur hat errechnet, dass sich in Europa die Gasreserven durch das sogenannte unkonventionelle Erdgas wie Schiefer- und Kohleflözgas fast verdoppeln. In Deutschland schätzen die Geologen der staatlichen Rohstoffagentur BGR die förderbaren Vorkommen mit 0,7 bis 2,3 Billionen Kubikmeter. Beim heutigen Verbrauch würde das den deutschen Bedarf für bis zu drei Jahrzehnte decken - falls sich die Förderung nicht nur als technisch möglich, sondern auch als wirtschaftlich erweisen sollte.

Der Unsicherheitsfaktor der Schätzungen ist allerdings groß. Erst im Sommer hat Exxon-Mobil nach mehreren Fehlschlägen seine Schiefergas-Bohrungen in Polen gestoppt. Geologen gehen davon aus, dass das Land neben Frankreich über die größten Vorkommen in Europa verfügt. Und auch in den Vereinigten Staaten mussten trotz großer Euphorie nach zahlreichen Fehlschlägen bei Probebohrungen die geschätzten Reserven Anfang des Jahres um 40 Prozent deutlich nach unten korrigiert werden.

Quelle: F.A.Z.

Wirtschaftsforscher warnen

Werden die Zentralbanken zu abhängig von der Politik?

05.01.2013 · Lassen sich die Notenbanken zu sehr vor den Karren der Politik spannen? In Amerika kommt Kritik an der Notenbank „Fed“ auf - doch die zeigt wiederum auf die Europäische Zentralbank.

Von [Patrick Welter](#), San Diego



© dpa Was für Geldpolitik darin wohl gemacht wird? Die neue Zentrale der EZB ist noch im Bau.

Zum guten Ton unter Notenbanken gehört es, sich nicht gegenseitig zu kritisieren. In Krisenzeiten aber gilt das offenbar nicht mehr. **Der Präsident der regionalen Federal Reserve Bank von St. Louis, James Bullard, hat in San Diego vor einer schleichenden Politisierung** der Zentralbanken gewarnt - und als Beispiel die Europäische Zentralbank (EZB) gewählt.

Bullard nannte das [Ankaufprogramm der EZB für Staatsanleihen von Krisenstaaten](#) („OMT“) eine „Fiskalisierung“ der Geldpolitik, die die geldpolitische Antwort der EZB auf die Rezession schwäche. „Der geldpolitische Prozess hat sich im politischen Ringen um das OMT- und andere Programem festgefahren“, begründete Bullard seine Kritik auf einem Seminar der National Association for Business Economists im kalifornischen San Diego. Die EZB habe ihren Zinssatz nicht signifikant an die Rezession angepasst.

Bullard warnte, dass das Programm die EZB weit aus dem Aufgabenbereich der Geldpolitik herausführe. Die Analogie wäre in den Vereinigten Staaten, dass die Federal Reserve verspräche, Schulden der Bundestaaten kaufen oder zu monetisieren, im Gegenzug für das Versprechen, dass die Staaten eine vorsichtige Finanzpolitik beibehalten. Solche finanzielle Unterstützung von der Zentrale für Regionen werde am besten durch den politischen Prozess in demokratisch gewählten Institutionen ausgehandelt, erklärte Bullard, nicht aber durch Zentralbanken.

„Schleichende Politisierung der Zentralbanken“

Der regionale Fed-Präsident griff die EZB nur beispielhaft auf und bezog seine Kritik auf alle Zentralbanken. „Die Folgeschocks der Globalisierung hätten global zu einer „schleichenden Politisierung der Zentralbanken“ geführt, erklärte Bullard. Er warnte davor, dass in dem Ausmaß, in dem die Unabhängigkeit der Zentralbanken leide, die gesamtwirtschaftliche Stabilitätspolitik nicht mehr so gut durchgeführt werde wie seit Mitte der achtziger Jahre. Das deute darauf hin, dass weitere gesamtwirtschaftliche Schwankungen bevorstünden.

Auch in den Vereinigten Staaten steht die Federal Reserve wegen ihres [Ankaufs von Regierungsanleihen](#) unter der Kritik, dass sie sich in fiskalpolitischen Aktionen verzettelt. Im Unterschied zur EZB kauft die Fed indes Anleihen der Bundesregierung, nicht aber der regionalen Bundestaaten. Ökonomen klagten auf der Jahrestagung der American Economic Association darüber, dass die Fed damit - wie auch die EZB -

fiskalpolitische Aufnahmen übernehme. [Sie stellten das Prinzip der Unabhängigkeit der Zentralbanken in Frage](#). Die Krise habe gezeigt, dass die juristische Unabhängigkeit noch keine faktische oder inhaltliche Unabhängigkeit gewährleiste.

„In einer Demokratie sollte keine Institution unbegrenzte Macht haben“, sagte der Ökonom Alan Meltzer mit Blick auf die Federal Reserve. John Taylor von der Stanford Universität argumentierte, dass die Fed mit dem Ausflug in die Fiskalpolitik ihre Unabhängigkeit selbst aufgegeben habe. Taylor sprach sich dafür aus, die Fed per Gesetz wieder zu einer regelorientierten Geldpolitik zu zwingen. Der frühere Vizevorsitzende der Federal Reserve, Donald Kohn, argumentierte dagegen entlang herkömmlicher Linien, er sei über die Fed „in einer Ära des polarisierten und extremen politischen Diskurses“ besorgt. Das Wettrennen der republikanischen Bewerber um die Präsidentschaftskandidatur im vergangenen Jahr, wer am schnellsten den Fed-Vorsitzenden Ben Bernanke feuern werde, sei „nicht ermutigend“ gewesen.

Wann beendet die Fed den Ankauf von Staatsanleihen?

Bullard und auch der Präsident der regionalen Federal Reserve Bank von Philadelphia, Charles Plosser, erwarten, [dass die Fed den Anleiheankauf noch in diesem Jahr beendet](#). Bullard, der in Jahr dafür stimmberechtigt ist, erwartet selbst bei nur moderatem Wachstum, dass die Arbeitslosenquote weiter sinken werde. Die Notenbank werde dann in einer guten Position sein, über eine Pause in dem Programm nachzudenken. Plosser erklärte in San Diego, er erwarte, dass die Arbeitslosenquote von zuletzt 7,8 Prozent bis Jahresende auf 6,8 bis 7 Prozent sinken werde. Er hoffe, dass die Fed den Anleiheankauf einstelle, bevor eine Arbeitslosenquote von 6,5 Prozent erreicht sei. Indirekt bedeutet dies, dass Plosser, der den Anleiheankauf ablehnt, ein Ende des Programms noch vor Jahresende erwartet.

Die Fed kauft derzeit im Monat Anleihen für 85 Milliarden Dollar an: 40 Milliarden Dollar Hypothekenanleihen überwiegend der staatskontrollierten Hausfinanzierer Fannie Mae und Freddie Mac und 45 Milliarden Dollar Anleihen der Bundesregierung.

Dauerhafter Schaden für Amerikas Wirtschaft

Plosser erklärte zugleich, dass die amerikanische Wirtschaft mit der Finanzkrise wohl dauerhaften Schaden erlitten habe, der das Trendwachstum verringere. „Es sieht so aus, als ob wir einen permanenten Schock hatten“, sagte Plosser. Das Problem sei, dass man dies erst nach vielen Jahren genau wissen werde. Für die klassische Geldpolitik ist die Einschätzung des Trendwachstums dennoch entscheidend, richtet sich doch daran der Grad der monetären Stimulierung aus.

Die Fed begründet ihre lockere Geldpolitik damit, dass die Wirtschaft ihr Potential noch lange nicht erreicht habe und deshalb keine Inflationsrisiken drohten. Hat das Trendwachstum aber Schaden genommen, ist die derzeitige Geldpolitik in herkömmlicher Analyse vielleicht schon zu locker. Plosser warnte vor dem Risiko der „Überstimulierung“ der Wirtschaft, was Inflation hervorrufen würde. Zuletzt hatte die Federal Reserve sich diesen Fehler in den siebziger Jahren erlaubt, als sie das Trendwachstum weit höher einschätzte als es tatsächlich war.

January 3, 2013

That Russian Movie Star, Gérard Depardieu

By [DAVID M. HERSZENHORN](#)

MOSCOW — At the time, it seemed like a joke. President [Vladimir V. Putin](#) of [Russia](#), [at his annual news conference before more than 1,000 journalists last month](#), declared with a mixture of braggadocio and magnanimity that if one of the world's best-known Frenchmen, the actor [Gérard Depardieu](#), really wanted to renounce his French citizenship, he would find the doors to [Russia](#) wide open — with a residency permit and Russian citizenship his for the asking.

But since then, a public feud between Mr. Depardieu and French officials has continued to simmer over Mr. Depardieu's complaint about [France](#)'s high tax rates on the wealthy. French politicians and commentators have criticized him for renouncing his French citizenship and registering [as a resident of Néchin in Belgium](#), which has lower taxes. And on Thursday, the Kremlin announced that Mr. Putin had kept his promise and had signed a decree making Mr. Depardieu a citizen of Russia.

A spokesman for Mr. Putin, Dmitri S. Peskov, said that Mr. Depardieu had recently applied for citizenship, and that it was granted in honor of his cultural achievements.

“The thing is that Depardieu has been a part of large film projects and has acted many parts, including the part of [Rasputin](#),” Mr. Peskov told the news agency Interfax. Referring to a television movie about the mad monk, he added, “This film has not been shown here, but it is a very bold and innovative interpretation of the character.”

In a [letter to the Russian television station Channel One](#), Mr. Depardieu confirmed that he had applied for Russian citizenship and said he was happy that the request was granted.

“I adore your country, Russia, your people, your history and your writers,” he wrote, adding that his father was a Communist who listened to Moscow radio. He promised to study Russian and said he wanted to live in a village because Moscow was too big a city.

He said he had informed the French president, François Hollande, of his decision and also said, “I love your president, Vladimir Putin, very much and it's mutual.”

It seemed likely, however, that Mr. Putin also saw a poetic opportunity in the chance for Russia, long known for losing wealthy citizens to the West, to claim one in return — and not just anyone, but a macho actor instantly recognizable by a giant nose.

That Mr. Depardieu might find Russia an attractive place in which to settle down, or at least to declare as his official tax address, fits in well with a narrative that Mr. Putin has developed in recent months portraying Russia not just as a geopolitical equal of Western powers, but as superior in many respects, especially in terms of its performance during the economic downturn.

“On the whole, we made a recovery from the crisis even faster than other countries,” Mr. Putin said. “Just look at the recession in Europe. Russia has posted growth, albeit a modest one, but we still have a much better situation than in the once-prosperous euro zone, or even in the United States.”

If Mr. Depardieu chooses to take up Russian citizenship, he would potentially trade steep French income tax rates, which he said now claim 85 percent of his income, and even Belgian rates of 60 percent or higher, for Russia's flat 13 percent income tax. The [value-added tax](#), a sales tax on goods and services, is 18 percent in

Russia compared with nearly 20 percent in France, while Russian social security taxes are 30 percent compared with 50 percent in France.

But aside from tax savings, Mr. Putin suggested that French officials were too brusque in their response to Mr. Depardieu's complaints and that he might find that Russians simply understand him better as an artist. "Actors, musicians and artists are people with a special, delicate psychological makeup and, as we say in Russia, the artist is easily offended," Mr. Putin said at the news conference on Dec. 20. "So I understand Mr. Depardieu's feelings."

Mr. Putin at the time went out of his way to say that he meant no ill will toward the French. "Among our foreign partners, France stands out," he said, prefacing his response to a reporter who asked if he had offered Mr. Depardieu residency. "We have had close spiritual ties for centuries now, despite tragic events in our common history."

Mr. Putin also said that he regarded Mr. Depardieu as thoroughly French as Mr. Putin, a former K.G.B. agent, is Russian. "I must say that even though he said — and I read his statement — that he considers himself a European, a citizen of the world, I know for a fact that he considers himself a Frenchman," Mr. Putin said. "I know this since we have very friendly, personal relations, even though we have not met many times. He loves his country, its history, its culture; that's his life."

Mr. Depardieu, it turns out, is no stranger to Russia. In October, he visited Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where he attended a celebration of the capital's 194th anniversary with the Chechen leader, Ramzan A. Kadyrov, who has invited Mr. Depardieu to live there.

Mr. Depardieu has also agreed to star in a movie written by Gulnara Karimova, the eldest daughter of President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan.

A spokeswoman for the French government, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, said Thursday the decision to grant Mr. Depardieu a passport was "an exclusive prerogative of the head of the Russian state," and declined to comment further, Europe 1 radio reported.

Economy: America's European moment

4 January 2013

Presseurop

The Economist



[The Economist](#), 4 January 2013

“America turns European”, jokes *The Economist* on a cover featuring US President Barack Obama and the Republican House Speaker John Boehner dressed as a Frenchman and German respectively. “For the past three years America’s leaders have looked on Europe’s management of the euro crisis with barely disguised contempt,” [observes the British weekly](#), comparing [the 11th hour US deal to dodge the “fiscal cliff”](#), with Europe’s handling of the euro crisis.

Washington shows a “pattern of dysfunction [that] is disturbingly similar to the euro zone’s”, says *The Economist*. Both the US and EU seem unable to move beyond [short term fixes usually negotiated well after midnight](#), it adds, and points to the oversized influence of some individuals or groups in negotiating the final deals. The newspaper also criticises the US and Europe for failing to be honest with voters, saying –

Just as Chancellor Angela Merkel and President François Hollande have avoided coming clean to the Germans and the French about what it will take to save the single currency, so neither Mr Obama nor the Republican leaders have been brave enough to tell Americans what it will really take to fix the fiscal mess. [...] As it has failed to deal with the single currency, Europe’s standing has crumbled in the world. Why should developing countries trust American leadership, when it seems incapable of solving anything at home? And while the West’s foremost democracy stays paralysed, China is making decisions and forging ahead.

New Year's Quiz:

40 trick questions about Europe

31 December 2012

[Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung](#) Frankfurt



Ticking the right box: Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Bundestag in December 2012.

AFP

Three years of the euro crisis, 2013 is around the corner, and you still have some questions? So does essayist Hans Magnus Enzensberger. The outspoken critics of the Brussels bureaucracy has been inspired to draw up a quiz – with, of course, entirely objective questions. Have fun!

[Hans Magnus Enzensberger](#)

What's it all about when an intelligent woman occupying a high position claims: "If the euro fails, Europe fails"?

1. A threat? Yes No
2. A defensive statement? Yes No
3. Or just a piece of stupidity? Yes No
4. Do you feel that our continent still exists much as it always has, despite the reality that over the last two thousand years, the talent, the denarius, the guilder, the lira, the lepton and the Reichsmark have all perished?
Yes No
5. Do you know who invented the abbreviation "euro", which before the end of the twentieth century no one had ever had to mouth? Yes No
6. Are you capable of deciphering acronyms such as ECB, EFSF, ESM, EBA and IMF? Yes No
7. Do you suspect that most European countries for quite some time have no longer been governed by [democratically elected bodies](#), but are ruled by these acronyms? Yes No

8. Have you voted for these ‘facilities’? Yes No

9. Are they mentioned in the Constitution or in any other European constitution? Yes No

10. Have you been notified in the past few years that there is “no alternative” to the [decisions of these institutions](#)? Yes No

11. Are homeless persons, drug abusers, wage earners or retirees not entitled to “sign up for” their financial fix, but members of the euro group and bank executives are? Yes No

12. Is this demand met on a regular basis? Yes No

13. Have you recently come up against the technical term “financial repression”? Yes No

If so, does it mean:

14. Pension cuts? Yes No

15. Tax hikes? Yes No

16. Debt write-offs? Yes No

17. Compulsory levies? Yes No

18. Inflation? Yes No

19. Currency reforms? Yes No

20. Do you know the name and exact address of the “markets” that tell the euro rescuers what they have to do? Yes No

21. Must the Coast Guard continue to screen whether passengers in distress are “system-relevant” before they can be saved? Yes No

Do you agree with the following views?

22. “Power is the privilege of not having to learn.” (Karl German, 1912-1993.) Yes No

23. “Life without a Constitutional Court is possible, but pointless.” (Loriot Mops) Yes No

24. “We decide on something, put it on the table and wait a while to see what happens. If there is no hue and cry and no uprisings, because most people have no idea about what has been decided, then we carry on – step by step, until there is no turning back.” (Jean-Claude Juncker, chairman of the Euro Group, 1999.) Yes No

25. “Politicians are like bad horsemen who are so busy keeping themselves in the saddle that they can no longer worry about the direction they are riding in.” (Joseph A. Schumpeter, 1944.) Yes No

26. Did the European Commission know what was meant by the word “subsidiarity”? If so, has it forgotten it?
Yes No

What does the term “quantitative easing” mean?

27. A yoga exercise? Yes No

28. The acceleration of the printing press? Yes No

29. Is the constitutional judge Gusy from Bielefeld right to say: “Where there is a trough, pigs will gather”? Yes No

30. Does the blossoming metaphorical speechifying of the saviours of the euro make you feel all cosy and warm inside, or does it come across to you as somewhat menacing, confusing or just plain ridiculous? Are you in a position to distinguish precisely between ‘umbrellas’, ‘levers’, [‘bazookas’](#), ‘Big Berthas’, ‘firewalls’ and ‘aid packages’? Yes No

31. Do you feel coddled in the confidence that Karl Valentin summed up in the words: “I hope it is not as bad as it already is”? Yes No

32. If it turns out that introducing a new paper currency has led not to the integration of Europe but to its sundering, and led not to [understanding but to hatred and mutual resentment](#), would it appear advisable to abandon this position, or invoke the motto “close your eyes and carry on down the same road”? Yes No

33. Or is that impossible because it would mean that a [narcissistic disorder afflicts the responsible politicians] (883411)? Yes No

34. Is there a Europe this side of the EU institutions and their 40,000 officials, or are they the sole representatives of our continent, the only ones whose voices matter? Yes No

35. Are these the people who have the right to decide who is to be considered “anti-European”? Yes No

36. Do you grasp why the European politicians handle the Treaty of Rome and the Maastricht Treaty as if they had never actually signed them? Yes No

37. Do you believe that [referenda and elections annoy them](#) because any expression by the population could disrupt their efforts to reassure the “markets”? Yes No

38. Is democracy really such a bad idea that it can be dispensed with when necessary? Yes No

39. Does the example of China not show that without democracy, in the age of globalisation, one can still become a successful world power? Yes No

40. Accordingly, is the [political disenfranchisement of citizens](#) inevitable, and is their economic dispossession the necessary consequence of that? Yes No

HM Enzensberger’s *Euro Quiz* will be published in February 2013 as a preface to a new book by economist Joachim Starbatty *Tatort Europe* (Crime scene Europe).

Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Vierzig hinterhältige Fragen zu Europa

25.12.2012 · „Wenn der Euro scheitert, scheitert Europa“: Ist das eine Schutzbehauptung? Oder eine Drohung? Und haben Sie den IWF gewählt? Hans Magnus Enzensberger fordert uns zu einem Europa-Quiz heraus. Ihre Antworten müssen Sie selbst geben.



© AFP

Euro-Krise und kein Ende: Täglich erreichen uns Schreckensmeldungen über Schuldenhöchststände, verschleppte Staatspleiten und soziale Brandherde. Und meistens tagt auch gerade wieder ein - ultimativer! - Euro-Gipfel in Brüssel. Den Schriftsteller Hans Magnus Enzensberger (83) hat die unendliche Eurogeschichte jetzt zu einem Quiz angeregt, bei dem Ernst und Satire wie im Vexierbild ständig verwischen. Enzensberger versteht sich seit seinem Reisebericht „Ach Europa“ (1987) als leidenschaftlicher Europäer. Gerade deshalb aber geißelt er das Europa der Brüsseler Bürokraten, Zentralisten und Euromantiker, die dabei sind, aus der bunten Vielfalt des Kontinents ein „Sanftes Monster“ (so der Titel von Enzensbergers 2011 bei Suhrkamp erschienerer Polemik) zu machen, und erfolgreich an der politischen Entmündigung der Bürger arbeiten. FAZ.net veröffentlicht Enzensbergers Europa-Quiz. Viel Spaß! (ank.)

„Wenn der Euro scheitert, scheitert Europa“ - was ist das?

Worum handelt es sich, wenn eine intelligente Frau in hoher Position behauptet: „Wenn der Euro scheitert, scheitert Europa“?

1. Um eine Drohung?
2. Um eine Schutzbehauptung?
3. Oder nur um eine Dummheit?
4. Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass unser Kontinent nach wie vor existiert, obwohl im Lauf der letzten zweitausend Jahre das Talent, der Denar, der Gulden, die Lira, das Lepton und die Reichsmark untergegangen sind?
5. Wissen Sie, wer das Stummelwort Euro erfunden hat, das vor dem Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts niemand in den Mund genommen hat?
6. Sind Sie in der Lage, Akronyme wie EZB, EFSF, ESM, EBA und IMF zu entziffern?

7. Vermuten Sie, dass die meisten europäischen Länder seit geraumer Zeit nicht mehr von demokratisch legitimierten Instanzen, sondern von diesen Abkürzungen regiert werden?

8. Haben Sie diese Einrichtungen gewählt?

9. Werden sie im Grundgesetz oder in einer anderen europäischen Verfassung erwähnt?

10. Ist Ihnen in den letzten Jahren mitgeteilt worden, dass die Entscheidungen dieser Institutionen „alternativlos“ sind?

Wer darf Finanzbedarf „anmelden“?

11. Sind Obdachlose, Fixer, Lohnempfänger oder Rentner nicht berechtigt, Finanzbedarf „anzumelden“, wohl aber Mitglieder der Eurogruppe, Bankvorstände und Fernsehintendanten?

12. Wird diesem Verlangen regelmäßig entsprochen?

13. Ist Ihnen in der letzten Zeit der Fachausdruck „finanzielle Repression“ begegnet?

Falls ja, sind damit gemeint:

14. Rentenkürzungen?

15. Steuererhöhungen?

16. Schuldenschnitte?

17. Zwangsabgaben?

18. Inflation?

19. Währungsreformen?

Was ist die Adresse der „Märkte“?

20. Kennen Sie die Namen und die genaue Adresse der „Märkte“, die den Euro-Rettern vorschreiben, was sie zu tun haben?

21. Muss die Küstenwacht prüfen, ob Passagiere in Seenot „systemrelevant“ sind, bevor sie gerettet werden dürfen?

Stimmen Sie den folgenden Ansichten zu?

Stimmen Sie den folgenden Ansichten zu?

22. „Macht ist das Privileg, nicht lernen zu müssen.“ (Karl Deutsch, 1912-1993.)

23. „Ein Leben ohne Verfassungsgericht ist möglich, aber sinnlos.“ (Loriots Mops)

24. „Wir beschließen etwas, stellen das dann in den Raum und warten einige Zeit ab, was passiert. Wenn es dann kein großes Geschrei gibt und keine Aufstände, weil die meisten gar nicht begreifen, was da beschlossen wurde, dann machen wir weiter - Schritt für Schritt, bis es kein Zurück mehr gibt.“ (Jean-Claude Juncker, Vorsitzender der Eurogruppe, 1999.)

25. „Politiker sind wie schlechte Reiter, die so stark damit beschäftigt sind, sich im Sattel zu halten, dass sie sich nicht mehr darum kümmern können, in welche Richtung sie reiten.“ (Joseph A. Schumpeter, 1944.)

26. Wusste die Europäische Kommission, was das Fremdwort Subsidiarität bedeutet? Und wenn ja, hat sie es vergessen?

Was bedeutet der Ausdruck „Quantitative Lockerung“?

Was bedeutet der Ausdruck Quantitative Lockerung?

27. Eine Yoga-Übung?

28. Die Beschleunigung der Notenpresse?

29. Hat der Verfassungsrechtler Gusy aus Bielefeld recht, wenn er sagt: „Wo ein Trog ist, sammeln sich Schweine“?

30. Können Sie sich mit der blühenden Metaphorik der Euro-Retter anfreunden, oder kommt sie Ihnen martialisch, konfus oder gar lächerlich vor? Sind Sie in der Lage, zwischen Schirmen, Hebeln, Bazookas, Dicken Berthas, Brandmauern und Hilfspaketen punktgenau zu unterscheiden?

31. Wiegen Sie sich in der Zuversicht, die Karl Valentin in die Worte fasste: „Hoffentlich wird es nicht so schlimm, wie es jetzt schon ist“?

32. Wenn sich herausstellt, dass die Einführung einer neuen Papierwährung statt zur Integration Europas zu seiner Spaltung, und wenn sie statt zur Verständigung zu Hass und gegenseitigem Ressentiment geführt hat, wäre es da angezeigt, diese Position zu räumen, statt nach dem Motto „Augen zu und durch“ zu verfahren?

33. Oder ist das undenkbar, weil es eine narzisstische Kränkung der verantwortlichen Politiker bedeuten würde?

Gibt es ein Europa diesseits der EU-Institutionen?

34. Gibt es ein Europa diesseits der Institutionen der EU und ihrer 40.000 Beamten, oder sind sie die einzigen Vertreter unsers Erdteils, deren Stimme zählt?

35. Sind es diese Personen, die darüber zu entscheiden haben, wer als „Anti-Europäer“ zu gelten hat?

36. Verstehen Sie, warum die Europa-Politiker mit den Römischen Verträgen und dem Traktat von Maastricht so umgehen, als hätten sie diese Papiere nie unterschrieben?

37. Glauben Sie, dass ihnen Referenden und Abstimmungen lästig sind, weil jede Meinungsäußerung der Bevölkerung ihre Bemühungen stören könnte, die „Märkte“ zu beruhigen?

38. War die Demokratie wirklich eine so schlechte Idee, dass auf sie notfalls verzichtet werden kann?

39. Zeigt nicht das Beispiel Chinas, dass man es auch ohne sie im Zeichen der Globalisierung zu einer erfolgreichen Weltmacht bringen kann?

40. Ist demnach die politische Entmündigung der Bürger unvermeidlich, und ist ihre ökonomische Enteignung die notwendige Folge?

Enzensbergers Euro-Quiz erscheint im Februar 2013 als Vorwort eines neuen Buches des Ökonomen Joachim Starbatty.

Quelle: F.A.S.

Debt crisis

Europe survives the year

21 December 2012

[El País](#) Madrid



Angela Merkel guiding Europeans out of the desert

[Peter Schrank](#)

The year 2012 seemed pretty dangerous for the eurozone and the whole of the EU. But the worst did not come to pass, especially since Angela Merkel made concessions, which allowed Mario Draghi, President of the ECB to intervene. However, in 2013, Europeans will still have to remain vigilant.

[José Ignacio Torreblanca](#)

“Forget the Mayan calendar: it's in Berlin where Cassandra will be vindicated or refuted.” So concluded [my final column of last year](#). It seemed like a forecast, but it was not, as it allowed two completely opposite finales.

Nor did it reveal anything that we did not already know, because we had been aware for some time that all roads led to Berlin (although with a stopover on the way in Frankfurt, headquarters of the European Central Bank). If recalling it is worth anything, it serves to remind us how close we were to the abyss and so helps us understand where we are now.

Throughout 2011, a lethal combination of hesitation, prejudices, myopia, lack of leadership, divisions between countries and a maddening slowness managed to turn a deep economic crisis into an existential crisis that put the survival of the euro in question. In extremis, the European Central Bank flooded the market with liquidity, which eased the problem temporarily but did not solve it.

True, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, aware of the gravity of the crisis, had publicly acknowledged in November (2011) that “if the euro falls, Europe falls”. However, her deeds fell far short of convincing anyone of her determination to take that rhetoric to its logical conclusion. This explains why, in the first half of this year, some traders stopped speculating about the financial survival of the euro and started to make preparations for its collapse.

Doing whatever it takes

The perception that the financial markets were beginning to redenominate debts calculated in euros to debts into national currencies, thereby foreshadowing the day after its collapse, was the red line that drove the ECB to act and, at the same time, the argument that the German government needed to overcome the resistance of those in Germany who still believed that Spain and Italy would have to survive on their own or leave the euro.

With his resounding statement in July affirming his intent “to do whatever it takes and, believe me, it will be enough,” to which he added in September a debt purchase programme that brought credibility to that declaration, [Mario Draghi](#) has earned the well-deserved title of Man of the Year. And rightly so, because from that moment on any financial trader who decided to speculate on the collapse of the currency knew that that would be a losing position from the start.

But, as is sometimes said, behind every great man there is always a woman (hidden, or a surprise?). In this case, Chancellor Merkel, who after having dragged her feet for months and even having fed the scepticism in her own country with unfortunate statements about southern Europe, she decided to confront the German Bundesbank, which voted against these measures and to ignore the hardliners in her own party who were reluctant to accept any kind of commitment to public or private debt (bank debt), and to accept, in the first place, the bailout of Spanish banks and [ECB intervention](#) to relieve the pressure on the risk premium on Spanish and Italian bonds and, in the second place, to start talking about [a banking union](#). And so, between June and September 2012, the euro was saved. That's the year's good news.

Not out of the woods yet

The bad news is that although the euro has been saved, and the eurozone countries as well – not to mention the fact that a Greek exit, which after months of speculation, now seems extremely remote – what lies ahead remains extremely complicated.

As demonstrated by what happened to the plans for a banking union, which were reduced, held up and cut into pieces over successive summits. European policy – if one overlooks the great uncertainty – has gone back to its normal course.

And so the exasperation at the lethargy, the myopia and lack of political courage returns. If we all know at this point what needs to be done, it is tough to explain why it is not being done. And meanwhile, the Angela Merkel who took the lead for a few days was again reverting to the narrowness that marks the national agenda, dominated by elections, reminding us that butterflies spend most of the time in a dull and ugly chrysalis and for only a very small part of their lives astonish us with their flight and their colours.

Still in the desert

The year 2013 will be a year of transition in which two contradictions will dominate: on the one hand, the feeling of having left the abyss behind us, which is visible in the lowering of the risk premium and the decision of the Spanish government not to ask for a bailout; but on the other, the impossibility of denying that the adjustment policies are still not working and there will be no external stimuli to let us grow and create jobs.

We are still alive, but in the desert, and with very little water.

The press in Europe (5/5)

Embedded in the Brussels bubble

28 December 2012

[Inside Story](#) Melbourne



Overview of the press room before the summit of the European Council on December 11, 2008 in Brussels.

AFP

The Belgian capital is the heart of the EU power machine, where dozens of journalists try to cover the activities of all the institutions. But as an Australian newcomer finds out, they have too much information and too little time to make sense of what's going on. Excerpts.

[James Panichi](#)

Every day for the past couple of months I have been parking my computer in the press area of the European Commission – literally a few steps away from the large press conference room. I'm surrounded by a multinational (and multilingual) army of casual reporters, taking advantage of the free wifi and what appears to be subsidised coffee (€0.90 a cup – how is that possible?).

While the capital-C correspondents working for the big mastheads are around the corner at the International Press Centre or the Residential Palace, us freelancers are squeezing into the nooks and crannies of a crowded media landscape.

Being the only Australian around and having no obvious affinity with the other anglophones, I have been adopted by a group of Italians, who promptly informed me that my human rights were being violated every time I ate at the Commission's canteen (the European Council across the road is much better).

They're an interesting bunch of people: smart, articulate, speaking good English and mainly in their early thirties. One of them has carved out a niche by filing for a small wire service and an aviation magazine; another has been employed locally by the Brussels bureau of an Italian cable news TV station; another files for an agricultural newsletter. They are all going from contract to contract, sometimes even from job to job, and they're always on the lookout for more.

'Permanent stringer'

I'm also introduced to the "father" of the Italian press corps: a distinguished gentleman whose business card reads like a tautology: *collaboratore fisso* ("permanent stringer"). His newspaper in Italy did not want to pay for him to stay in Brussels, but instead agreed to buy a certain number of his stories every week and put him on a type of retainer. And he's not alone: Italy's second-largest newspaper, [La Repubblica](#), recently replaced its retiring Brussels correspondent with... himself – that is, they told him he could stay in the position, but as a casual with an exclusive contract.

The paper's Brussels bureau is now made up of a retired correspondent supplementing his superannuation by doing the same job he was doing before.

It's not the glamorous life you would associate with journalism in the most important city of Europe. Over the course of a day I overhear one journalist on the phone demanding to know what kind of lunch would be served (free of charge) at a conference he was thinking of covering. "When you say sandwiches – what kind of sandwiches?" he asks. A bit later someone is locked in a tug-of-war with his newspaper, which wants him to attend an annual meeting in his home country but won't pay the airfare. The head office eventually relents, but the journalist will have to take a Ryan Air flight out of Charleroi (the town, an hour's drive south of Brussels, that everyone loves to hate). The journalist grumbles about it for the rest of the day.

How this [casualisation is affecting the reporting](#) of European news is hard to say, given that many European freelancers sitting alongside me as I write this have never known anything else. They work frantically – rushing from the midday press conference then typing madly for the next hour. They rarely travel and will readily admit that they don't have much time for research – they are there to gather the hassle-free news which the European Union offers them every day.

And if straightforward news is your game, work here at the European Union can be easy.

Every day the pigeonholes outside the [European Commission's press conference](#) room fill up with media releases announcing important and expensive policy decisions. More often than not you'll get the mobile phone numbers of highly articulate (and multilingual) advisers to offer background or on-the-record quotes. You can attend "technical briefings" and, if you play your cards right, you can secure an interview with a commissioner.

For the electronic media there are two online channels covering all EU events (in Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg) and more video-on-demand than you could poke a memory stick at. Studios and technicians are made available, free of charge: if you want to record a TV interview with a member of the European Parliament, just call the guys down in audiovisual bookings.

Information overload

One day I picked up all the pieces of official communication I could find: fifteen items. An announcement by the commissioner for regional policy on competition and state aid; a European parliamentary committee looking into the Common European Sales Law; an announcement by vice-president Catherine Ashton about the elections in Ukraine; the Commission approving the merger of two telecommunications companies... Meanwhile, my email inbox was filling up with email alerts from EU bodies I hadn't known existed.

The centrepiece of the European Union's news-generating system is the Commission's daily, midday press conference, which can usually be relied on to provide no new information. In fact, more often than not the Commission's spokeswoman Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen (a multilingual version of C.J., for fans of *The West Wing*) simply reiterates what has been announced in the media releases. I begin to suspect that reporters are showing up simply to find a way into a story – to get a sense from the questions of other journalists of where they might find a hook.

My fellow inductees joke that they have already learnt the most important rule for a journalist working out of Brussels: spend the last ten minutes of your day deleting emails you have received from the European Union.

You don't want to take that stuff home with you and a cathartic ritual can be empowering. But on the broader issue of how to manage our relationship with the institution we'll be covering, we are offered no advice.

Turning point

We're here right at a turning point in the history of Europe – and the world. Over coming years the European Union will either start to unravel or its core members will embrace the pioneering spirit of the grouping's founders and drive for greater unity – even a fully fledged federation.

It's all happening at a snail's pace, but when our reports over the next five years are summed up, we will have chronicled something huge. It could be the best work of our careers.

But will we be up to the challenge? Will we manage to rise above the daily fog of press releases, quotable quotes and petty bickering to make sense of the times we are living in? Or does our vantage point in the basement of the Commission make us too close to the action – too compromised by the mechanics of policy announcements – to ever make sense of what's going on?

Eurozone

Apocalypse not Now

20 December 2012

[The Economist](#) London



Economy

Merkel shepherds us away from the fiscal cliff

3 January 2013

[NRC Handelsblad](#) Amsterdam



[Horsch](#)

The last minute negotiations in Washington to avoid a budget shortfall show that short-termism is well grounded in US politics. And by contrast, it shows that despite her controversial handling of the euro crisis, the German chancellor is wise enough to instead push for long-term solutions.

[Melvyn Krauss](#)

To hijack a phrase made famous by the US historian Robert Kagan, [“Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus”](#) when it comes to dealing with questions of long-term fiscal health.

The fact that the best Washington politicians could come up with in the face of the so-called “fiscal cliff” is a stripped-down, minimalist agreement belies a genuine US interest in solving its long-term budget deficit problem.

This is not mainly because of US partisan differences (though it often is portrayed as such). Americans of whatever political stripe simply are not serious about the nation’s long-term fiscal health.

How else could you interpret the fact that the only way Washington politicians could be coaxed into accepting an even modest amount of fiscal austerity in pursuit of long-term fiscal health was to convince them – with gimmicks like the “fiscal cliff” – that greater amounts of austerity awaited had they failed to take at least a minimal dose of fiscal medicine now?

[Jumping off the fiscal cliff](#)

If US President Barack Obama and Congress really cared about fixing the country’s budget deficit problem, they would have enthusiastically jumped off the “fiscal cliff” with its mandated spending cuts and tax increases, not endlessly haggled to circumvent it.

This is just the opposite of what is happening in Europe where German Chancellor Angela Merkel is leading the charge for short-term fiscal pain in pursuit of long-term fiscal gain. Keynesians and supply-siders both

disagree but Mrs Merkel is sticking to her guns that Europe can not return to sustainable growth and prosperity without first putting its fiscal house in order – and she is creatively using German money to get the German rules she wants for Europe.

This – plus the fact that she has been both wise and courageous enough [to embrace](#) Mario Draghi’s market-stabilising bond-buying program in the face of determined Bundesbank opposition – is the reason I believe she deserves to be Europe’s person of the year.

Investors note: 2013 looks like the year markets start to realise it’s the “people from Venus” who are on the right track and the “Martians” who are on the wrong one. It’s the Americans who are kicking the fiscal reform can down the road, not the Europeans.

‘Tidal wave of turmoil’

This is putting Europe in danger as well as America. Washington’s failure to address US long-term fiscal health can spark a virtual tidal wave of turmoil throughout the entire global economy. We live in the kind of interconnected world where the “people from Venus” can suffer grave consequences if the “people from Mars” are not tending to business.

A blow up of the US bond market would do serious damage to Europeans and Americans alike (not to mention the Asians).

Part of the blame for US fiscal health problems rests squarely on the shoulders of the [US Federal Reserve](#), whose quantitative easing policies – whether intentionally or not – have made it easier for US politicians to put the nation’s long-term fiscal health on the back burner.

Why make painful fiscal reforms to protect your sovereign debt when the central bank’s unconditional buying of US bonds does the job for you? (The ECB is demanding reforms before it spends a euro on bond buying).

Fed chairman Ben Bernanke undoubtedly would be loath to admit it but quantitative easing, Federal Reserve style has helped take the air out of the US fiscal reform balloon.

January 5, 2013

Editorial

Reviving the French Economy

French voters elected François Hollande president last May with a mandate to revive the country's stalling economy, which analysts estimate grew just 0.1 percent last year and had an unemployment rate of 10.7 percent in October. But Mr. Hollande has so far done little to turn things around.

Since taking office, he has made a great show of talking about growth and resisting the austerity approach pushed by Angela Merkel, the German chancellor. But in practice, he has followed the same flawed policies of higher taxes and flat or lower spending that has hindered growth in other European economies.

On Thursday, Mr. Hollande [announced](#) that his government would enact new economic reforms, but he offered few details. A true agenda for growth would include more stimulus and policies that would encourage consumption and improve the economy's competitiveness.

Mr. Hollande could, for example, borrow a page [from Ireland](#), which has increased revenues through carbon taxes that have also had the beneficial effect of lowering greenhouse-gas emissions. The revenues raised could then be channeled into productive public investments in infrastructure and education, which would provide boosts to the economy in both the short and longer term.

Other effective reforms include dismantling state support for large corporations, or "national champions" as they are known in France. The country has too long coddled its biggest banks and corporations at the expense of small and entrepreneurial businesses by providing them with cheap financing, thwarting acquisitions of French companies by foreigners and repeatedly bailing out poorly performing companies to prevent bankruptcies.

In exchange for reducing corporate welfare, Mr. Hollande could propose more flexible labor laws, say by allowing businesses to respond to slowdowns and recessions by temporarily reducing workweeks and hours. It could **follow the example of Germany's successful government-subsidized program of shorter working hours known as Kurzarbeit**, which makes up about two-thirds of workers' lost wages through a fund that is filled in good times by payroll and corporate contributions.

These are just some of the ideas that could provide a way forward, but few have been actively debated in Paris these days. Instead, Mr. Hollande and his government have been busy defending a controversial increase in the marginal income tax rate to 75 percent, from 41 percent, on incomes of more than a million euros (about \$1.3 million).

The rate increase, which was struck down last month by a court on technical grounds, would last only two years and would hit a few thousand people to raise a few hundred million in new revenues. **Mr. Hollande and his government have insisted they will find another way to enact the increase, even though it generates too little to have any meaningful effect on the government's finances. Still, it has drawn public attention away from meaningful reforms**, in part because of the uproar created when the actor Gérard Depardieu [said he was moving](#) to Belgium to avoid paying high French taxes.

Mr. Hollande's [popularity](#) has been sinking and his mostly symbolic tax increase would not reverse that trend. But a well-thought-out package of fiscal and economic reforms that put France on the path of recovery would do that and much more.

The fiscal cliff deal

America's European moment

The troubling similarities between the fiscal mismanagement in Washington and the mess in the euro zone

Jan 5th 2013 | from the print edition



FOR the past three years America's leaders have looked on Europe's management of the euro crisis with barely disguised contempt. In the White House and on Capitol Hill there has been incredulity that Europe's politicians could be so incompetent at handling an economic problem; so addicted to last-minute, short-term fixes; and so incapable of agreeing on a long-term strategy for the single currency.

Those criticisms were all valid, but now those who made them should take the planks from their own eyes. America's economy may not be in as bad a state as Europe's, but the failures of its politicians—epitomised by this week's 11th-hour deal to avoid the calamity of the “fiscal cliff”—suggest that Washington's pattern of dysfunction is disturbingly similar to the euro zone's in three depressing ways.

Can-kicking is a transatlantic sport

The first is an inability to get beyond patching up. The euro crisis deepened because Europe's politicians serially failed to solve the single currency's structural weaknesses, resorting instead to a succession of temporary fixes, usually negotiated well after midnight. America's problems are different. Rather than facing an imminent debt crisis, as many European countries do, it needs to deal with the huge long-term gap between tax revenue and spending promises, particularly on health care, while not squeezing the economy too much in the short term. But its politicians now show themselves similarly addicted to kicking the can down the road at the last minute.

This week's agreement, hammered out between Republican senators and the White House on New Year's Eve, passed by the Senate in the early hours of New Year's Day and by the House of Representatives later the same day, averted the spectre of recession. It eliminated most of the sweeping tax increases that were otherwise due to take effect from January 1st, except for those on the very wealthy, and temporarily put off all the threatened

spending cuts (see [article](#)). Like many of Europe's crisis summits, that staved off complete disaster: rather than squeezing 5% out of the economy (as the fiscal cliff implied) there will now be a more manageable fiscal squeeze of just over 1% of GDP in 2013. Markets rallied in relief.

But for how long? The automatic spending cuts have merely been postponed for two months, by which time Congress must also vote to increase the country's debt ceiling if the Treasury is to be able to go on paying its bills. So more budgetary brinkmanship will be on display in the coming weeks.

And the temporary fix ignored America's underlying fiscal problems. It did nothing to control the unsustainable path of "entitlement" spending on pensions and health care (the latter is on track to double as a share of GDP over the next 25 years); nothing to rationalise America's hideously complex and distorting tax code, which includes more than \$1 trillion of deductions; and virtually nothing to close America's big structural budget deficit. (Putting up tax rates at the very top simply does not raise much money.) Viewed through anything other than a two-month prism, it was an abject failure. The final deal raised less tax revenue than John Boehner, the Republican speaker in the House of Representatives, once offered during the negotiations, and it included none of the entitlement reforms that President Barack Obama was once prepared to contemplate.

The reason behind this lamentable outcome is the outsize influence of narrow interest groups—which marks a second, unhappy parallel with Europe. The inability of Europeans to rise above petty national concerns, whether over who pays for bail-outs or who controls bank supervision, has prevented them from making the big compromises necessary to secure the single currency's future. America's Democrats and Republicans have proved similarly incapable of reaching a grand bargain; both are far too driven by their parties' extremists and too focused on winning concessions from the other side to work steadily together to secure the country's fiscal future.

The third parallel is that politicians have failed to be honest with voters. Just as Chancellor Angela Merkel and President François Hollande have avoided coming clean to the Germans and the French about what it will take to save the single currency, so neither Mr Obama nor the Republican leaders have been brave enough to tell Americans what it will really take to fix the fiscal mess. Democrats pretend that no changes are necessary to Medicare (health care for the elderly) or Social Security (pensions). Republican solutions always involve unspecified spending cuts, and they regard any tax rise as socialism. Each side prefers to denounce the other, reinforcing the very polarisation that is preventing progress.

Fixed today, hobbled tomorrow

Optimists will point out that America is unlikely to face a European-style debt crisis in the near future, but the slow-burning fuse is itself a problem. One positive side-effect of Europe's crisis is that it has forced euro-zone countries to raise their retirement ages and rationalise pensions and health-care promises. America, which has the biggest structural budget deficit in the rich world bar Japan, will become an outlier in its failure to deal with the fiscal consequences of an ageing population. Its ageing is slower than Europe's but, as its debt piles up and business and consumer confidence is dampened, the eventual crunch will be more painful.

The saddest thing about this week's deal is how unaware Messrs Obama and Boehner seem to be of the wider damage their petty partisanship is doing to their country. National security is not just about the number of tanks or rockets you have. As it has failed to deal with the single currency, Europe's standing has crumbled in the world. Why should developing countries trust American leadership, when it seems incapable of solving anything at home? And while the West's foremost democracy stays paralysed, China is making decisions and forging ahead.

This week Mr Obama boasted that he had fulfilled his mandate by raising taxes on the rich. In fact, by failing once again to clear up America's fundamental fiscal trouble, he and Republican leaders are building Brussels on the Potomac.

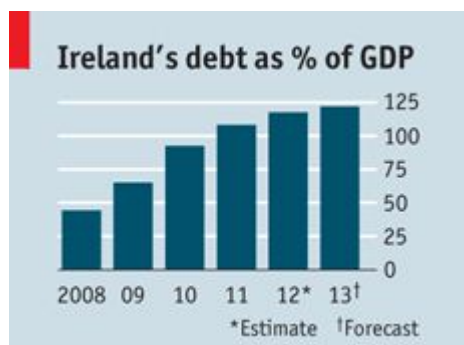
Ireland and the euro crisis

Dawn in the west

Why the Irish deserve a helping hand to leave their bail-out programme

Jan 5th 2013 | from the print edition

ALTHOUGH the prospects for most of the euro zone's periphery remain dark, there is a glimmer of hope in the west. By the end of 2013 Ireland could leave its bail-out programme and stand on its own feet again.



An Irish recovery would provide a boost for Europe and its de facto leader, Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, as much as for Ireland and its prime minister, Enda Kenny. It would show that the controversial treatment of austerity and structural reforms imposed as the price of bail-outs can work. It would reassure the electorates of core Europe, especially German voters who go to the polls in the autumn, that rescues do not condemn them to a never-ending call upon their taxes, as seems to be the case with Greece. And a sustained return by Ireland to the bond markets would boost confidence more generally, helping other bailed-out economies such as Portugal and Spain.

Unlike the struggling countries of southern Europe, Ireland has a good story to tell. Last year it dodged the euro zone's wretched recession. Unit labour costs in the country have come down sharply, making the economy more competitive. That has enhanced Ireland's allure for foreign companies, which continue to favour the country as a manufacturing and services hub for international markets, not least because of its low corporate-tax rate. These are useful advantages. If things go well in 2013, Ireland might be able to leave its programme without any further assistance.

Celtic hangover

But a happy ending is by no means assured. Ireland's very reliance on foreign firms creates both economic and fiscal vulnerabilities. If global growth falters this year, for example, Ireland will be hit hard because its exports are bigger than the economy. Any economic setback will make it more difficult to get the deficit down, as planned in yet another austerity budget (the sixth) late last year. Even if things go to plan, public debt, which amounted to only 25% of Ireland's GDP in 2007, will exceed 120% in 2013; and once the large slice of GDP which goes to low-taxed foreign multinationals is taken into account, it will reach almost 140% (see [article](#)).

If things do go wrong, a debt burden of this magnitude could prove unsustainable. That is why Ireland could do with a helping hand from the rest of Europe. About a third of its public debt has been incurred bailing out its banks, an imposition which Irish taxpayers resent bitterly. The Irish government is largely to blame for that, because it issued blanket guarantees to bank creditors at the height of the financial crisis in 2008. But European leaders, scared about the repercussions of a default in the bond markets, later forced the Irish government to protect the banks' senior bondholders.

There are a couple of ways in which Mrs Merkel could help Ireland. The terms on the promissory notes—IOUs—which the Irish government used in 2010 to prop up its banks could be eased. A more effective measure would be to allow the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the euro area's permanent rescue fund, to take stakes in the Irish banks that remain operational. That would help Ireland both by removing some of its sovereign debt and by insulating the government from any further calls on public funds as a result of more mishaps to Irish banks. It would also help the euro zone by making concrete the undertaking by European leaders last June to break the vicious circle between weak banks and weak governments that has exacerbated the debt crisis.

Finance ministers in Germany and other core creditor countries subsequently said that the ESM could be deployed in this way only in new rescues. It will be hard for Mrs Merkel to shift course again, especially in an election year. But the euro area must sooner or later deal with debt that is beyond the capacity of individual states to cope with. Moreover, European creditors would be rewarding Ireland for good behaviour—for complying so well with all the conditions that it is on course to leave the bail-out programme altogether. That would stiffen the resolve of other rescued countries as they push through unpopular measures. But the most compelling reason for Mrs Merkel to offer such a concession is that Germany and the wider European economy would benefit, too, as investors saw there was light at the end of a rescue. And with the euro zone still mired in recession, it could do with all the light it can get.

The Irish economy

Fitter yet fragile

Ireland's success in attracting foreign investment has its drawbacks

Jan 5th 2013 | from the print edition



AFP Yes to more help

from Europe

IF 2012 was the year when a sense of calm returned to euro-zone financial markets, 2013 will be when Europe needs to show that its recipe of austerity and reforms can work. Strong evidence for that would be if a bailed-out country could finance itself again. Hence the hopes invested in Ireland, which entered its rescue programme in 2010 and is scheduled to make a full return to the bond markets at the end of 2013.

The markets seem to be signalling it can be done. Yields on Irish government bonds maturing in 2020 fell from 8.5% at the start of 2012 to 4.5% by the end of the year. Renewed appetite for Irish debt allowed the government to regain partial access to bond markets in 2012. Ireland's debt-management agency plans to raise €10 billion (\$13.2 billion) by issuing bonds in 2013. That will leave it with €19 billion of cash reserves, sufficient to cover the government's needs for 2014.

There are stirrings of life in the battered Irish economy. Although GDP is thought by the IMF to have grown by only 0.4% in 2012, that compares well with deep recessions in Italy and Spain and followed a 1.4% rise in 2011. The current account has been in surplus since 2010. Underlying competitiveness has improved sharply, judging by unit labour costs.

Helped by a low corporate-tax rate of 12.5%, Ireland continues to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), especially from American firms and particularly in pharmaceuticals, information technology and financial services. The number of new FDI projects in 2012 has been similar to that in 2011, itself the highest for a decade, says Barry O'Leary, the boss of Ireland's inward-investment agency.

The foreign presence is now a towering one, so much so that Irish exports actually exceed the value of GDP. The contribution from net trade—exports less imports—has more than offset falls in domestic demand, which

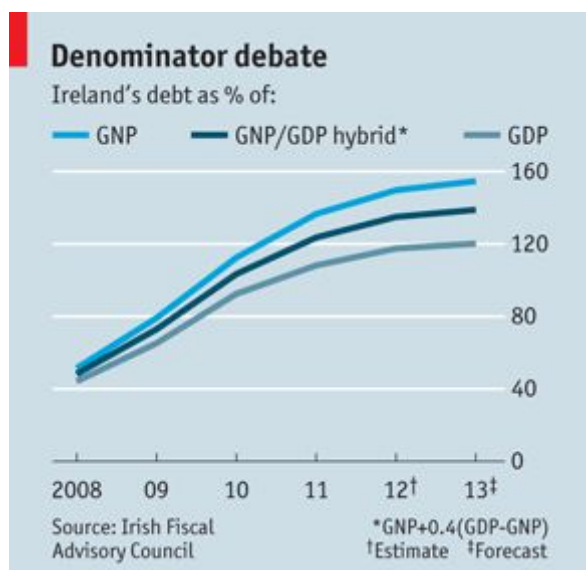
remains traumatised by excessive debt (households owe 209% of disposable income), continuing austerity and a financial squeeze as the now well-capitalised but unprofitable Irish banks limp along.

But this brightening picture is not all that it appears. Take Ireland's reliance on foreign firms. That gears the Irish economy to global growth so that it suffers when world trade falters, says Simon Hayes of Barclays. Exports have been growing at only 2% a year since last spring, the slowest since they started to recover in early 2010.

It also makes the economy vulnerable to shocks affecting specific sectors. Ireland's success in attracting global drugs firms—pharmaceuticals made up half of goods exports in 2011—means that it is being affected by the “patent cliff”, the expiry of patents on many blockbuster drugs. In 2011 the value of Irish pharmaceutical exports rose by almost 7%, but in the first ten months of 2012 it fell by 3% compared with the same period a year earlier.

Another concern is that Irish progress, both economic and fiscal, is typically measured using GDP, the output generated within Ireland. But for an economy where foreign firms are so dominant, GNP, or the income that goes to residents, is more relevant. Irish GNP is lower than GDP because of the big profits made by foreign firms. The gap between the two has been widening, from 14% in 2007 to 20% in 2011.

That widening shortfall reflects the fact that the Irish people have fared much worse than the Irish economy. National output measured by GDP was 7% smaller in 2011 than in 2007, whereas national income measured by GNP was 11% smaller. This matters not just for living standards but also for Ireland's fiscal situation: it is GNP that does the heavy lifting on the public finances, since multinational profits are taxed so lightly.



If measuring Ireland's debt as a share of GDP understates the burden, measuring it as a share of GNP overstates it because it neglects the contribution that foreign firms do make to taxes. The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, a watchdog, has suggested a hybrid measure in which 40% of the excess of GDP over GNP is added to GNP. This offers a better gauge of fiscal sustainability for the Irish economy, says John McHale, who chairs the council. On this basis, the debt burden, which is expected to peak in 2013 at around 120% of GDP, would really be close to 140% (see chart).

Ireland's vulnerabilities explain why the IMF wants Ireland's European creditors to give it more help. In particular it advocates lightening the debt-servicing charges on promissory notes, a sort of IOU, which the Irish government issued in 2010 mainly to prop up the collapsed Anglo Irish Bank. It also wants the European Stability Mechanism, a euro-zone rescue fund, to relieve Ireland's public-debt burden by taking an equity stake in banks which have had state help. A lot has gone right for Ireland (which has just begun its six-month stint in the EU's rotating presidency). But it wouldn't take much for the euro zone's model pupil to fail to graduate from its rescue programme.

January 5, 2013

Greek Tax Scandal Distracts From a Collection Shortfall

By [LIZ ALDERMAN](#) and [RACHEL DONADIO](#)

The tax scandal that reignited in [Greece](#) over the holidays had all the makings of a grade-B drama. A former finance minister, George Papaconstantinou, [was accused of scrubbing his relatives' names](#) from a CD containing the identities of thousands of possible Greek tax dodgers. Within hours, his chief political rival tossed him from their party.

Mr. Papaconstantinou, in turn, hinted darkly that he was the victim of a plot masking malfeasance at higher levels.

While the firestorm may have made for political theater of a sort, **it has diverted attention from a much bigger problem: Greece, its foreign lenders say, has fallen woefully short of its tax collection targets and is still not moving hard enough to tackle widespread tax evasion — long tolerated, particularly among the country's richest citizens.**

Greek officials agreed to the targets as part of an international lending pact last year, but there is no penalty for missing them. In recent weeks, however, two reports by Greece's foreign lenders have found that Athens pulled in less than half of the additional tax income that it expected last year and performed fewer than half of the expected audits.

One report said that Athens had brought in a little less than \$1.3 billion in additional taxes of the \$2.6 billion it had hoped to collect in 2012. Only 88 major taxpayers, including corporations, were the subject of full-scope audits, well below a target of 300, the report said, while just 467 audits of high-wealth individuals were completed, compared with a goal of 1,300.

The fragile, three-party [coalition government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras](#) continues to vow it will crack down on corruption and tax evasion, but [a blunt assessment](#) last month by a task force of Greece's foreign lenders said, "These changes have not yet been reflected in results in terms of improved tax inspection and collection." Analysts say the failure to pursue tax evaders aggressively is deepening social tensions. "It's a weak government with very difficult work to do, and this is very, very bad for the morale of the people," said Nikos Xydakis, a political columnist for Kathimerini, a daily newspaper. **"This year will be hell for the middle-class people. And the rich people are untouchable. This is very bad."**

In a separate report, **the European Union and the International Monetary Fund said they were concerned that the "authorities are falling idle and that the drive to fight tax evasion by the very wealthy and the free professions is at risk of weakening."**

The report added that total unpaid taxes amounted to nearly \$70 billion, about 25 percent of Greece's gross domestic product. But only about 15 percent to 20 percent of the amount is actually collectible, either because the statute of limitations has run out or the scofflaws do not have the money.

It pressed Greece to focus on the cases most likely to produce real revenues, especially in vocations where tax evasion has become pernicious. "Doctors and lawyers are a good place to start," it said.

Critics, especially the leftist party Syriza, which leads in opinion polls, say the government has not done enough to stop corruption because its members are tied to the country's business elite and do not want to jeopardize their political careers.

“The problem is not simply tax evasion among the rich,” said Zoe Konstantopoulou, a member of Parliament from Syriza who serves on a panel investigating the so-called Lagarde list, a compilation of more than 2,000 Greeks with accounts in a Swiss branch of HSBC that had been sent to Mr. Papaconstantinou in 2010 by Christine Lagarde, then the finance minister of France. **“The problem is tax evasion among the rich with the complicity and the aiding and abetting of those who govern.”**

While Greece received a badly needed \$45 billion in aid last month to help it avoid defaulting on its debts, critics say that unless Athens can more forcefully tap the billions it is owed in taxes, it will never pay off its debts, even if its moribund economy eventually starts to recover.

A dysfunctional bureaucracy weakened by budget cuts, two destabilizing rounds of elections last spring and an economy decimated by austerity have hampered tax collections further. But a thicket of regulations and a culture of resistance also fuel a shadow economy that includes an estimated 25 percent of economic activity.

One study by researchers from the University of Chicago and Virginia Tech estimated that tax evasion costs Greece about \$37 billion a year, equivalent to nearly 15 percent of economic output. The study found that doctors, engineers, accountants and lawyers were “the primary tax-evading occupations.”

The reports were released shortly before Greece’s financial crimes squad accused Mr. Papaconstantinou late last month of removing the names of three of his relatives from the Lagarde list.

Those accounts belonged to a cousin of Mr. Papaconstantinou’s, her husband and the spouse of another cousin. On Wednesday, the cousin, Eleni Papaconstantinou-Sikiaridis, resigned from her post at the Greek privatization agency, saying in a letter that the money held in the HSBC Geneva account was “the legal wealth of myself and my husband.”

Mr. Papaconstantinou has vehemently denied the accusations and has said that he worked to clamp down on tax evasion as finance minister from 2009 until 2011. “I handed to the tax authorities all the files which I received from the French authorities,” he said in an e-mail. “I am not in a position to confirm that the original information received in 2010 contained the three files concerned,” he added, about his relatives.

“If the original is identical to the new one sent by the French authorities two weeks ago, this means that someone removed the names after I handed the files over,” he said.

Mr. Papaconstantinou told Parliament in November that he had asked the head of the financial crimes unit at the time to investigate only the names of the 20 biggest account holders on the list. In the e-mail interview, he said that an aide in his office pulled together the names, which he said accounted for about half of the money in the accounts.

He said he had been uneasy releasing the full 2,000 names to financial investigators for fear that they would be leaked. “Surely it is easier to safeguard an investigation of 20 people than one of 2,000 people,” he said.

Mr. Papaconstantinou testified that he then passed the entire file in June 2011 to the head of Greece’s financial crimes unit, Ioannis Diotis, who later gave it to Mr. Papaconstantinou’s successor, Evangelos Venizelos, the current leader of the Socialists and a rival of Mr. Papaconstantinou’s.

Mr. Diotis said that Mr. Venizelos did not give him orders to investigate the names on the list. Mr. Venizelos said Mr. Diotis had told him the material was unusable as it had been illegally acquired. Mr. Venizelos added that he passed the memory stick to the prime minister, Mr. Samaras, last October after Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras said the authorities could not find the original list.

On Thursday, Syriza called for an investigation into Mr. Papaconstantinou and Mr. Venizelos, and it labeled the current coalition government “the architects of corruption, and of the cover-up of corruption.”

2012 Year in Review

Free markets, rule of law, and other urban legends

by David Collum

An interview video with RT here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orrCeQ0RsG8#>

Transcript of the interview with Chris Martenson: <http://www.peakprosperity.com/podcast/80364/david-collum-headed-for-showdown>

Friday, December 21, 2012, 2:34 PM

[Every year, friend-of-the-site [David Collum](#) [47] writes a detailed "Year in Review" synopsis full of keen perspective and plenty of wit. This year's is no exception. Moreover, he has graciously selected PeakProsperity.com as the site where it will be published in full. It's quite longer than our usual posts, but worth the time to read in full. A downloadable pdf of the full article is available at the bottom of the post -- cheers, Adam]

Background

I was just trying to figure it all out.

~ Michael Burry, hedge fund manager

Every December, I write a *Year in Review* that has now found a home at Chris Martenson's website [PeakProsperity.com](#) [48].¹ [49].² [50].³ [51] What started as a simple summary intended for a couple dozen people morphed over time into a much more detailed account that accrued over 25,000 clicks [last year](#) [52].⁴ [53] 'Year in Review' is a bit of a misnomer in that it is both a collage of what happened, plus a smattering of issues that are on my radar right now. As to why people care what an organic chemist thinks about investing, economics, monetary policy, and societal moods I can only offer a few thoughts.

For starters, in 33 years of investing with a decidedly undiversified portfolio, I had only one year in which my total wealth decreased in nominal dollars. For the 13 years beginning 01/01/00—the 13 toughest investing years of the new millennium!—I have been able to compound my personal wealth at an 11% annualized rate. This holds up well against the pros. I am also fairly good at distilling complexity down to simplicity and seem to be a congenital contrarian. I also have been a devout follower of Austrian business cycle theory—i.e., free market economics—since the late 1990s.⁴ [53]

Each review begins with a highly personalized analysis of my efforts to get through another year of investing followed by a more holistic overview of what is now a 33-year quest for a ramen-soup-free retirement. These details may be instructive for those interested in my approach to investing. The bulk of the review, however, describes thoughts and observations—the year's events told as a narrative. The links are copious, albeit not comprehensive. Some are flagged with enthusiasm. Everything can be found here.⁵ [54]

I have tried to avoid themes covered amply in my previous reviews. There is no silver bullet, however, against global crises, credit bubbles, and feckless central bankers. Debt permeates all levels of society, demanding comment every year. Precious metals and natural resources are a personal favorite. This year was particularly distorted by the elections; I offer my opinions as to why. Sections on Baptists, Bankers, The Federal Reserve, and Bootleggers describe the players in Jack Bogle's *Battle for the Soul of Capitalism*.⁶ [55] Special attention is given to a financial crime diaspora fueled by globally overreaching monetary policies. Everything distills down to a relentlessly debated question: *What is the role of government?* I finish light with the year's book list that shaped my thinking. I acknowledge individuals who have made pondering capitalism a blast through direct

exchanges over the years. They brought wisdom; I brought the chips and dip. You already know who you are. And then there are those characters whose behavior is so erratic, sociopathic, criminal, or just plain inexplicable—you guys are central to the plot. I leapfrog Rome and Titanic metaphors and go straight to the Lusitania.

One last caveat: I subscribe to the Aristotelian notion that one can entertain ideas without necessarily endorsing them, often causing me to color *way* outside the lines. With trillions of dollars circumnavigating the globe daily, nefarious activities are not only possible but near certainties. If you are prone to denounce conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists to avoid unpleasant thoughts, you should stop reading now. I'm sure there's another Black Something sale at Walmart. If you are a bull, you should also bail out or buckle up. This is the bear case. I will remain a permabear until some catharsis knocks me off my stance and they find a cure for my market- and politics-induced PTSD.

As this review was being completed, Lauren Lyster and Demetri Kofinas recently uploaded a [companion interview](#) [56] on the *Year in Review* I did with Capital Accounts on RT_America (to be aired on December 21st and posted on Youtube.)⁷ [57] In this context I offer wisdom from the Master:

If there is ever a medium to display your ignorance, television is it.

Footnote superscripts appear extensively throughout this review. The actual footnotes and associated hyperlinks can be found [here](#) [58].

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Europe

The ECB is going to buy bonds of bankrupt banks just so the banks can buy more bonds from bankrupt governments. Meanwhile, just to prop this up the ESM will borrow money from bankrupt governments to buy the very bonds of those bankrupt governments.

~ Kyle Bass, CEO of Hayman Capital

Watching Europe is like reading *Waiting for Godot*—it is unintelligible. This is unfortunate because these folks may determine my fate. The problems begin with the PIIGS—Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain—suffering from insolvency. We were assured that the Maastricht Treaty and Haagen Dazs Accord that spawned the Euro explicitly forbade deficits and bailouts.²¹⁷ Well that was then and this is now. Christine Lagarde, head of the IMF, held a press conference literally flashing a big, black purse suggesting that it needs some serious money, and—Shazam!—a €700 billion bailout was in place before the weekend was over. Soon there were trillion-euro bailouts with fuzzy names such as Long-Term Refinancing Operation (LTRO), European Stabilization Mechanism (ESM), European Financial Stability Facility (EFSM), and Monetary Injection Liquidity Fund (MILF). Spiking interest rates of the PIIGS were driven down to levels that look like AAA-rated debt of Pfizer and General Electric. The European Commission (EC), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and European Central Bank (ECB)—the so-called Troika—are the enforcers. The banks get what the banks want.

A Greek exit—shortened to Grexit by Willem Buiter—would have created a fiscal crisis as well as an acronym crisis—PIIS. We endured an insane discussion about whether or not Greece should suffer austerity.²¹⁸ Versus what? Rich, prosperous, and productive? The only legitimate employment was hawking gyros to rioters. A photograph of the Greek Ministry of Finance showing total chaos went viral, becoming a metaphor for the nation.²¹⁹ Nobody got the memo: Austerity is not a choice; it's a result. Any banker who lends to Greece will be the author of his own (and our) misfortunes. Iran stopped shipping oil to Greece. Just when Greece appeared to be plumbing the bottom, they suffered a locust attack—a *real* one.²²⁰ Greece is the smallest pawn on the chessboard and with little bargaining power. They were asked to sign a bailout agreement with deep-seated sovereignty issues, yet the document was written in a different language with an incomplete translation.²²¹ However, the Greek default could cost the banks trillions, and the Greeks know this.²²²

The bailouts are coming from Germany because everyone else is on the receiving end. Yet, with an economy 20% the size of the U.S. economy, the Germans are trying to prop up a gaggle of countries that are collectively bigger than the U.S. economy. Europe has \$30 trillion unfunded pension liabilities. *It's not going to work.* Discussions of why the Americans should bail out Europe—even more than the hundreds of billions of QE II that ended up in European banks—led to a classic Santelli-Liesman love-fest on CNBC.²²³ The banks get what the banks want.

Soon Spain began to slip into the abyss,²²⁴ something I had been waiting for since 2009. [3] Shockingly, Mariano Rajoy, Prime Minister of Spain, declared, “We support a rescue mechanism, the bigger the better.”²²⁵ It was all part of a shakedown of the EU, and it seemed to work. Money began flowing into Spanish banks. (Bankia actually got a bailout before the bailouts officially began because they couldn't wait.)²²⁶ Spain put a €2500 cap on cash transactions,²²⁷ which is emblematic of an end game. Meanwhile, Spain is bidding for the 2020 Olympics. They will be sponsored by Lowenbrau.²²⁸

Then came the Italians. Bill Gross noted that “Italian banks are now issuing state guaranteed paper to obtain funds from the European Central Bank (ECB) and then reinvesting the proceeds into Italian bonds, which is QE by any definition and near Ponzi by another.” The oldest bank in the world, Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena founded in 1472, got bailed out. I wonder how many times *that* has happened in the last 540 years.²²⁹ The wheels of justice in Italy were moving forward; they convicted scientists for failing to predict an earthquake.²³⁰ The guys who *cause* earthquakes are still on the lam.

What happened to the assurances of the Maastricht Treaty that no sovereigns would be bailed out? It seems simple enough to me. Politically disconnected sovereign states are strongly shackled together by a common currency and borderless multinational banks. Why would the politicians in the sovereign states agree to self-

destructive austerity deals rather than giving them the Icelandic Salute—a default and the finger? That’s easy, too; the banks own the politicians, probably via Cayman Island subsidiaries. (In the olden days, it would have been the Swiss, but their money-laundering ways are at risk.²³¹) One of the many subplots is a mountain of credit default swaps that would break the banks if they were triggered.²³² No problem: The banks refuse to declare the credit event. The banks get what the banks want.

The LTRO is particularly insidious because it subordinates existing debt, inducing a bad case of transurphobia (fear of haircuts). The more LTRO money, the less capital remains backing the existing debt.²³³ Which legal body gets to make this decision? That’s what the Troika is for—democracy not included. These guys are undermining the debt markets in fundamental ways.

The 2012 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union,²³⁴ rumored to be for “keeping their shit together” and for “displaying an unprecedented willingness to not start another world war.” The great part about this wave of absurd Nobel Peace Prizes is that, in theory, I could get one—a dollar and a dream.

A World Economic Forum (WEF) report says we must double global debt by 2020 (to \$210 trillion) to keep the global economy growing.²³⁵ If that’s the price, shrinkage is sounding pretty rational. The killer phrase was that “most of the growth will come from the government segment.” That ain’t economic growth.

Let us not forget the troubles in the UK. Goldman announced that they were installing one of their boys (Mark Carney) as head of the Bank of England, prompting David Stockman to ask, “Is there any monetary post in the world not run by Goldman Sachs?”²³⁶ UK family debts are up by almost 50% in a year. That is serious slippage. The Bank of England cranked \$140 billion into the system in one day—equivalent to 177% of the annual global gold production.²³⁷

The Brits *et al.* are eating a lot of "toast sandwiches," otherwise known as the "austerity sandwich"—two slices of bread wrapping a piece of toast (butter/salt optional).²³⁸ Irish taxpayers withheld property taxes in protest to the Troika. This smacks of a “peasant rebellion” claiming taxation without representation. With this history ringing in his ears, Sir Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, noted, “I have deep sympathy with those who are totally unconnected with the origins of the financial crisis who suddenly find that the returns on their savings have reached negligible levels. These are consequences of the painful adjustment prompted by the financial crisis and the need to rebalance our economy.”²³⁹ We feel your pain too, Sir Mervyn. Can I offer you a toast sandwich?

The whole mess has been summarized and bulleted by countless bloggers. A few are worth reading.^{240,241,242} Credit Swiss noted that “Portugal cannot rescue Greece, Spain cannot rescue Portugal, Italy cannot rescue Spain, France cannot rescue Italy, but Germany can rescue France.”²⁴³ Of course, in February Baghdad Ben Bernanke noted that "the ECB is well capitalized."

Mindestlohn-Studie Rösler:

Alle profitieren vom flexiblen Arbeitsmarkt

06.01.2013 · SPD-Kanzlerkandidat Peer Steinbrück will bei einem Wahlsieg schnell einen Mindestlohn einführen. Ein interner Vermerk des Wirtschaftsministeriums weist darauf hin: Das würde die Arbeitslosigkeit erhöhen.

Von [Kerstin Schwenn](#)



Philipp Rösler beim Dreikönigstreffen der FDP.

Ein gesetzlicher Mindestlohn erhöht die Arbeitslosigkeit. Dies geht aus einem internen Vermerk des Bundeswirtschaftsministeriums hervor. „Die Arbeitslosenquote in EU-Staaten mit gesetzlichem Mindestlohn liegt mit 13 Prozent um 6 Prozentpunkte höher als in EU-Staaten ohne Mindestlohn mit 7 Prozent“, heißt es in dem Papier, das dieser Zeitung vorliegt. „Auch nach Berechnungen der OECD zeigt sich, dass die Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in der Finanzkrise vor allem in den Ländern sprunghaft anstieg, in denen ein hoher Mindestlohn existierte.“ Flexibilität sei ein wesentlicher Faktor für Beschäftigung .

Bundeswirtschaftsminister Philip Rösler (FDP) warnt in dem Papier: „Eine Aushebelung der Tarifautonomie durch einen gesetzlichen Mindestlohn beschränkt die notwendige Anpassungsfähigkeit der Löhne und würde die Arbeitsmarkterfolge schnell zunichte machen.“ Auch eine weitere Ausweitung branchenspezifischer Mindestlöhne berge die Gefahr, in einen allgemeinen Mindestlohn zu münden.

Peer Steinbrück will einen Mindestlohn einführen

Am Wochenende äußerte derweil der Kanzlerkandidat der SPD, Peer Steinbrück, die Absicht, nach einem Wahlsieg im Herbst umgehend eine gesetzliche Lohnuntergrenze einführen zu wollen. Dies würde „zu den ersten Maßnahmen unseres 100-Tage-Programms gehören“, sagte er der Zeitung „[Tagesspiegel am Sonntag](#)“. Auch der Vorsitzende der Gewerkschaft Verdi Frank Bsirske sprach sich abermals dafür aus. Er zeigte sich „optimistisch“, dass es in diesem Jahr zu einem gesetzlichen Mindestlohn komme. Alle Parteien außer der FDP hätten „das Problem“ inzwischen erkannt: „Viele Menschen erleben derzeit eine Rückkehr zur Unsicherheit, zu einer längst überwunden geglaubten proletarischen Lebenserfahrung, nämlich nicht zu wissen, wie die eigene Existenz und die der Familie in den nächsten zwei Monaten abzusichern ist“, sagte Bsirske der Agentur dpa.

Das Wirtschaftsministerium verweist derweil auf die [Erfolge am Arbeitsmarkt](#). „Die Erwerbstätigkeit ist [mit 42 Millionen auf Rekordhöhe](#). Damit sind 2,5 Millionen mehr Menschen in Arbeit als 2005“, heißt es in dem Papier. Die Entbürokratisierung habe Chancen für Langzeitarbeitslose und Geringqualifizierte eröffnet, heißt es in dem Vermerk. Die durch befristete Beschäftigung, Teilzeit, Mini- und Midijobs gewonnenen Spielräume müssten erhalten bleiben.

Rösler: Die gute Lage am Arbeitsmarkt geht nicht auf Kosten der Arbeitnehmer

Rösler weist in dem Zusammenhang die Behauptung von Opposition, Gewerkschaften und Sozialverbänden zurück, die gute Lage am Arbeitsmarkt gehe auf Kosten der Arbeitnehmer, weil „atypische“ Beschäftigungsformen zugenommen hätten und sich die Einkommensschere geöffnet habe. 70 Prozent aller Erwerbstätigen (29,4 Millionen) seien sozialversicherungspflichtig beschäftigt. Ihre Zahl sei seit 2005 um 2,8 Millionen gestiegen.

Die große Mehrheit der sozialversicherungspflichtig Beschäftigten sei in Vollzeit tätig; nur rund 20 Prozent hätten eine Teilzeitbeschäftigung. Der Anteil der atypisch Beschäftigten (Teilzeit, befristet Beschäftigte, Zeitarbeiter, Minijobber) liege seit 2005 stabil bei 25 Prozent. „Eine Verdrängung von Normalarbeitsverhältnissen ist nicht nachweisbar“, betont Rösler. Die Zahl der „Minijobber“ ohne Hauptjob liege bei 4,8 Millionen und sei im Vorjahresvergleich gesunken. Die Zahl der Zeitarbeiter habe sich bei 860.000 stabilisiert. Vom Aufschwung am Arbeitsmarkt hätten alle Personengruppen profitiert, auch Ältere, Frauen, Personen mit Migrationshintergrund und Langzeitarbeitslose.

Die Zahl der Langzeitarbeitslosen sei in den vergangenen fünf Jahren von 1,7 auf 1 Million gesunken. Rösler führt auch die Einkommensentwicklung als Beleg an: „Die durchschnittlichen Einkommen sind von 2005 bis 2010 real um 4 Prozent in Westdeutschland und 20 Prozent in Ostdeutschland gestiegen.“ Die Ungleichheit der Einkommen sei zugleich zurückgegangen. Einkommensunterschiede „vererbten“ sich in Deutschland weniger stark als in anderen Ländern.

Rösler verteidigte derweil die Streichung der Bundesbeteiligung am Haushalt der Bundesagentur für Arbeit. Die Arbeitsagentur müsse sich verstärkt um Verwaltungseffizienz bemühen und weitere arbeitsmarktpolitische Maßnahmen (etwa in der Rehabilitation) überprüfen. Um die erwartete Arbeitskräftelücke zu decken, will Rösler „alle Hebel in Bewegung setzen“, um sowohl die inländischen Potenziale verstärkt zu nutzen als auch das Land für verstärkte qualifizierte Zuwanderung zu öffnen. „Der Fokus muss sich nun auch auf qualifizierte Fachkräfte ohne Hochschulabschluss richten.“

Quelle: F.A.Z.

Nigel Farage: 'I'd rather have a party of eccentrics than bland, ghastly people'

The leader of Ukip explains why he thanks God for David Cameron, and why his once-bonkers party will change the face of British politics

- [Decca Aitkenhead](#)
- [The Guardian](#), Monday 7 January 2013



Nigel Farage: 'Tories call me all the time.' Photograph: David Levene for the Guardian

Five years ago, anyone interested in political predictions would probably not have consulted [Nigel Farage](#). Even five months ago he would have been a long way down most people's lists of plausible Cassandras. But if you want to know what our political future might look like, Ukip's party leader is becoming harder to ignore.

"Five years from now, Ukip will have changed the face of British politics," Farage says. It might become "a huge political party" – or it might merge with another – "a realignment in British politics, a sort of SDP moment on the centre right". Alternatively, a new Tory leader might have ousted David Cameron and embraced Ukip's agenda. "I've no idea which of those three scenarios will play out," he admits cheerfully, nor does he have a favourite. "I don't care. What I care about is that we achieve our goals."

Farage turns out to be one of the most surprising politicians I have met – charismatic, funny, indefatigably good-natured and essentially cheerful towards absolutely everyone, apart from the prime minister and Rotherham council. He is dressed for a home counties golf club AGM, and smokes with the committed defiance of a dissident setting himself on fire; when I confess to having given up, he offers a doubtful, "Probably wise", as if I had outed myself as a raw diet fruitarian. He has tried to quit a few times, and even lasted three months once. "But who wants to live like that? We're only here once, you know."

His facial expressions are like a cabaret all of their own – wildly camp, part [Frankie Howerd](#) with a hint of [Larry Grayson](#), defying both symmetry and gravity. But he listens carefully to questions, and even seems to want to answer truthfully. Occasionally he opts for strategic ambiguity or dodges a question – but with heroic reluctance. When he tells me he has no personal ambition for high office, and cares only about seeing Ukip policy implemented, I believe him. Whether or not he is also right about Ukip rewriting our political future is another matter – but so far he has been right about more than most liberals would like to admit.

After the recent [dramatic poll surge](#) and [byelection triumphs](#), senior Conservatives are [openly discussing an electoral pact](#), in which Ukip would get a straight in-out referendum on EU membership in return for not standing against Eurosceptic Tories. It is a measure of Farage's bombastic confidence that he acts as if the very idea of dealing with David Cameron is beneath him – "There's no way we could work with that man under any circumstances" – and suggests a pact with Labour might be on the cards instead, "if [Jon Cruddas's view](#) prevails

within the party". Farage has never forgiven Cameron for [calling Ukip members closet racists](#), but, on the other hand, has to credit him with making Ukip so popular.

"From a purely personal Ukip perspective I'd say thank God for David Cameron, wouldn't I? Who has told a whole load of lies, quite deliberately, before the election to shore up the Tory vote – going to repeal the hunting ban, get rid of the human rights act, reduce immigration. Everyone said to me, 'Well, Nigel, I like what you say, but just you wait until David gets in, he's playing a very clever game but once he's in he'll be really tough.' Well, David is in."

The Lib Dem coalition partners have not watered Cameron down, Farage maintains, but merely provided an alibi for his wetness. "It would have been easier for us had there been a Tory majority. It would have been clearer to everybody that Cameron is a social democrat."

His mobile rings, and he answers. "Yeah ... mmhm ... mmhm ... yeah ... interesting. Right, interesting. Thank you." That was very cryptic, I say, when he hangs up. "Yes, very interesting." About? "Cameron's speech." Who was that? "Umm, a Tory." How often do they call? "All the time."

Farage is one of the few politicians who looks convincingly appalled when invited to imagine waking up one day as PM. "I'd have a hell of a headache, wouldn't I?" he laughs, adding briskly, "But it's not going to happen. No, I'm a full-time campaigner. Different psychology." The possibility of becoming deputy PM, with Ukip replacing the Lib Dems in a new coalition, has, however, clearly crossed his mind. "That isn't my ambition," he insists. But is it an attractive proposition? He spreads his arms, his face a frenzy of innocence and insinuation. "I don't know, I don't know. I can't really answer it."

That's such a proper politician's answer, I say. "Oh God, I'll be becoming respectable now, and then it'll all be over," he groans. He has, he concedes, learned that "If I have a fault, it's that I get a bit carried away." He laughs. "I do believe in things quite strongly and I can get a little bit excited sometimes."

Most of the people now joining Ukip are not motivated chiefly by Europe, and if the UK were to pull out of the EU that would only be phase one, as far as Farage is concerned. "Leaving the EU doesn't solve all our problems, it just gives us back the ability to solve them. We are a very important catalyst for change in the national debate on a wide range of subjects and a completely alternative view on the size and role of government." Once you get beyond Europe, though, much of Farage's political landscape looks very shaky.

[He won a lot of Tory support by opposing gay marriage](#), chiefly because it was an affront to religious values. "Tolerance is a two-way street, and the whole equality rights agenda has come to the point of head-on conflict with religious faith," he declares, as if such a conflict must *de facto* discredit the equality agenda. It takes some nerve to oppose gay marriage on religious grounds – while adding, "I know the Anglican church isn't much good, but mind you, with that idiot having run the show for the last 10 years that's hardly surprising. Couldn't even clip his beard for the royal wedding!" – when, on closer questioning, it transpires Farage isn't even really a Christian. He claims never to have thought about whether he will go to heaven, or even if such a place exists. "Never." He goes to church four or five times a year, and thinks it plays "an important role in our society", but as for believing in God, "I think there is something there, but that's as far as it goes." It sounds to me as if he's agnostic. "Well you'll have to draw your own conclusion," he says, looking slightly embarrassed.



Nigel Farage worries that if drink-driving laws are harmonised across the EU: 'Anybody who goes to a rural pub on a Sunday lunchtime will be in breach of the law.' Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

Like almost every rural Tory I know, he claims to care passionately about the environment while querying both the fact of climate change and the culpability of CO₂ emissions. When I ask about our drink-driving laws, he reluctantly offers: "I suppose I support them. I suppose I do." He has no sympathy for anyone caught drink-driving in London. "But if you're caught out in the rural parts of the country ... " But if the legal alcohol limit is correct in the city, then anyone who exceeds it is a danger wherever they are. "I just don't like what's happening in rural England, really. Pubs, clubs, social life closing down." And if drink-driving laws are harmonised across the EU, he adds indignantly, lowering the legal alcohol limit even further: "Anybody who goes to a rural pub on a Sunday lunchtime will be in breach of the law."

But his party's enthusiastic libertarianism goes out of the window when it comes to a pleasure its core members aren't so keen on – illegal drugs. Farage's own instinct would be for wholesale decriminalisation – which would almost certainly broaden Ukip's appeal among younger urban voters – but the policy isn't even up for debate. "It would be completely impossible for me to win that debate within the party. And a general doesn't try to fight every battle."

If Farage has perfected one political trapeze act above all others, it is friendly gratitude for a movement he concedes was basically bonkers when he first joined. Now 48, Farage had never planned to be a politician. A south London public schoolboy, the son of a stockbroker, his youthful ambition was uncomplicated: "Be rich, absolutely." Heading straight for the City at 18, he was earning £200,000 by 21. "That was a lot of money, wasn't it?" But then the UK joined the ERM, "and I just thought it was cretinous." Having started his own business, he forgot to spend the 90s getting rich as he devoted himself to Ukip, culminating in unlikely triumph in 1999 when he was elected to the European parliament. But those were thankless, wilderness years – surely he must have wondered if the whole enterprise was mad? "Um, I didn't think the concept was mad. I thought the people, in many cases," and he starts to laugh, "were not to my taste."

"Ukip in the 1990s, the people in it and who voted for it were in the main 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells'. I mean, you look down the membership list in 1994, anyone below a half colonel was a nobody," he hoots. "I used to say you could always tell it was a Ukip meeting by the number of bomber command ties in the room. It was that generation." Was it his milieu? "No! I was the odd one out. Which I loved, of course. I've always liked to be the odd one out, wherever I am."

He gave everything he'd got to the 1999 European Parliament electoral campaign. "I was so knackered I had a tic in both eyes." He knew the path of an anti-EU MEP would never be easy, but hadn't bargained on his own colleagues creating his party's biggest difficulties. "In those days in Ukip there were an awful lot of people who didn't pass the Farage test. Number one, would I employ them? Do I think they could do something competent, professional, rational? Number two, would I like to go to the pub with them? You haven't got to pass both. But no, these people didn't pass either."

Worse, they were putting off potential new members. "Very competent people would come to a Ukip meeting and go: 'Nah, not for me.'" Farage freely admits some of his own personal recruits turned out to be calamitous misjudgments of character. When I mention [Robert Kilroy-Silk's brief, disastrous spell in the party](#), Farage performs a little pantomime of horror at the memory.

"He is a monster, he really is," he chuckles, shuddering. "But then, do I want a party where we've got some eccentrics and occasionally someone causes us an embarrassment – or do I want a party made up of a bland lot of ghastly people whose names I don't even know? I'm in politics, and I've never heard of half the MPs who come on the telly. I meet them at cocktail parties and after 30 minutes I can't remember their name!" He hoots with laughter. "And they have absolutely no connection with the real world. No, I want Ukip to be a party of free-thinkers."

When a Ukip council election candidate made headlines [by proposing compulsory abortion for every foetus with Down's syndrome](#), Farage admits "it was a bit of a shock", but is keen to point out that while he leads the party, he does not micromanage it. He is, however, proud of a unique condition he has imposed on membership; "We are the only UK political party that bars you from becoming a member, let alone an officer or candidate, if you have ever been involved with the BNP." Critics might say his is the only party that needs to. "No, we've seen defections from the BNP to Labour in the north of England, so I won't take that. People come to me and say, 'Well this is how I feel, Nige,' and I say, 'That's great, you're not for us, go and join the BNP, cheerio.' I think the message loud and clear is that if that's how you view humanity, we're not the right people for you. And I think it's working."

In fact, he has his eye on the West Indian community. "That's one where Ukip could do very well. They love our pro-Commonwealth stuff." Mostly, though, he is chasing C2 votes. "Very much so. The biggest group for us are what I would call not particularly well off but aspirational people." However, his biggest obstacle in winning over any voter remains tribal loyalty. If the nation voted on manifestos alone, "Ukip's support would be 25-30%."

As for the ongoing Eurozone crisis, I'd expected him to pretend he's not secretly rejoicing at each new disaster, but hadn't expected the protestations to sound sincere. "No, it's desperately sad. Inevitably, this is going to end in some kind of widespread violence, the likes of which none of us wants to see. We're not going to be digging holes in Belgium, facing each other, no. But will we get terrorist groups emerging in Greece, Spain and Portugal? Yes."

Farage seems to have an uncanny knack for conjuring capital from crises. He nearly lost his life in a plane crash on election day in 2010, which left him with permanent damage to his back – but even his injury has turned out to be rather helpful. A famously enthusiastic drinker: "Before, I would always have been, at any event, the last to leave – kicked out by the cleaners. That isn't the case any more." That's probably been good for his political career? "Well it might make me a bit more fit for duty, yeah."

As for the most unlikely bit of recent sensational political luck – the fostering row in Rotherham – he is in no hurry to let the matter lie. "We won't let this rest, no, no, no, no, no, that big bully-boy council, if they think they can brush me aside, they've got another think coming. They've not done a good job for kids in Rotherham."

But a brilliant job for Farage?

"Ironically, yes," he beams. "Funny how life works out, isn't it?"

The PM should have more respect for Ukip

It is counterproductive for Cameron to mock voters who don't want a Miliband government, argues Paul Goodman.



Ukip leader Nigel Farage believes his party is the “third force” in British politics Photo: CLARA MOLDEN

By Paul Goodman

6:00PM GMT 06 Jan 2013

It was not very smart of David Cameron [to call some Ukip members “pretty odd”](#). That a lot of them are very odd indeed is beside the point – which is that what a politician says about another party’s activists will be taken personally by its voters (and by others who rather like the look of Nigel Farage). For this reason, the [Prime Minister](#) wouldn’t dream of calling Liberal Democrat members “pretty kooky” or Labour members “pretty common”. He should apply the principle more widely. It is not at all clever to slight members of a party that is scoring up to 16 per cent in the polls – out-rating his Coalition partner in the process – and gaining the support of roughly one in eight voters.

It was possible for the Prime Minister to get away with calling [Ukip](#) members “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists” (a description which Downing Street renounced and then repeated within a single day last year) when the party was scoring only 3 per cent and drawing support more evenly from all parts of the political spectrum. Those days are gone. Conservative Party activists began to vote for Mr Farage’s party in European elections long ago. A rising number of them started to depart for it during the last parliament. Now, the party’s voters are now following suit. In short, the higher Ukip’s poll ratings climb, the more support it is drawing from the Conservatives.

It is a myth that the party deprived the Tories of up to 40 seats in 2010: a more accurate calculation would be five or so. And projections yesterday claiming that it could cost Mr Cameron 50 seats at the next election are fanciful, since today’s polls aren’t tomorrow’s results. But Mr Farage and his party are undoubtedly a growing strategic problem for the Prime Minister. Ukip will probably top the poll in next year’s European elections. It is getting better at by-elections, coming a good third recently in formerly Conservative-held Corby. Mr Farage will make a big push during this summer’s local government contests, many of which take place in the Tory county council heartlands.

The Ukip leader is marketing his party as if it were a Thatcher-era tribute band, stressing opposition to same-sex marriage and support for grammar schools. How strange it is, then, for Mr Cameron to cock a snook at Ukip’s members, when he already has as good a plan as any for dealing with the threat.

Mr Farage is like a guerilla leader who hopes to lure his bigger but less mobile opponent on to his own terrain – in this case, the impassable wasteland of EU policy. Certainly, the Prime Minister will be right to set out more of his own this month, and his speech certainly ought to include a commitment to a referendum in the next parliament, to be legislated for in this one.

But what matters when considering Ukip isn't opinions, but evidence, and the polling is unanimous. Surveys by YouGov and Lord Ashcroft have separately established that the EU is not the top issue for Mr Farage's voters (which is why he has astutely sought to abandon the party's longer title and pound-symbol badge). Rather, their main concern is immigration, with crime coming second and the EU only third. Studies of Ukip's supporters find pessimism about the country's future and rage against the political class. These very angry and predominately male voters won't come back to Mr Cameron if he gives them what they want on the EU. Indeed, many of them are so furious as to be unwilling to return at all.

None, however, want to see the country run by Ed Miliband. The Prime Minister's best chance of squeezing Mr Farage's support is thus to avoid being drawn too deep into the EU quagmire and keep hold of the strategic high ground – in other words, to deliver policy success. This entails George Osborne reducing the structural deficit further, Michael Gove pressing on with his schools revolution, Theresa May reducing immigration to the tens of thousands and Iain Duncan Smith introducing the universal credit and bearing down on welfare fraud and error – plus much of the programme of further reform that Mr Cameron and Nick Clegg will outline tomorrow.

The 2020 Group of Conservative MPs wants to go further, and it's a sign of the times that, Cameron loyalists though they are, the core of their programme is flinty – longer school hours, and lower public sector pay and benefits outside the prosperous south-east. This would be a hard sell in the Midlands and Northern marginals which the party needs to hold and win next time. At any rate, the best way of dealing with Ukip is clear – and the Prime Minister would do better to stick to it than to lob jibes at that party's members. It is to keep a grip on the Conservative base while reaching out to new voters.

Contrary to the view of some extreme modernisers, this isn't mission impossible. It means building outside brownfield sites only with the support of local people. It means not penalising single-earner families in childcare policy. And it means delivering EU renegotiation and a referendum not to thwart Mr Farage, but because they're the right thing to do.

Paul Goodman is executive editor of ConservativeHome

Cameron's absurd behaviour over EU membership

Placing a question mark over Britain's European Union membership and its benefits is economically disastrous

- [Peter Mandelson](#)
- [The Guardian](#), Sunday 6 January 2013 19.14 GMT



David Cameron with the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, in Berlin. Photograph: Carsten Koall/AFP/Getty Images

The new year has begun with renewed pressure on David Cameron to start the clock ticking on [Britain's abandonment of the EU](#). Tory MEP, Daniel Hannan, the anti-Europeans' keenest ideologue, argues that quitting should hold no terror for Britain as we are the world's seventh largest economy. Does he not realise the substantial contribution the EU's 500 million-person single market is making to keeping us in this position and that the distant relationship he seeks will deliver significantly less to our economy?

Yet the prime minister seems to think he can only pacify his party by conceding to anti-Europeans their long coveted referendum. I think his hopes for buying peace will be disappointed. The Tories risk dividing into irreconcilable factions, those who want to adjust the terms of Britain's EU membership in order to stay in, and those who will do everything they can to get Britain out. That's what happens when madness takes over a political party. Ask anyone who was in the Labour party in the 1980s.

Beginning 2013 by placing this large and indefinite question mark over our membership of the EU, and all the trade and investment privileges it brings us, can only be described as economically insane. The signal it sends to the world is that we are on our way out of the European single market and that those who invest in Britain in order to trade in that market should think again.

International companies now headquartered in Britain will start wondering if they should opt for a continental base. Why should investors who want to take advantage of the prospective EU-US free trade agreement consider doing so by investing in Britain if they think we will not be fully part of the pact?

We already have huge factors weighing against our economic recovery. We cannot afford further uncertainty. International companies invest in Britain for our benign business climate but also because, in doing so, they have access to Europe's huge market. We are too small on our own to attract the same quantity and quality of investment, just as we are too small to forge trade pacts with other parts of the world by ourselves and too small to influence major global events.

[The prime minister's answer to this, in his forthcoming speech](#), may be that he will limit the uncertainty by imposing a negotiating deadline on other heads of government. Again, he will be disappointed if he thinks he

can put a gun to their heads to begin renegotiating Britain's EU membership and then dictate when it will end, especially when, in their view, he is arguing not in Europe's interests as a whole but for British exceptionalism.

Cameron argues that the EU is going to undertake a major treaty change anyway so no one will mind if, along the way, we ask for a recasting of Britain's membership, the so-called repatriation of powers. But he seems not to have noticed that Germany and other eurozone partners are wary of a major treaty revision. If the eurozone becomes critical again, a wider negotiation may become more urgent. But in this case, the others will have more on their mind than Britain's cherry-picking demands: their priority will be saving the eurozone.

To put it mildly, the EU is experiencing serious problems, the status quo is unacceptable and major reform is required. In particular, it has to find new ways of containing those inside and outside the eurozone and make its institutions more accountable. The single market must be extended and deepened with other regulation lightened. These are precisely the areas where Britain's voice should be loudest. For the country to forsake this influence and risk driving away much needed investment is not just irresponsible, it's incomprehensible to all but the hardest hardliners.

David Cameron's EU dream is doomed to failure

All the 'tough' renegotiation David Cameron promises is ruled out by his refusal ever to contemplate leaving the EU



The Prime Minister promises an 'important speech' on Europe soon Photo: REX FEATURES

By [Christopher Booker](#)

7:00PM GMT 05 Jan 2013

When David Cameron makes that “important speech on Europe” he promises later this month, is he going to fall flat on his face? On Friday he told the BBC that he intends to give the British people “a real change in our relations with the EU” and to give us “a real choice about that change”. He added that he would be promising a “tough” renegotiation of the terms of our membership of the EU, but that it would not be in Britain’s interests to leave the EU altogether. It certainly would not be “right for us to aim for a status like Norway or Switzerland, where basically you have to obey all the rules of the Single Market but you don’t have a say in what they are”.

What Mr Cameron seems to be offering is a referendum which he hopes will authorise him to embark on “tough” negotiations about a new relationship, while at the same time insisting that Britain wants to remain a full member of the EU, enjoying all the trading arrangements that go with the single market. Not for the first time, one has to wonder whether Mr Cameron has actually read the European treaties or has the faintest idea what he is asking for.

For a start, like so many other people in Britain, he hasn’t grasped the real nature of the “European project”. From its inception, it has always worked for “full political and fiscal union”. The trading arrangement we signed up to 40 years ago was always intended as merely a first step towards that. It is what most of his EU colleagues are again driving for, in the new treaty they plan in a desperate bid to save their doomed euro – one that would consign us to being a second-class member of the club, with even less influence than we have now.

What Mr Cameron also doesn’t seem to grasp is that the most fundamental rule of the “project” has always been that powers surrendered to Brussels can never be given back. The last thing the other members have on their minds is to allow Britain to break that rule and form some unique new relationship, just because we hanker after a return to the kind of trading arrangement we joined back in 1973.

As I have noted before, there is only one way under the rules that Mr Cameron could get the negotiations he is talking about, and that is by invoking Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, which would compel his colleagues to negotiate. But he can only achieve that by first saying that Britain wishes to leave the EU – the one course he is ruling out from the start.

It is also telling that, in dismissing the possibility that we could continue to enjoy the trading relationship that he wants if we were outside the EU, he should so caricature the positions of Norway and Switzerland, the two most prosperous countries in Europe. These have, in fact, far more say in shaping the EU's trading rules than Mr Cameron allows for, through their membership of other international bodies which give them full access to the single market, such as the European Free Trade Area (Efta) or the European Economic Area (EEA).

Above all, what he doesn't seem to realise is that it is no longer a question of Britain leaving the EU: the EU is leaving us. In that spirit of "ever closer union" proclaimed in the first sentence of its founding treaty, it is moving on to a new stage of integration where, by definition, we cannot follow, because of our failure to join its single currency.

The only way Mr Cameron can get what he says he wants is by doing something he says he will not do. When he appears before the nation later this month, he will be proposing a course of action doomed to failure.

Free at last: a Slovak family happily reunited

When a plane from London touched down in Bratislava last week, carrying a grandmother and her two grandsons, this brought a happy ending to as extraordinary a case of child-snatching by English social workers as I have ever reported.

It is two years since the story began, when the boys' parents, Ivana and Vladimir – Slovaks who had been working in Britain for several years – took one of their sons to a hospital A&E department for advice about a minor infection. Surrey social workers were alerted that this might be the result of a "non-accidental injury". The boys were temporarily placed in the care of the family's American pastor and his wife, who examined them carefully and looked after them for a month. But then social workers arrived, with three police cars, to remove the children – weeping in the presence of their horrified mother and grandmother, who had been visiting the house. They were taken to live with non-Slovak-speaking foster carers.

Weeks later, the parents were accused of having "sexually abused" the boy. The pastor was astonished to see the "evidence" for this: pictures of bruising which could only have been inflicted after the children were taken from his care. But when he offered to give evidence in court which might have stopped the case dead, he tells me that the lawyers for the couple showed no interest.

Thus began a two-year legal battle, involving many court hearings, four different social workers, seven "expert" doctors and psychologists, 16 interpreters and whole teams of lawyers. Initially, the local authority seemed ready to agree that the children might return to live with Ivana's mother, Eleonora Studencova, in Slovakia. But the social workers then suggested to the foster carers that they might wish to keep the boys and, last May, a judge agreed that the boys should be adopted.

After a television documentary on the case aroused widespread anger in Slovakia, however, the Slovak authorities became involved, seeing no reason why the children should not return to live with their grandmother. They expressed "serious concern", threatened to take the UK Government to the European Court of Human Rights, and supported Mrs Studencova in taking the case to the Court of Appeal. In November, three judges, led by Lord Justice Thorpe, ruled that the children should be returned to her care in Slovakia as soon as possible.

Still the social workers did not give up, asking for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court, and doing all they could to frustrate Thorpe's orders. Finally, on December 14, he delivered an excoriating judgment on what he described as the local authority's "lamentable" conduct, ruling that the boys must return to Slovakia with their grandmother no later than January 4.

To the last, the social workers were advising the mother that there must be no publicity about what had happened. But when that plane landed in Bratislava on Wednesday, there were celebratory announcements on Slovak television, and unconfined joy for the children and the family – for Ivana is to rejoin her sons this week.

Thus this appalling story – which has cost British taxpayers more than £1 million and which says so much about the murky underworld of our “child protection” system – finally reached a happy conclusion.

Is India’s record so much worse than ours?

Despite lurid attempts to portray India as “the rape capital of the world”, following the horrifying episode which last week led to five men being charged with murder in Delhi, the figures leave us in the West with little to be proud of. My son Nick – who, after Christmas in England with his Indian wife, has returned to their home in Delhi – sends a sheaf of statistics which scarcely confirm the fears being expressed, not least by the tens of thousands of Indians protesting on the streets.

Cases of rape recorded by the Indian police amount to 1.8 per 100,000 of the population – compared with a figure of 27.3 in the US and 28.8 in Britain. Even if these numbers reflect considerable under-reporting, other figures show that almost all sexual assaults reported in India are by a current or former partner, and less than 1 per cent by strangers – whereas in Britain the figure for current or ex-partners is 54 per cent, leaving assaults by strangers at over 40 per cent.

Even on the charge that India has a low conviction rate for rape cases brought to trial, the figures of 41 per cent for Delhi, and 58 per cent for the country’s largest state, Uttar Pradesh, compare favourably with many Western nations.

And, as my son points out, at least the Indians are ready to demonstrate their passionate concern about this issue. “When, last year, those shocking stories of systematic mass-rape in Rochdale and Rotherham made headlines, did we see thousands of demonstrators on the streets of Britain protesting at such a national scandal?”

January 6, 2013

Greece's Rotten Oligarchy

By *KOSTAS VAXEVANIS*

Athens

DEMOCRACY is like a bicycle: if you don't keep pedaling, you fall. Unfortunately, the bicycle of Greek democracy has long been broken. After the military junta collapsed in 1974, [Greece](#) created only a hybrid, diluted form of democracy. You can vote, belong to a party and protest. In essence, however, a small clique exercises all meaningful political power.

For all that has been said about the Greek crisis, much has been left unsaid. The crisis has become a battleground of interests and ideologies. At stake is the role of the public sector and the welfare state. Yes, in Greece we have a dysfunctional public sector; for the past 40 years the ruling parties handed out government jobs to their supporters, regardless of their qualifications.

But the real problem with the public sector is the tiny elite of business people who live off the Greek state while passing themselves off as "entrepreneurs." They bribe politicians to get fat government contracts, usually at inflated prices. They also own many of the country's media outlets, and thus manage to ensure that their actions are clothed in silence. Sometimes they'll even buy a soccer team in order to drum up popular support and shield their crimes behind popular protection, as the drug lord Pablo Escobar did in Colombia, and as the paramilitary leader Arkan did in Serbia.

In 2011, Evangelos Venizelos, who was then the finance minister and is now the leader of the socialist party, Pasok, instituted a new property-tax law. But for properties larger than 2,000 square meters — about 21,000 square feet — the tax was reduced by 60 percent. Mr. Venizelos thus carved out a big exemption for the only people who could afford to pay the tax: the rich. (Mr. Venizelos is also the man responsible for a law granting broad immunity to government ministers.)

Such shenanigans have gone on for decades. The public is deprived of real information, as television stations, newspapers and online news sites are controlled by the economic and political elite.

Another scandal involves the so-called Lagarde List. In 2010, [Christine Lagarde](#), then the French finance minister (and now the head of the International Monetary Fund), gave the Greek government a list of roughly 2,000 Greek citizens with Swiss bank accounts, to help uncover tax fraud. Greek officials did virtually nothing with the list; two former finance ministers, George Papaconstantinou and his successor, Mr. Venizelos, reportedly even told Parliament they did not know where it was. Meanwhile, several media outlets falsely accused some politicians and business figures of being on the list in order to conceal the ugly reality: rich people were evading taxes while their desperate fellow citizens were searching the trash for food.

When Hot Doc, the monthly magazine I edit and publish, made the list public in October, [I was arrested](#) and charged with violating personal privacy, but was acquitted. The result didn't please those in power. So I am being brought back for a second trial (a date has yet to be set) on similarly vague allegations. Throughout the entire process — the publication of the list, my arrest, my acquittal — the Greek media were absent. The case was a top story in the international press, but not in the country where it took place.

The reason is simple. The Lagarde list implicates a corrupt group that answers to the name of democracy even as it casually nullifies it: officials with offshore companies, friends and relatives of government ministers, bankers, publishers and those involved in the black market.

After my magazine released the list, the Greek government made not a single statement about the case.

When Mr. Venizelos left the Finance Ministry last March, he failed to turn the CD with the list over to his successor. He took it with him. Only when his successor, Yannis Stournaras, told The Financial Times in October that he had never received the list did Mr. Venizelos turn it over to the prime minister's office. He was never asked about the delay, and leaders of the three parties in the coalition government have not referred his conduct to Parliament's investigatory committee.

Meanwhile, a newly released version of the list made clear that someone had removed the names of three relatives of Mr. Papaconstantinou, who was the finance minister from 2009 to 2011, before Mr. Venizelos. Last month, Mr. Papaconstantinou was [expelled](#) from Pasok. He now [faces](#) a Parliamentary investigation, the potential lifting of his immunity from prosecution as a former minister, and charges of tampering with the data. It appears that he may become a new Iphigenia, a scapegoat sacrificed so that the corrupt political system can survive.

This is all unfolding at a time when Greece is walking a tightrope above the abyss of bankruptcy, while the coalition government is instituting new taxes on the lower classes. Half of young Greeks are unemployed. The economy is shrinking at an annual rate of 6.9 percent. People are scrounging for food. And a neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn, is on the rise, exploiting the resentment and rage toward the ruling class.

The Greek people must remount their bicycle of democracy by demanding an end to deception and corruption. Journalists need to resist manipulation and rediscover their journalistic duties. And the government should revive Greece's ancient democratic heritage — instead of killing the messenger.

Kostas Vaxevanis is a magazine publisher and television journalist. This essay was translated by Karen Emmerich from the Greek.

January 5, 2013

Decades of German Pacifism Yield to Bigger Military Role

By [NICHOLAS KULISH](#)

BERLIN — When Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) hosted a recent reception for military families, she greeted parents, wives and children whose loved ones were spending their holidays in [Afghanistan](#), Lebanon, Kosovo and off the Horn of Africa. German deployments overseas, Ms. Merkel said, “will soon encompass the entire globe.”

On that same wintry afternoon, members of Parliament debated whether to add to the nearly 6,000 German troops currently serving abroad by sending up to 400 soldiers to Turkey, where they would operate two Patriot missile batteries to help [protect their NATO ally](#) from a potential escalation of the civil war across the border in Syria.

“For decades, we Germans have benefited from the fact that our partners gave us the feeling of reliable security,” Thomas de Maizière, [Germany](#)’s defense minister, said during the debate last month. “Now we are in a position and have the duty, even, to make our impact felt.”

Only a handful of shivering protesters passed out fliers in front of the Brandenburg Gate opposing the deployment. The vote easily passed in the Parliament two days later.

It was not that long ago that every German military action brought with it mass demonstrations, public hand-wringing and probing questions about the country’s militarist past. But the shadow of history continues to recede here and Germany is, for better or worse, quietly approaching a normal relationship with its armed forces.

For the past three years, Europe has been preoccupied with economic issues as the [debt crisis](#) threatened to sunder the euro currency union. But strategic military questions cannot be ignored indefinitely. The United States is increasingly shifting its focus to the Asia-Pacific region and reducing the number of troops stationed in Europe.

“Europe has more responsibility for its own security, and Germany has to step up to that, particularly considering its new economic power in Europe,” said Constanze Stelzenmüller, senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund in Berlin.

Conscription was suspended indefinitely here in 2011 as part of a drive to professionalize and modernize the armed forces. In August, the Constitutional Court ruled for the first time that the German military could be deployed at home under exceptional circumstances, like in the wake of a terrorist attack.

“Naturally, a great deal has developed further in terms of the acceptance of deployments outside of this country and outside the NATO territory,” said Col. Ulrich Kirsch, chairman of the German Federal Armed Forces Association, which represents the interests of active and former military personnel. “But the Germans are, now as before, difficult to inspire for military operations.”

Military business is another matter. Germany is the world’s third-biggest arms exporter, behind only the United States and Russia, sending weapons not only to NATO members and allies like Israel but increasingly to the Middle East and beyond. As the business grows, critics at home [question sales to undemocratic countries](#) like Saudi Arabia.

Germany’s military industry employs an estimated 80,000 people, jobs Ms. Merkel wants to protect, especially less than a year before September’s parliamentary election. In October, German opposition helped doom the

proposed merger of two aerospace giants, British-based BAE Systems and the consortium EADS, in part out of concern that German jobs and influence might be lost in the new entity.

Last month Der Spiegel, the influential newsmagazine, showed a grim-faced Ms. Merkel on the cover in a camouflage suit jacket with the headline “German Weapons for the World.” The magazine described the Merkel doctrine as deploying fewer German troops to conflict zones and instead strengthening partners by selling them arms. The German government approved military exports in excess of 10 billion euros, or over \$13 billion, for the first time in 2011, the magazine reported.

That is an especially impressive feat considering that military expenditures in Western and Central Europe fell 1.9 percent in real terms that year, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Those cuts have “prompted unease in many quarters that European countries risk losing global influence as they fall further behind the United States in military capabilities,” the institute said in [its most recent annual report](#) on military spending, “while rising powers such as China rapidly catch up and even overtake them.”

Germany’s path forward could well determine the shape of Europe’s military affairs for years to come. Whether that is through a growing leadership role and the assumption of more responsibility for regional security or a limited, some say cynical, emphasis on protecting its own interests still remains to be seen.

“Germany is back in the game as one of the most important countries in the Western Hemisphere, but the kind of responsibility that goes with that is not really reflected in German government behavior,” said Olaf Böhnke, head of the Berlin office of the European Council on Foreign Relations. “If Germany wants to be in a leadership position, you need stronger military engagement.”

German troops have been in Afghanistan for more than a decade, but mostly restricted to the safer northern part of the country. The Bundeswehr, Germany’s army, sent its first Tiger attack helicopters to Afghanistan in December. On Tuesday the army announced that it had not suffered a single fatality in 2012 in Afghanistan.

“This conflict-averse basic attitude still remains, and one has to deal with it,” said Martin Kahl, a political scientist at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg. “People feel safer than before. There is no enemy on the European continent who could lead a classic conflict.”

After [World War II](#), West German politicians rejected military force for any goal other than self-defense, and a strong pacifist streak developed in the public. The end of the cold war brought the beginning of a long period of halting change. Allies, particularly in the United States, have repeatedly called for Germany to take more responsibility and a larger share of the burden.

“I don’t think it’s healthy for the future of Europe to give Germany this refuge where Germany handles the economy and doesn’t have to deal with the dirty stuff,” Mr. Böhnke said.

The biggest turning point was probably when Germany participated in airstrikes in the Kosovo war in 1999, a break with the taboo against offensive operations.

Even as Germany exports arms around the world, idealism about the use of force by German soldiers remains. In May 2010, Germany’s president, Horst Köhler, gave an interview to German public radio saying that society needed to recognize the sacrifices and contributions of the military. A broader political discussion was necessary, Mr. Köhler said, about the military’s role.

“A country of our size,” Mr. Köhler said, “with its focus on exports and thus reliance on foreign trade, must be aware that military deployments are necessary in an emergency to protect our interests, for example, when it comes to trade routes, for example, when it comes to preventing regional instabilities that could negatively influence our trade, jobs and incomes.”

A [public outcry ensued, and Mr. Köhler resigned](#). But the German Navy was essentially already doing what Mr. Köhler described in his comments, as part of the multinational mission to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia. The government announced plans to suspend conscription just a few months after Mr. Köhler quit.

Parliament made it official in 2011, toppling in the process another of the remaining hurdles between Germany and a normal military.

“The suspension of conscription officially recognized the fact that the German Army had become a professional army,” said Ms. Stelzenmüller from the German Marshall Fund. “These are people who get paid for putting themselves in harm’s way, just like other Western armies.”

Chris Cottrell and Victor Homola contributed reporting.

01/07/2013 12:15 PM

Britain's Political Poltergeist

Cameron Succumbs to Growing Europhobia

By Christoph Scheuermann

Britain's right-wing conservative movement is making life difficult for Prime Minister David Cameron. The UK Independence Party wants to lead the country out of the EU, and its approval ratings are higher than ever. As the pressure mounts, Cameron has been at pains to outline a clear stance on Europe.

Nigel Farage is the kind of politician who apparently needs an opponent to bring out the best in him. Right now, that role is being played by a cushion. Sitting on a sofa in a London hotel lobby, Farage alternately slaps the cushion with the palm of his hand and punches it with his fist as he talks about how he intends to stir up British politics.

Farage is the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a right-wing conservative movement that aims to lead Britain out of the [European Union](#).

For months now, his proposals have put the government on the back foot -- and this has rapidly increased his party's popularity among voters. Recent surveys show UKIP polling around 15 percent, which would make it the third most important political force in the country, after the Conservatives and the center-left Labour Party, yet ahead of the Liberal Democrats.

Nobody believes that UKIP could win that many votes in the lower house of parliament, the House of Commons -- in part because the British electoral system puts small parties at a disadvantage. But the opinion polls are enough to unsettle British [Prime Minister David Cameron](#) and his strategists on Downing Street.

This political pressure comes at a time when Cameron already has his hands full dealing with his own center-right Conservative Party. Tory parliamentarians are pushing him to make a commitment on Britain's future course with the EU.

High Stakes

Roughly one-third of Conservative MPs favor an EU exit, and even Cameron sees this as a plausible scenario. The prime minister has announced that he will clarify his stance on Europe in a long-awaited address this month, but he provided a foretaste in a television interview on Sunday.

While it would not be "right for Britain" to leave the EU entirely, the country is "perfectly entitled" to ask for changes to this relationship, particularly in light of the fact that the EU is "changing the nature of the organization to which we belong," he said on the BBC's "Andrew Marr Show."

In exchange for greater European integration, Cameron said that Britain should be allowed to take back some powers from the EU. Among his suggestions were a review of tighter EU immigration controls to limit the possibility for "people to come and live in Britain and claim benefits," and getting rid of the EU's Working Time Directive, which he said "should never have been introduced."

The political stakes are high and Cameron cannot allow himself to make any mistakes on these issues, having hesitated for too long to take a clear position on Europe. The prime minister has no strategy and has made tactical decisions out of fear of alienating voters. This is also one of the reasons why ranting members of UKIP

and rebellious anti-EU members of Cameron's Conservatives are dominating the political discourse. They are making sweeping demands that Cameron cannot meet if he wants to avoid steering his country towards an exit.

Cameron's dithering on the issue is also to blame for the UK losing nearly all its clout in Europe. With increasing reluctance, he travels to Brussels, where the other heads of state hope that he won't threaten a veto again in an attempt to score points on the domestic political front. Nevertheless, Cameron doesn't want Britain to leave the European Union. He knows that an exit would damage the British economy -- and have considerable political consequences. On the other hand, he has members of his own party, Farage and a large proportion of the electorate breathing down his neck.

Europhobia Spreads

Roughly half of all Britons would vote in favor of withdrawing from the EU. Many of them see the debt crisis as proof that the European project has failed. Meanwhile, Cameron has to find a way to appease the British without further annoying his European partners. It was already months ago that he announced that Britain would examine existing European treaties to pick and choose which EU laws and regulations benefit the country. German diplomats are currently trying to convince their British counterparts that it doesn't work that way.

Still, Europhobia continues to spread throughout the country and is forcing both the Conservatives and Labour further to the right. Of the three parties represented in the House of Commons, only the Liberal Democrats are staunchly pro-EU -- and they are currently running at 8 percent in the opinion polls. Labour is afraid of making a crystal-clear commitment to Europe and the Tories are largely spewing populist rhetoric. UKIP leader Farage is pleased with this development. "What happens is that everybody is coming towards our position," he says.

Farage, 48, has been a member of the European Parliament since 1999. He has survived a serious car accident, a plane crash and testicular cancer. His autobiography bears the title "Fighting Bull." His second marriage is with a German national. He loves Europe, he says, adding "my enemy is the British political class, who have signed us up for this without ever telling us the truth."

Farage's tirades are appreciated by many British -- and generally loathed by politicians. His favorite targets are EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy, who Farage has dubbed "Rumpy Pumpy," and the president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz. "They want to be the world's global superpower," Farage shouts, his voice booming throughout the lobby while he abuses the cushion. During one session of the European Parliament, he shouted at Van Rompuy: "You have the charisma of a damp rag and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk. Who are you?" Farage believes that the UK is losing global influence because it's clinging too much to a failing Continent.

Britain's Tea Party Equivalent

Like many small right-wing parties in Europe, UKIP is a movement of radical opportunists who claim that they speak for a large proportion of white lower-middle-class voters. They are fighting to ease the current ban on smoking in pubs and to stop the construction of wind turbines. It is a British version of the American Tea Party movement. Farage's latest battlefield is same-sex marriage, which the Conservatives are currently debating. Cameron says that he intends to introduce legislation this year that would make it legal for gays and lesbians to marry, starting in 2014. The Church of England and Roman Catholics oppose the plan, and 100 Tory MPs say that they will vote against the proposal. Cameron is sticking to his guns, though, and appears much more committed to this issue than to Europe.

Farage takes delight in watching the Tories rip themselves apart. The more divided they are, the better he can stage himself as Britain's savior. The UKIP leader is an aggressively nostalgic figure -- the poltergeist of British politics. This leads many to underestimate him and his party. Farage wants to make UKIP the strongest British party in the European elections in 2014 -- and the way things are looking now, this may not be an entirely unrealistic objective. By contrast, Cameron dismisses Farage and his supporters as marginal oddballs. He once called them "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists." However, this doesn't allow the prime minister to escape the political dilemma that he has stumbled into.

If he wants to appease the Europhobes in his upcoming speech on Europe, Cameron will at least have to set a deadline for a referendum on the EU -- and he will have to decide what the people will vote on: whether Britain will leave the EU, or merely whether voters are satisfied with the government's policy on Europe.

Populist Agenda Ahead

In any case, the backbenchers in his party will only be satisfied if Britain withdraws from the EU. Moderate Tories have long since fallen silent. A balanced approach towards Europe has almost become a stigma. Nevertheless, Conservative MPs like Robert Buckland could add a number of enlightening aspects to the debate.

Buckland represents Swindon, a city 100 kilometers west of London, and home to a number of companies that rely on access to the European market, such as carmaker Honda and computer chip manufacturer Intel. He says it's probable that some of these companies will transfer their production facilities to the Continent if Britain leaves the EU. Buckland is afraid that thousands of workers will lose their jobs. The debate alone on exiting the EU annoys him, he says, because he thinks it's simply absurd.

Meanwhile, Farage is planning ways to win even more supporters. His party's campaigns against wind turbines and gay marriage are just the beginning, he says. His biggest issue this year, he contends, is the possible influx of millions of Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants, starting Jan. 1, 2014. Farage promotes the notion of a state that cuts itself off from the outside world and keeps out of people's lives as much as possible on the domestic front. It's a state that has a strong army to protect the lives of its citizens, but doesn't establish quotas for the fishing industry or ban hunting foxes with hounds. He would prefer to have everything as it was in the old days.

After an hour in the lobby, he gets up and lights a cigarette outside. That also annoys him. In an ideal Britain, there would be no ban on smoking.

Translated from the German by Paul Cohen

Ökonomen-Konferenz

Euro-Befürworter Mundell warnt vor Fiskalunion

08.01.2013 · Der Wirtschaftsnobelpreisträger Robert Mundell gilt als wissenschaftlicher „Vater des Euro“ - von einer Fiskalunion hält er aber nichts. Viele amerikanische Ökonomen tun sich immer noch schwer mit der europäischen Währungsunion.

Von [Patrick Welter](#), San Diego



© Andreas Müller Robert Mundell: Vater der Theorie des optimalen Währungsraums

Der kanadische Ökonom Robert Mundell, der sich gerne als wissenschaftlicher „Vater“ oder „Pate“ des Euro bezeichnen lässt, rät den Europäern von einer umfassenden Fiskalunion ab. „Es wäre irrsinnig, eine zentrale europäische Autorität zu haben, die all die Steuern und Ausgaben der Staaten oder der schwachen Staaten in der Union kontrolliert“, sagte Mundell auf der Jahrestagung der Vereinigung der amerikanischen Wirtschaftswissenschaftler, American Economic Association (AEA), im kalifornischen San Diego. „Dieser Transfer von Souveränität ist viel zu groß.“ Der vernünftige Schritt für die Europäer wäre es, zurück auf den Startpunkt zu gehen, zurück zur Disziplin der nationalen Staaten, sagte Mundell.

Er erinnerte daran, dass die Vereinigten Staaten in der Schuldenkrise der 1830er Jahre keinen Bundesstaat aus einer Zahlungsunfähigkeit herausgepackt (bail out) haben. Damals gerieten in der Dollar-Union Amerika zehn überschuldete Bundesstaaten in Zahlungsverzug. Zwei davon zahlten ihre Schulden später ganz zurück, zwei erkannten ihre Schulden nicht mehr an. Der Rest handelte Umschuldungen mit den Gläubigern aus. Dieses Prinzip, gemäß dem die Bundesregierung die Bundesstaaten nicht fiskalisch gängelt, sie aber auch nicht vor Zahlungskrisen bewahrt, hat seither gehalten. Mundell bezweifelte indes, dass die Bundesregierung heute bei einem Default etwa Kaliforniens tatenlos zusehen werde.

Die Krise sei eine Krise der fehlenden Haushaltsdisziplin

Mundells Nein zu einer umfassenden Fiskalunion in Europa spiegelt seine marktliberale Haltung wider. Der Ökonom, der 1999 den Nobel-Gedächtnispreis für Wirtschaftswissenschaften verliehen bekam, gilt als einer der Väter der „Reagonomics“, der Liberalisierung der Wirtschaft und der Steuersenkungen unter Präsident Ronald Reagan in den achtziger Jahren. Er hält es aus politischen Gründen freilich nicht für möglich, dass die Europäer noch völlig auf Bail-outs von Mitgliedstaaten verzichten könnten. Sie müssten eine Formel finden, mit der Souveränität geteilt - aber eben nicht weitgehend übertragen - werde, im Gegenzug für Transfers und für das Herauspacken von Mitgliedstaaten.

Im Gegensatz zu Mundells Beharren auf der weitgehenden fiskalischen Souveränität der Eurostaaten im Wettbewerb warb der frühere Präsident der Europäischen Zentralbank, Jean-Claude Trichet, für eine straff

zentralistische Lösung, um Mitgliedstaaten notfalls zu disziplinieren. Anstatt mit Strafzahlungen beim Verstoß gegen eine solide Finanzpolitik zu drohen, sollte die Europäische Kommission zeitweise die wirtschaftlichen und fiskalischen Regierungsgeschäfte in dem Land übernehmen, sagte Trichet. Er beklagte ferner, dass das Finanzvolumen des Europäischen Rettungsfonds ESM „wahrscheinlich zu moderat“ sei.

Mundell hatte Anfang der sechziger Jahre die Theorie des optimalen Währungsraums entwickelt, die von Kritikern gegen die Euro-Währungsunion angebracht wird. Mundell machte sich aber immer für eine gemeinsame europäische Währung stark. Er betonte, dass die Krise im Euroraum keine Krise des Euro, sondern eine Krise der fehlenden Haushaltsdisziplin sei. Die Europäische Währungsunion an sich habe sehr gut funktioniert, sagte Mundell.

Die größte Ökonomen-Konferenz der Welt

In der Diskussion auf der AEA-Tagung überwogen aber trotz der Zuversicht Mundells die Zweifel an der Europäischen Währungsunion. Die Krise in Europa sei eine Krise überdehnter Ansprüche in europäischen Wohlfahrtsstaaten wie Italien, die sich als Euro-Krise verkleide, sagte Ronald McKinnon, der in den sechziger Jahren auch zur Theorie der optimalen Währungsräume beigetragen hatte. „Wie es weitergeht mit der Währungsunion? Ich weiß es nicht“, sagte McKinnon. Der Harvard-Ökonom Kenneth Rogoff prognostizierte, dass auf Europa wegen der hohen Staatsschulden noch weitere Defaults von Mitgliedstaaten zukämen. Sein Universitätskollege Martin Feldstein erklärte, der Schuldenerlass und die Bankenhilfe für das kleine Griechenland seien für Deutschland nur eine „Irritation“. Die Wirtschaftsleistung der Krisenstaaten Spanien und Italien zusammen sei aber größer als die deutsche, sagte Feldstein. Die Bereitschaft an den Kapitalmärkten, dem Sonderfall Frankreich noch Geld zu geben, könne in der vergleichsweise geringen Schuldenquote von 80 Prozent gründen - oder aber „bald korrigiert werden“.

Feldstein erinnerte unter Gelächter im Publikum daran, dass die Europäische Union den Friedensnobelpreis just in dem Moment erhalten habe, in dem die Verbitterung zwischen den Euro-Mitgliedstaaten über Transferzahlungen und eine von Deutschland erzwungene Sparpolitik so groß sei wie noch nie. Er habe sein Urteil von 1992 nicht revidiert, sagte Feldstein, dass es ein wirtschaftlicher Fehler sei, heterogenen Ländern eine gemeinsame Währung aufzuerlegen, denen die räumliche Mobilität der Bevölkerung und die fiskalische Struktur der Vereinigten Staaten fehlten. Ausdrücklich widersprach Feldstein der These von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel, dass die Krise nur auf europäischer Ebene gelöst werden könne. Merkel und die EU-Offiziellen in Brüssel nutzten die Krise, um das Projekt der politischen Union voranzutreiben, sagte Feldstein. Die Fortschritte bei der Überwindung der Fiskalkrise seien aber auf nationaler Ebene geschehen, ohne irgendeine Koordinierung der Politiken auf europäischer Ebene. Die Tagung der AEA in San Diego mit mehr als 11.000 Teilnehmern ist die größte Ökonomen-Konferenz der Welt.

Weitere Berichte zur Tagung der American Economic Association unter www.faz.net/fazit.

Quelle: F.A.Z.

AEA Meeting (3):

Hat die Unabhängigkeit einer Zentralbank überhaupt noch einen Sinn?

04. Januar 2013, 14:57 Uhr

In der aktuellen Krise sind viele Zentralbanken näher an die Regierungen gerückt. **Otmar Issing spricht von einem "verlorenen Paradies"**. Auf der AEA-Tagung in San Diego diskutieren bekannte Ökonomen über Sinn sowie Vor- und Nachteile unabhängiger Währungshüter. Der Mythos, der sich um die Unabhängigkeit der Zentralbanken gebildet hat, beginnt zu bröckeln.

Von Gerald Braunberger

"The political mystique of Central Banking was, and still is to some extent, widely expressed by an essentially metaphysical approach to monetary affairs and monetary policy-making. ... The mystique thrives on a pervasive impression that Central Banking is an esoteric art. Access to this art and its proper execution is confined to the initiated elite."

Karl Brunner (1981)

"Unabhängige Zentralbanken sind eine historische Episode."

Joachim Fels (2011)

Der Vater der deutschen Ordnungsökonomik, Walter Eucken, lehnte unabhängige Zentralbanken ab, weil er kein Vertrauen in Geldpolitiker besaß: "Unkenntnis, Schwäche gegenüber Interessengruppen und der öffentlichen Meinung, falsche Theorien, all das beeinflusst diese Leiter sehr zum Schaden der ihnen anvertrauten Aufgabe." Der Vater des Monetarismus, der Nobelpreisträger Milton Friedman, besaß ebenfalls kein Vertrauen in unabhängige Geldpolitiker, also Personen "in a body free from any kind of direct, effective political control". Ihre Macht werde sie zu falschen Handlungen verlocken. Dennoch sind unabhängige Zentralbanken in vielen Ländern etabliert worden. Das Hauptargument lautet: Nur eine dem kurzfristigen Denken gewählter Regierungen entzogene Zentralbank ist in der Lage, Geldpolitik langfristig und ungestört auf die Sicherung des Geldwertes auszurichten.

Die laufende Krise hat Zentralbanken näher an Regierungen rücken lassen. Auf der Jahrestagung der American Economic Association in San Diego diskutieren am 4. Januar 2013 nordamerikanische (Alt-)Meister über Wert und Zweck unabhängiger Zentralbanken im Lichte früherer und aktueller Erfahrungen. Wir dokumentieren alle vier Papiere und stellen einen Vortrag des amerikanischen Ökonomen Marvin Goodfriend hinzu. Außerdem erwähnen wir einen Vortrag Otmar Issings. Nicht in diesem Beitrag behandelt, aber als Leseempfehlung erwähnt, sei eine Arbeit von Brunnermeier/Gersbach zum Thema "Unabhängigkeit der EZB in einer Bankenunion".

Aktualisierung 6. Januar 2013: Der amerikanische Nobelpreisträger Joseph Stiglitz hat anlässlich eines Vortrags in Indien deutliche Kritik am Konzept unabhängiger Zentralbanken geübt.

1. John Taylor: Zurück zu Milton Friedman - Regeln sind wichtiger als Unabhängigkeit

Eingangs erinnert Taylor an eine Arbeit Friedmans (1962), in der Friedman mit Blick auf die amerikanischen Erfahrungen die Festschreibung geldpolitischer Regeln für wichtiger hielt als die Unabhängigkeit der Zentralbank. Taylor kommt dann auf die Phase der "Great Moderation" (1985 bis 2007) zu sprechen, während der die Inflationsrate niedrig und das Wirtschaftswachstum solide war. Taylor sieht die Geldpolitik als eine Ursache dieser vorteilhaften Entwicklung - weil sie von Mitte der achtziger Jahre bis 2003 implizit einer

geldpolitischen Regel gefolgt sei. Allerdings betreibe die Fed seit 2003 eine kurzfristig orientierte, gesamtwirtschaftlich teure Geldpolitik. Obgleich ihre juristische Unabhängigkeit unangetastet blieb, ist die De-facto-Unabhängigkeit der Fed in der Krise - wie schon früher - durch eine Annäherung an die Regierung beschädigt.

Daher sollte die Rolle der juristischen Unabhängigkeit nicht überschätzt werden: "In my view this record raises questions about the role of de jure central bank independence in generating good monetary policy. It appears that existing law about independence has not worked. It has not prevented the central bank from engaging in activities that would question its independence from the rest of government. Looking beyond the United States an even higher degree of de jure independence in recent years has not prevented the Bank of England from largely ignoring its inflation target or the European Central bank from buying sovereign debt with the excuse of financial stability."

Damit ist man bei Friedmans Betonung von Regeln, die nach Taylor gesetzlich fixiert werden sollten, was eine Einschränkung der Unabhängigkeit der Geldpolitik bringt: "The policy implication is that we need to focus on ways to "legislate" a more rules-based policy. We need to encourage more predictable policy that has worked and discourage the bouts of discretion and loss of de facto independence which have not worked. I have given several practical suggestions for legislation in Taylor (2011), but there are many other possibilities. The task is difficult and the field is wide open."

2. Thomas F. Cargill/Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr.: Die Unabhängigkeit ist ein Mythos

[Cargill](#) (University of Nevada, Reno) und [O'Driscoll](#) (Cato Institute) attackieren die juristische Unabhängigkeit: "The paper argues that central bank de jure independence is far too uncritically accepted as a foundation for a stable financial and monetary environment. Not only is the modern view's foundation weak but its widespread acceptance permits central banks to engage in suboptimal policy with political undertones under the cover of independence." Die Autoren formulieren fünf Einwände.

Erstens stimmt die Empirie nicht: Die Fed ist formal unabhängig, schneidet aber im Vergleich der Inflationsraten schlechter ab als die bis 1998 politisch formal abhängige Bank von Japan.

Zweitens: De-jure-Unabhängigkeit und De-facto-Unabhängigkeit gehen nicht zwingend einher: Die Geschichte der Fed zeigt eine im Zeitablauf schwankende De-facto-Unabhängigkeit. Auch seit ihrer De-jure-Unabhängigkeit 1998 ist die Bank of Japan nicht frei von Regierungseinflüssen.

Drittens orientieren sich unabhängige Zentralbanken mit multiplen Zielen nicht zwingend an der Sicherung des Geldwerts. Friedman hatte in seinem Aufsatz aus dem Jahre 1962 betont, dass unabhängige Zentralbanken zu gesamtwirtschaftlicher Instabilität beitragen dürften.

Viertens beruhen bisherige Studien, die unabhängige Zentralbanken in der Sicherung des Geldwerts erfolgreicher sehen als abhängige, auf fragwürdigen methodologischen und statistischen Fundamenten.

Fünftens werden Zentralbanken von Regierungen mit Eigeninteressen geschaffen. Man sollte Zentralbanken stärker mit Methoden der Politischen Ökonomik analysieren.

Der entscheidende Punkt ist der vierte: Seit Bade/Parker (1978) wurden mehrere Arbeiten veröffentlicht, die juristisch unabhängige Zentralbanken als besonders erfolgreich in der Sicherung des Geldwertes sehen. Cargill/O'Driscoll stellen die Ergebnisse dieser Arbeiten in Frage.

Am Ende sehen auch sie die einzige Möglichkeit darin, einer Zentralbank durch eine gesetzlich fixierte Regel Handlungsspielraum zu nehmen: "The requirement to follow a rule is what gives a central bank independence from political pressures. Paradoxically, being bound by a rule is what makes a bank independent. If it wants the "freedom," of discretion, it will lose its independence. The rule can be a price rule (e.g., zero inflation), a rate rule (inflation targeting) or a commodity standard."

3. Michael Parkin: Ein Vertrag zwischen Zentralbank und Regierung

Von [Parkin](#) und seiner Frau Robin Bade stammten die ersten Studien zum Zusammenhang von Unabhängigkeit und Leistung einer Zentralbank. Parkin stellt die Arbeiten vor, erwähnt die Kritik von Cargill, und unternimmt dann einen anderen Test: Er schaut auf Änderungen in der Unabhängigkeit von Zentralbanken und Änderungen von Inflationsraten. Im Ergebnis existiert ein Zusammenhang zwischen größerer Unabhängigkeit und niedrigeren Inflationsraten sowie einer niedrigeren Varianz der Inflationsraten, aber einer größeren Varianz des realen Wirtschaftswachstums. Allerdings untersucht Parkin auch den Effekt der Übernahme einer geldpolitischen Strategie durch eine Zentralbank, konkret die in den vergangenen 20 Jahren populäre direkte Steuerung der Inflationsrate (Inflation Targeting): Diese Strategie führte zu niedrigeren Inflationsraten, einer geringeren Varianz der Inflationsraten und zu einer geringeren Varianz des Wirtschaftswachstums.

Wiederum sieht die Unabhängigkeit im Vergleich zu einer festen Regel nicht besser aus; im Gegenteil: "But the conclusions from the inflation targeting experiment cast doubt on the necessity of central bank independence. An inflation control contract with government transparently pursued can apparently do a very good job."

4. Allan H. Meltzer: Das duale Mandat der Fed ist erfüllbar

[Meltzer](#) (Carnegie Mellon University Pittsburgh) bildete mit Milton Friedman und [Karl Brunner](#) das Dreigestirn des Monetarismus; während der Amtszeit Alan Greenspans erhielt er das Angebot, eine mehrbändige Geschichte der Fed ([hier](#) und [hier](#) und [hier](#)) zu schreiben. Auch Meltzer sieht die Fed de facto mal näher und mal weiter an der Regierung - er beurteilt Greenspan aber weniger kritisch als dies Cargill/O'Driscoll tun. Meltzer erblickt in einer Regelbindung einen Weg zu einer größeren De-Facto-Unabhängigkeit. Beigetragen zu der aus seiner Sicht unseligen diskretionären Geldpolitik der Gegenwart haben bestimmte Aspekte moderner monetärer Ökonomik, wie sie sich mit den Arbeiten Michael Woodfords verbinden. Meltzer beklagt, dass die aktuelle Geldpolitik monetäre Größen nicht (mehr) zur Kenntnis nimmt.

Mit Blick auf sein Plädoyer für monetäre Größen ist Meltzers Handlungsempfehlung mehr als erstaunlich: Er empfiehlt eine Taylor-Regel (für die monetäre Größen keine Rolle spielen), mit der sich, richtig angewendet, das duale Mandat der Fed, stabiles Geld und hohe Beschäftigung zu sichern, gleichzeitig erreichen lasse. (Vor wenigen Jahren noch hatte Meltzer das duale Mandat der Fed heftig kritisiert.) Hierzu solle die Fed mehrjährige Ankündigungen für die Arbeitslosenquote oder das Wirtschaftswachstum und das Preisniveau machen.

5. [Marvin Goodfriend](#): Unabhängige staatliche Zentralbanken erzeugen Instabilität

[Goodfriend](#) (Carnegie Mellon University Pittsburgh) vergleicht zwei während des Goldstandards gegründete Zentralbanken. Die Bank of England war damals eine private Bank mit Aktionären; verstaatlicht wurde sie erst kurz nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die Regionalbanken der Fed sind zwar in privatem Besitz; die wichtigen geldpolitischen Entscheidungen werden spätestens seit 1935 im vom Staat geschaffenen Federal Reserve Board getroffen, in dessen wichtigstem Gremium, dem Offenmarkt-Ausschuss, die stimmberechtigten Vertreter der Regionalbanken gegenüber dem vom Staat ernannten Vertretern in der Minderheit sind. Insofern zieht Goodfriend zurecht die Fed als Beispiel für eine Zentralbank mit öffentlichem Auftrag heran.

Goodfriend vergleicht die Bank of England und die Fed ab dem Goldstandard in zweierlei Hinsicht: in der Geldpolitik (dabei geht es um die Ziele der Zentralbank und die Leitzinssetzung) und in der Kreditpolitik (dabei geht es um die Höhe der vergebenen Kredite, die Adressaten und die Konditionen einschließlich Besicherung). Goodfriend kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die Bank of England in der Regel den Regeln des Goldstandards folgte und selbst dann, wenn sie in Krisen von den Regeln ein wenig abwich, durch ihre Verfassung als Aktiengeschäft und die Interessen ihrer Anteilseigner an Exzessen gehindert war. Wenn sie in Krisen anderen Banken zusätzliche Kredite zur Verfügung stellte, dann zu hohen Zinsen und nur gegen sehr gute Sicherheiten.

Die Fed hingegen schaffte sich durch die Akkumulation von sehr viel Gold zinspolitischen Handlungsspielraum. Die Anlage in überschüssigem Gold anstelle von zinstragenden Aktiva reduzierte die Zinserträge, was durch den öffentlichen Charakter begünstigt worden - die private Bank of England hielt nie

sehr hohe unverzinsliche Goldreserven. Die Fed verfolgte in ihrer Geschichte mal eher Inflations-, mal eher konjunkturpolitische Ziele, was zur gesamtwirtschaftlichen Instabilität beitrug. Zudem ist im Laufe der Zeit, und zuletzt gerade in dieser Krise, ihre Kreditvergabe in mehrfacher Hinsicht zügellos geworden - durch sehr niedrige Zinsen, sehr hohe Volumina, den Ankauf aller möglicher Wertpapiere und die Akzeptanz nicht nur erstklassiger Sicherheiten. Auch damit trägt die Fed nach Ansicht Goodfriends zur Instabilität bei.

Goodfriend beschreibt zwei Remeduren: Zum einen muss die Geldpolitik ein klares Ziel setzen und sich daran halten. In diesem Sinn bezeichnet er die Ankündigung der Fed von Anfang 2012, eine Inflationsrate von 2 Prozent anzustreben, als einen Meilenstein. Die exzessive Kreditvergabe will er durch eine stärkere Kontrolle und Eingriffsrechten (durch das Parlament, nicht durch die Regierung) in den Griff bekommen - im Klartext: durch eine Beschränkung der Unabhängigkeit.

Eigene Anmerkungen:

1. Die Ansprüche an Geldpolitik sind zu hoch. Dies gilt für Ökonomen, die der Ansicht sind, die Geldpolitik könne die Konjunktur steuern. Dies gilt auch für Ökonomen, die meinen, Geldpolitik sei eine angewandte Wissenschaft, die sich langfristig als Geldwertsicherer in Reinform umsetzen lasse. Gelegentlich wurde die Zentralbank als eine über den Partikularinteressen der Politiker stehende elitäre Institution mit unbestechlichem Wissen verklärt.

2. Die juristische Unabhängigkeit ist prinzipiell eine gute Idee. Aber Geldpolitik wird von Menschen gemacht. Diese Menschen sitzen nicht in einem vom Rest der Welt abgeschiedenen (Elfenbein-)Turm, sie sind nicht allwissend und sie sind keine Maschinen. Die vor der Krise verbreitete Vorstellung, eine Zentralbank sei in der Lage, eine langfristige Politik ohne Fehler und ohne äußere Einflüsse zu betreiben, ist eine Idealisierung durch akademische Ökonomen gewesen. Auch Geldpolitiker bewegen sich in einer unsicheren Welt, und es gibt derzeit nicht "die" allgemein akzeptierte Theorie, an der sich eine Zentralbank zuverlässig ausrichten könnte.

3. Auch die Debatte um Regelbindung oder diskretionäres Handeln ist nicht beendet. Issing schreibt: "Whereas following a strict rule would eliminate any influence of individual preferences of central bankers, pure discretion would give the widest latitude for decision makers. The practice of monetary policy remaining somewhere in between implies that the traditional debate 'rules versus authority' continues." Überdies: An welche geldpolitische Regel hat sich die Fed unter Greenspan eigentlich gehalten? Taylor hat gezeigt, dass man die Geldpolitik bis 2003 mit einer Taylor-Regel simulieren kann, aber in der Praxis hatte sich Greenspan als "Magier" inszeniert, der in der Badewanne Statistiken las und am liebsten in seiner Entscheidungsfindung unverstanden blieb. Ist es völlig abwegig, die Politik Greenspans als eine Abfolge diskretionärer Entscheidungen wahrzunehmen?

4. Es gibt gute Gründe, das duale Mandat der Fed abzulehnen und die Geldpolitik nur auf Preisniveaustabilität zu verpflichten. Aber deswegen ist eine Zentralbank nicht blind für die Konjunkturentwicklung. Wiederum Issing: "No central bank will ignore the situation of the real economy and the impact of monetary policy in the short to medium term. A medium-term oriented monetary policy will take this into account on the basis of a single mandate." Ein von Parkin angesprochenes Thema sind die internationalen Wirkungen von Geldpolitik in einer globalisierten Welt. Muss eine Zentralbank darauf Rücksicht nehmen? Bedarf es einer internationalen Kooperation, [die manche Ökonomen befürworten](#), die Issing aber ablehnt?

5. Auch wenn überzeugende Gründe für eine Regelbindung existieren, gilt: Es existiert keine in der Fachwelt unumstrittene Regel, ob es sich um das Inflation Targeting, eine Taylor-Regel, eine Geldmengenregel (die ihr Schöpfer Friedman schon in den achtziger Jahren aufgab), eine Warenbindung (Euckens Präferenz) oder die Steuerung des nominalen BIP (ein Thema, das an Schwung gewinnt) handelt. Meines Erachtens ist die eklektische Zwei-Säulen-Strategie der EZB in der Praxis das derzeit beste Pferd im Stall, aber sie beruht nicht auf einer einheitlichen Theorie und verlangt daher Entscheidungsspielraum für die Zentralbanker. Aber ist nicht das ganze Leben eine Abfolge von Entscheidungen?

Schädliche Sparprogramme

08. Januar 2013, 08:26 Uhr



Sparprogramme schaden der Konjunktur viel stärker als gedacht, hat der Internationale Währungsfonds ausgerechnet. Was lernen wir daraus? Hohe Schulden werden leicht zur Falle.

Von [Patrick Bernau](#)

Sparprogramme schaden der Konjunktur viel stärker als gedacht, hat der Internationale Währungsfonds ausgerechnet. Vor einigen Wochen haben Chefökonom Olivier Blanchard und Ökonom Daniel Leigh [im Weltwirtschaftsausblick](#) kurz die Ergebnisse einer Rechnung vorgestellt, der zufolge die Wirtschaftsleistung durch die Sparprogramme in der Eurokrise doppelt bis dreimal so stark beeinträchtigt worden ist wie vorhergesagt. Damit hat sich der IWF auch selbst korrigiert. Jeder Euro an Haushaltskonsolidierung hätte nicht - wie meist ungefähr angenommen - 50 Cent vom BIP gekostet, sondern eher 90 Cent bis 1,70 Euro ("Multiplikator" nennen Ökonomen diesen Wert).

Inzwischen haben die beiden [im ersten IWF-Manuskript](#) des neuen Jahres ihre Rechnungen ausführlicher vorgestellt und bestätigt. Bei der [Financial Times](#) hat der Kollege Alan Beattie den Schluss gezogen, dass der IWF trotz der neuen Rechnungen seine Sparpolitik nicht grundsätzlich ändern wird - er bezeichnet das als "Das Lockern eines fiskalischen Dogmas im Stil des Vatikans [des zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils]". Aber hätte er denn einen Grund dazu?

Dazu müssen wir uns kurz vergegenwärtigen, was die Rechnungen genau zeigen:

a) Die *Erwartung* von Sparprogrammen hat kurzfristig negative Auswirkungen auf die Konjunktur, und zwar stärker als angenommen. Wer einen Staatshaushalt plant, muss mit weniger Steuereinnahmen rechnen, als er das 2008 oder 2009 getan hätte. (Die Prognosen für 2011 und 2012 waren schon erheblich besser; die Prognostiker hatten ihre Modelle offenbar schon angepasst.) Es geht übrigens vor allem um die Erwartung, auch wenn Blanchard und Leigh einen kurzen Robustheits-Test auf die tatsächliche Verwirklichung von Sparprogrammen machen.

b) In einer schweren Rezession ist die Staatstätigkeit wichtiger als im Aufschwung, mutmaßlich weil die Wirtschaft von selbst nicht so ausgelastet ist. (Keine Überraschung. Keynes hatte immer zuvorderst an Zeiten von Krisen und Rezession gedacht.)

c) Wenn Sparprogramme erwartet werden, leidet die Nachfrage. (Keine Überraschung.) Die Nachfrage nach Investitionsgütern wird stärker getroffen als der Konsum, auch weil sie von vornherein stärker schwankt.

Das große Problem ist dann der Basiseffekt. Wenn mit dem Sparpaket die Wirtschaftsleistung zu schnell schrumpft, wächst die Schuldenquote - möglicherweise schneller, als man spart. Zum Beispiel in Griechenland, dem Land mit der größten Herausforderung beim Sparen, weil Defizit und Schuldenstand sehr hoch waren.

Das Primärdefizit Griechenlands sank von 10,4 Prozent des BIP im Jahr 2009 auf 4,6 Prozent im Jahr 2010. Im folgenden Rezessionsjahr vom 1.1.2010 bis zum 31.12.2010 stieg Griechenlands Schuldenquote von 145 Prozent auf 165 Prozent, nur 10,5 Prozentpunkte davon stammten aus dem Gesamthaushaltsdefizit. Daraus lässt sich überschlagen: Zwar hat Griechenland sechs Prozentpunkte an Haushaltsdefizit eingespart, doch die Schuldenquote ist allein wegen des Basiseffekts um zehn Prozentpunkte gewachsen, sechs bis zehn Prozentpunkte des Basiseffekts könnten durch das Sparprogramm entstanden sein - da lohnt sich das Sparen kaum noch.

Es hilft übrigens kaum, langsamer zu sparen. Kurz überschlagen, stellt sich heraus: Wie groß das Sparprogramm ist, ist kaum relevant. Das Problem wird umso größer, je höher der Multiplikator ist (also je tiefer ein Land in der Rezession steckt) - und je höher der Schuldenstand zu Beginn ist. Wäre Griechenland mit einer Schuldenquote von 50 Prozent des BIP in die selbe Krise gekommen, hätte ein Sparpaket gleicher Größe (bei neuem, hohem Multiplikator) den Schuldenstand gesenkt. Aber viel mehr hätte es nicht sein dürfen, schon 60 Prozent wären zu viel gewesen.

Angesichts dessen liegt die Forderung nahe, eben gar nicht zu sparen. Aber das kann keine Lösung sein, zumal in der Eurokrise. Das ist ja keine einfache Konjunkturkrise, sondern sie hat als einen wesentlichen Grund eben die Zweifel an der Bonität von Ländern wegen hoher Schulden. Wie soll ein Land auf Dauer Kredit bekommen, das sagt: "Wir müssen uns Geld leihen, weil wir uns das Sparen nicht mehr leisten können"?

Am Ende bleibt ein Dilemma. Ohne Druck sparen viele Regierungen nicht - siehe Italien -, unter Druck aber funktioniert es vielleicht nicht mehr.

Die Folgerung ist damit vor allem: Hohe Schuldenstände sind noch gefährlicher als gedacht. Staaten müssen sparen, solange sie können.

ps: Das heißt aus meiner Sicht nicht, dass man in weniger schweren Rezessionen nicht sparen sollte. Bei kleinerem Multiplikator lohnen sich Sparprogramme auch bei höheren Schuldenquoten. Aber ex-ante weiß man nicht, wie schlimm die nächste Rezession wird.

Foto: AP

Fiscalité : la France à contre-courant de ses voisins

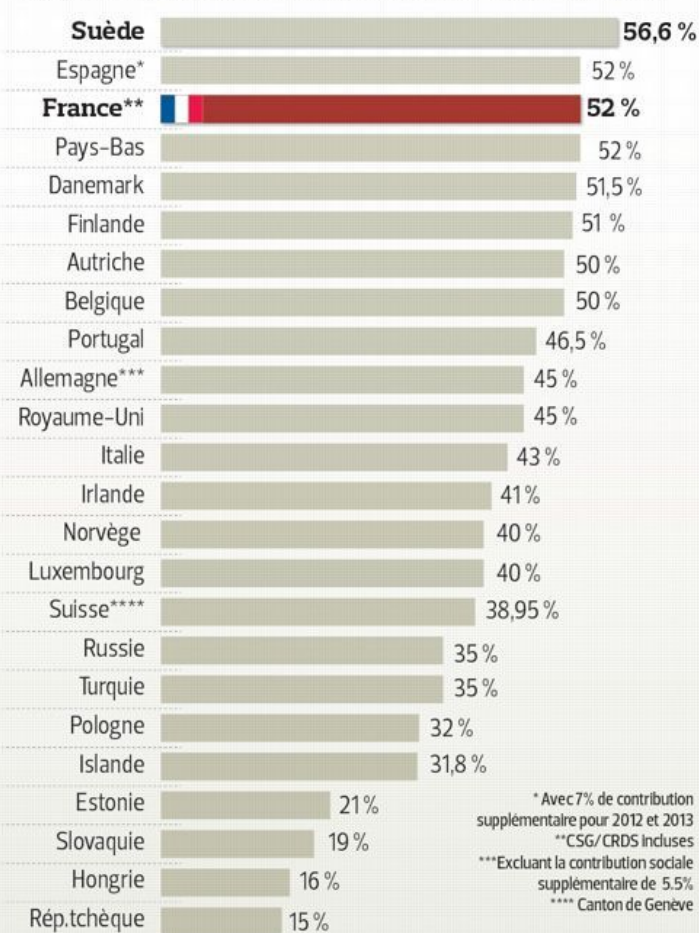
Par [Marie Visot](#), [Service infographie du Figaro](#) Mis à jour le 07/01/2013 à 21:58 | publié le 07/01/2013 à 20:05 [Réactions](#) (67)

INFOGRAPHIE - Selon une étude Ernst & Young, l'Hexagone augmente l'impôt sur les sociétés, alors que les Européens ont tendance à le stabiliser. Quant à la TVA, elle est restée stable depuis 2008.

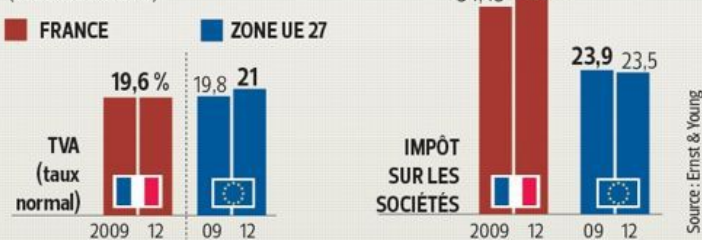
Question [fiscalité](#), la France a tendance à aller «à contre-courant» de ce qui se fait chez ses voisins. Dans une étude publiée hier, le cabinet Ernst & Young s'attache à comparer les grandes orientations budgétaires en Europe ces dernières années ; et le moins que l'on puisse dire, c'est que la politique fiscale choisie par le nouvel exécutif illustre bien une certaine tendance à faire cavalier seul. Si «la France a emprunté une voie originale au cours des quatre dernières années», cette singularité s'est accélérée récemment, dans un contexte où tous les États ont cherché à «concilier la sécurisation des recettes et le renforcement de la croissance», souligne Charles Ménard, avocat chez Ernst & Young Société d'avocats.

Les hauts revenus déjà très taxés en France

TAUX D'IMPOSITION COMPARÉS POUR LES HAUTS REVENUS EN EUROPE, en %



Évolution des taux, EN % (entre 2009 et 2012)



Ainsi, en 2012, la grande majorité des États que l'étude a scrutés à la loupe ont maintenu ou réduit leur taux d'imposition sur les sociétés. Seuls le Portugal (avec un IS à 29,50 %) et la France (IS à 36,15 %, du fait de la surtaxe «Fillon») ont augmenté leur taux entre 2011 et 2012. En moyenne, le taux dans les 39 pays de l'OCDE est de 23,93 %, note l'Observatoire des politiques budgétaires et fiscales. Entre 2009 et 2012, le taux de l'IS a augmenté de 5 % en France, alors qu'il a marqué une diminution de 0,38 % dans la zone euro, dit l'étude - qui, dans ses comparaisons, ne prend pas en compte l'assiette de l'impôt, mais uniquement son taux.

«Des dégâts en termes d'image et d'attractivité»

La TVA suit également, en France, une trajectoire différente de celle de nos voisins européens. L'Espagne, les Pays-Bas, l'Irlande et la Hongrie verront leur taux de TVA augmenter entre 2012 et 2013. Avec un taux de 19,6 %, la France reste en dessous du taux moyen observé au sein des pays étudiés, soit 20,91 %. Le taux normal de TVA n'a pas évolué en France depuis 2009 - et il ne bougera pas non plus cette année -, alors qu'il a augmenté de 4,77 % entre 2009 et 2012 dans la zone Euro.

Enfin, en ce qui concerne la fiscalité des ménages, l'étude rappelle que l'année 2012 marque une «augmentation du taux moyen de l'impôt sur le revenu, qui passe de 34,69 % à 41,17 %». Les chiffres concernant les Français les plus aisés pourraient faire office de piqûre de rappel pour le gouvernement. Elle montre en effet que l'Hexagone impose déjà lourdement ces contribuables: en tenant compte de la nouvelle tranche d'impôt sur le revenu la plus élevée (45 %), de la CSG et la CRDS, les ménages les plus riches sont déjà taxés à 52 %. Seuls l'Espagne et la Suède ont des taux plus élevés (voir graphique). Et encore, cette étude ne tient-elle pas compte de la taxe à 75 % pour les très hauts revenus - que le Conseil constitutionnel a censurée il y a quelques jours et que le gouvernement compte réintroduire sous une nouvelle forme d'ici quelques mois. «Si ce dispositif avait été validé, nous serions évidemment passés bon dernier», indique Charles Ménard, qui souligne que cette mesure a, quoi qu'il en soit, «fait des dégâts en termes d'image et d'attractivité fiscale».

Pour ne pas noircir totalement le tableau, Ernst & Young souligne qu'«en sanctuarisant le Crédit d'impôt recherche (CIR) on pourrait dire que la France a entendu les investisseurs étrangers critiques à l'égard de l'instabilité de la fiscalité française». Ce week-end, le ministre du Budget, [Jérôme Cahuzac](#), a d'ailleurs répété qu'il n'y aurait «pas d'augmentation d'impôts» d'ici à la fin du quinquennat.

Renewable energy: Ireland back in the green

7 January 2013

[La Repubblica](#) Rome



The Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry, Ireland

[via FlickrCC](#)

After two years of radical austerity the Irish economy is going through an upswing, thanks to new revenue the state is collecting from renewable energy and from taxing fossil fuels and rubbish.

[Sara Ficocelli](#)

Ireland is doing everything it can to leave the lean years behind. The boost to the finances and the morale of the proud Irish is not solely the doing of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which pumped \$1.17bn of rescue funds into the coffers of the country a few weeks ago: the Irish government and the Irish people have also played their part by opting for a totally innovative growth strategy based on renewable energy.

[According to the](#) *The Economist* the country is now the greenest in Europe – after being in the red four years ago – and should be able to bring its deficit to below 2 per cent of GDP thanks to a spurt in growth that looks set to hit the “miracle” figure of 2 per cent.

To spur the economy and save energy, the government has opted to tax the use of fossil fuels in homes, offices, cars and factories. The more carbon dioxide the Irish emit, the higher their bills – all the more encouragement to those who don't bother to sort their rubbish and rein in their waste (the rubbish is systematically checked and weighed at kerbside, and charges calculated every quarter).

Worst performers become best performers

It's a strategy that automatically translates into an increase of 5 to 10 per cent in the cost of oil, natural gas and kerosene. That forces the Irish to choose: either continue to pollute and throw away their money in taxes, or go green. The Irish have gone for the second option. Not only is the country now emerging from the crisis, but it is showing a record rate of clean energy use. Carbon dioxide emission levels have fallen 15 per cent since 2008, including a 6.7 per cent drop in 2011 alone, the year that saw the first signs of recovery in Ireland's economy.

Only a few years back the country was one of the worst performers in the EU when it came to per capita greenhouse gas emissions, which were at the levels of other countries where environmental concerns seemed absent, such as in the United States. “We're not saints, like those Scandinavians”, Eamon Ryan, Minister of Energy from 2007 to 2011, [told the New York Times](#). “We were lapping up fossil fuels and buying bigger cars and homes – very American. But slowly, progressively, we're taking a fresh look at our lifestyle.”

The political parties of the "Emerald Isle" have not flinched at the carbon tax, which let the Irish government reap nearly a billion euros in three years, including €400m in a single year, 2012. And the Irish people have responded by investing in renewable energy and getting involved in recycling waste.

New drive for electric cars

Today, new car purchases include a tax on the vehicle's emissions. To deal with these steps, Renault-Nissan signed an agreement with Dublin and BSE (Ireland's main electricity provider) a few weeks back to speed up bringing electric cars onto Ireland's roads.

If the environmental shift has been favourably received, it is thanks in part to an effective awareness campaign – [“Tackle litter before it tackles you”](#) – notably an amusing TV spot featuring a waste bin taking a run at litterbugs, even little old ladies, and knocking them flat.

According to data published last year at the European summit on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE), Ireland ranks first in the eurozone when it comes to waste collection, at 9 kg per capita, followed by Germany at 8.2 kilos and the UK at 7.5 kilos. Italy, at 4.7 kilograms per capita, narrowly crawls over the lower threshold of 4 kg set by Brussels.

Ireland's economic stimulus plan for 2013 provides for new taxes and new shavings off the budget. It's a strategy that's good for the environment, say experts, but that hits the poorest social classes the hardest. That is why the government has also opted to tax tobacco, which is considered by some to be a luxury for the wealthy. One thing is certain: Ireland will not climb out of its rut without upsetting some people and without making sacrifices. The Irish government has judged that it would be good, for once, if these sacrifices were not made at the expense of the planet.

View from Ireland

Black gold threatens green promises

Ireland's newfound environmental reputation is coming under threat following the announcement of the discovery of [huge oil reserves in the Irish Sea](#). With the Barryroe oil field off the coast of Cork estimated to hold around 1.6bn barrels alone, it could provide thousands of jobs and tax revenues, transforming the west coast towns of Cork or Galway into “mini-green versions of Dallas in an oil rush,” [says Irish Independent feature writer Kim Bielenberg](#). She adds –

Until recently, critics of Irish oil exploration complained that it produced a lot of guff but very little gush. But now healthy scepticism about the industry is giving way to optimism that an energy boom can play a role in our economic revival.

Some critics complain that the government's 25 per cent tax on oil finds is too low and is losing much-needed revenue, while others fear environmental damage to the region. She continues –

With the potential for increased tax revenues, reduced reliance on fuel imports, and new jobs, the benefits of a new energy industry may prove too tempting to resist.

Czech Republic-Slovakia:

The happy Czechoslovakia that could have been

7 January 2013

[Respekt](#) Prague



Vlahovic

Twenty years ago, Czechoslovakia split in two new countries. If the Czech Republic and Slovakia had stayed together and transformed the impoverished former nation into a multi-ethnic country, both societies would be more democratic today, argues a dual-nationality columnist.

[Martin M. Šimečka](#)

When someone in Hungary uses the word “*csehszlovák*”, everyone knows that what is being referred to is ugly and dysfunctional, whether it's a product or an activity. This contemptuous epithet, which entered the slang and survives to this day, comes from the era of socialist Czechoslovakia, when Hungarians considered my former homeland an embarrassment that churned out nothing but crap – from cars that were constantly breaking down and leaking tents, to poor services for tourists and its very own dysfunctional nature as a state.

Actually, the Hungarians were right (even if they cannot be all that proud of their own country these days). Czechoslovakia was mostly an awkward, inefficient and undemocratic state, and even the decent 20 years it had after 1918 cannot do much about this fact. So why should I be sorry that it fell apart 20 years ago?

I wouldn't, however, be sorry if this split had not [shrunk the space for democracy](#), which had got off to quite a good start in the first two years after [November 1989](#).

Looking out for your 'interests'

But at that time [two small states](#), whose godfathers turned into politicians with a dictatorial bent, were formed, their purpose became not democracy, but what came to be known as the Czech or Slovak “interest”. No one yet knows what that is exactly, but politicians frequently deploy the term to suppress the natural goal of state-building, which ought to be democracy.

If the former Czechoslovakia had survived, it would be impossible to hide behind the word “Czechoslovak interest”, because it would be clear to everyone that such a thing does not exist. The dispute over the democratic nature of the state, in which the nationalists would be clearly visible as those who view democracy

as an obstacle, would be fully exposed. In the Czech Republic in particular, this distinction is sometimes very hard to make these days.

A national state based on an ethnic principle – and both our countries are based on it, although the Czech constitution, at least formally, attempts to weaken it – have a worse starting position for building a democracy than the states that make political nationality, not ethnic origin, the basis for citizenship. I am deeply convinced that if Czechoslovakia had stuck to the principle of one political Czechoslovak nation – though one made up of various nationalities – it would be more democratic than our two small states are today.

A “csehüláll” situation

But that probably could not have succeeded. Czechoslovakia was a dictatorship for most of its existence, and faith in its democratic and federal future was too weak following 1989. And so, if the Hungarian language were to preserve the expression “*csehüláll*”, which is derived from the word “Czech” and has become the term for an idiotic situation, I would have to say we deserve it.

Not just because we are entering the new year, though, I believe that our small world, following the break-up of Czechoslovakia, still has a chance to be a better one, even if 20 years ago the two small states did not get off to the best start. In the end, when all is said and done, their godfathers are probably already finally headed into oblivion.

Translated from the Czech by **Anton Baer**

Entspannung in der Euro-Krise

Targetforderung der Bundesbank deutlich gesunken

08.01.2013 · Die Kapitalflucht aus den südeuropäischen Krisenländern ist offenbar gestoppt. Nun sinken die infolge der Euro-Krise bedrohlich ausgeweiteten Target-Salden wieder. Die Commerzbank vermutet eine Trendwende.

Von [Stefan Ruhkamp](#)



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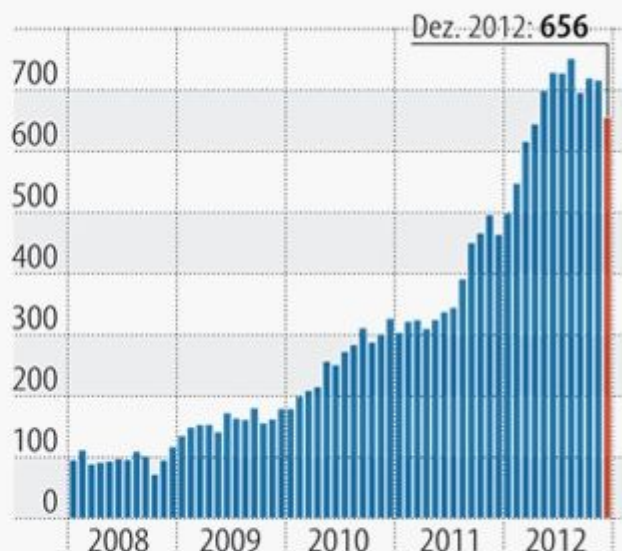
Geldsäcke von der Bundesbank

Die Forderung der Bundesbank aus dem europäischen Zahlungssystem Target ist im Dezember von 715 auf 656 Milliarden Euro gesunken. Damit liegt die Forderung, die die Bundesbank gegenüber der Europäischen Zentralbank und damit indirekt gegenüber den Notenbanken der Euro-Krisenländer hat, um knapp 100 Milliarden Euro unter dem im vergangenen Herbst erreichten Höchstwert.

Der „[Targetsaldo](#)“ ist in den vergangenen zwei Jahren in die Höhe geschossen, als die Leistungsbilanzdefizite der Krisenländer und vor allem die Kapitalflucht aus diesen Ländern immer weniger durch private Kreditgeber finanziert wurden. Da auch die Hilfskredite der europäischen Partnerländer und des Internationalen Währungsfonds nicht zur Finanzierung der Abflüsse ausreichen, ist die Last über das Target-System immer stärker bei den Notenbanken der finanzstarken Länder aufgelaufen. Dieser Prozess könnte sich, so die Hoffnung mancher Beobachter, nun umkehren.

Rückgang auf hohem Niveau

Forderung der Bundesbank gegen die Europäische Zentralbank aus dem Zahlungssystem Target-2 (in Milliarden Euro)



Kapital fließt in die Krisenländer zurück

„Für mich ist das eine Trendwende“, sagt Jörg Krämer, Chefvolkswirt der Commerzbank. Die über das Target-System für Italien und [Spanien](#) aufgelaufenen Verbindlichkeiten seien schon im Oktober und November deutlich gefallen, für die spanische Notenbank von 400 auf 366 Milliarden Euro, für die italienische von 281 auf 247 Milliarden Euro. Die Dezemberwerte sind noch nicht bekannt.

Wichtiger noch sei, dass die riesigen Abflüsse privaten Kapitals aus den Krisenländern seit dem dritten Quartal des vergangenen Jahres versiegt seien. Zeitweise hätten die Kapitalabflüsse aus Portugal, Italien, Irland, Griechenland und Spanien binnen zwölf Monaten rund 20 Prozent der Wirtschaftsleistung entsprochen. Finanziert seien diese Abflüsse durch staatliche Hilfskredite und die Target-Flüsse. Nach dem Sommer habe es dagegen erstmals seit Anfang des Jahres 2011 wieder Rückflüsse privaten Kapitals gegeben, argumentiert Krämer.

Angst um die Währungsunion zurückgegangen

Auf Anzeichen für solche Rückflüsse hat auch die Europäische Zentralbank schon hingewiesen. [EZB-Präsident Mario Draghi](#) nannte unter anderem die wieder wachsenden Einlagen der italienischen Banken.

Der Notenbankchef hatte im Sommer potentiell unbegrenzte Anleihekäufe der EZB zugunsten der finanzschwachen Euroländer in Aussicht gestellt, um der Furcht vor einem Auseinanderbrechen der Währungsunion zu begegnen. „Ich halte diese Politik für falsch, weil sie falsche Anreize setzt“, sagt nun Commerzbank-Ökonom Krämer, gibt allerdings zu: „Aber sie wirkt.“

Quelle: F.A.Z.

Booming Sales Beyond Europe

German Exports Seen Hitting New Record in 2012

German exports are set to hit a new record for 2012 as strong sales to the US and emerging economies like China offset falling demand from austerity-hit Europe. Exports rose 4.3 percent in the first 11 months, thanks to a jump in sales outside the crisis-hit Continent.

Exports, a traditional strength of the German economy, are on course to hit new records in both 2012 and 2013 thanks to strong demand for the "Made in Germany" brand outside crisis-hit Europe, official data released on Tuesday showed.

In the first 11 months of 2012, exports grew 4.3 percent to €1.018 trillion (\$1.335 trillion), the Federal Statistics Office said. Stagnant sales to the rest of the European Union contrasted with a 10.4 percent jump in exports to non-EU nations.

Separately, the Federation of German Wholesale, Foreign Trade and Services (BGA) said it expects the value of exports to have reached €1.103 trillion in 2012 as a whole, a four percent rise over 2011, when they exceeded the €1 trillion level for the first time. It also forecast slightly stronger export growth of 5 percent in 2013, to €1.16 trillion.

Still, exports weakened at the end of 2012, pulled down by slumping demand in Europe, Germany's biggest market.

The Statistics Office said that exports fell by 3.4 percent in November from the previous month. Exports to the rest of the 17-nation euro zone, hit by austerity drives in the euro crisis, dropped 5.7 percent year-on-year. Meanwhile, exports to the 27-nation EU were down 4.0 percent.

Gaining Momentum for 2013

The German economy, Europe's largest, continued to grow in 2012, but at a slower pace than in the previous two years, mainly because of the weak economic environment in Europe, economists said. The trade surplus in the first 11 months of 2012 shrank to €146.2 billion from €176.2 billion.

"The fourth quarter was weak for Germany and especially for its important export markets," said Christian Schulz, an economist at Berenberg Bank. "The German economy is likely to have contracted in the fourth quarter. But the outlook is better."

The economy is widely expected to pick up steam again in the course of 2013, though. "The decline in output is likely to be temporary," said Ulrike Rondorf, an economist at Commerzbank.

cro -- with wire reports

01/08/2013 11:21 AM

Interview with German Opposition Leader

'Merkel's Track Record Is Disastrous'

Sigmar Gabriel, 53, is the national chairman of Germany's center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), which hopes to return to power after national elections in September. In a SPIEGEL interview, he discusses recent controversies surrounding the party's chancellor candidate and his view of critical issues.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Gabriel, do you regret not being the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) chancellor candidate for the elections in September?

Gabriel: No, why should I?

SPIEGEL: Because Peer Steinbrück, the SPD's candidate, recently [came under fire](#) for his earnings as a guest speaker at corporate events while still serving in parliament ...

Gabriel: ... Oh, God ...

SPIEGEL: ... and then he caused a stir when he said that Germany's chancellor [isn't paid enough](#). One could get the impression that Steinbrück is determined to see German [Chancellor Angela Merkel](#) hold on to her job.

Gabriel: This debate probably shows more about how one can purposefully blow misunderstandings out of proportion during a campaign. In an interview just a few weeks ago, I said myself: "I find it inappropriate that the German chancellor earns less than the director of a mid-sized savings bank." At the time, there was general agreement. But now [Peer Steinbrück](#) repeats this phrase, and suddenly there's an enormous fuss. That's just silly. For him, it wasn't about calling for a higher salary for the office he's pursuing himself.

SPIEGEL: The question is what an appropriate annual salary for the chancellor might be. Should it be €1 million (\$1.3 million)? Or €17 million, the salary of Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn?

Gabriel: I find another question much more important. In contrast to these inconceivably high salaries at the boardroom level, why is the honest work of completely normal workers so poorly paid?

SPIEGEL: If you were the SPD's chancellor candidate, would you have been foolish enough to complain that the chancellor is underpaid?

Gabriel: I find nothing scandalous about Steinbrück's description of the facts. However, the discussion should revolve around the earnings and pensions of completely normal workers in Germany rather than around the top salaries in politics and business.

SPIEGEL: The SPD is hovering at a maximum of 30 percent in current opinion polls, and there wasn't any jump to speak of since Steinbrück was chosen to be its chancellor candidate.

Gabriel: In any case, 30 percent is still seven percentage points more than it was in the previous election for the Bundestag (the federal parliament, held in 2009), and that is pretty good nine months before the Bundestag [election](#). If you count the Pirate Party, there are now four parties on the left side of the political spectrum. On the right side, there is only one and a half: the Union (made up of Chancellor Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU), its Bavarian sister party) and the now almost invisible FDP (the business-friendly Free Democratic Party). It's clear that the Union has it easier for the

moment in this situation. But we're right at the start of the campaign. At the end, it's obviously our goal to have considerably more than 30 percent.

SPIEGEL: The only question is how. At the moment, one of the major issues is the euro crisis. Why should Germans vote for the SPD when its Bundestag members have backed all the bailout packages put forward by Chancellor Merkel's government?

Gabriel: There's a long tradition in Germany of having the government and the opposition seek consensus on foreign-policy matters. Opposition for the sake of opposition is a rather simple-minded concept, one that applies more to the (far-left) Left Party than to the SPD. But one doesn't have to belong to the SPD to realize that it was Ms. Merkel who endorsed the demands of the SPD rather than the other way around.

SPIEGEL: Would the EU-related policies of an SPD-led government look different from Chancellor Merkel's?

Gabriel: Yes, they would. For one, we would have focused on growth much earlier. Meanwhile, the austerity policies that Ms. Merkel has forced on Europe have driven it into an economic crisis. But that is also Ms. Merkel's manner. I realize that it's popular in Germany. For a long time, Ms. Merkel thought she didn't have to do anything at all; she got what she wanted thanks to Germany's economic strength. It will probably be a long time before we dispel the mistrust toward Germany's power in Europe.

SPIEGEL: One could also say that Merkel defended German interests in Brussels.

Gabriel: If only that were the case. But renouncing growth stimuli and allowing unchecked speculation on the financial markets have made the crisis bigger rather than smaller. Now things are going to get really expensive for German workers and taxpayers. If Europe falters economically, it will affect Germany particularly hard as an export country.

SPIEGEL: The SPD is calling for a new growth program. Who is supposed to pay for it?

Gabriel: First of all, we need taxation of the financial markets. Speculators in banks and stock exchanges must finally make a contribution to tackling the crisis. It was only when the SPD threatened to reject the EU fiscal pact that Ms. Merkel was willing to advance financial-market taxation. Second, we need to stop spending more than 40 percent of the EU budget on agricultural subsidies. And then the German finance minister also continues to make a good deal from the high interest rates paid by crisis-struck euro-zone countries. We need to reinvest part of this money back into Europe.

SPIEGEL: "German Money for Europe." That doesn't exactly sound like a winning campaign slogan.

Gabriel: That might be so on first glance. But a growth program is far better than constantly leading the Germans to believe that Europe won't cost any money while at the same time secretly forcing German taxpayers to be increasingly liable for European banks via the central bank.

SPIEGEL: During the campaign, will you also make an issue of [German arms shipments to authoritarian states](#), such as Saudi Arabia?

Gabriel: Yes. It's downright scandalous that the chancellor speaks of value-oriented foreign policies and praises the pro-democracy movement in the Arab world, and then delivers tanks to dictatorships like Saudi Arabia. We need to return to our old policy of no weapons to crisis zones. I'm not proud of the fact that Germany is one of the world's largest arms exporters. It's also unacceptable that the Federal Security Council meets to make decisions on arms exports without any public or parliamentary oversight. We're not in the Cold War anymore. The Bundestag needs to be informed whenever the Federal Security Council approves an arms deal.

SPIEGEL: Which domestic policies do you plan to attack Chancellor Merkel on?

Gabriel: First and foremost, it has to be about values and principles, which have been neglected under Ms. Merkel's leadership. Three issues will be important to us: fairness, security and social provisions. Fairness not only with the distribution of the tax burden, but also with a view to the minimum wage, for example. Security, meaning that effort and achievement once again lead to a secure job and fair pay. And making provisions for the future through better educational opportunities, ranging from day care centers to all-day schools. Merkel's government track record is disastrous in all of these areas. Under her aegis, the division between rich and poor in the country has become even larger.

SPIEGEL: The picture you paint is much too bleak. For example, unemployment is at its lowest point since German reunification in 1990.

Gabriel: Of course, Germany speaks happily about the upper 10,000 in society, but too little about the everyday life of normal people. We argue over quotas for women on supervisory boards but speak much less about the women working the cash register in supermarkets or as caregivers. Why does hardly anyone talk about the fact that women in Germany earn 22 percent less than men? In any case, an SPD-led government will introduce a bill that outlaws this unequal treatment.

SPIEGEL: At the moment, your party is championing higher taxes more than social justice. A year ago, SPD chancellor candidate Steinbrück said: "One cannot provoke the strong in terms of their willingness to achieve and alienate them to the point that they terminate the social contract." Don't you think he's right?

Gabriel: Of course Steinbrück is right. That's why we also won't raise taxes to the level of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl's era. At the time, the top tax rate stood at 53 percent. We are for moderately raising income taxes on annual earnings above €100,000 to 49 percent, while simultaneously using the tax on assets to make sure that the wealthy in Germany are also doing their part to help finance the polity.

SPIEGEL: Gerhard Schröder, Germany's SPD chancellor from 1998 to 2005, is perhaps best-known for his radical -- and widely unpopular -- "Agenda 2010" reforms of the labor market and welfare system. He recently said that the SPD would have been one of the strongest social democratic parties in Europe had it confidently stood by his Agenda. But you seem to view the Agenda as more of an embarrassment.

Gabriel: On the contrary, I defend many parts of Agenda 2010, such as the program for all-day schools or the consolidation of unemployment and social benefits, to name a few. But looking back, one has to say that there were also some mistakes, such as underestimating what would result from liberalizing the labor market -- namely, a gigantic low-wage sector. I believe that the Agenda wasn't sufficiently balanced in social terms. We didn't introduce an asset tax at the same time. We didn't push through a minimum wage at the same time. Now we have a chance to add what was missing back then.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Gabriel, thank you for this interview.

Interview conducted by René Pfister and Gordon Repinski; translated from the German by Josh Ward

Europe : les revenus chutent un peu partout, sauf en France

Par [Anne Cheyvalle](#) Mis à jour le 08/01/2013 à 13:20 | publié le 08/01/2013 à 12:58 [Réactions](#) (2)

Entre 2009 et 2011, les revenus des ménages ont baissé dans la plupart des pays européens, à l'exception de l'Allemagne et de la France, où ils ont continué d'augmenter, souligne Bruxelles.

Dans un rapport rendu public ce mardi, Bruxelles s'inquiète de la dégradation généralisée de l'emploi et des conditions sociales en Europe. «Après cinq années de crise économique et le retour de la récession en 2012, le [chômage](#) a atteint des sommets qu'il n'avait plus connus depuis vingt ans, le revenu des ménages est en baisse et le risque de pauvreté ou d'exclusion augmente, en particulier dans les États du Sud de l'Europe», souligne un rapport de la Commission européenne.

L'impact de la [crise](#) est d'autant plus fort que les effets protecteurs de ce que l'on appelle les stabilisateurs automatiques - diminution des recettes fiscales et augmentation des dépenses de protection sociale - se sont estompés.

Bruxelles souligne la baisse du revenu disponible brut des ménages, entre 2009 et 2011, dans deux tiers des pays de l'[Union](#). Sans surprise, la plus forte baisse revient à la Grèce (17%), suivie de l'Espagne (8%), Chypre (7%), Estonie et Irlande (5%).

La situation diffère dans les pays du Nord, dont l'Allemagne, et la France, «où le système de protection sociale et un marché de l'emploi plus robuste ont permis aux revenus globaux de continuer à augmenter malgré la crise», précise le rapport.

Record de chômage en zone euro

L'exécutif européen ne table pas sur une amélioration en Europe de la situation socio-économique en 2013. «À moins qu'elle ne parvienne à trouver une solution crédible pour résoudre la crise de l'euro, à se procurer des fonds pour financer des investissements grandement nécessaires, y compris dans les compétences individuelles, l'employabilité et à mettre la finance au service de l'économie réelle», souligne le commissaire européen à l'Emploi et aux Affaires sociales, Laszlo Andor.

Les chiffres du chômage en attestent. En [zone euro](#), le taux de chômage a franchi un nouveau record en novembre à 11,8% de la population active, soit 18,82 millions de personnes sans emploi.

Entre 2008 et 2012, le taux de chômage de l'Union européenne est passé de 7,1% en 2008 à 10,6% au dernier trimestre. L'écart entre le Nord et le Sud s'est accru: tombé de 3,5 points en 2000 à zéro en 2007, il a grimpé à 7,5 points en 2011. Le taux le plus élevé revient à l'Espagne qui culminait à 26,2% en octobre.

Plus inquiétant encore est l'aggravation du chômage de longue durée, qui a augmenté de 3% en 2009 à 4,6% au deuxième trimestre 2012. Si tous les pays subissent une détérioration, 90% de cette hausse revient à huit pays (notamment France, Grèce, Espagne et Royaume-Uni), dont 43% pour la seule péninsule ibérique.

The euro crisis is over, declares José Manuel Barroso

European commission president's optimistic comments were in sharp contrast to new year message from Angela Merkel

[Phillip Inman](#), economics correspondent

[The Guardian](#), Monday 7 January 2013 19.13 GMT



'I think we can say that the existential threat against the euro has essentially been overcome,' said Barroso. Photograph: Sasha Mordovets/Getty Images

The [euro](#) has been saved and the euro crisis is a thing of the past, European commission president José Manuel Barroso has declared.

But his optimistic comments and the prospect of looser rules for banks failed to lift markets, which ended a strong run of recent gains.

"I think we can say that the existential threat against the euro has essentially been overcome," Barroso said in Lisbon. "In 2013 the question won't be if the euro will, or will not, implode," he said.

Barroso has maintained an optimistic stance throughout the crisis, but his comments were in sharp contrast to the new year's message from German chancellor Angela Merkel, who told TV viewers last week that the currency zone faced another rocky 12 months.

City analysts are also deeply concerned that austerity measures demanded by Brussels as the price of bailout funds would lead to prolonged recessions in periphery countries and the need for steeper spending cuts.

Cuts to essential public services in Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal are expected to increase unemployment and lead to further social unrest.

Protests on the streets of Madrid on Monday highlighted the tensions inside the euro area after banner-waving protesters blamed Brussels, Berlin and the right of centre PP government of Mariano Rajoy for privatisations and cuts in healthcare spending.

Elga Bartsch, an analyst at Morgan Stanley, said she was anxious that Barroso and his colleagues in Brussels would fail to resolve long-running disputes over the EU's new institutions.

"The euro crisis seems contained for now. But we think it is not resolved for good. In addressing the fundamental flaws in the euro's institutional set-up, progress on banking union will be key. Assuming no crisis escalation, the euro area should re-emerge from recession and return to sub-par growth. Politics is the main risk," she said.

Political deadlock, which has also characterised the reform agenda in Washington and Tokyo, could allow social unrest to grow and wreck any coherent reform plans, she said.

"An extended recession, diverging political positions and several elections create a difficult backdrop for in-depth reforms. We therefore expect only limited progress on an effective resolution of the crisis this year. We believe that progress on banking union, where preparations are under way for a Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) and where discussions continue on harmonising, and possibly pooling, bank resolution and deposit guarantee schemes, will be key."

Merkel faces a general election in the autumn against a resurgent Social Democratic party (SPD) while the Italians are expected to go to the polls next month in an election that could see a revived Silvio Berlusconi with enough votes to block reform measures.

Global stock markets, which have warmed to the message that the euro crisis is abating, drifted lower as some investors sought to cash in on last week's strong gains and worries grew of more political brinkmanship in Washington. Major indices surged last week after the US Congress passed a bill to avoid a "fiscal cliff" combination of government spending cuts and tax increases.

The deal, however, remains incomplete. Politicians will face another deadline in two months to agree on more spending cuts while a debate over the country's \$16 trillion (£9.9tn) debt ceiling is also looming.

Concerns that the eurozone will suffer another year of economic downturn after entering recession last year were heightened by comments from OECD boss Angel Gurría who said the 17 member zone could continue contracting into 2014.

Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.4% to 6064 while Germany's Dax was down over 0.7% to 7719.78. France's Cac-40 lost 0.8% to 3701.06.


Wall Street opened lower as well, with the Dow shedding 0.4% to 13,377.13 and the broader S&P 500 falling 0.4% to 1460.14.

The one bright spot for the markets was the banking sector, where stocks were up after global regulators eased new rules obliging lenders to set capital aside. The so-called Basel III rules are a set of new international standards to make sure banks protect themselves from the same trouble that caused the 2008 financial crash.

On Sunday, the officials setting those rules delayed the date by which banks needed to have certain amounts of cash readily available.

The move caused a jump in bank shares – Deutsche Bank was up 3% but the biggest gains were among ailing Spanish banks, which some had feared would struggle to meet the new cash requirements. Bankinter was up 8% and Banco Popular was 2.8% higher.

Eurozone live: Angela Merkel warns crisis is 'far from over'

- guardian.co.uk, Monday 31 December 2012 14.49 GMT
- [Jump to comments \(181\)](#)
- 



German

chancellor Angela Merkel poses for photographs after recording her annual new year's speech at the Chancellery in Berlin yesterday. Photograph: POOL/REUTERS

Angela Merkel: 2013 will be harder

Good morning, and welcome to our final day of [rolling coverage of the eurozone debt crisis](#), and other key events in the world economy, for 2012.

We're ending the year with a solemn warning from **Angela Merkel** that the crisis has not run its course, despite the waves of optimism that have swept some parts of Europe in recent months.

In her new year message, the German chancellor warned that 2013 will be challenging , saying:

I know that many are also heading into the new year with trepidation. And indeed, the economic environment next year will not be easier, but more difficult. That should not discourage us, but - on the contrary - serve as an incentive.

And on the eurozone crisis, she was adamant that more work must be done, despite the progress made this year:

The European sovereign debt crisis shows us how important this balance is. The reforms we have agreed to are beginning to take effect. But we still need a lot of patience. The crisis is far from over.

More needs to be done internationally, as well, to monitor the financial markets. The world has not sufficiently learned the lesson of the devastating financial crisis of 2008. For never again must such irresponsibility be allowed to take hold as it did then. In the social market economy, the state is the guardian of order, and the public must be able to place its trust in it.

[The full text is online, in English, here.](#)

The comments are more downbeat than we've heard from other senior politicians and officials in recent weeks. Just last Thursday her finance minister, **Wolfgang Schäuble**, declared that ['the worst is over' for the eurocrisis](#).

But with the eurozone struggling to return to growth, and public anger against austerity unabated, it's clear that 2013 will indeed be tough.

I'll be tracking reaction to Merkel's new year message in the blog, along with other key developments as a historic year for Europe draws to a close.....

Updated at 8.20am GMT

France: flight of the celebs

Even if the exodus is phoney, it does not look good. It speaks of a rudderless government and an indecisive president

- Editorial
- [The Guardian](#), Sunday 6 January 2013 20.31 GMT
- [Jump to comments \(192\)](#)

[Gérard Depardieu](#) has become Vladimir Putin's latest [recruit](#). [Jean Michel Jarre](#) is cosyng up to Downing Street. [Brigitte Bardot](#) is about to don her *sapogi* over the treatment accorded to Baby and Nepal, which happen to be two elephants. She should first have a look at what passes for animal welfare in Russian zoos. It matters not that the totemic measure of [François Hollande](#)'s election campaign, the 75% tax on millionaires, has already been struck down by a court – the rich and famous appear to be heading for the door anyway. It is still appearance, rather than reality – the numbers leaving for Belgium doubled, from 63 in 2011 to 126 last year, but at that rate it would take a long time to add a significant number to the 200,000 French residents already there – but even if the flight of the celebs is phoney, it does not look good. It speaks of a rudderless government and a president who still has not decided who he really wants to be.

Mr Hollande's bigger problem is surely with those who cannot flounce off in a blaze of publicity. He devoted his new year message to what he called the great battle for employment – and well he might, after France saw its 19th consecutive month of rising unemployment. Its 1997 record of 3.2 million jobless could soon be broken. The urgency of turning these figures around is clear. What Mr Hollande's government has as yet failed to do is offer a convincing way forward. Take Pierre Moscovici, who as minister of finance is one of the more experienced in government. He was asked by [Les Echos](#) how he was going to get the economy to grow by 0.8%, a vital part of this year's plans, when the IMF predicts near-flat figures. He replied that French growth would be boosted by Barack Obama's fiscal cliff victory, a rebirth of eurozone confidence and the president's programme of public investments. Really? There are 16 other eurozone nations and they don't share Mr Moscovici's confidence.

Mr Hollande has the road clear in front of him. There are no stop signs or traffic lights in his path. His party retains a firm majority at all levels; the right is in disarray after a leadership election fiasco which has permanently divided the largest party; and there are no elections this year. And yet so far Mr Hollande has done a good job of stalling the engine before he has even got it in gear.

The 75% tax rate for people earning €1m a year or more was both popular and a measure that was more symbolic than real. It would not have produced great amounts of extra revenue. Furthermore, if life were a game of Mastermind, taxation would be Mr Hollande's specialist subject. As an academic, he lectured on it. Despite this, he managed to get his law struck down on a technicality – that taxation in France is raised on the income of a household, not an individual. Further, it is difficult to see how he can reformulate the law and stick to its spirit. If he raises the threshold to €2m per household, the number of mega-rich drops significantly. If he lowers the rate, he faces cries of a sellout from the left.

Not everything is going badly for him. For all its indebtedness, on Friday France's borrowing costs dipped fractionally lower than [Britain's](#), which still retains its triple-A rating. His prime minister may be unpopular, and the ministers unable to speak with one voice, but Mr Hollande's biggest problems are structural ones – an over-rigid labour market; the extra costs French employers pay for their employees; the French car industry – and they are all inherited. Neither of his two conservative predecessors, Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy, bit the bullet of reform, and France is paying for that paralysis now. It still has some of the best multinationals in [Europe](#).

Seven months in, Mr Hollande has to stop the rot. As party chief, he showed he was a good dealmaker and negotiator. As presidential candidate, he caught the overwhelmingly anti-Sarkozy mood. As president, he now has a task of a different magnitude. He has to show the nation that he can lead. A lot rides on the result. This year could make or break his presidency.

Britain must stay at the heart of Europe

Membership of the European Union, despite its imperfections, is right for the UK in every respect

- Editorial
- [The Observer](#), Sunday 6 January 2013
- [Jump to comments \(200\)](#)

The [European Union](#) is a beautiful idea. Obviously it is less than perfect in reality. But the notion of Europe's nations coming together to forge a common destiny is inspiring – an exemplar of how different countries sharing the same continent and many of the same values can enrich themselves and their peoples. Engagement, exchange and openness are virtues that underpin any civilisation.

Yet Britain, it is confidently proclaimed by the army of Eurosceptics who dominate our national conversation, wants no part of this project, a position apparently supported by a majority of public opinion that they have helped to create. In their world view, the European Union represents an attempt to force Europe's diversity into a Brussels-made bureaucratic mould, making a mockery of democracy and good economics. Whether it is the single currency, human rights or minimum standards of consultation in the workplace, in this account, Europe is anti-liberty, anti-enterprise and anti-British.

A growing proportion of Conservative MPs, an insurgent Ukip and the centre-right media believe that the precondition of a British economic and social renaissance is to leave the EU, based on an in/out referendum that they believe they would comfortably win. Others on the right, more keenly aware of the reality of Britain's economic interests and position, are prepared to countenance only some form of trading relationship with the EU, but one that they know is essential to sustain inward investment and many business models of UK enterprise. Otherwise, they make common cause with those who want out.

It is against this background that the prime minister is set this month to make a long-awaited speech on Europe setting out his stall.

His audience is allegedly the nation. In fact, it will be the one-third to two-fifths of the centre-right electorate split between wanting out altogether and those wanting a semi-detached relationship, a division that threatens to make British conservatism unelectable. For decades, leading Conservative politicians have connived with the centre-right press to present a highly ideological view of what constitutes a vigorous capitalism, which they say is anathema to all things European. Now they are reaping the reward for never having had the courage to tell the truth.

Britain's political, social and economic fortunes are intertwined with the continent of which it is part. Whether it was the rise of Protestantism in the 16th century, the Enlightenment in the 18th century or the bitter struggles between communism and fascism in the 20th, Britain has been a pivotal part of the European story. The idea that we can leave Europe is fatuous. Geography has its own brutal logic.

So has economics. Britain has been a member of the EU for 40 years. Every British industry is now predicated on free access to the European single market. The renaissance of the British car industry, owned and spearheaded by foreigners, for example, relies on the capacity to export to the EU. British agriculture, an under-praised success story, has reinvented itself courtesy of the Common Agricultural Policy. The international financial services industry – ranging from insurance and banking to law and futures trading – is based in London in order that it can enjoy both the benefits of access to New York and to the EU. Even British higher education, another success story, has built its success on freely attracting European students. For Ukip, the centre-right, much of the Tory party and too many members of Britain's economic establishment, these are facts that either are disputed or ignored as inconvenient. The greater good is served, for them, by freedom from Brussels.

The limitations of this ideological view of the world were brutally exposed during 2012. A procession of British economists, along with Ukip leader, Nigel Farage, announced with mounting certainty the imminent break-up of the euro. It was taken as self-evident that floating exchange rates were superior to any form of managed currency relationship. Britain, experiencing a double-dip recession with a threat of a third dip, and already entering its fifth year of depressed output, was curiously praised as embodying the virtues of a freely floating exchange rate. Greece was urged to forget the protections the EU offered it and convert back to the drachma, becoming an inflation-ridden Balkan republic exercising the freedoms enjoyed by Britain.

Nobody in Britain seemed to understand the unattractiveness of this option. Hedge funds, when not being offered the chance of endorsing Mr Osborne's crass economic policy, sold all euro assets, confident that doing so was a guarantee of making money. They all lost fortunes; the only winner was the single hedge fund that bought Greek assets.

The euro will have further strains, but the realisation is growing that Chancellor Merkel and European Central Bank president Mario Draghi are a formidable duo who will do whatever is necessary for the euro to survive – whether creating a banking union or buying euro bonds.

Moreover, on many fundamentals – inflation, productivity, public debt, trade, investment and innovation – the euro area as a bloc looks a great deal stronger than Britain. European recovery is forecast for 2014. Sadly, the same cannot be said for the UK.

It would be good if Mr Cameron could acknowledge that Britain's membership of the EU – and the EU itself, together with the euro – has some virtues. He is a politician capable of taking a brave stance. It would be a better option than the other choices. If he calls for an immediate in/out referendum, he will split his party because, as a responsible sitting prime minister, he will be compelled to campaign to stay in. If he calls for a renegotiation of Britain's relationship, to become a permanent semi-detached member and hold a referendum on the result in the next parliament, he condemns the British economy to three or four years of crippling uncertainty. Nor is semi-detached status desirable or perhaps even negotiable. If he says nothing but wait and see, he will be damned as indecisive.

The euro crisis has created a pan-European democratic conversation – the first of many. Britain's best choice is stay with the EU, neither such a bad economy nor as anti-democratic as it is portrayed, and organise itself so that it does. The EU is a beautiful idea – if imperfect – and Britain's fortunes are irrevocably tied to it. Mr Cameron should address the nation rather than his party and say just that.

- http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324660404578201484035826330.html?mod=WSJEurope_hpp_LEFTTopStories
- EUROPE NEWS
- January 7, 2013, 7:44 p.m. ET

Slowing Birthrates Weigh on Europe's Weak Economies

By [PATRICIA KOWSMANN](#)

MELGAÇO, Portugal—This small town is facing another year of austerity enforced by Portugal's bailout lenders, but there is one category of expenses the mayor says he won't cut: birth incentives—the awards of up to €1,000 (\$1,300) to new mothers, as well as free nursery services and tax breaks on homes for young couples.

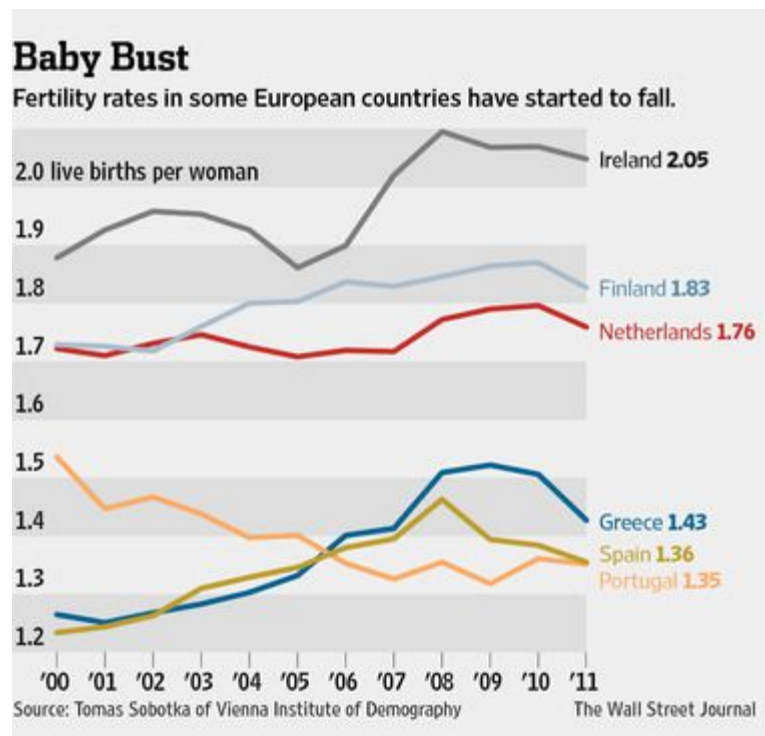
"That's an area we must continue doing what we can to help," said António Rui Esteves Solheiro, who has governed Melgaço for more than three decades. "It's about our future."

Mr. Solheiro's efforts are driven by the stark demographics accompanying Portugal's downturn. The number of newborns and new immigrants in town isn't offsetting the number of residents who die, most of them in the 65-and-older age group that makes up more than one-third of the population of 9,172. Just 33 babies were born in Melgaço last year, half the average during the boom of the previous decade.

If the trend continues, Mr. Solheiro said, the economy of this relatively prosperous town on Portugal's northern tip will falter. "Our activities, which include production of *vinho verde* [a white wine] and smoked sausages, are currently profitable," he said, "but there isn't much growth potential beyond this with the population we have."

Communities across the Continent, particularly in countries hit hard by the euro-zone debt crisis, are recording drops in birthrates that experts say could speed the decline and aging of a European population already struggling with low economic growth and high public spending. Europe-wide, birthrates have been declining for decades, but rates had begun to increase some during the boom.

Tomas Sobotka, a research scientist at the Vienna Institute of Demography, estimated that of the 22 European Union countries with comparable data, 15 have registered a drop in fertility rates—the number of children a woman is expected to have during her lifetime—since the financial crisis started in 2008. That contrasts with a rise in 19 of the 22 countries during the boom years of 2005 to 2008, he said.



Experts say a 2.1 fertility rate is needed to keep the population stable, assuming net migration is zero. In crisis-stricken Greece, the fertility rate dropped to an estimated 1.43 in 2011 after rising to 1.51 in 2008 from 1.27 in 2000, Mr. Sobotka said. Official data from Greece show abortions there rose 50% to 300,000 in 2011 from 2010.

In Spain, which has one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, the fertility rate fell to 1.36 in 2011, after increasing to 1.46 in 2008 from 1.23 in 2000, according to Mr. Sobotka's data.

In Ireland, the economy is still growing despite the country's austerity regime, begun when it took a bailout in 2010. The Irish birthrate registered only a modest fall in 2011, Mr. Sobotka said, to 2.05 from 2.1 in 2008.

In Portugal, the number of births in 2012 is expected to tally around 90,000, the lowest level in more than 60 years.

"Birthrates in Portugal have been so low for such a long time that even if the falling immigration eventually increases again, it won't be enough to sustain the population," said Maria Filomena Mendes, president of the Portuguese Demography Association. Ms. Mendes estimates the country's population will be close to nine million by 2030, down from the current 10 million.

Spain's national statistics agency estimates that nation's population could fall 10%, to 41.5 million, by 2052 as more people die than are born, even taking into account an eventual upturn in immigration.

The Vienna institute estimates that by 2050, people 65 and older will account for one-third of the populations of Portugal, Spain and Greece, up from about 18% currently.

"Along with a population fall, we will obviously see fewer productive people financially supporting an increasingly older population," Ms. Mendes said, referring to conditions in Spain, Portugal and Greece. "That will have consequences not only on economic growth prospects, but also raise questions on how to afford a ballooning pension system."

In Melgaço, that future is now. Mr. Solheiro, the mayor, said the elderly absorb a good part of his €20 million annual budget, which includes projects to improve transportation for seniors, discounts on cultural and sports events and even improvements to the town's cemeteries.

While those expenses will continue growing, he said, the town's economic output won't, because the economically active population, which currently accounts for slightly more than half the residents, is expected to continue falling.

"It's a real challenge," he said. "We try to give incentives to mothers, but the crisis is bringing so much uncertainty, we can't fight against that."

Kelly Paula Rodrigues Bento, a 28-year-old from Brazil who works as a waitress in a Melgaço cafe, agreed. She had her first child in 2011. But after living for five years in Portugal, Ms. Bento said she plans to return to Brazil with her son and her husband, who can no longer count on temporary construction jobs in neighboring Spain since that country's housing boom collapsed.

"When I got pregnant in 2010, things weren't as bad, but now they are and we don't know when they will improve," Ms. Bento said. "I may eventually have a second child. But it won't be here."

—Darcy Crowe contributed to this article.

The fiscal cliff deal

America's European moment

The troubling similarities between the fiscal mismanagement in Washington and the mess in the euro zone

Jan 5th 2013 | from the print edition

Video: <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2013/01/americas-european-moment>

Comic-Video: <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2013-01-08/stephen-colbert-takes-trillion-dollar-coin>



FOR the past three years America's leaders have looked on Europe's management of the euro crisis with barely disguised contempt. In the White House and on Capitol Hill there has been incredulity that Europe's politicians could be so incompetent at handling an economic problem; so addicted to last-minute, short-term fixes; and so incapable of agreeing on a long-term strategy for the single currency.

Those criticisms were all valid, but now those who made them should take the planks from their own eyes. America's economy may not be in as bad a state as Europe's, but the failures of its politicians—epitomised by this week's 11th-hour deal to avoid the calamity of the “fiscal cliff”—suggest that Washington's pattern of dysfunction is disturbingly similar to the euro zone's in three depressing ways.

Can-kicking is a transatlantic sport

The first is an inability to get beyond patching up. The euro crisis deepened because Europe's politicians serially failed to solve the single currency's structural weaknesses, resorting instead to a succession of temporary fixes, usually negotiated well after midnight. America's problems are different. Rather than facing an imminent debt crisis, as many European countries do, it needs to deal with the huge long-term gap between tax revenue and spending promises, particularly on health care, while not squeezing the economy too much in the short term. But its politicians now show themselves similarly addicted to kicking the can down the road at the last minute.

This week's agreement, hammered out between Republican senators and the White House on New Year's Eve, passed by the Senate in the early hours of New Year's Day and by the House of Representatives later the same day, averted the spectre of recession. It eliminated most of the sweeping tax increases that were otherwise due to take effect from January 1st, except for those on the very wealthy, and temporarily put off all the threatened spending cuts (see [article](#)). Like many of Europe's crisis summits, that staved off complete disaster: rather than squeezing 5% out of the economy (as the fiscal cliff implied) there will now be a more manageable fiscal squeeze of just over 1% of GDP in 2013. Markets rallied in relief.

But for how long? The automatic spending cuts have merely been postponed for two months, by which time Congress must also vote to increase the country's debt ceiling if the Treasury is to be able to go on paying its bills. So more budgetary brinkmanship will be on display in the coming weeks.

And the temporary fix ignored America's underlying fiscal problems. It did nothing to control the unsustainable path of "entitlement" spending on pensions and health care (the latter is on track to double as a share of GDP over the next 25 years); nothing to rationalise America's hideously complex and distorting tax code, which includes more than \$1 trillion of deductions; and virtually nothing to close America's big structural budget deficit. (Putting up tax rates at the very top simply does not raise much money.) Viewed through anything other than a two-month prism, it was an abject failure. The final deal raised less tax revenue than John Boehner, the Republican speaker in the House of Representatives, once offered during the negotiations, and it included none of the entitlement reforms that President Barack Obama was once prepared to contemplate.

The reason behind this lamentable outcome is the outsize influence of narrow interest groups—which marks a second, unhappy parallel with Europe. The inability of Europeans to rise above petty national concerns, whether over who pays for bail-outs or who controls bank supervision, has prevented them from making the big compromises necessary to secure the single currency's future. America's Democrats and Republicans have proved similarly incapable of reaching a grand bargain; both are far too driven by their parties' extremists and too focused on winning concessions from the other side to work steadily together to secure the country's fiscal future.

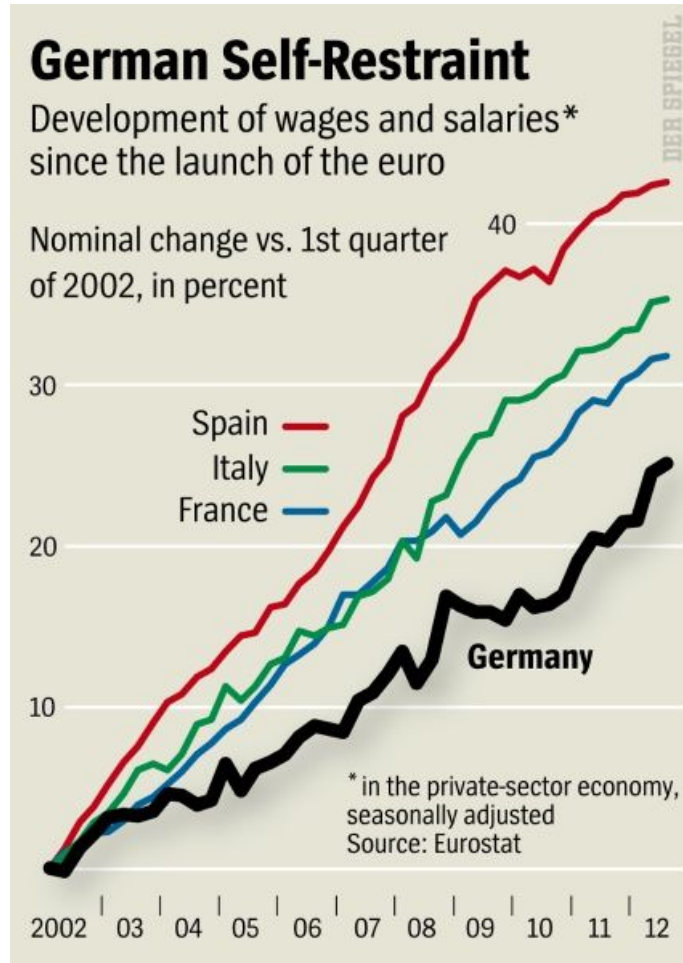
The third parallel is that politicians have failed to be honest with voters. Just as Chancellor Angela Merkel and President François Hollande have avoided coming clean to the Germans and the French about what it will take to save the single currency, so neither Mr Obama nor the Republican leaders have been brave enough to tell Americans what it will really take to fix the fiscal mess. Democrats pretend that no changes are necessary to Medicare (health care for the elderly) or Social Security (pensions). Republican solutions always involve unspecified spending cuts, and they regard any tax rise as socialism. Each side prefers to denounce the other, reinforcing the very polarisation that is preventing progress.

Fixed today, hobbled tomorrow

Optimists will point out that America is unlikely to face a European-style debt crisis in the near future, but the slow-burning fuse is itself a problem. One positive side-effect of Europe's crisis is that it has forced euro-zone countries to raise their retirement ages and rationalise pensions and health-care promises. America, which has the biggest structural budget deficit in the rich world bar Japan, will become an outlier in its failure to deal with the fiscal consequences of an ageing population. Its ageing is slower than Europe's but, as its debt piles up and business and consumer confidence is dampened, the eventual crunch will be more painful.

The saddest thing about this week's deal is how unaware Messrs Obama and Boehner seem to be of the wider damage their petty partisanship is doing to their country. National security is not just about the number of tanks or rockets you have. As it has failed to deal with the single currency, Europe's standing has crumbled in the world. Why should developing countries trust American leadership, when it seems incapable of solving anything at home? And while the West's foremost democracy stays paralysed, China is making decisions and forging ahead.

This week Mr Obama boasted that he had fulfilled his mandate by raising taxes on the rich. In fact, by failing once again to clear up America's fundamental fiscal trouble, he and Republican leaders are building Brussels on the Potomac.



Possible Boost for EU Economy

Germany Gears Up for Big Pay Hikes

By [Sven Böll](#) and [Janko Tietz](#)

German trade unions plan to demand big pay increases this year and look set to get their way. Economists say that after years of wage moderation, it is high time that German firms agreed to bigger hikes -- not least because this would help the entire European economy.

Frank Bsirske, the head of the Ver.di service workers' union, gets annoyed when he hears people say that Germany is doing pretty well. "That only applies to the well-off," he says angrily. "The gap between rich and poor has never been this wide, and never has the middle class felt this threatened." The union leader is even worried that social conflict could escalate.

His recipe against the erosion of society is hardly surprising: Wages have to go up, and by a significant amount, at that. In the current collective bargaining round, Ver.di is calling for a 6.5-percent pay increase -- the highest in years -- for German public sector employees.

Bsirske has the support of other unions with his demand for a substantial pay hike. After metalworkers' union IG Metall fought for improvements in the treatment of temporary workers and more assistance for trainees in the last bargaining round, the union's main focus in the new round beginning in May will be on money. "Our demand will focus on a decent pay increase," says IG Metall regional director Meinhard Geiken. Michael Sommer, head of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), is convinced that "the people who keep the country running and generate its wealth deserve to get their fair share."

Although it sounds like union ritual, the labor organizations are getting more support than they have in a long time. For more than a decade, it was considered reasonable in Germany to keep wage increases moderate at best, in light of high unemployment. But now the country is getting used to a new logic, namely that Germany, more than any other European economy, can afford pay increases.

The German economy got through the euro crisis in much better shape than almost all of its neighbors. Employment, at more than 41 million, is at the highest level ever recorded, and many companies have recently reported record profits.

Nevertheless, most employees have less disposable income, when adjusted for inflation, than they did 10 years ago. "The working world has to be reorganized in 2013," says Stefan Körzell, the DGB chairman for the two states of Hesse and Thuringia. "We cannot allow more and more people to be poor despite being employed."

Wage Hikes to Become Campaign Issue

Politicians are also embracing the issue. With collective pay agreements for about 12.5 million employees expiring this year, it's no surprise that the opposition center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) wants to make them a campaign topic ahead of the general election this autumn. "Employees have exercised wage restraint for more than a decade," says Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel, the SPD chairman in the western state of Hesse. "It's high time that workers get to participate in the success of the economy."

Politicians from the ruling center-right coalition are also tapping into the general sentiment. Labor Minister Ursula von der Leyen already called for a "noticeable increase" last year, and even Finance Minister Wolfgang

Schäuble agreed in principle. Rising wages, he argued, "also contribute to eliminating imbalances within Europe."

Essentially, this means that in times of the euro crisis, Germany's collective bargaining negotiations have a different meaning than during the deutschmark era. Many economists agree. When employers and union officials in Germany sit down to hammer out their wage deals, they have to look beyond the economic situation in Germany and think of growth and employment in the entire euro zone.

"It should certainly amount to a 5-percent increase across all German industries," says Peter Bofinger, a member of the German Council of Economic Experts which advises the government. He isn't overly troubled by the fact that this is more than twice as much as the level his fellow Council member Wolfgang Franz believes is reasonable. Bofinger has also argued consistently for higher wage agreements in the past. But now he has a new argument. His current hefty demand includes a 2-percent supplement to save the euro.

Income Gains Needed to Help Tackle Euro Crisis

"During wage negotiations, we can no longer act as if we were living on an island," he says. For this reason, Bofinger believes that a significantly higher increase is necessary, in addition to the 3-percent increase that he argues results from growth in productivity and inflation.

German workers as the saviors of the Spanish economy? Yes, indeed, says Bofinger. He too believes that the Southern European countries will not be able to avoid wage cuts. But the Germans, Bofinger argues, could soften the necessary adjustment process with a substantial wage increase.

Bofinger makes a case for income increases in many areas. Pensions need to go up, he says, as do long-term jobless benefits, even if this will drive up inflation at first. And because he knows that many politicians shudder at this idea, he says: "We have a choice between two ugly alternatives: either a temporarily higher inflation rate in Germany or deflation in Southern Europe."

It's true that Germany's past wage restraint is part of Europe's current problem. Wages have increased sharply in Southern Europe since the launch of the single currency. As a result, countries like France, Spain and Italy are now far too expensive. To become more competitive and reduce trade deficits with Germany, salaries have to be reduced substantially. This is unavoidable, but the decreases in Southern Europe could be somewhat smaller if they coincided with a larger increase in German wages.

Of course, German employers don't like to hear these arguments. Peer-Michael Dick, for example, the current managing director of the Gesamtmetall Engineering Employers' Federation, notes that there are "noticeable skid marks" in the economy and sees "a worse situation than last year." Most of all, he doesn't support the idea of wage hikes to show solidarity with the rest of Europe. "It makes no sense at all economically, the notion that we have to pay higher wages so that Southern Europe can get back on its feet."

Euro Has Helped Boost German Exports and Profits

Many economists disagree. In the postwar years, the deutschmark repeatedly appreciated against Southern European currencies, and German industry was more productive. This also benefited employees, because their higher wages enabled them to buy more foreign goods and made foreign travel cheaper for them.

But this effect has disappeared since exchange rates were fixed with the introduction of the single currency. There has been no currency appreciation since then, and the greater competitiveness of German companies is reflected solely in higher exports and greater profits. This also applies to trade with customers outside Europe.

German producers do their accounting in euros, which is why they profit from the fact that the currency is relatively undervalued at the moment because of the debt crisis. Experts estimate that if the deutschmark still existed, German cars and machines would probably be 15 to 20 percent more expensive than they are now. Economists with Citigroup assume that Germany's annual exports have been about €100 billion higher for this reason alone.

Even economists who are sympathetic to the employers' stance concede that the framework for wage policy has changed since the introduction of the euro. "If we still had the deutschmark, we could hardly afford wage increases, in light of the massive appreciation of our currency," says Michael Hüther, head of the Cologne Institute for Economic Research.

Because the euro exists, even Hüther believes that there is room for higher wages, albeit much less than fellow economist Bofinger. Hüther feels that wage increases of up to 3 percent are certainly feasible in the upcoming bargaining round, although he does not believe that this will produce a significant increase in jobs. "And despite all the euphoria, we mustn't forget that there are still 2.9 million unemployed people in Germany."

Germany's union officials don't seem to be overly worried about this at the moment. Instead, they are gearing up for big pay demands. One of them is Onno Dannenberg, public sector wage policy manager at Ver.di. He will attend the first negotiations for state government employees on Jan. 31, and two additional rounds are planned for February and March. In light of the economic situation in Europe, says Dannenberg, it is "all the more important that we strengthen domestic demand."

Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan

January 8, 2013

Depardieu and the New Capitalism

By VADIM NIKITIN

WHEN the French actor Gérard Depardieu collected his Russian passport this week, the English language media erupted with puzzlement and mockery. One online commentator called the corpulent defector “shameless” for becoming “a citizen of a dictatorship just to avoid taxes.”

Tax exile is nothing new, of course. European countries have a long history of wooing one another’s rich with offers of bigger salaries and smaller government. Last year, Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain announced that he would “roll out the red carpet” for any French businessmen willing to take up his country’s lower tax rates.

Yet while few batted an eye when a slew of prominent Parisian financiers moved their families (and bank accounts) en masse across the channel in December, Depardieu’s action seems to have crossed an imaginary line in many people’s minds.

For if by moving to Belgium or Britain the actor could be criticized merely for valuing money over motherland, in decamping to authoritarian Russia he seems to have placed money ahead of even democracy itself. In this way, he might be said to have forsaken not just his country, but also the fundamental Western notion that rights and freedoms are inalienable and non-negotiable.

Yet in another sense, it’s odd that people should feel so shocked by Depardieu’s decision. After all, in escaping from a messy, expensive democracy to a cheaper and simpler autocracy, the actor is only doing what thousands of Western multinational corporations do every day by moving their factories to China, and their management to the United Arab Emirates.

For example, when it invests in China, a company like Apple can reap all the benefits of totalitarianism — streamlined governance, low wages and no labor unrest — at the same time as it opts out of the abuses, restrictions and indignities faced by ordinary Chinese people.

Depardieu has done the same thing. In Russia, he can benefit from the double standards the country affords members of the pro-government elite vis-à-vis the general public. Due to his personal friendship with President Vladimir Putin, Depardieu will benefit from the country’s low taxation and other perks of dealing with a democratically unaccountable system, such as having his citizenship fast-tracked by presidential decree while ordinary people have to wait years to get their passports.

Such ability to opt in or out at will is a defining feature of neoliberalism, as is the persistent race to the bottom in terms of the prices countries and people are willing to charge to attract investment. Democracy and human rights are not cheap: So it’s not surprising that countries like Russia and China enjoy an advantage over their Western competitors.

Some of Depardieu’s critics on the French left have characterized his behavior as motivated by greed. Such reactions are not dissimilar to those widely applied to Wall Street bankers in the wake of the financial meltdown. Both explanations, however, conflate symptom with cause.

As the political philosopher Michael Sandel suggests in his latest book “What Money Can’t Buy,” “we are moving toward a society in which everything is up for sale.” It is a world in which “the logic of buying and selling no longer applies to material goods alone,” but “increasingly governs the whole of life.” This includes both citizenship and labor rights.

Thus it is markets, rather than human greed or even Depardieu's stomach, that have expanded beyond all boundaries, creating a kind of commercial panopticon. As long as more and more previously un-commodified things — such as citizenship in a tax haven or labor rights in a totalitarian country — come up for grabs, it is difficult to blame a man, or a company, with the means to acquire them for doing exactly that.

Vadim Nikitin is a freelance journalist and blogger based in London.

AGENCE GLOBAL

January 8, 2013

Unemployment Rises to New High in Euro Zone *By MELISSA EDDY and [DAVID JOLLY](#)*

BERLIN — Unemployment in the euro zone rose to a new high in November, according to data released Tuesday that also showed that the troubles in the 17-nation currency bloc were straining its strongest member, [Germany](#).

The euro zone jobless rate rose to 11.8 percent in November from 11.7 percent in October, according to Eurostat, the statistical agency of the [European Union](#). Eurostat estimated that 18.8 million people in the euro zone were unemployed in November, two million more than a year earlier.

Germany has provided momentum to the European economy over the past three years, as strong exports protected the country from the crisis.

But on Tuesday, the Federal Statistics Office in Berlin said that German exports declined 3.4 percent while imports slid 3.7 percent in November from a month earlier. The weakness narrowed Germany's trade surplus to €14.6 billion, or \$19 billion.

German factory orders also fell in November amid weak demand from outside the euro area, the Economy Ministry said Tuesday. Orders, adjusted for seasonal swings and inflation, slid 1.8 percent from October, when they jumped 3.8 percent.

“The November numbers are not a one-off but an extension of the current trend of weakening exports,” Carsten Brzeski, an economist at ING, wrote in a research note Tuesday. He pointed out that German exports had fallen about 4 percent since May.

“Today's data confirmed our view that exports should have turned from driver of growth into drag on growth,” he wrote.

A separate report from Eurostat showed that retail sales fell 2.6 percent in November from a year earlier, though they gained 0.1 percent from October.

The gloomy reports come as the Governing Council of the [European Central Bank](#) prepares to hold a policy meeting Thursday, followed by an interest-rate announcement. Despite a sharp decline in bank lending [reported](#) last week, which had some analysts suggesting that the central bank might try new steps to stimulate the economy, economists surveyed by Reuters said they expected the E.C.B. to leave policy unchanged in January as it waited for a clearer picture of economic conditions.

Like their counterparts in the United States, Japan and Britain, the monetary authorities in the euro zone have already opened the spigots, allowing banks to borrow essentially as much as they want at the benchmark rate. [Mario Draghi](#), president of the E.C.B., has pledged to do whatever is necessary to ensure the stability of the euro, including, if needed, buying the sovereign bonds of Spain and Italy to hold their borrowing costs to sustainable levels.

The president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, said Monday in Lisbon that “the existential threat against the euro has essentially been overcome.”

“In 2013 the question won't be if the euro will, or will not, implode,” he said.

The central bank's actions have succeeded in calming markets and driving down government bond yields for embattled countries. The European Commission reported Tuesday that an index of economic sentiment in the

euro zone had improved by 1.3 points in December, to 87. “Economic sentiment in the euro area improved among consumers and across all sectors, except retail trade,” the commission reported.

Gilles Moëc, an economist at Deutsche Bank in London, said the data Tuesday were consistent with expectations that the euro zone economy would remain in recession through the winter, with the unemployment rate possibly rising to as high as 12.4 percent.

“We’re still far below the level of growth that would stabilize the labor market,” he said.

But he added that the commission’s report on economic sentiments, as well as recent surveys of purchasing managers, suggested that the downturn in the manufacturing sector had “bottomed out,” making possible a return to growth later in the year.

“External demand seems to be holding up better than we had thought,” Mr. Moëc said. “Now we are to a large extent dependent on what happens in the United States,” he added, referring to the negotiations on spending.

Europe also got a vote of confidence from Tokyo on Tuesday, as Finance Minister Taro Aso said Japan would buy bonds of the European Stability Mechanism, the euro zone bailout fund, as well as sovereign debt in the currency zone.

“The financial stability of Europe will help the stability of foreign exchange rates, including the yen,” Mr. Aso was quoted by the Nikkei newspaper as saying.

Attacking joblessness may require governments to ease back on austerity measures that many economists, including some at the [International Monetary Fund](#), say might have gone too far. In [France](#), President [François Hollande](#) has [vowed](#) to turn around the flagging labor market, where, according to Eurostat, unemployment was 10.5 percent in November.

Eurostat said Spain, which is suffering from the collapse of a real estate bubble and the impact of a raft of tough austerity measures, had the highest unemployment rate in the bloc, at 26.6 percent. Greece, where the [sovereign debt crisis](#) began, was next at 26 percent, according to data released in September. The lowest rates were in Austria, at 4.5 percent; Luxembourg, at 5.1 percent; and Germany, at 5.4 percent.

Worryingly, youth unemployment in the euro zone continued to grow, with 5.8 million people under age 25 classified as jobless in November, up 420,000 from a year earlier.

The Greek prime minister, Antonis Samaras, who was in Berlin for talks with Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) on Tuesday, singled out youth unemployment as one of the biggest challenges Greece faces in reviving its economy. But he said at a news conference before meeting the chancellor that, over all, he was positive.

“I see the glass half-full,” Mr. Samaras said before taking part in an economic conference in Berlin. “We’re delivering and Europe’s helping.”

It was the Greek prime minister’s second trip to Berlin since taking office. The mood appeared lighter than during his visit in August, which came on the heels of calls from within Ms. Merkel’s government for Greece to leave the common currency.

Greece is focusing its efforts on winning back the trust of Europeans, as well as the markets, Mr. Samaras said. But he emphasized that high unemployment, especially among young people, weighed heavily on Greeks.

“I would like to make it clear up front that our country is making enormous efforts and many are paying a high price, in order to get things back on track,” Mr. Samaras said.

Ms. Merkel said that Greece’s European partners must continue to support the country. She was perhaps wary of the fragility of Mr. Samaras’s three-party coalition government, which has been pushing through deeply unpopular reforms.

“We also must do everything to guarantee economic growth, security and jobs,” Ms. Merkel said.

Opposition in Berlin

Cyprus Bailout Could Fail in German Parliament

The urgently needed bailout of the Cypriot banking industry is in danger of being vetoed by the German parliament. The opposition Social Democrats say they are leaning towards voting no, according to a media report. With Chancellor Merkel unable to rely on her own majority, that could be bad news for Cyprus and for the euro.

Optimism has been in no short supply in the euro zone in recent weeks. Before the new year, both European Commissioner Olli Rehn and notoriously circumspect German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble said they [believed that the worst of the euro crisis had passed](#). European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso joined the chorus late last week.

But for crisis late-comer Cyprus, the worst is almost surely still to come. Even more concerning for the Mediterranean island nation, Germany's opposition Social Democrats (SPD) now say they are considering voting against a badly needed aid package for the country. And the Green Party is skeptical too. With Chancellor Angela Merkel no longer able to rely on her own parliamentary majority to push through euro-zone bailout packages, help for Cyprus may not be forthcoming.

"As things currently stand, I can't imagine German taxpayers bailing out Cypriot banks, whose business model depends on abetting tax fraud," SPD head Sigmar Gabriel told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in comments published Wednesday. "If Ms. Merkel wants SPD support for a Cyprus aid package, she will have to have excellent arguments. At the moment, however, I don't see what those might be."

The SPD is not alone in its concern over the planned aid package for Cyprus. [Other euro-zone capitals and many in Brussels are likewise wary of propping up the banking industry there due to its having become a favorite destination for money from Russian oligarchs](#). The country is widely seen as a tax haven.

'Not Russian Oligarchs'

Marcus Ferber, a leading German conservative in the European parliament, told the *Süddeutsche* that he too is skeptical. He is demanding a guarantee "that we are helping the citizens of Cyprus and not Russian oligarchs."

The Cypriot banking industry has run into recent trouble in part due to the huge quantities of Greek debt on its books. It is also much too large for Nicosia to bail out on its own; banks in Cyprus hold assets worth some €150 billion (\$196 billion) against a Cypriot gross domestic product of just €18 billion in 2011. Currently under discussion is a €17.5 billion (\$23 billion) package which, relative to the country's GDP, would be the euro zone's largest yet.

Euro-zone finance ministers are now set to approve the emergency aid on Feb. 10 following a delay in late December over demands from the International Monetary Fund that the package be [accompanied by a debt haircut](#). Merkel has said that she will not move forward with aid for Cyprus without IMF participation. The delay meant that [Cyprus was forced](#) to borrow €250 million from the pension funds of state-owned companies to remain solvent into early 2013.

Changing the Subject

Even if euro-zone finance ministers do approve an aid package for Cyprus in February, the German parliament must sign off on it. Yet with elections in Germany looming this autumn, the Social Democrats have become less willing to follow Merkel's euro strategy. **Furthermore, widespread concerns surrounding massive Cypriot bank deposits from Russian oligarchs as well as accusations that the country doesn't do enough to combat money laundering would seem to provide the SPD with an attractive opportunity to finally detach itself from Merkel's crisis management strategy.**

Furthermore, it would allow SPD chancellor candidate Peer Steinbrück to distract attention from his [growing collection of gaffes](#) following a rocky start to his candidacy.

Though Merkel has a parliamentary majority, the number of conservatives who regularly dissent on euro-zone aid package votes has grown throughout 2012. Were the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party (which votes against aid on principle) to all dissent on aid for Cyprus, Merkel's majority would be in serious danger.

As would the Cypriot economy.

Euro-Crisis Hope

Confidence in European Banks Is Returning

By [Stefan Kaiser](#)

There is cause for hope in southern Europe. New numbers indicate that trust is returning to banks located in countries that have been hit hardest by the euro crisis, a trend triggered by ECB head Mario Draghi. But even as discrepancies in the Continent's Target2 payment system shrink, danger still lurks.

The turning point came almost exactly four months ago. On Sept. 6, 2012, 22 men gathered on the 36th floor of the European Central Bank building in Frankfurt to reach a momentous decision on the Continent's common currency. The euro, said ECB President Mario Draghi at the press conference following the meeting, is "irreversible." To save it, he added, his bank would undertake unlimited purchases of sovereign bonds should it become necessary.

Since then, an amazing thing has happened. Although the ECB has yet to embark on any such bond shopping sprees, countries such as Italy and Spain, at risk of being engulfed by the crisis, no longer have to pay the horrendous interest rates they did in the middle of 2012. Furthermore, the massive imbalances that have recently plagued the European banking system have shrunk, if only slightly.

As recently as the summer of 2012, investors and those with savings accounts in crisis-stricken countries were moving their money out as quickly as they could. Billions of euros were withdrawn from accounts in Greece and Spain and banks in stable countries such as Germany put a cap on the amount of money they were willing to lend business partners in countries hit hardest by the euro crisis.

But since last autumn, this trend has come to a stop. Indeed, the most recent numbers indicate that a slight reversal is underway, with ECB statistics showing that deposits in Spanish and Greek banks have recently ticked upwards. Furthermore, Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank, reported this week that imbalances in Europe's so-called Target2 settlement system, in which euro-zone central banks and the ECB transfer money across the common currency union, have declined. As the euro crisis progressed, the system had become massively imbalanced, which could result in massive losses for countries such as Germany should Greece, for example, be forced to exit the euro zone.

Cause for Hope?

Just prior to the ECB's massive intervention on the bond markets in August, 2012, the Bundesbank had Target2 claims worth €751 billion (\$981 billion). But by the end of December, they had sunk to €656 billion. The imbalance is still dramatic, but the trend reversal provides cause for hope, particularly because it is mirrored by falling debts at the other end of the transfer system. Taken together, the combined Target2 debts owed by Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Ireland shrank from €989 billion at the end of August, 2012 to €902 billion at the end of October. More current data is unavailable.

When the Target2 system is healthy, accounts balance out and the discrepancies, such as they are, tend to be close to zero. And that is how things actually looked until 2007. But as the crisis took hold, the balances of those euro-zone countries suffering the most under the crisis began to drift apart from those, like Germany, that remained largely untouched, a phenomenon first noticed by German economist Hans-Werner Sinn.

The imbalances were the direct result of both savers and investors pulling their money out of the euro-zone's crisis-stricken member states. Furthermore, because banks in the better-off countries of northern Europe were increasingly skeptical about doing business with their southern European cousins, financial institutions in Greece, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere became increasingly dependent on money borrowed from the central banks in their home countries. Such credits show up in the Target2 balance -- and are also reflected in the claims held by central banks in stable members of the common currency area.

Crisis Not Yet Overcome

The reversal of the dangerous trend has many breathing a sigh of relief. "Trust is returning," says an investment banker at a bank in Germany. "Spanish banks are once again receiving investor money." Nevertheless, the trader noted, most financial institutions in crisis-stricken countries remain cut off from the interbank lending market. "Such business is still being conducted via the ECB."

Even Draghi's biggest critics are not denying that the ECB president's plan to buy unlimited amounts of sovereign bonds is largely responsible for the improvements. The announcement "calmed the markets and initiated the trend reversal," **economist Sinn, who is president of the Ifo Institute in Munich**, told SPIEGEL ONLINE. "Fresh liquidity with affordable interest rates is flowing to southern Europe. That reduces the Target2 imbalances."

Nevertheless, Sinn is not prepared to count the phenomenon as an ECB success story. On the contrary: "The markets have been calmed because new ways have been found to make taxpayers in those European countries that are still healthy liable," Sinn says. He is not just referring to the bond purchases that could be undertaken by the ECB -- purchases that taxpayers are ultimately liable for. Rather, he is also referring to new rules allowing the crisis backstop fund, the European Stability Mechanism, to provide aid directly to banks.

"The debt crisis is eating its way ever further into the budgets of Europe's core countries," he says. "But policymakers are celebrating the obfuscation of this fact as a success."

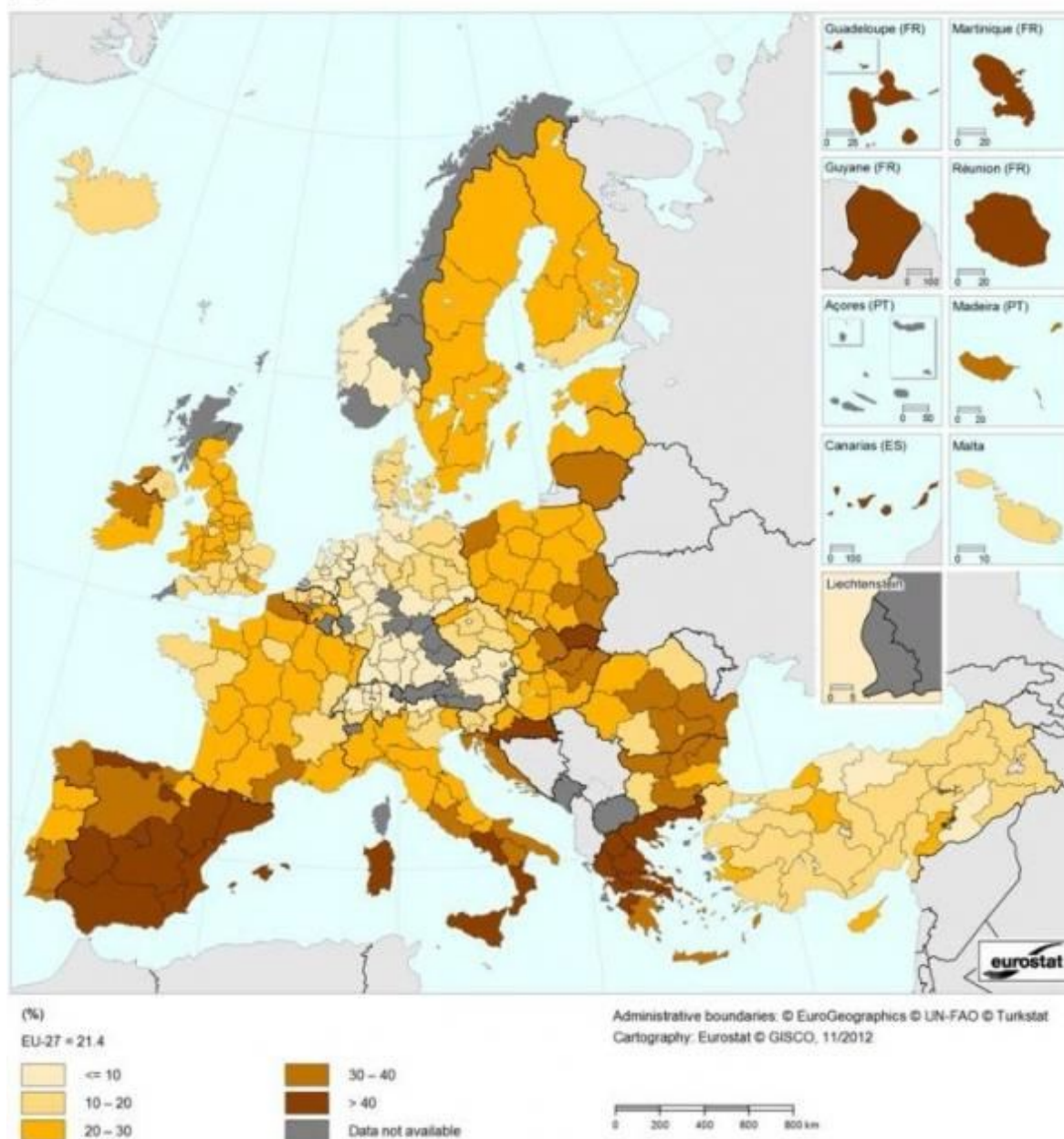
In other words, Sinn does not believe that the crisis has yet been overcome. The risks have merely been shifted.

Europe's Scariest Heatmap

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 01/09/2013 08:39 -0500

Readers already know that when it comes to Europe, the scariest chart, from a political, economic, financial and social perspective, is that showing youth unemployment - youth, which engaged in idle, non-productive activity is a *powder keg for both future economic instability and social upheaval*. The monthly update is presented below. This time, we are happy to also present the "scariest heatmap" that goes with it, showing the geographic breakdown of unemployment in the critical 15-24 age groups. **Those looking for geopolitical hotspots in the coming months and years, look no further than the dark shaded areas.**

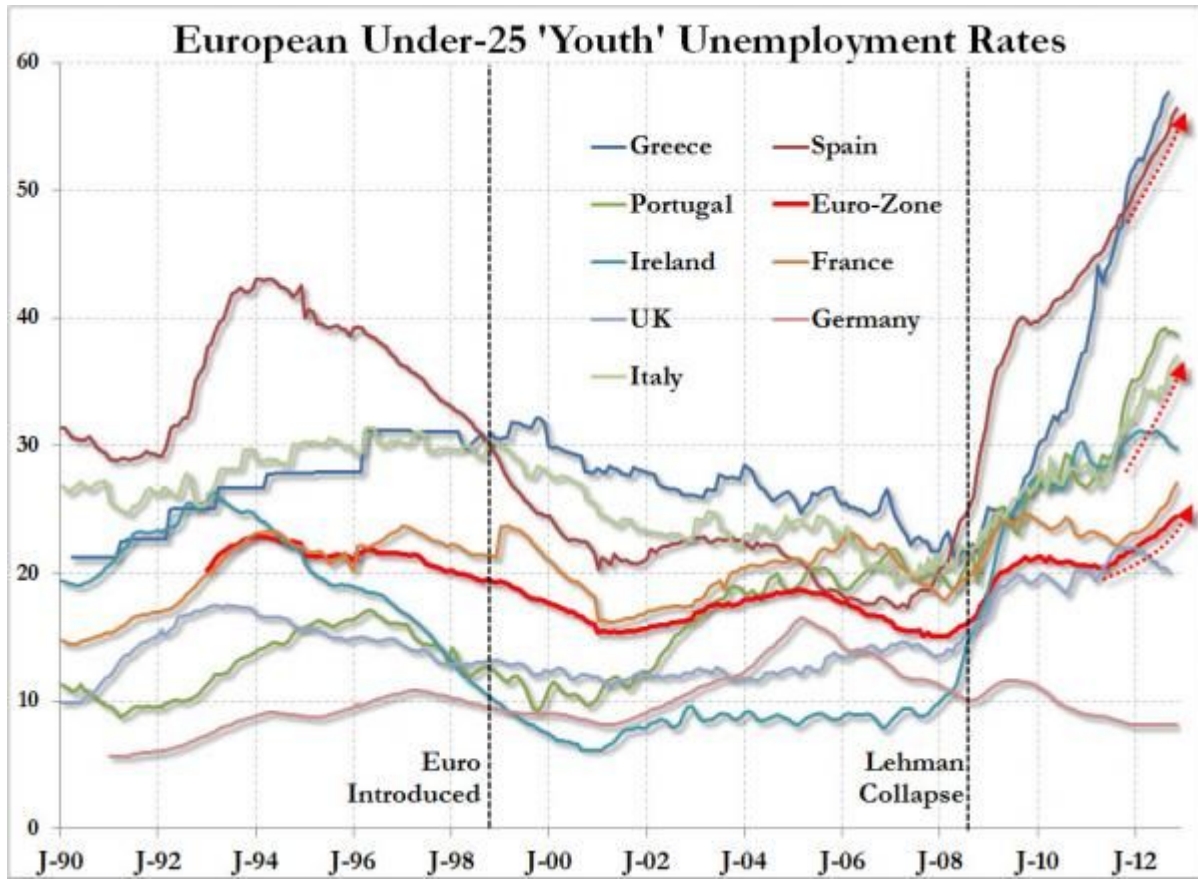
Map 3: Youth unemployment rate, persons aged 15 to 24 years, by NUTS 2 regions, 2011 (%)



Source: Eurostat (online data code [fst_r_lfu3rt](#))

Europe's youth unemployment rate pushed higher once again to a record-breaking 24.4% - where Greece was in Dec 2008. What is crushingly awful is the 57.6% youth unemployment in Greece and 56.5% in Spain

that leaves a social fire burning in the belly of the nations. **Italy also saw a major move to record highs above 37% youth unemployment** and France is now above 27% also... recovery?

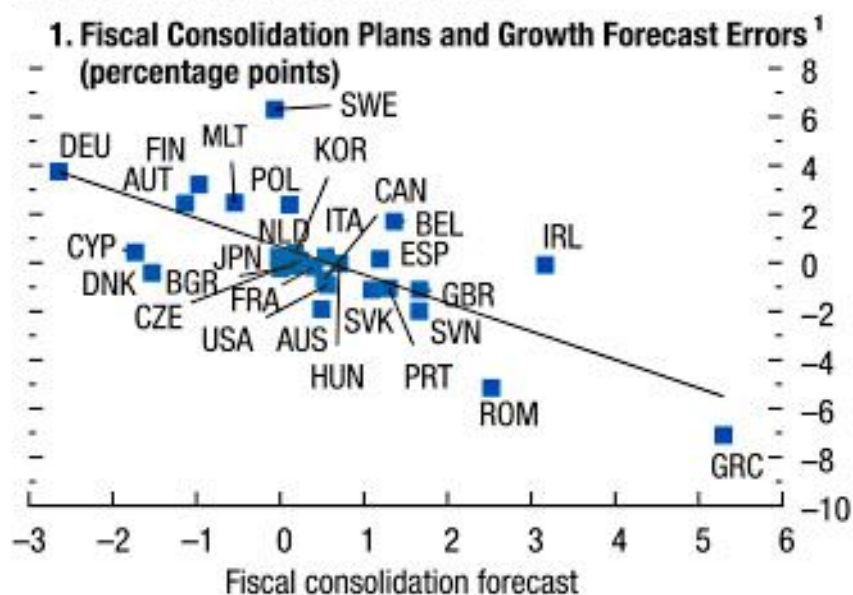


IMF Austerity Mea Culpa?

Author: [Barry Ritholtz](#) · January 7th, 2013 · [Comments \(3\)](#) Share This Print 41 10

Figure 1.1.1. Growth Forecast Errors and Fiscal Consolidation Plans

Activity over the past few years has disappointed more in economies with more aggressive fiscal consolidation plans, suggesting that fiscal multipliers used in making growth forecasts have been systematically too low. This relationship holds for different components of GDP, the unemployment rate, and forecasts made by different institutions.



A number of folks are looking at the latest IMF paper ([here](#)) as a startling admission of the failure of Austerity:

“Consider it a mea culpa submerged in a deep pool of calculus and regression analysis: The International Monetary Fund’s top economist today acknowledged that the fund blew its forecasts for Greece and other European economies because it did not fully understand how government austerity efforts would undermine economic growth.

The [new and highly technical paper](#) looks again at the issue of fiscal multipliers – the impact that a rise or fall in government spending or tax collection has on a country’s economic output . . .”

The math is quite simple: Simultaneously choke off government spending and raise taxes, and you crimp the economy reduce job creation and hurt tax revenues — creating an even bigger deficit.

To fix a chronic deficit, you need to make the economy grow faster . . .

The ECB Is Not Infallible

Author: [Ivo Arnold](#) · December 31st, 2012 · [Comments \(2\)](#) Share This Print 29 0

For the ECB, 2012 ended on a high note. Mario Draghi was proclaimed person of the year by the Financial Times, and at the December summit the ECB was given the final say on euro area banking supervision. Amid a general collapse in confidence in banks, politicians and national supervisors, all hopes are now directed towards the ECB, as the new beefed-up guardian of the financial system. In this environment, it is easy to forget that the ECB has always had a responsibility for the stability of the financial system and that her track record in this area is not impressive.

The case for moving towards a banking union, starting with the Single Supervisory Mechanism, is strong. The euro has led to a huge increase in systemic risk. The combination of a single currency, free capital flows and low interest rates created a macro-economic environment conducive to bubbles in housing and bond markets. In the process, banks and sovereigns became more intertwined while the option to address domestic problems with a national central bank had gone. This is how an Irish banking problem or a Greek fiscal problem infected the euro area as a whole.

Since her inception, the ECB is tasked with contributing to the smooth conduct of policies relating to prudential supervision and the stability of the financial system (TEU, article 127.5). Based on this mandate, the ECB has published a Financial Stability Review (FSR) since 2004. In the first FSR Jean Claude Trichet lists three steps to gain insight into financial stability:

“The first entails forming an assessment of the individual and collective robustness of the institutions, markets and infrastructures that make up the financial system. The second involves an identification of the main sources of risk and vulnerability that could pose challenges for financial system stability in the future. The third and final step is an appraisal of the ability of the financial system to cope with crisis, should these risks materialise.” (FSR, December 2004)

This quote shows that the ECB early on saw it as her duty to identify systemic risks, even though the term “macro-prudential” was not yet in vogue and the European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB) had not yet been established.

Now that all hope is pinned on the ECB as the European supervisor, it is quite legitimate to ask how the ECB has acquitted herself from her financial stability task in the past. The bi-annual FSRs are an obvious place to look for an answer. If the ECB detected faults in the design of the monetary union, worried about German capital flows to bubbling Spain or the exposures of the financial system to sovereign debt, we should have read it in this publication.

Without pretending a full analysis of the FSRs, two observations stand out from reading the FSRs which were published before the crisis:

- 1) When the FSRs identify macro-economic imbalances, in almost all cases these relate to the global imbalances between China and the US. Similarly, mentions of current account problems refer to the US. Internal imbalances in the euro area get little timely attention.
- 2) The FSRs take a “holistic” view of the euro area, implicitly assuming a homogeneous internal economy. Most tables and graphs present aggregated euro area data. You will not find data on German bank loans to Spain or on the exposure of Greek banks to their sovereign. Before the crisis the FSRs thus provided little insight into the intertwining of sovereign and banking risks, which proved to be a crucial risk factor.

In short, prior to the crisis the FSRs assumed internal stability and focused on global risks, mostly originating from the US. My interpretation of this blind spot is that the ECB – as the guardian of monetary unity – suffered

from cognitive dissonance. The internal economic divergences just didn't fit in with the ECB's preferred view of the euro area.

A blind belief in unity which is not there has probably been more dangerous to the euro than an early recognition of the economic differences between member states would have been. At present, the ECB is much more aware of the role of internal macro-economic imbalances and the sovereign-bank nexus in the euro crisis. To successfully fulfill her expanded supervisory responsibility the ECB needs to continue shedding her holistic view of the euro area and establish a supervisory culture in which differences between individual member states are recognized and addressed earlier and more forcefully than in the past.

In the euro area, it's pretty much going to suck for awhile

Lisa Pollack | Jan 09 12:48 | [16 comments](#) | [Share](#)

Shortly after the new year, the **Economics Research team over at Goldman Sachs** published their outlook for growth in the euro area. Frankly, it doesn't look all that hopeful, especially in the periphery (surprise!). We hope you weren't holding out for something better than the growth rates associated with a "muddle through" strategy...

But hey, at least it's several rungs higher on the ladder of economic happiness than the collapse of the currency union, eh?

Expectations suitably dampened, you're probably ready to look at this table:

Exhibit 1: We forecast modest Euro area growth to mid-decade
Real GDP growth, % yoy

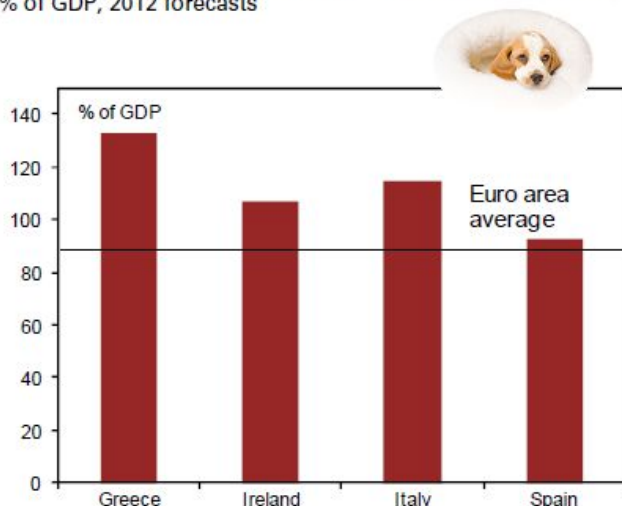
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Euro area	1.5	-0.4	-0.2	0.9	1.3	1.5
Germany	3.1	1.0	0.8	1.9	2.1	2.2
France	1.7	0.1	0.0	0.6	1.2	1.5
Italy	0.6	-2.0	-0.8	0.6	0.9	1.2
Spain	0.4	-1.3	-1.7	-0.2	1.0	1.8
UK	0.9	0.1	1.4	2.0	2.3	2.6

Source: GS Global ECS Research

Goldman Sachs is forecasting that by 2016, the euro area might get back to where it was in 2011.

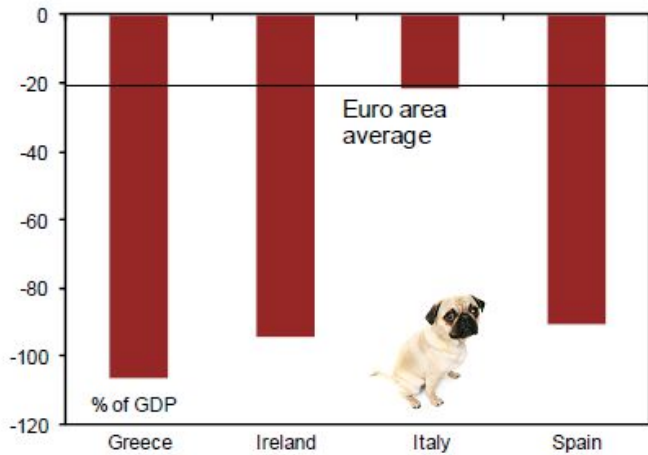
Huw Pill and team like to divide up woes into a "stock problem" of the periphery's debt overhangs, and a "flow problem" of ongoing deficits. These are best illustrated in further depressing, but well-labelled, charts (to which we may have added some puppies):

Exhibit 2: Large public debt overhangs in Italy and Greece
% of GDP, 2012 forecasts



Source: Haver Analytics, GS Global ECS Research

Exhibit 3: External debt overhang in Spain, Greece and Ireland
 Net international investment position, % of GDP, 2012 fcsts



Source: Haver Analytics, GS Global ECS Research

From the team at Goldman, a summary of what you already knew, plus bonus slap in the face:

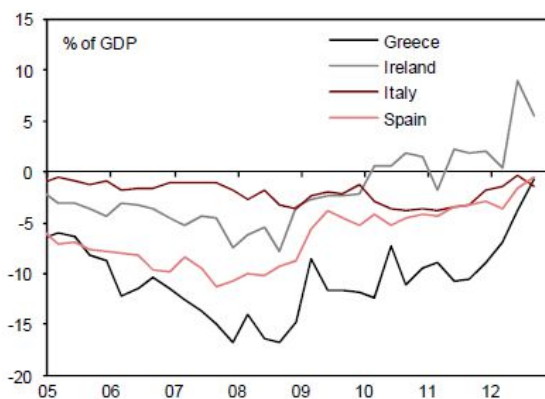
The stock problem, as reflected in the periphery's debt overhangs. The inheritance of prior excessive borrowing in the Euro area periphery is a large stock of outstanding debt. In some countries (Greece, Italy), the accumulated debt stems from poor fiscal discipline; in others (Spain, Ireland) it has its origin in excessive (bubble-driven) borrowing by the private sector (as interest rates fell at the inception of monetary union). Either way, the peripheral economies have become unbalanced and lost competitiveness. And **these legacy problems cannot simply be wished away**: if debt overhangs – be they fiscal (Exhibit 2), external (Exhibit 3) or private – are not to weigh on growth prospects indefinitely, debt stocks must be credibly reduced over time.

Next up, flow:

The flow problem. In some cases, these debt stocks are augmented by ongoing deficits. While peripheral current account deficits on the balance of payments have narrowed significantly over recent years (Exhibit 4), fiscal deficits remain large in several countries (notably Spain and Ireland), at least in headline terms (Exhibit 5). Moreover, looking forward, if the mistakes of the past are not to be repeated, the Euro area needs to develop a credible mechanism for containing the future fiscal and macroeconomic imbalances that are reflected in government and external deficits. Here building the right incentives to promote the necessary fiscal and financial discipline is crucial.

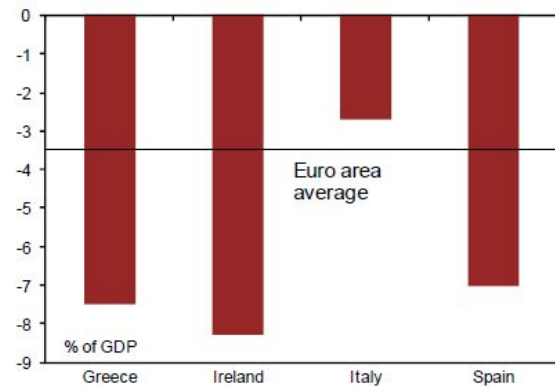
With charts:

Exhibit 4: Peripheral current account deficits narrowing
 % of GDP



Source: Haver Analytics, GS Global ECS Research

Exhibit 5: But peripheral fiscal deficits remain large
General government deficit, 2012 forecast, % of GDP



Source: IMF Fiscal Monitor, GS Global ECS Research

Enough with the doom-mongering. They are actually hopeful that it can come good (eventually). Roll-out the catch-phrase, boys!

We continue to have confidence that the Euro area will prove able to address these challenges and survive its current travails essentially intact. The political will is there, and the economic interests of the participating parties are well-aligned. In other words, in the face of any pressure from financial markets, the European authorities will (in the words of ECB President Draghi) do “**whatever it takes**” to sustain the Euro.

Although frankly, when *Belgium* is held out as an example of how austerity and growth can be successfully balanced, we aren't all that encouraged (sorry, Belgium):

All this leads to the danger that peripheral economies can be caught in a debt trap. Unable to reduce debt through austerity and yet unable to grow owing to accumulated debt overhangs, these countries cannot escape from their debt burden through any feasible combination of austerity and growth, let alone a choice of one rather than the other.

While there are examples of countries (e.g., Belgium) that have effected significant debt reductions in the past through a combination of austerity and growth, such considerations inevitably shift attention to the other three adjustment mechanisms [inflation, debt restructuring, and mutualisation] listed above.

It all feels very knock-us-down:

But with greater stability having been created by the ECB's summer announcement of new non-standard policy measures, it is nonetheless important to look beyond the next year to the potential shape of the 'new Europe' that must be created to provide a lasting workable Euro area. In this note, we have sketched out elements of what that new regime may embody while recognising that considerable uncertainties and risks remain.

Bring-us-up:

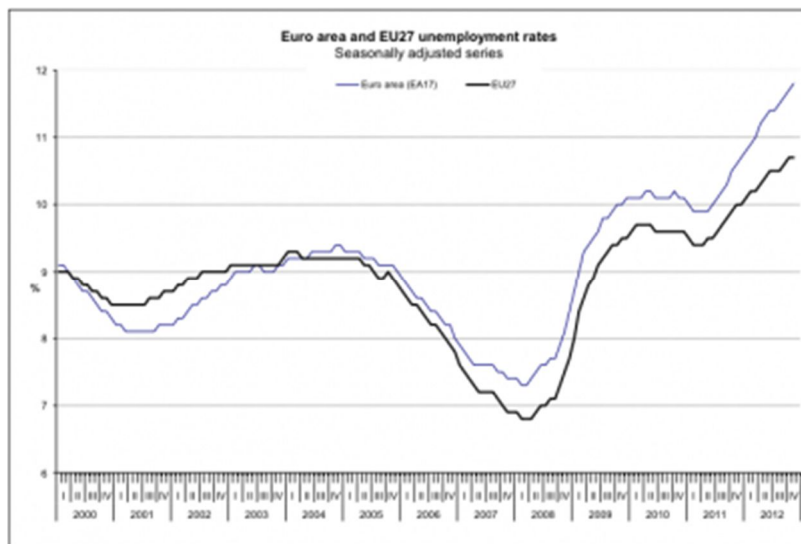
The Euro area continues to face significant challenges. In our view, these challenges are unlikely to be overcome in the next 12 months, given their magnitude and (especially) the electoral timetable in Germany and Italy. Our forecast for 2013 therefore assumes continued 'muddling through' the Euro area turmoil, rather than achievement of the convincing resolution that would restore confidence and growth. **As a result, the Euro crisis is set to evolve from acute to chronic.**

Motion sickness tablets. Do they do those for economists?

More miserable jobs numbers for Europe

Paul Murphy | Jan 08 10:55 | [17 comments](#) | [Share](#)

You really do wonder how long this trend can be allowed to continue. From [Eurostat on Tuesday...](#)



In terms of headline numbers, unemployment edged up to 11.8 per cent across the euro area in November, up from 11.7 per cent in October and 10.6 per cent a year earlier. But look at the figures for youth unemployment:

In November 2012, 5.799 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU27, of whom 3.733 million were in the euro area. Compared with November 2011, youth unemployment rose by 329 000 in the EU27 and by 420 000 in the euro area. In November 2012, the youth unemployment rate was 23.7% in the EU27 and 24.4% in the euro area, compared with 22.2% and 21.6% respectively in November 2011. In November 2012 the lowest rates were observed in Germany (8.1%), Austria (9.0%) and the Netherlands (9.7%), and the highest in Greece (57.6% in September 2012) and Spain (56.5%).

Here's the country breakdown:



This entry was posted by [Paul Murphy](#) on Tuesday January 8th, 2013 10:55. Tagged with [Europe](#), [Eurozone](#), [Unemployment](#).

Happy 2013? 64,127

Charles Wyplosz

Professor of International Economics, Graduate Institute, Geneva; Director, International Centre for Money and Banking Studies; CEPR Research Fellow

4 January 2013

Financial market quiescence has removed pressure for immediate policy action on the Eurozone crisis. **This column argues that while important repairs were made in 2012, the most difficult ones still lie ahead. Much remains to be done by unwilling politicians. Things will have to get worse before they get better. The best hope is that this happens in 2013 rather than in 2014.**

The situation of the Eurozone is now becoming clearer. This article lists ten observations and draws five consequences. The bottom line is that, even though some important steps were taken in 2012, the most difficult ones still lie ahead. Much remains to be done by unwilling politicians. So, regrettably, things will have to get worse before they get better. Maybe 2013 will be the year of bottoming up.

This crisis should never have been allowed to happen

It was predictable. Policy responses were initially easy. What was not as predictable was how policymakers would make a mess of it. Economists too bear a fair share of responsibility as they indulged in total disharmony, with many of us floating irresponsible propositions backed by deeply confused analyses. As time is passing by, the Darwinian process of separating out bad from good analyses is taking hold and things become clearer. Hopefully the following ten observations are less controversial in 2013 than in previous years.

- As long known by elementary textbook readers, austerity policies have contractionary effects.

More sophisticated economists know of non-Keynesian effects, but they also know the exacting conditions under which these effects occur. They are certainly not expected in the midst of a sharp downturn partly provoked by bank deleveraging.

- Debt reduction is a very long process; we're talking about decades, not about the next Troika review.

Whether it starts in 2011 or in 2016 makes no material difference for that process, but it matters a great deal for the macroeconomy.

- The debt-to-GDP ratio is best reduced through sustained nominal GDP growth.

Inflation may seem to be the easiest solution, but it is not. Japan has shown how a lame central bank can be unable to extract the country from a deflation trap. A more active central bank can 'do things' but public bonds are no longer what they used to be: in a globalised world, promise two decades of moderate inflation and you get another sovereign debt crisis on your hands. Besides, having been there, no one really wants to unleash inflation anymore. **That leaves us with real GDP growth as a necessary condition for bringing the debt-to-GDP down painlessly.**

- **In a better world, we would have a fiscal union whereby the famed benevolent dictator would both coordinate national fiscal policies to achieve a good Eurozone policy mix and organise transfers from the countries that achieve their lowest unemployment rates in a decade to those where social suffering is acute.**

But in today's world voters are angry at everything that is called Europe and will not back a fiscal union. And, by the way, we do not have benevolent dictators either.

- The crisis has delivered a surprising degree of wage flexibility and labour mobility.

This means that the need for dissolving the euro back into national currencies at almost any cost has evaporated.

- **The long-hoped-for awakening of the ECB has produced several miracles, especially a major relaxation of market anguish.**

The predictable result, unfortunately, is that politicians too have relaxed. They now are ever less willing to face reality.

- In most Eurozone countries, structural reforms are as needed now as they were before the crisis.

There are hopes that the crisis is somehow – i.e. through external pressure – making it less impossible to carry them out. But progress has been limited and, crucially, the results take a very long time to materialise.

- **Banks are at the heart of a diabolic loop: bank holdings of their national public debts (Brunnermeier et al., 2011).**

As these debts lose market value, banks suffer losses. If the banks fail, governments must borrow to rescue them. But national banks are the only remaining private buyers of public debts. Over 2012, national public debts have been alarmingly concentrating in their respective banks.

- Massive forbearance has allowed many banks to not fully account for the losses that they incurred in 2007-8.

For that reason, they deleverage, which leads to a credit crunch, which slows growth down. As the recession spreads and deepens, bank loan quality is quickly deteriorating. This second diabolic loop links banks and the real economy.

- The ECB is the lender of last resort both to banks and to governments.

This involves massive moral hazard. Moral hazard can be sharply reduced with appropriate institutional measures (Wyplosz, 2006).

The policy implications

If these observations are agreeable, what are the policy implications? We all draw different lessons from the same observations, unfortunately. Here are mine.

- Sustained real growth should be the number one priority.

In the longer run, structural reforms will produce their magic effects, but we must also worry of the short run, and we have run out of instruments. **Like the other central banks, the ECB has reached the limit of macroeconomic effectiveness. A few basis points off the policy interest rate are not commensurable with the depth of the recession.**

- **Austerity policies must stop, now.**

However, this does not mean that expansionary fiscal policies are possible. Countries that have lost market access cannot borrow their way out unless official lenders are willing to help out. As more countries lose market access, official lending can only be provided by a dwindling number of countries, many of which are already highly indebted. Germany is a case in point. So we cannot expect fiscal policies to turn expansionary, especially in countries where the recession is deepest.

- Growth will not return unless bank lending is adequately available.

For that to happen, the banks must be extracted from the two diabolic loops described above: (1) they must stop lending to their own governments, and (2) they must be shut down if they are unable to raise the capital needed for them to lend to the private sector. But their governments may not have the resources to carry out resolution.

- **The ECB may act as lender in last resort to banks and governments, but who will bear the residual costs?**

The ESM is much too small for the task ahead and there is little chance that the better-off countries will agree *ex ante* to bear huge and unpredictable costs.

This all means that we have hit a wall of contradicting needs – barring an export miracle, something will have to give.

- The only remaining option is public debt restructuring, a purging of the legacy.

This will lead to bank failures. This means that debt reductions must be deep enough to make it possible for governments to then borrow, to shift to expansionary fiscal policies and to bail out the banks that they destroyed in the first place, in effect undoing the diabolic loop.

Who will lend? Even the best-crafted bank restructuring will not allow an immediate recovery of market access. The ECB is the only institution in the world that can help out. That means massive losses on its balance sheet and therefore negative capital, which is not an economic problem but a potentially severe political one.

Conclusions

There is no easy option for the Eurozone after three years of deep mismanagement. Governments will not accept drastic action unless forced to. This means that we need another round of crisis worsening. Since every day that passes by is a day of misery and since the eventual costs are rising as public debts keep growing, the best that we can hope for is that it happens in 2013 rather than in 2014.

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US warns Britain against leaving European Union

Intervention from senior US official comes as UK position on EU membership is criticised in Brussels and Dublin

- [Julian Borger](#) and [Ian Traynor](#)
- [guardian.co.uk](#), Wednesday 9 January 2013 18.55 GMT
- [Jump to comments \(282\)](#)



David Cameron's stated strategy on securing a looser UK-EU relationship to be laid out in a major speech within weeks.
Photograph: Kerim Okten/EPA

The US has issued a blunt warning to the UK not to leave the [European Union](#), saying Britain would undermine its influence in Washington by trying to renegotiate membership.

The forthright American intervention in the European debate, from a senior US official, came on a day [David Cameron's](#) campaign to reset the terms of Britain's EU membership also came under concerted assault from Brussels and Dublin, with senior figures warning the prime minister against renegotiating the European treaties to secure a new deal and signalling bluntly that this was not on the agenda.

"We have a growing relationship with the EU as an institution, which has an increasing voice in the world, and we want to see a strong British voice in that EU," Philip Gordon, the US assistant secretary of state for [Europe](#), said on a visit to London "That is in America's interests. We welcome an outward-looking EU with Britain in it."

Gordon stressed that it was up to the UK define its own interests, but in what appeared a clear reference to the government's proposal to renegotiate membership and repatriate some powers from Brussels, he stressed that an inward-looking EU, preoccupied with its own internal procedures would be seen as a lesser ally by Washington.

"Every hour at a summit spent debating the institutional make-up of the European Union is one hour less spent on how to deal with the common issues of jobs, growth and international peace around the world," he said, in remarks first reported by the Financial Times.

Meanwhile, at an event in Dublin marking Ireland's assumption of the EU's six-month rotating presidency, [Enda Kenny](#), the Irish prime minister, described the prospect of Britain quitting the EU as a "disaster", while [Herman Van Rompuy](#), the president of the European council, called on the UK to remain an "active, full, and leading" member of the union.

It has been US position for several years that it regards close British engagement in Europe as being in American interests. But Gordon's remarks – delivered on a day he met David Lidington, the Europe minister, and shortly before David Cameron is due to deliver a landmark speech setting out his plan to renegotiate Britain's ties with the EU – appeared to be a clear message to the government that the "special relationship" would be devalued in the eyes of the Obama administration if Britain left the EU, or got bogged down in drawn-out negotiations on the details of its membership.

Cameron's stated strategy on securing a looser UK-EU relationship, to be laid out in a major speech within weeks, hinges on 27 governments reopening the EU's Lisbon treaty, enabling Britain to push changes "repatriating" powers from Brussels to London.

Senior Irish politicians said other European governments were privately urging Cameron to desist. Van Rompuy said EU governments could not agree on what they wanted to change in the treaty, so the prospect of a renegotiation was remote.

"At this stage of the debate we don't need as much treaty change as people think," said Van Rompuy. "For those ideas for where treaty change is needed there is simply no consensus. So the possibility of having treaty changes in the next future or present are not very high."

He added that he would wait to hear what Cameron said in his keenly awaited speech on Britain in Europe, although there is much confusion in EU capitals about when and where the prime minister will deliver a speech that has been given a high billing for months.

Kenny warned that the EU's "floodgates" would be opened if the Lisbon treaty was revisited to suit an individual country.

"We would see it as being disastrous were a country like Britain to leave the union. Clearly the British government will form their own view."

The Irish see British membership as a vital national interest for themselves because of the close economic and financial ties as well as a common history. Senior government figures in Dublin appeared thoroughly bemused as to what Downing Street actually hopes to achieve.

Cameron has repeatedly stated in recent weeks that other European leaders want to re-open the Lisbon treaty because of the euro currency crisis and to engineer a closer fiscal and political union at least among the 17 countries sharing the currency.

In fact, the other EU leaders are seeking to avoid treaty change since it could result in years of gruelling negotiations and open a Pandora's box of competing claims.

"Britain is a highly appreciated, highly valued and very important member of the EU. I believe it is in British interests to stay not only a member of the EU but a very active and full member, a leading nation in the EU. Of course it is for the British people to decide on their future," said Van Rompuy.

Finanzkrise

Spanien steht vor der nächsten Rentenreform

10.01.2013 · Kaum ist das Pensionsalter auf 67 Jahre erhöht worden, scheinen weitere Einschnitte unausweichlich. Denn auf jeden Rentner kommen in dem Land nicht einmal mehr zwei Erwerbstätige.

Von [Leo Wieland](#), Madrid



© Eilmes, Wolfgang Eine wachsende Gruppe: Rentner im Zentrum Barcelonas

Zum 1. Januar ist in Spanien die Zapatero-Rentenreform in Kraft getreten, die das Pensionsalter stufenweise bis zum Jahr 2027 von 65 auf 67 Jahre erhöhen soll - und schon ist sie reformbedürftig. Denn die Kassen der Sozialversicherung sind leer und der demographische Ausblick für das Land - immer mehr Rentner, praktisch „Nullwachstum“ bei Geburten - ist besorgniserregend. Die Arbeitslosigkeit, die nach fünf Jahren Wirtschaftskrise gegenwärtig bei 26 Prozent (sogar 50 Prozent bei Jugendlichen unter 25 Jahren) liegt, belastet das hoch verschuldete und unverändert mit seinem Budgetdefizit kämpfende Spanien. In diesem Jahr könnte bei der Erwerbslosigkeit noch die Sechs-Millionen-Grenze erreicht werden. In dieser prekären Lage hat die konservative Regierung unter Ministerpräsident Mariano Rajoy sogar schon mehrfach in das nationale „Sparschwein“ der Rentner gegriffen: den Reservefonds der Sozialversicherung.

Die Europäische Kommission hat Spanien zuletzt im Dezember gewarnt, dass die Rentenreform, die noch im Jahr 2011 unter dem sozialistischen Ministerpräsidenten José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero verabschiedet wurde, nicht „nachhaltig“ genug sei und „beschleunigt“ werden müsse. Um die Sicherheit der Renten und die Stabilität der Staatsfinanzen zu garantieren, seien zusätzliche Maßnahmen nötig. Rajoy hat die Mahnung gehört und seine Wirtschaftsmannschaft angewiesen, möglichst noch in diesem Monat erste konkrete Vorschläge zu machen.

Jährliche Rentenerhöhung wird ausgesetzt

Zuvor hatte er noch im alten Jahr sein letztes Wahlversprechen gebrochen, nämlich die Renten nicht anzutasten. Er entschied, die in Spanien bislang übliche und mit der Inflationsrate gekoppelte jährliche Erhöhung auszusetzen. Stattdessen erhöhen sich 2013 Renten über 1000 Euro im Monat nun nur um ein Prozent und die darunterliegenden um 2 Prozent. Die sozialistische Opposition hat dagegen zusammen mit den Gewerkschaften heftig protestiert und sogar Einspruch beim Verfassungsgericht eingelegt. Es gilt jedoch als unwahrscheinlich, dass die Richter diese finanzielle Notmaßnahme für verfassungswidrig erklären werden.

Die Krise hat im vorigen Jahr nicht nur ein geschätztes Loch von rund 10 Milliarden Euro in die Rentenkasse geschlagen. Sie hat auch nach den letzten Zahlen vom Dezember die spanischen Beitragszahler von 19,5 Millionen im Jahr 2008 auf nunmehr noch 16,3 Millionen dezimiert. Weil inzwischen - bei einer Gesamtbevölkerung von 46 Millionen - 8,1 Millionen pensioniert sind, hat sich das Missverhältnis noch verschärft: Jetzt arbeiten nur noch 1,9 Spanier für einen Rentner.

Anbrechen der Reservefonds

Hatte die Sozialversicherung in den Jahren vor dem Platzen der „Baublase“, der doppelten Rezession und der Finanzierungsschwierigkeiten des Staates noch Überschüsse im zweistelligen Milliardenbereich, wurde daraus inzwischen ein kräftiges jährliches Defizit. Zum ersten Mal klemmte es im vorigen Juli, als die Regierung beschloss, zur Zahlung der Renten und, wie Rajoys Stellvertreterin Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría damals etwas nebulös sagte, „für eine Reihe von Bedürfnissen“ des Finanzministeriums 4,5 Milliarden Euro aus einem staatlichen Reservefonds für Krankenversicherungen und Arbeitsunfälle abzuziehen. Doch das sollte nicht reichen. Im September kündigte die Regierung an, dass sie zum ersten Mal 3 Milliarden Euro aus dem Rentenreservefonds entnehmen werde. Und damit sie das Weihnachtsgeld für die Rentner - sie erhalten 14 Zahlungen im Jahr - aufbringen konnte, musste sie im November noch einmal mit 3,5 Milliarden Euro zugreifen. Weil beides zusammen das gesetzliche Limit von 4 Milliarden Euro je Jahr überstieg, wurde kurzerhand das Gesetz geändert.

Spaniens Arbeitsministerin Fátima Báñez versuchte, die Bürger zu beruhigen. Sie sagte, das System sei „sicher“ und der Reservefonds sei schließlich gerade „in wirtschaftlich schwierigen Zeiten“ dazu da, benutzt zu werden. Noch waren in dem Topf nach offiziellen Angaben vom November etwa 66 Milliarden, von denen in diesem Jahr vermutlich wieder einiges abgezogen werden wird. Was in- und ausländische Fachleute indes zusätzlich bedenklich stimmt, ist, dass inzwischen 99 Prozent der Fondsmittel - 2008 war es nur etwa die Hälfte - in spanischen Staatsanleihen angelegt ist. Seit Spaniens Bonität von internationalen Ratingagenturen aber empfindlich auf eine Note über Ramschniveau herabgestuft wurde, ist fraglich geworden, ob dies noch den eigenen Stabilitätskriterien entspricht, wonach die Anlagen „hohe Kreditqualität“ verlangen.

Frühpensionierungen stoppen

Dies alles erhöht für Rajoy nun den Reformdruck bei den drei kritischen Punkten: Rentenalter, Berechnungsgrundlage (gerade von 15 auf 25 Jahre erhöht) und automatische Anpassung an die Inflation. Die Durchschnittsrente, die gegenwärtig auf 836 Euro im Monat beziffert wird, ist mittelfristig ohne Wirtschaftswachstum nur schwer und langfristig ohne längere Lebensarbeitszeiten gar nicht zu halten. Und bei dem Griff in das „Sparschwein“, das im Jahr 2000 geschaffen wurde, ist ebenfalls Vorsicht angezeigt.

Als ersten Schritt wird Rajoy wohl versuchen, den in Spanien verbreiteten Frühpensionierungen - sie sind in jüngster Zeit vor allem im sozialistisch regierten Andalusien Ursache für Korruptionsskandale und politische Vetternwirtschaft gewesen - einen stärkeren Riegel vorzuschieben. Im Parlament wird er sich dabei auf die noch solide anmutende eigene absolute Mehrheit stützen müssen. Denn die Opposition und die Gewerkschaften dürften harten Widerstand leisten, obwohl auch sie nicht ignorieren können, dass Spanien auf dem Weg ist, eines der „ältesten“ Länder der Welt zu werden. Im Jahr 2050, so die Hochrechnung, werden vier von zehn Spaniern über 60 Jahre alt sein.

L'UE presse Cameron de changer de ton

Par [Jean-Jacques Mevel](#) Mis à jour le 09/01/2013 à 21:27 | publié le 09/01/2013 à 19:38 [Réactions](#) (14)



David Cameron quitte le 10 Downing Street, le 9 janvier. Officiellement, le premier ministre britannique souhaite le maintien de son pays dans l'UE. Crédits photo : JUSTIN TALLIS/AFP

Le «nouveau contrat» avec l'Europe réclamé par Londres inquiète les responsables de l'Union et les milieux d'affaires.

L'Europe s'est déchirée deux ans pour finalement garder la Grèce dans le club, elle ne tient pas à sombrer dans une incertitude encore plus dévastatrice sur le statut du [Royaume-Uni](#). À l'approche d'un discours décisif de [David Cameron](#) sur le «nouveau contrat» qu'il entend arracher à l'UE, ses partenaires l'invitent publiquement à revoir ses ambitions en baisse.

François Hollande et Angela Merkel avaient déjà indiqué que l'Europe est un engagement qui ne se vit pas à la carte. C'est désormais au tour d'interlocuteurs proches et d'ordinaire plus consensuels de monter en ligne contre le premier ministre conservateur.

L'Irlande souhaite clairement le maintien du Royaume-Uni, parce qu'il «s'agit d'un acteur essentiel» et que sa mise à l'écart «serait désastreuse pour toute l'UE», dit le premier ministre Enda Kenny. Mais il ajoute: «Je ne vois pas de raison de modifier les traités européens en faveur d'un seul pays, dans un avenir proche.» Dans un décor dublinois encore hanté par les portraits des «vice-rois» jadis dépêchés par la Couronne, le ministre des Affaires étrangères Eamon Gilmore enchaîne: une Europe fondée sur 26 ou 27 contrats différents «ne pourrait tout simplement pas fonctionner».

«Une incertitude nuisible»

Même son de cloche pour le président du Conseil européen, venu inaugurer mercredi la présidence irlandaise de l'Union. «À ce stade, il n'existe aucun consensus pour modifier les traités, assène Herman Van Rompuy. Le Royaume-Uni aurait au contraire d'excellentes raisons de vouloir rester un élément moteur dans l'UE.» De bonne source, la chancellerie allemande vient de faire parvenir un message similaire au 10, Downing Street.

La contre-offensive surgit aussi de quartiers moins convenus. Les milieux d'affaires britanniques, jusqu'ici réservés, sortent du bois, mettant en balance le risque pour l'emploi quand l'UE absorbe plus de la moitié des exportations. Dans une lettre au Financial Times, dix grands patrons dont Richard Branson (Virgin), Chris

Gibson-Smith (London Stock Exchange) et Jan du Plessis (Rio Tinto) craignent de voir se «créer une incertitude nuisible, qui est la dernière chose que peut souhaiter le premier ministre».

L'Administration Obama elle-même entre dans le jeu. Les États-Unis ont toujours considéré le Royaume-Uni comme une passerelle essentielle vers l'UE, ils redoutent aujourd'hui que les états d'âme britanniques replongent le continent dans une crise sans fin. Mercredi, un haut responsable du département d'État a fait le voyage de Londres pour faire connaître à des éditorialistes triés sur le volet l'agacement que suscitent outre-Atlantique les gesticulations de David Cameron.

Euroscepticisme

Officiellement, le premier ministre britannique souhaite le maintien dans l'UE. Mais son insistance à «rapatrier des compétences» dans l'île, voire à renégocier l'adhésion de 1973 pour se soustraire à l'intégration accélérée promise par Berlin et Paris, suscite plus qu'un sérieux doute. L'euroscepticisme croissant de son électorat et la montée en audience du parti europhobe UKIP conduisent aussi les responsables européens à se demander si le chef conservateur contrôle encore la dynamique qu'il a initiée.

Côté européen, les dirigeants semblent désormais à peu près unanimes pour refuser le changement de traité qu'impliquerait la réécriture du contrat britannique. Bref, après avoir fait miroiter du jamais-vu à ses électeurs, David Cameron pourrait n'offrir que le rapatriement de compétences pour lesquelles Londres jouit déjà d'exemptions (justice, police, Schengen et bien sûr l'euro).

Derrière un affichage de principe, le continent apparaît divisé. L'idée d'un rééquilibrage des pouvoirs entre Bruxelles et les capitales continue de séduire des alliés traditionnels de Londres - tels la Suède, les Pays-Bas ou le Danemark. La question pourrait se retrouver sur la table après les élections européennes de 2014. L'Allemagne et la France, quant à elles, sont loin d'un accord parfait sur la question britannique. Angela Merkel ne fait plus mystère de sa volonté de garder Londres à bord afin de contrebalancer Paris, quand c'est nécessaire. François Hollande, lui, reste ambigu. Au dernier sommet, c'est le premier ministre italien Mario Monti qui a vendu la mèche: certains, disait-il, auraient le cœur léger si le Royaume-Uni quittait l'UE et «des Français sont parmi ceux-là».

January 9, 2013

At Once Catholic and Secular, France Debates Gay Marriage

By [STEVEN ERLANGER](#)

PARIS — Frigide Barjot has made a career of mocking the establishment of [France](#), dressing in fluorescent pink sweaters, playing in a band called the Dead Pompitous and hosting a philosophy soirée at which she handed out T-shirts with the logo, “Kierkegaard is my homeboy.”

But Ms. Barjot, born Virginie Merle 50 years ago, has also rediscovered her religious roots, writing a book called “Confessions of a Trendy Catholic.” And she has become one of the main actors and voices in France’s fierce debate over gay marriage, adoption rights and state financing for procreation assistance. It is a debate as sincere and confused, in a way, as Ms. Barjot’s own involvement.

Despite her love of mockery and her support for the rights of gay couples, she is strongly opposed to gay marriage, and especially to the part of a proposed law that would allow married gay couples to adopt children and be recognized as their parents. On Sunday, she will help lead a large demonstration called “La Manif Pour Tous,” or a demonstration for everyone, a follow-up to an initial protest in November.

Legalizing gay marriage — “marriage for all” — was a campaign promise by President François Hollande, a Socialist, but it has proved tricky and divisive in France, which is a secular republic but remains an essentially Roman Catholic country where few go to church. He promised to enact it within a year of taking office last May, and his draft bill will go before Parliament for debate by the end of this month.

[Same-sex marriages](#) are now performed in about a dozen countries and at least 9 of the 50 states in America, while it is constitutionally banned in others. But gay marriage was not a big issue in the 2012 presidential campaign, and there are a number of cases about its legality before the Supreme Court.

In France, religious leaders have become deeply involved, arguing that the government should be cautious before redefining the institution of marriage and legal “parenthood.” The chief rabbi of France, Gilles Bernheim, has cautioned about toying with the idea that gender has become “a social role that we choose for ourselves,” instead of “a given element of nature that man has to accept.”

Pope Benedict XVI cited Rabbi Bernheim in a Christmas address opposing gay marriage, saying that it was wrong for people “to deny their nature and decide it is not something previously given to them, but that they make themselves.” He drew a parallel between those who deplore “the manipulation of nature” where “our environment is concerned,” but sanction it as “man’s fundamental choice where he himself is concerned.”

The intervention of religious leaders in opposition, including Muslims, has caused something of an uproar, especially among supporters of the Socialist government. The minister in charge of education, Vincent Peillon, has even warned parochial schools against having debates in classrooms about the merits of gay marriage and adoption, citing a threat to French secularism, bringing charges of Catholic-bashing.

“To make a child, you need a man and a woman,” Ms. Barjot said. For a gay couple to become the legal parents of a child “is totally contrary to reality,” she said.

She is quite happy for gay couples to have official status and legal protections. “The problem is not homosexuality, but human filiation,” she argues — a child’s need to have legal affiliation and access to its biological parents.

Mr. Hollande and his government say that they were elected on a clear platform and will pass the “marriage for all” law, and that the legislature, not the street, will decide.

A careful political tactician, however, Mr. Hollande has said he wants to keep separate from the marriage law the demand of some Socialist legislators that the government also legalize access to state-financed help for married lesbian couples seeking to bear children. On this issue, Mr. Hollande describes himself as not having strong views, which means that he does not favor the idea.

Former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a conservative, spoke for the ambivalence of France when he said he supported giving gay couples the legal rights of heterosexual couples, but reserving the term "marriage" for heterosexuals. A name like "civil union" has been suggested by some; others think that a strengthening of the legal rights under current laws would be sufficient.

There exists a form of civil union called a *pacte civil de solidarité*, or PACS. When passed in 1999 it was intended for gay couples, but as a halfway house to marriage it has been used predominantly by heterosexuals. It could, some suggest, be extended to have the full rights of marriage.

The opposition center-right party, the Union for a Popular Movement, is divided about whether to attend the demonstration. Like Ms. Barjot, many in the party favor a national referendum on the issue, which is highly unlikely. Even Marine Le Pen and the far-right National Front are of two minds — opposing the law but divided on whether to take part on Sunday, with Ms. Le Pen against participation but allowing members to do so.

Gay marriage "is a hot issue and defines identity for a lot of people," said Dominique Moïsi, a French political analyst. "In moral terms, there is a kind of precautionary principle for some — let's not go too fast or too far or be too radical."

France remains a Latin country, he said, and "there is a sense that when the church says: 'Let's not go too quickly. This is fashionable now and trendy, but aren't we breaking a longstanding taboo that has meaning?' a lot of people agree."

As for children, he said, "there is a difference between the life you protect and the one you create." A gay couple adopting an abandoned child is fine, many think. "But to create life for them is maybe going a bit too far," he said.

Armand Laferrère has just written a book, "The Liberty of Men," about the politics of the Bible. He is a gay Protestant, and he has problems with the law. "The real issue is about what it is to be a parent, not about marriage," he said.

Most French people agree that gay couples should have legal rights, he said. "But what's at stake is that the law gives arbitrary power to the state to decide who is a parent and who is not," he said. "That is a deep problem for the identity of the child, which should not be for the state to decide." Helping to raise a child as a couple "is different than claiming legal parentage," he added.

Many Muslims also oppose the law. Camel Bechikh, 38, runs *Fils de France*, a Muslim group that affirms French identity and is participating in the demonstration. Like others, he fears the law will produce more "communitarianism," with special-interest demands that will undermine the unity of the French republic.

Nicolas Gougain, a spokesman for the Inter-LGBT, a federation of many gay groups, said the law was certain to pass; the question is its parameters. "We're ready to debate the content," he said, arguing that the debate over artificial insemination is outdated. "Homosexual parenting is already here," he said.

The importance of the law, he said, is that it "recognizes and protects all families." In two years, he said, "it's going to seem surreal that we had this whole debate."

Scott Sayare contributed reporting.

January 9, 2013

A Step Backward in Bank Regulations

A committee of central bankers and regulators from more than two dozen countries, including the United States, has disappointingly given in to lobbying by big banks and [watered down important rules](#) meant to strengthen the global financial system. [The change](#) will let banks include risky financial instruments like corporate bonds and mortgage-backed securities as part of their liquid asset reserves, which are meant to cover up to 30 days of cash outflows during crises. And the banks have until 2019, not 2015, to comply fully with the easier standards. Each nation will decide when and how to implement the rules.

The committee unanimously rolled back the so-called Basel III rules that were adopted in 2010 to make them “more realistic,” said Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England. The banks argued that requiring them to hold most of their liquid reserves as cash and government securities would restrict their ability to lend to small businesses and consumers because they would have less money to lend.

The problem is that the new assets defined as liquid are precisely those that banks found difficult to value and trade in 2008. Relying on them to provide liquidity during a crisis is a recipe for disaster, said Anat Admati, a professor of finance and economics at Stanford University.

But the banks want to be allowed to hold more such assets because they are more profitable than cash or government bonds, like 10-year Treasury notes, which were yielding just 1.86 percent a year on Wednesday. Big banks also know that in a crisis they would likely receive emergency loans and capital from central banks and their governments, so why tie up their reserves with assets that provide only modest returns?

Coming four years after the failure of Lehman Brothers, the dilution of liquidity standards suggests that banks are again dictating policy in ways that will put the world at greater risk of another crisis. Policy makers in Washington and other capitals need to ask banking regulators to hold the line on the very limited progress made so far.

January 9, 2013

A Frenchman Dreams of Russia

By ROBERT ZARETSKY

RETURNING home from a visit to Russia in 1774, the *philosophe* Denis Diderot wrote that in France, he could not “help but think that I’ve the soul of a slave in a country where men are called free,” whereas in Russia he “had the soul of a free man in a country where men are called slaves.”

Has Gérard Depardieu had similar thoughts of late?

On Sunday, President Vladimir V. Putin [welcomed](#) the French actor to Russia with a newly issued Russian passport. Mr. Depardieu, outraged by the French Socialist government’s proposed 75 percent wealth tax, had walked out on his country. A fan of Russia’s low taxes, he also praised its “great democracy”: “I love your country, Russia — its people, its history, its writers. I love your culture, your intelligence.” Mr. Putin’s increasing authoritarianism went unmentioned.

In the centuries since French celebrities began washing up on its shores, Russia has used them to affirm itself as a center of European culture, as well as to poke its finger in the eye of Western nations. Russia has always needed its Depardieus, just as much as they needed Russia.

Diderot’s reasons for visiting were not terribly different from Mr. Depardieu’s. Catherine the Great had repeatedly expressed her desire to meet the celebrated *philosophe*. In an age of enlightened despotism, when kings made a show of seeking the guidance of philosophers on how best to rule, such an invitation was hard to ignore. This was certainly the case for Diderot, editor of the *Encyclopédie*, whose entry on government affirmed that the laws of nature and reason must guide rulers in bettering the lot of the people, for whom the greatest good is liberty. (That famous line attributed to Diderot — about the last king being strangled by the entrails of the last priest — did not make the great work.)

The more pressing motivation, however, was financial: Diderot was broke. Catherine thus took the extraordinary step of buying Diderot’s personal library, leaving it in his possession until his death and paying him a salary as librarian. In return, in 1773, Diderot went to St. Petersburg, where he enjoyed long tête-à-têtes with Catherine, whom he described as embodying the charms of Cleopatra and the soul of Caesar.

Catherine was thrilled to boast of Diderot’s friendship, and their conversations left some lasting marks — the bruises on Catherine’s legs, for example, when the excited *philosophe* grasped them tightly to make a point — but the empress had little patience with his idealism. “If I had followed his advice,” she said of her visiting Frenchman, “everything would have been turned upside down in my kingdom.”

La mission civilisatrice — France’s civilizing mission — was nevertheless started in Russia, and furthered by a wave of French celebrity émigrés fleeing the very event for which thinkers like Diderot were held responsible: the revolution. Few countries seemed safer for French aristocrats than reactionary Russia.

Small wonder, then, that Joseph de Maistre, the dark genius of counterrevolutionary thought from Savoy, ended up taking a diplomatic posting in St. Petersburg. The city became the setting for his “St. Petersburg Dialogues,” which, in voluptuous French, offered a profoundly grim view of human nature. Man was violent and domineering; society needed a strong hand. Near the beginning, Maistre, gazing on a statue of Peter the Great, rhapsodized: “His terrible arm is still extended” over Russia. “Looking at him, one does not know whether this bronze hand protects or threatens.” The answer for Maistre, of course, was both, and he helped provide an intellectual justification for the dim brutality of the czarist state.

A new generation of French intellectuals and artists arrived after 1917, the revolution that grew out of 1789. The Surrealist Louis Aragon, who toured Russia in the 1930s, was just one who was dazzled by what he wanted

to see. He praised the science of the re-education of man unfolding in Stalin's gulag, while in his notorious poem "Red Front" he urged, in Lenin's name, the massacre of France's bourgeois political leaders.

Set alongside these remarks, Mr. Depardieu's sallies on Russian democracy are mostly silly. But they also have a history. From enlightened despotism through absolute autocracy to Soviet communism, Russia has been a screen against which France has projected its ideological or merely idiosyncratic dreams. That these dreams have proved nightmares for those who really lived them is, of course, beside the point for Russia's leaders.

One of Mr. Depardieu's best-known roles is as Georges Danton, the revolutionary leader consumed by the events he helped incite. As he is led to the guillotine, Danton tells his executioners, "Show my head to the people — it is worth seeing."

Considering the many photographs of Mr. Depardieu embracing the Russian leader this week, we can well imagine this is a sentiment Mr. Putin happily shares.

[Robert Zaretsky](#), a professor of French history at the University of Houston, is working on a book about Albert Camus.

2012 in Deutschland

Mehr Kohlestrom und Stromexport-Rekord

10.01.2013 · Energiewende paradox: Der Kohlestromanteil steigt. Und Deutschland exportiert - auch wegen immer mehr Wind- und Solarstrom - so viel Strom ins Ausland wie noch nie. Teilweise wird er sogar verschenkt.



© dapd Der Stromverbrauch sank in Deutschland im Jahr 2012 leicht um 1,4 %

Trotz des Ausbaus erneuerbarer Energien ist der Anteil des klimaschädlichen Kohlestroms in Deutschland im Jahr 2012 gestiegen. Der Braunkohleanteil am Strommix kletterte von 24,6 auf 25,6 Prozent, der von Steinkohle von 18,5 auf 19,1 Prozent. Dies teilte der Bundesverband der Energie- und Wasserwirtschaft (BDEW) am Donnerstag in Berlin mit.

Zugleich stieg aber auch der Ökostromanteil von 20,3 Prozent auf den neuen Rekordwert von 21,9 Prozent. Der Anteil von Atomkraft ging von 17,7 auf 16 Prozent zurück. Der Stromverbrauch sank leicht um 1,4 Prozent. Insgesamt wurde mehr Strom produziert als benötigt wurde. Mit rund 23 Milliarden Kilowattstunden wurde so viel Strom ins Ausland geleitet wie nie zuvor.

Teilweise wurde Strom verschenkt oder sogar noch draufbezahlt, um ihn aus dem deutschen Netz zu bekommen. Allerdings ist ein Teil des Exports auf physikalische Umwege zurückzuführen, er wird also nicht ins Ausland verkauft. Mangels Netzen sucht sich Windstrom aus dem Norden immer öfter den Umweg über Polen und Tschechien nach Bayern. Polen will daher sogenannte Phasenschieber einbauen, um den unerwünschten Stromdurchfluss aus Deutschland etwas zu drosseln.

Wind- und Solarstrom werden vorrangig eingespeist, daher kann etwa bei überraschend viel Wind zu viel Strom aus Kohle- oder Atomkraftwerken im deutschen Netz sein. Am 1. Weihnachtsfeiertag führte dies dazu, dass ausländische Abnehmer dafür bezahlt wurden, wenn sie deutschen Strom abnehmen. Besonders die Niederlande waren damals ein Nutznießer der deutschen Stromgeschenke.

„Ein komplexes Thema bedarf einer komplexen Steuerung“

Der Anstieg des Kohlestromanteils hängt besonders mit dem Preisverfall im europäischen Handel mit Verschmutzungsrechten zusammen, dadurch ist die Kohlestromproduktion höchst lukrativ. Während Bundesumweltminister Peter Altmaier (CDU) durch Markteingriffe den Preis für CO₂-Ausstoßrechte wieder steigern will, ist Bundeswirtschaftsminister Philipp Rösler (FDP) strikt dagegen.

BDEW-Hauptgeschäftsführerin Hildegard Müller betonte bei einer Pressekonferenz in Berlin, besonders Gaskraftwerke würden so aus dem Markt gedrängt. Zudem kritisierte sie die hohen Kosten für die Verbraucher beim Ausbau gerade der Solarenergie. „Die Energiewende darf nicht dazu führen, dass die Preise und die CO₂-Emissionen steigen“, betonte Müller. Sie forderte eine bessere Synchronisierung des Ökoenergie-Ausbaus mit dem Netzausbau und mehr Koordination. „Ein komplexes Thema bedarf einer komplexen Steuerung“, sagte Müller.

Germany tells Cameron: don't blackmail the EU

Merkel ally Gunther Krichbaum says referendum on membership may cause economic disaster for UK and paralyse Europe

- [Patrick Wintour](#), political editor
- [guardian.co.uk](#), Thursday 10 January 2013 14.51 GMT



David Cameron looks toward German chancellor Angela Merkel during an EU summit. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

One of Angela Merkel's closest allies has warned [David Cameron](#) not to try to blackmail the rest of [Europe](#). The prime minister was also told a UK referendum was a high-risk option that might paralyse Europe and end in economic disaster for Britain.

The chair of Germany's European affairs committee, Gunther Krichbaum, is leading a high-powered delegation from the German Bundestag on a two-day visit to Britain.

He said: "There is certainly a risk that [a referendum] could paralyse efforts for a better Europe and deeper integration. Britain would risk being isolated. That cannot be in Britain's interests."

Asked how Germany would respond to the UK's threat to block treaty changes designed to make the euro stronger if the UK is not granted the reforms it seeks, Krichbaum said: "You cannot create a political future if you are blackmailing other states. That will not help Britain. It needs a Europe that is stable. It needs markets that are functioning."

He also questioned whether Cameron would be able to control the terms of a referendum on renegotiated terms of membership.

"You have to ask yourself if it is wise to carry out a referendum. It is certainly possible to convince people of advantages of the EU. But there is always a risk that the referendum becomes – as Charles de Gaulle put it – less about the question asked and more about the person who's asking it."

He urged British Eurosceptics to think through the consequences of Britain leaving the EU, or adopting the same status as Switzerland or Norway.

"Some people claim that Switzerland is in a remarkable position. I highly doubt that: Switzerland needs the EU, but it cannot influence the political process within the EU. That is a big problem."

"If Britain loses the single market it would be a disaster for the British economy. If Britain left the EU, it would weaken the [European Union](#) and the idea of Europe, but it would also weaken the position of Britain vis-à-vis the EU and in the world."

Krichbaum is a senior member of Merkel's CDU party. His remarks come a day after the US assistant secretary of state for European affairs, Philip Gordon, [warned Cameron of the dangers of staging a referendum](#).

Gordon infuriated some British sceptics by saying a referendum might turn the EU inwards at a time when America wants an outward-looking EU with Britain in it.

Krichbaum also expressed fears that a British attempt to reopen its relationship with the EU at a time of a treaty negotiation sometime after 2015 would open a Pandora's box, with different demands being made by other EU member states.

Asked if Britain could reopen the Lisbon treaty, he replied: "That's first of all legally impossible because the treaties are done. But in the broader sense of negotiating a new treaty, it is neither wise nor useful to open Pandora's box, because every state in the EU, not just Britain, would again try to get their interests in."

He said he was convinced that although all EU member states need each other, Britain would suffer more from being outside the EU, than the rest of the EU would from Britain's absence.

He suggested Britain would need to renegotiate a series of bilateral trade deals to ensure its goods had access not just to EU, but to world markets.

Downing Street responded to the American intervention by insisting it wanted a change in the UK-EU relationship.

Cameron is due to make his landmark speech on Europe shortly, with growing signs that British business is becoming nervous that he is opening up a period of lengthy uncertainty that will damage Britain's trading relationship with the EU.

Krichbaum suggested the European economy was now strengthening after its crisis last summer, and suggested it may be necessary to pass treaty changes in two to three years' time to strengthen the euro.

"The crisis was not caused by 'too much Europe' but by 'too little Europe'. We had a common currency but we did not have a necessary common economic policy."

Other figures have suggested that the EU could strengthen its economic integration without resorting to treaty changes, a decision that would deprive Cameron of a negotiating wedge to demand changes in the UK relationship.

All treaty changes require unanimous support from member states, something Britain could withhold until it won its concessions.

America has 'no clue' about Europe, say Tories

The backlash over US intervention into the debate over Britain's EU membership has intensified as Conservative Euro-sceptics said Americans "haven't got a clue".



Prime Minister David Cameron with President Barack Obama Photo: Bloomberg



1:21PM GMT 10 Jan 2013

[The unusually direct comments by the Obama administration](#) provoked a furious backlash from Conservative Euro-sceptics who want to see the UK loosen its ties with the [EU](#).

Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister, seized on the warning as evidence that it was in Britain's interests to "stand tall" in Europe.

As Westminster eagerly awaits a landmark speech on the EU by [David Cameron](#), the US assistant secretary for European affairs Philip Gordon made clear Washington favoured a "strong British voice" in Brussels.

He also warned that referendums could turn countries "inward".

"We have a growing relationship with the EU as an institution, which has an increasing voice in the world, and we want to see a strong British voice in that EU," he told reporters during a visit to London.

"That is in America's interests. We welcome an outward-looking EU with Britain in it."

The Prime Minister is due to make a speech this month in which he will set out his plans to renegotiate Britain's relationship with the EU – including clawing back many powers – and put that settlement to voters.

Tory MP Bernard Jenkin said today that the US had not "got a clue".

"The Americans don't understand Europe. They have a default position that sometimes the United States of Europe is going to be the same as the United States of America. They haven't got a clue," he told BBC Radio Five Live.

Another eurosceptic Tory MP, Peter Bone, said Mr Gordon should "butt out" and that it was "nothing to do with the Americans".

He added: "It's like us trying to tell Germany or France how to run their affairs. It's quite ridiculous and it's not what you'd expect from a member of the senior executive in the USA, and I hope that the president will slap him down very quickly."

But Mr Clegg, in a phone-in on LBC radio, said that Mr Gordon's comments were "entirely unsurprising".

"Americans have been saying for generations, for ages, since the 1950s, that Britain and the special relationship between Britain and America – which is a really important one, it's one we've relied upon through thick and thin, through conflict and peace – is one that is partly based on the fact that we are valuable to our American friends, and frankly we are also important to people in Beijing and Tokyo, because we stand tall in our own neighbourhood.

"If you want to lead around the world, and this is a globalised environment we are walking in, the first thing you've got to do is be strong in your neck of the woods. I think that's the point they are making."

He added: "They are perfectly entitled to say, 'look, if you are interested in the American perspective, we think that Britain stands taller in the world if you stand tall in your own neck of the woods'."

A Number 10 spokesman said last night: "The US wants an outward-looking EU with Britain in it, and so do we."

Of all the bad arguments for being in the EU, the worst is to humour Barack Obama

By [Daniel Hannan](#) [Politics](#) Last updated: January 10th, 2013

Daniel Hannan is a writer and journalist, and has been Conservative MEP for South East England since 1999. He speaks French and Spanish and loves Europe, but believes that the European Union is making its constituent nations poorer, less democratic and less free.



Let's see how the Brits like being colonised...

Diplomats the world over tend to be the EU's biggest fans: the system, after all, was designed by and for people like them. The US State Department has been consistently Euro-integrationist since the 1950s, pouring resources into various European pressure groups that shared its aim. Back in those early days, its concern was to build up the Western alliance. The EEC was seen as a way of strengthening Nato and keeping countries out of the Soviet camp. We can argue about whether that rationale was valid even in the 1950s; it certainly hasn't been since 1989.

After the end of the Cold War, the Brussels élites started picking fights with what they called the world's *hyperpuissance*. They channelled funds to Hamas, declined to get tough with the ayatollahs in Teheran, declared their willingness in principle to sell weapons to China, refused to deal with the anti-Castro dissidents in Cuba, started building a satellite system with the Chinese to challenge American 'technological imperialism' (J Chirac), hectored the US about its failure to join various global technocracies and complained about domestic American policies, from cheap energy to the use of the death penalty. Most Americans, even some in the State Department, have started to grasp, Frankenstein-like, that the EU is turning against them. So now they want the most pro-American member state, namely the United Kingdom, to get stuck in and moderate these *anti-yanqui* tendencies. Would we mind [abandoning our democracy](#) so as to help them out?

Well, sorry chaps, but yes, we rather would mind. Of all the bad arguments for remaining in the EU, the single worst is that we should do so in order to humour Barack Obama, [the most anti-British president](#) for nearly 200 years. It's not even as if he reflects American opinion toward the EU. To treat Philip Gordon, or any other Foggy Bottom stripey-pants, as the authentic voice of the US on this issue would be like treating UKREP as the true voice of the UK.

Still, since he's decided to wade in, I have a question for Mr Gordon, and for other American Euro-enthusiasts. **When are you planning to pool your sovereignty with Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba?**

- EUROPE NEWS
- Updated January 10, 2013, 9:58 a.m. ET **64,147**

ECB's Draghi Says Challenges Remain

By [GEOFFREY T. SMITH](#)

European Central Bank President [Mario Draghi](#) warned against declaring a quick end to the euro zone's problems Thursday, saying that the economy wasn't out of the woods yet despite "considerable" progress in repairing a broken banking system.

In his opening remarks at the news conference following the monthly meeting of the ECB's Governing Council, Mr. Draghi appeared to keep a modest bias toward an easier monetary policy, saying that "the risks surrounding the outlook for the euro area remain on the downside" and adding that inflation will fall below 2% this year, from 2.2% at the end of 2012.



And in answer to journalists' questions, Mr. Draghi said that it was still too early to think about exiting from the ECB's extraordinarily easy policy, because the economy remains too weak.

The risks he highlighted included the possible failure of euro-zone governments to continue structural reforms to make their economies more competitive, and he warned against squandering the progress made last year.

But issues outside the euro zone, such as the U.S. "fiscal cliff" and the willingness of the new Japanese government to pursue a weaker yen, also still appeared to be weighing on minds at the ECB.

Mr. Draghi said "geopolitical issues and imbalances in major industrialized countries...have the potential to dampen sentiment for longer than currently assumed and delay further the recovery of private investment, employment and consumption."

He said that the euro's exchange rate "isn't a policy target" for the ECB and is currently in line with its long-term average, but admitted that "the exchange rate is certainly a very important element as far as growth and price stability are concerned," and reminded his audience of the public commitment by the Group of 20 industrialized and developing nations not to pursue competitive devaluations of their currencies.

At the same time, he hailed the "considerable" improvement in financial-market conditions in recent months that is reducing the "fragmentation" of the euro area, and indicated that this had played a role in reducing calls for further stimulus from within the Governing Council.

In contrast to December, when a number of the 23-strong council argued for a cut in official interest rates, the decision to leave them unchanged for a sixth successive month Thursday was unanimous, Mr. Draghi said.

The ECB's main refinancing rate will stay at 0.75%, while the deposit facility rate remains at 0% and the marginal lending facility rate at 1.5%.

"We would take away from Draghi's comments that the bar to another rate cut is higher than seemed to be the case last month," said Marc Chandler, global head of currency strategy at Brown Brothers Harriman in New York, in a note to clients. He said that the ECB could still cut rates again if the improvement in financial markets fails to feed through to the economy, but that no action would be likely before the second quarter of the year.

The ECB itself only expects a recovery in the latter half of the year and last month slashed its economic forecast for 2013 to a 0.3% contraction, from a forecast of 0.5% growth three months earlier.

"All in all, we have signs that fragmentation is being gradually repaired, but all in all this is not feeding through to the real economy yet," Mr. Draghi said. "The real economy continues to be what was diagnosed in our predictions a month ago."

Markets chose to concentrate on the more upbeat elements in Mr. Draghi's message, pushing the euro up a cent against the dollar to \$1.32, and pushing the single currency to its highest level against the yen in 18 months. In the bond markets, the prices of sovereign bonds perceived as riskier rose as money flowed out of safe retreats such as German debt.

The improvement in financial-market sentiment has accelerated since the start of the year, as investors have scaled back their expectations that the euro zone will disintegrate.

On Wednesday, Ireland launched a new five-year bond and promised to reintroduce monthly auctions of long-term debt soon, as it moves to exit its bailout program. And at an auction of 12-month bills earlier Thursday, Italy's one-year borrowing costs fell to their lowest in three years.

Mr. Draghi declined to say when and whether Ireland would start to qualify for support in the primary bond market from the ECB's still-unused program of Outright Monetary Transactions, under which the central bank has pledged to buy government bonds from euro-zone members that agree to fiscal scrutiny from the peers and the International Monetary Fund.

Conditions have also improved for banks, with Italy's [Intesa Sanpaolo SA](#) [ISP.MI +3.27%](#) earlier this week issuing the largest European bank bond in a year, and Spain's [Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria SA](#) [BBVA.MC -0.06%](#) also issuing a large new benchmark bond at the start of the year.

Such considerations appear to have outweighed any concerns the Governing Council may have had at its meeting about record unemployment across the euro zone, and about signs that even the strongest economies in the region were contracting at the end of 2012. Mr. Draghi repeated that "our mandate isn't full employment."