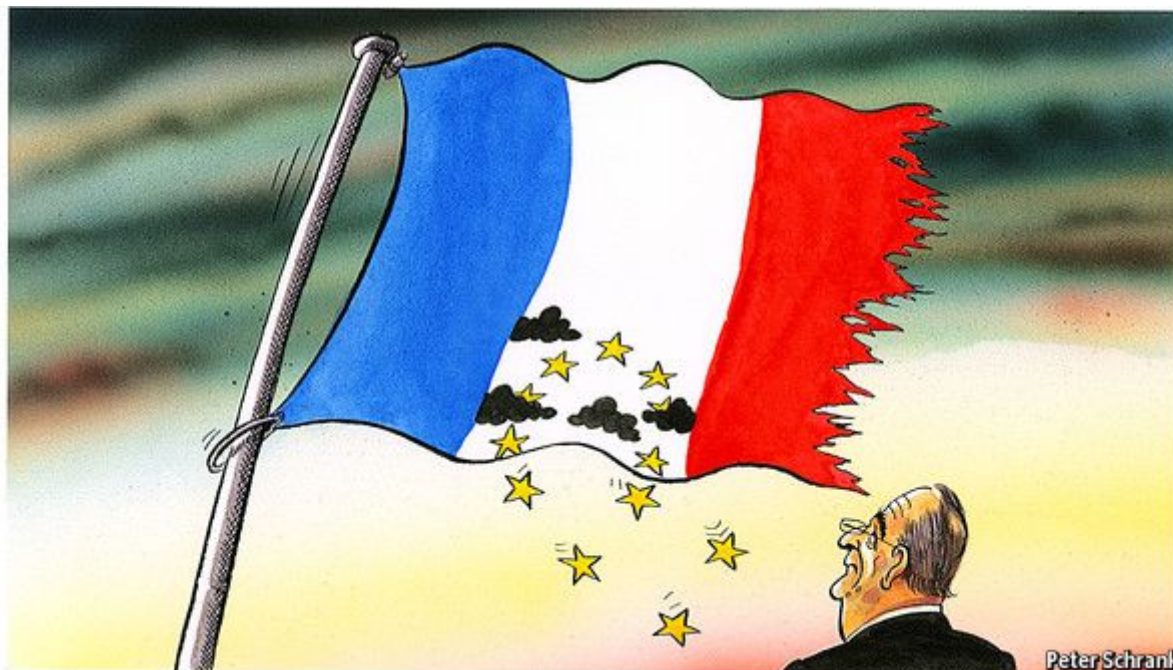


Charlemagne

Désillusion

The French increasingly think Europe is the problem, not the solution 91,1

Nov 16th 2013 | From the print edition



DOWN a muddy path in a clearing in the forest of Compiègne, in northern France, lies a musty-smelling little museum. Amid scraps from trench life displayed in glass cabinets, the museum's chief exhibit is an old oak railway-carriage, a replica of wagon 2419D, used on this spot by Marshall Foch to sign the 1918 armistice with Germany—and then by a vengeful Adolf Hitler to secure France's surrender to Nazi forces in 1940. The modest memorial is a big and sobering reminder of the historical impulses that prompted the French to pursue the post-war European project. As President François Hollande prepares for the centenary of the start of the first world war next year, however, it also exposes a widening gap between those ambitions and a new French ambivalence about the European Union.

As a founder-member with Germany, France has, for over half a century, put the construction of Europe and the taming of Germany at the heart of foreign policy. If the British have grown up on tabloid Euroscepticism to regard Europe as a menace to national power, **the French have been taught to see Europe as an amplifier of theirs. Europe, according to the French creed, is the solution, not the problem. To any new obstacle: more Europe still.**

Yet four years after the start of the euro-zone crisis, with joblessness at a 16-year high and a recession-battered economy, **disillusion has set in.** In today's French mind, the EU has become too big, too distant, too focused on austerity and trade: **a constraint, not a means of salvation.** Only 41% of the French now say that they are favourably disposed to the EU, according to Pew Research, far fewer than in Germany (60%)—and fewer even than in Britain (43%). Fully 77% say that European integration has weakened their economy, more than in Spain or Italy. One in three of the French would leave the EU today, according to a YouGov poll.

On the fringes of French politics, populists are surfing this sentiment with zeal. When Mr Hollande on November 12th welcomed EU leaders to Paris to discuss youth unemployment, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a Communist-backed firebrand, derided them as the “undertakers of the European ideal”. On the far right, Marine Le Pen predicts gleefully that the EU will collapse “like the Soviet Union” under the weight of its own contradictions. Her National Front could come first in European Parliament elections next May.

Even the pro-European elite is voicing its second thoughts. François Heisbourg, of the Foundation for Strategic Research, has just published “The End of the European Dream”, which argues that the euro cannot survive without a degree of integration that is politically unrealistic. His remedy? The orderly dismantling of the single currency in order to rebuild the EU on solid ground.

French ambivalence towards Europe is not entirely new. France voted by only a whisker for the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which launched the euro, and in 2005 sprung a shock by voting against the draft European constitution. Nor is it new for French leaders, left and right, to grumble about Europe—in particular the unloved European Commission—while using its edicts to impose unpalatable reforms at home. In the past, however, such setbacks did not alter the elite’s generally unshakable faith in further integration, or their confidence in their ability to shape it as they wanted. What seems different this time is that euro-antipathy is curbing France’s European vision.

Security policy aside, France has become, in the words of a European diplomat, “low-ambition” on Europe. It is not that the French lack ideas. They are pushing for banking union; they want a budget for the euro zone (a simpler forum to operate in, without the pesky British); and proper social transfers. But much of their Europe policy is defensive. They are prickly about criticism in Brussels of economic weakness and tried to shrug off news that GDP shrank by 0.1% in the third quarter. **They dislike attempts to meddle in national policy; the commission, snapped Mr Hollande, should not “dictate” pension reform in France. They are set against any talk of a new treaty and nervous about Germany’s preference for competitiveness “contracts” that would allow Brussels to intrude even more.**

Leading from behind

The upshot is that France is in a state “not of retreat, but resignation” over Europe, says Thomas Klau of the European Council on Foreign Relations. This matters. Although today’s more assertive Germany has outgrown the need to be handcuffed to its neighbour over the Rhine, it knows that little can get done, especially on the euro, without France. Germany may lead Europe, but it does not want to be seen to be deciding everything alone.

A protégé of Jacques Delors, architect of the single currency, Mr Hollande intends to be a good European and a genuine partner. But he is caught in a pincer-hold that is partly of his own making. He is struggling to rally support among smaller countries for his sort of Europe—**more solidarity, less economic oversight**. At the same time, his standing at home is curbing his ability to make the case for more Europe. After various mishandled muddles and a tax revolt, Mr Hollande’s authority has sunk, and his poll rating has dropped to just 21%, a record low. The result, laments a French official, is “**zero political debate about Europe**”.

Crablike, Mr Hollande is trying to do just enough on Europe, without aggravating nationalism at home. Through the 1914 centenary, he still hopes to find words to rehabilitate Europe and unite the nation. “To **commemorate**”, he declared in a remembrance speech marked by vocabulary usually reserved for the right, “is to **renew patriotism**.” Yet however moving the centenary events next year prove, or memorials like that in Compiègne remain, **France’s faltering faith in the European project will make it an increasingly unpredictable partner.**

November 17, 2013 7:43 pm

Why Europe needs to try unconventional policy

91,3



By Wolfgang Münchau

It is time for its central bank to consider starting quantitative easing

Last week's dreadful data for the eurozone tell us that a long period of low economic growth and excessively low inflation lies ahead. France is falling back into recession; the signs of recovery in Italy have disappeared – again; even Germany has lost momentum.

What should the European Central Bank do now? It could, and probably should, cut interest rates again. The eurozone needs all the help it can get, but an additional cut will probably not be sufficient. We are in a situation of diminishing marginal returns. The main significance of rate cuts these days are their impact on forward rates – money market rates ranging from a duration of one week to one year. A cut in the main interest rate, together with policies to supply unlimited liquidity at those rates, would probably nudge forward rates down further. But if Mario Draghi, the ECB president, wants to make a real difference, he should contemplate quantitative easing.

There are three reasons why he should now look beyond the conventional. The first is, of course, the economic outlook, and the associated downside risk on inflation. When German commentators such as Hans-Werner Sinn criticise the ECB's decision to cut rates they never discuss the decision in connection with the inflation target – which should be the primary benchmark. The current inflation rate of 0.7 per cent is below target, and forecasts tell us that it will remain so for at least two years.

The second reason is a lack of further policy tools after the next rate cut. The main ECB interest rate is now 0.25 per cent. The deposit rate – the one levied on commercial bank deposits at the ECB – is zero. The central bank could cut its main rate one more time and impose a small negative deposit rate. At that point, the ECB will have run out of policies. That would be an uncomfortable position.

The third set of reasons relates to Mr Draghi's lender-of-last-resort promise – the outright monetary transactions he launched last year. The OMT has no doubt calmed down markets over the past year, but it is not a monetary policy instrument. It is an insurance policy. Its purpose is to reassure investors by reducing the likelihood of a country's being forced from the eurozone. But it is still only a backstop. Quantitative easing, by contrast, is a monetary policy instrument. Its purpose would not be to bail out countries but to reduce medium to long-term interest rates in specific sectors of the economy.

Even though QE and OMT differ, they are both asset-purchase programmes in the end. If the OMT lost credibility you would need another asset purchase programme to take its place. That could happen if, for example, the German constitutional court were to rule against the OMT in one of its forthcoming judgments. The court is currently considering whether the OMT violates the German constitution. In a hearing in June, the chief justice left no doubt that he has fundamental problems with the programme. Even if the verdict is nuanced – as verdicts by this court usually are – any doubts about the OMT's legality or practicality might upset investors. At that point, the ECB would be well advised to have a plan B in place. QE could meet that requirement.

Indeed, QE has the advantage that it is legally beyond reproach. With a programme of QE, the central bank would target specific types of securities without prejudice to their national origin. It is a pure monetary policy operation. Unlike the OMT, it cannot be mistaken for an illegal monetisation of sovereign debt – the use of the central bank's balance sheet to reduce a state's debt in real terms.

Would such a programme be feasible? QE is certainly more difficult in a monetary union with fragmented financial markets than in the US or the UK, where the central banks have used QE in part to help the housing market and the corporate sector. In the eurozone, the ECB would buy sovereign and corporate bonds – and perhaps some bonds that back loans to the property sector. Since small and medium-sized companies in the eurozone are heavily reliant on bank finance, they are beyond the direct reach of such a programme. For them, the impact on QE would be indirect. The ECB could, for example, speed up work it is already undertaking on securitised finance for small company loans, where it could become a central market maker. Or it could set up a scheme, similar to the Bank of England's Funding for Lending programme, to assist bank lending.

Would QE work? Once you hit the zero limit on interest rates, QE is the most effective policy instrument. It is not a cure-all – we know from the US how hard it is to curtail. But the alternative is worse. Without QE, the eurozone economy threatens to get stuck in an equilibrium of low growth and ultra-low inflation, or even outright deflation. And if you are worried about the impact of QE on financial stability, you might want to consider the impact of a long depression.

The case for quantitative easing is overwhelming.

The Economist explains

If the European economy is so shaky, why is the euro so strong? 91,5

Nov 17th 2013, 23:50 by R.A.



THE euro zone is looking healthier than it has in some time, but that is not saying much. The long-suffering economy pulled out of recession earlier this year, unemployment is levelling off, and crisis worries continue to ebb along with government borrowing costs. Yet growth may struggle to top 1% next year, which in turn is generating fear of deflation. European firms and households remain stuck under piles of debt. Earlier this month, amid signs of new economic weakness, the European Central Bank (ECB) cut its benchmark interest rate to 0.25%. From late 2009 to mid-2012 the euro weakened as Europe's debt crisis deepened. But since July of last year the euro has been on a tear, and it is now back to 2007 levels. After half a decade of financial gyrations, investors seem as eager to hold euros as ever. If the European economy is still shaky, why is the euro so strong?

An appreciating currency can cause serious problems. Exchange rates are an important determinant of the price of a country's goods on world markets. If American car prices hold steady while the dollar strengthens, then the cost of American cars in yen or euros rises and America will sell fewer of them abroad. Europe has more reason than most to fear a strong currency. With firms, households and governments all cutting back, Europe is reliant on exports to drive growth and hiring. Some European leaders, such as France's president, François Hollande, worry that a strong euro is hurting European exporters.

Explaining exchange-rate moves is a near-impossible task. A currency might rise as improving economic prospects attract foreign capital—or because domestic banks are liquidating foreign investments and bringing money home to cover expected losses. Yet two factors look especially culpable for the euro's recent strength. One is falling odds of a nasty euro-zone break-up. The flip from weakening to strengthening came in July 2012, when the president of the ECB, Mario Draghi, promised to do "whatever it takes" to preserve the single currency. Markets breathed a sigh of relief and seemed to worry less about keeping money in euros. Relatively tight monetary policy could also be a factor. European interest rates are often higher than those elsewhere, while inflation is lower. Those small differences can add up to big gains for investors who borrow dollars (for example), and use them to buy euros to park in European banks. This "carry trade" raises the value of the euro relative to other currencies.

A soaring euro is not all bad news. It could signal increased foreign interest in lending to periphery governments. And Europeans benefit from lower import prices. But the costs—to struggling exporters and from deflation—are probably larger. Luckily Europe is not powerless in the face of a buoyant euro. The ECB could discourage the carry trade by paying negative interest rates on deposits and could follow other rich-world central banks in deploying "quantitative easing" (QE) to boost the economy. QE entails printing euros to buy government bonds. In the end, an exchange rate is just a price: the price of euros, as expressed in other currencies. The surest way to bring it down is to make more euros.

IDEAS:Populism is not the real issue

91,6

8 November 2013

LA REPUBBLICA ROME

Referring to all the movements of rebellion that are springing up here and there as populist or reactionary only serves to hide the real roots of the problem. The EU, as we know it, is not threatened by the anger of its citizens, but by the reluctance of governments to delegate their sovereignty.

Barbara Spinelli

I hope for the birth of a federal Europe and for the maintenance of the single currency. If this does not happen, instead of the EU we will have a number of small states lacking greatness but not baseness, which are no longer allies of the United States but rather, are, more than ever, vassals of US power. We would be back to square one: vanquished by our nationalisms, as we were during the wars of the 20th century.

Why are a growing number of Europeans so discontented, so disgusted, and willing to join the ranks of the extreme right and the Eurosceptic parties? To call this trend populist or reactionary is just brushing the surface without discovering the root of the behaviour. Answering the question is meaningless if the protests and the proposals – which are all very different – are swept aside like a dust mote hampering some undefined progress.

Sweeping away the problem with disdain and denial is equal to ignoring that Europe, as it is today, oozes certain chronic poisons. It is not enough, as current governments do, to invoke it for it to actually exist. There is no hiding what is nonetheless clear: the summits and the elites of the union are afflicted by the vices of nationalism and conservatism.

Here again, we should examine the words that are used. The word "federalism" is no longer taboo – except in France. Touted by the left and the right, it is, however, not followed by concrete action such as pooling the public debt and spurring growth through eurobonds or by way of far-greater EU financial resources than are currently available. Nor are there measures aimed at giving new powers to the European Parliament based on a new, common Constitution, born of the will of the people. In short, a Europe that would be a refuge in these troubled times rather than a bastion protecting an inbred oligarchy of powerful people all covering-up for one another.

In a democracy, the people are sovereign

Europe as it stands is not threatened by the anger (either from the right or the left) of its citizenry. It is threatened by governments that are reluctant to delegate their national sovereignty which is not only a sham but also usurped since, in a democracy, the people are sovereign. If the 2007-2008 crisis torments Europe beyond measure, it is because of these distortions. Austerity that accentuates poverty and inequality, a Stability Pact discussed by no parliament; that is the Europe that wants to get rid of populism. It is the misery in Greece. It is government corruption that fuels inequality and sham stability.

Neither SYRIZA nor Alexis Tsipras, its leader, are anti-European. They are asking for a different Europe

The case of the radical left in Greece is exemplary. SYRIZA, a coalition of citizen movements and left-leaning groups, was called anti-European and populist during both the 2012 elections in May and in June. European governments were mobilised, describing SYRIZA as the monster to be slaughtered. Berlin even threatened to

cut off its aid. But neither SYRIZA nor Alexis Tsipras, its leader, are anti-European. They are asking for a different Europe – and that is what the establishment dreads.

When Alexis Tsipras presented his programme to the Kreisky Forum in Vienna, he surprised those who had covered him in mud. He said that the framework of the euro and of the bailout plans had destroyed the EU instead of healing its wounds. He recalled that the 1929 crisis was first managed with a free-market approach — as is the case today. "Governments denied that the framework of their projects was absurd, insisting on austerity and calling only for a recovery through exports".

Putting the blame on hardworking citizens

The result was misery and the advent of fascism in southern Europe and of nazism in central and northern Europe," he said. This is the reason for which the Union must be revamped from A to Z. Taking up a proposal made by German trade unions, SYRIZA advocates a Marshall Plan for Europe, a true banking union, a public debt centrally managed by the European Central Bank and a massive EU public investment programme.

But Alexis Tsipras also denounces what no one else dares to point out: the link between the European crisis and the corrupt democracies in Athens and other southern countries. "Our kleptocracy has forged solid alliances with the European ruling elites," he said, and their deal is fuelled by the lies about the faults of the Greeks and the Italians, about wages that are too high and about states that are over-generous. These falsehoods "serve in effect to shift the blame for these national failures from the shoulders of the kleptocrats to those of the hardworking citizen," he added.

This alliance of elites meets with no opposition since the classical left also adopted, in the 1990s, the free-market dogma

This alliance of elites meets with no opposition since the classical left also adopted, in the 1990s, the free-market dogma. A large part of the population thus finds itself without representation. They are missing, resigned and punished by austerity policies paced like a military exercise. It is this part – a majority, if those that abstain from voting are included – that is protesting against Europe.

Inbred elites

Sometimes this group even calls for an unreal return to national currencies and sovereignty; sometimes it calls for another Europe which includes the poor, as was the case after World War II and in the 1970s. That is what Tsipras says. And in Italy, Beppe Grillo, in his somewhat chaotic speeches, says just about the same thing.

If nothing moves, Europe will no longer be a shelter but a building open to the elements. Administered by inbred elites, it resembles more and more the Dead Letter Office guarded by Bartleby, in Herman Melville's short story, *Bartleby the Scrivener*. After sorting and throwing away thousands upon thousands of letters sent but not delivered Bartleby decides to refuse all orders and requests with a dispassionate "I would prefer not to".

MAIN FOCUS

ECB makes money even cheaper

91,8

In a surprise move, the European Central Bank cut the benchmark interest rate to 0.25 percent on Thursday. After the previous [cut in May](#), this marks a further historic low. The move can stimulate Europe's economy, commentators believe, but fear that the ECB may soon have [used up all its ammunition](#).

De Tijd - Belgium

Central bank left without ammunition

Mario Draghi and the ECB could soon run entirely out of ammunition, the business paper De Tijd warns: "The ECB's intervention is a good thing because now both the indebted states and business can finance themselves more cheaply. That's important on the one hand to prevent the euro crisis from flaring up again, and on the other to provide the economy with sufficient growth incentives. The core question is, however, how much and how sustainably the cut in interest rates will affect the economy. If inflation remains low and growth fails to materialise, the ECB will have to intervene sooner rather than later. But it won't have much room to manoeuvre before we reach zero interest rates. ... It would be a good thing for Draghi to enlarge his arsenal in the not too distant future, because the economic indicators continue to look bad." (08/11/2013)

Expansión - Spain

Traitorous interest cut

The ECB's decision to cut the benchmark interest rate again can be interpreted in two ways, the conservative daily Expansión points out, because "it can promote national exports (by making them cheaper), make borrowing cheaper and prop up the recovery in certain sectors like real estate. But there can be no doubt that the message behind Mario Draghi's historical decision is less positive, namely that Europe's economic [recovery](#) is less solid than assumed. ... We can only hope that the ECB's surprising step quickly has the desired effect, because it is running out of resources and there's no sign of any other agent capable of boosting the European economy." (08/11/2013)

Corriere del Ticino - Switzerland

ECB promoting sovereign debt

With its [low interest policy](#) the ECB is preventing the indebted Eurozone countries from tackling their problems, the liberal daily Corriere del Ticino complains: "If the central bank always steps in to help them by switching on the money press the countries with high levels of public debt will hardly change their political course in the long term. This means they won't take the necessary steps to fix their finances. ... Moreover it is to be feared that increasing the flow of money will only have a minimal impact on economic growth because on the one hand a substantial amount of the money will go into the financial markets rather than the real economy, and on the other the countries that don't cut their deficits will need more and more money to pay off their interest. This money won't be available for sustaining the recovery." (08/11/2013)

Handelsblatt - Germany

Draghi continues controversial euro rescue

Mario Draghi's argument that the ECB must prevent deflation is merely a pretext to justify the controversial euro bailout policy, the liberal business paper Handelsblatt writes: "The deflationary trends are an expression of an improvement in the competitiveness of those economies that were overheated in the years before the euro crisis, not least because of the low interest rates on the capital markets. If such deflationary tendencies are desirable, however, this raises the question of whether Draghi's arguments for another easing of monetary policy are well-founded. ... If they aren't, the ECB head may be using worries of deflation to pursue a different agenda. ... From Draghi's perspective it's no doubt more important to keep down short-term interest rates on the capital markets, which have recently increased significantly, so that the bonds of crisis countries continue to be attractive for investors. However facilitating the refinancing of selected Eurozone countries is also not part of the ECB's mandate." (08/11/2013)

7 November 2013

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG FRANKFURT



A nuclear power station in Nogent sur Seine, France

CHICUREL Arnaud / hemis.fr

Germany is going down the green energy road, Poland is drilling for shale gas, and the United Kingdom has announced the building of new nuclear plants: when it comes to energy supply and security, the Europeans are hauling in different directions. It's in their own interest, though, to adopt a common strategy.

Hendrik Kafsack

While some are reacting with shock and others with enthusiasm, the EU Commission has responded with a single sentence to the British announcement that the UK will be building new nuclear reactors: on the question of the energy mix, the member states have sole responsibility. It's in the EU treaties: be it from nuclear reactors, gas and coal, or from windmills and solar grids, how a country produces its power is up that country alone. The Commission, as mere guardian of the treaties, has no say in the decision. No one in Brussels, in any case, has been surprised by the news. After all, the British have been signalling for a long time now that the country intends to roll out nuclear power in the fight against climate change. End of debate.

Of course, this is only half of the truth. If the British want to subsidise the construction of nuclear power plants, EU Commissioner for Competition Joaquín Almunia must at least take another look at the plans. All the same, the Commission and Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger has allowed an opportunity to go to waste. As a matter of urgency, the EU should hold a debate about how it can ensure that the energy policies of the member states are better coordinated. In light of the changes in the British and German energy policies, it's time to let actions follow up on the repeated lip service to “more Europe” in the energy policies of member states.

Energy sovereignty

Energy policy is security policy

This does not mean simply handing over sovereignty in the energy mix to the EU institutions. Notwithstanding the entrenchment of the EU, there are good reasons for competency on that question to remain in national capitals. Energy policy is security policy. What proves this better than the constant game that

Russian President Putin plays with the gas-cocks to Europe?. It is already clear that Putin will again use the gas supply as a weapon if Ukraine shifts too much closer to the Europeans at the EU summit in Vilnius in November. So long as there is no common European security policy, the supply of industry and consumers with power is too important to be left in the hands of foreigners – that is, in the hands of Brussels.

Competition among systems – the debate over the best mix of energy – may also be fruitful. The Commission's oversight usually ensures that this competition is not distorted by excessive subsidies. Why should the EU force the British down the German path towards a nuclear phase-out – from the British point of view, a costly exercise in naivete? And why should the EU force the Germans to choose the British path back towards nuclear power – from the German point of view, a risky exercise in naivete? It remains to be shown whether wind and sun can deliver security of supply and the hoped-for jobs in "green" industries, or whether the industry will shift to Britain in the end. Or even whether Poland will win the race with its controversial shale gas gambit. Greenhouse gas emissions, it must be mentioned, will be lower under all three models.

Will Europe have the courage to adapt its climate and energy policy?

The EU aims to define new 2030 objectives to reduce CO2 emissions and increase the share of renewables in the energy mix. But differences in the approaches adopted by member states could compromise this ambition.

Video by EUViews

No more energy islands

The purely national orientation of energy policy lags behind the reality on the ground

So why limit this range of options? There are two reasons. For one, EU states – including Britain – are no longer energy islands. Despite all the hiccoughs in the building of the EU network, electricity (and gas) today flow across the borders largely unobstructed. Power gets from point A to point B on zig-zagging paths; only a fifth of a packet of electricity, for example from Stuttgart to Paris (if one can speak of 'packets'), takes the direct route between the two cities; the rest flows in a roundabout way, and through neighbouring countries too. In short, the network is already European. The purely national orientation of energy policy lags behind the reality on the ground.

National solo efforts have their consequences, as demonstrated by the energy transition in Germany, whose nuclear phase-out and simultaneous expansion in eco-electricity are having grave consequences for its neighbours. In peak times, large amounts of green electricity surge through the Dutch, Polish and Czech networks, since the German grid cannot absorb them. Building phase modifiers could prevent that, but only at the cost of putting a de facto end to the internal energy market. Germany cannot really want that, because during winter periods of dim sunshine and weak winds – and high power consumption – the country will have to rely on imported electricity. That power can then come from French nuclear plants – which is why the complete nuclear phase-out is just a mirage in any case.

The internal market is meant to lower electricity and gas prices through competition. The internal market, however, is also tasked with increasing the security of supply and lowering dependence on third countries. That is why the EU is using public money to promote the building of links with, for instance, the Baltic States, which are dependent on Russia. In this respect, from the point of view of energy security, there are reasons for better coordination at the EU level. Member states, who have yet to succeed in uniting against countries like Russia on the issue of gas supply, should be careful not to compromise the stability of their power supplies through poor coordination of their energy transition policies.

November 12, 2013 7:18 pm

Why Draghi was right to cut rates

91,12

National divisions undermine the legitimacy of the monetary union



©Ingram Pinn



By Martin Wolf

The monetary policy of the European Central Bank has been too tight. This is shown in the fall of core annual inflation to just 0.8 per cent in the year to October 2013. The case for the monetary easing undertaken last week was overwhelming. Indeed, it was long overdue.

Yet, it has been leaked, the decision to cut the refinancing rate from $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent split the council. Both German representatives – Jörg Asmussen, a member of the ECB's board, and Jens Weidmann, head of the Bundesbank – as well as the heads of the central banks of the Netherlands and Austria voted against this move.

State of the union

Open splits on national lines have emerged previously, but only over controversial programmes such as the Securities Markets Programme, launched under Jean-Claude Trichet, Mario Draghi's predecessor as president of the ECB, and the Outright Monetary Transactions programme, launched by Mr Draghi in the summer of 2012. Both of these initiatives were intended to relieve market pressure on sovereign bonds. That was bound to be controversial, given German hostility to monetary financing of governments. But such splits over standard monetary policy decisions are new. This matters: they endanger the legitimacy of the ECB – and so of the monetary union.

Some have accused Mr Draghi of acting in the interests of Italy – and the objections of German representatives to the easing are bound to stimulate such suspicions. Yet the case for a cut in the ECB's standard policy rate is, in truth, overwhelming: core inflation is now less than half the ECB's target of "below, but close to, 2 per cent".

As Mr Draghi argued, there are compelling reasons for not putting up with inflation below that level. First, an inflation rate recorded at 2 per cent might, in truth, be close to zero: inflation is almost certainly exaggerated at the moment in conventional measurements.

Second, needed changes in competitiveness inside the eurozone would be difficult even if average inflation were 2 per cent. They would be far harder at close to zero, given the resistance of workers to nominal wage cuts.

Third, monetary policy tends to be more ineffective the closer inflation comes to zero, partly because depressed economies may well need negative real interest rates – which are much easier to implement when inflation rates are positive.

To these I would add a fourth: the eurozone risks falling into deflation, given excess capacity and high unemployment. The ECB says that inflation expectations are anchored. That might be overconfident.

It is easy to identify other reasons why policy has been too tight. Between the first quarter of 2008 and the second quarter of 2013, nominal eurozone demand expanded by just 1 per cent. Nominal gross domestic product grew by a mere 3.4 per cent. Moreover, so-called M3 money – a measure of the “broad” money supply – has been virtually stagnant since late 2008. (See charts.)

What, then, are the arguments against the last Thursday’s decision? One was that the decision could well be postponed. But it has already been postponed too long: the longer the delay, the greater the danger. A second concern is that this move brings unconventional measures even closer. But the less promptly the ECB uses conventional measures, the greater the likelihood that extreme ones will be needed. If the ECB had moved rates decisively towards zero in 2010, it might have avoided at least some of today’s difficulties.

Another complaint is that interest rates on German savings are too low. As Benoît Cœuré, a member of the ECB Board, has argued, this is just wrong. First, savings have little value during a deep slump, such as that in the eurozone. Second, the principal determinant of the return on German savings is the long-term yield on German Bunds, which is now 1.8 per cent on 10-year debt. But it is the slump, plus Germany’s role as a safe haven, that creates such low rates. The less effective is the support provided to the eurozone economy, the more Bunds will stay a safe haven and the lower the return on German savings.

A final concern is that the monetary policy of the ECB is unsuitable for Germany and might even cause asset price bubbles. This is surely true, just as the monetary policy pursued before 2007 was unsuitable for Ireland and Spain and did indeed drive asset price bubbles. A central bank called upon to deliver a target rate of inflation in a union of diverse economies will destabilise nearly all the members at some time. But that is what joining a currency union entails for all members, including even the largest.

Between 2001 and 2007, the average core inflation rate of the eurozone was 1.8 per cent, with Germany on 1.1 per cent and Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain close to 3 per cent. If the overall inflation rate is to remain close to 2 per cent, while the inflation rates of the latter four countries, plus Italy, are to be well below this average, that of Germany and other surplus countries needs to be well above 2 per cent. Otherwise, overall inflation will be far too low. Moreover, real short-term interest rates are likely to be negative in these higher-inflation countries, just as they were for those now in difficulty, before 2008. Efforts to resist such adjustments guarantee a persistent crisis and so the low interest rates the critics detest.

Many in Germany might conclude that they would be better off outside the eurozone. I sympathise, But they should be careful what they wish for. In the absence of a currency union, a putative D-Mark would soar. The impact of a large real appreciation of the new currency would be similar to what has befallen Japan: large parts of German manufacturing output would shift into neighbouring countries; the economy would surely be pushed into a recession; and domestic prices would probably fall.

Without heroic unconventional measures, to which the Bundesbank is fiercely opposed, the deflationary spiral might be steep. Some Germans would benefit. But the dislocations could be huge. Compared to that, the costs

associated with a successful eurozone adjustment, including a period of, say, 3 per cent inflation in Germany, would hardly be excessive.

Yes, the ECB cannot deliver optimal monetary policy for Germany: it is not supposed to do so. But it might still be far better than alternatives.

September 23, 2012 7:22 pm

Draghi is devil in Weidmann's euro drama

91,15



By Wolfgang Münchau

Bundesbank chief is sabotaging the single currency by reinforcing people's fears

“Such paper, in the place of actual gold, is practical: we know just what we hold ... But wise men will, when they have studied it, place infinite trust in what is infinite.” **Mephistopheles, from *Faust Part Two*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

Whatever you need to know about Germany, you will probably find it somewhere in Goethe's *Faust*. But it is rare that wisdom is found in part two of the tragedy, one of the most revered and least read books in all of German literature. Someone who managed to dig up something truly remarkable from it was Jens Weidmann. The president of the Bundesbank cited Mephisto's advice to the Emperor, quoted above, that the simple solution to a lack of money is to print it.

Mephisto's speech encapsulates Germany's ultimate nightmare about fiat money and about monetary union. It was clear from the context and the timing of the speech that Mr Weidmann would cast Mario Draghi in the role of modern-day Mephisto, though, obviously, he did not say so explicitly. Mr Weidmann's remarks concluded one of the most extraordinary two-week periods in the history of central banking. We are on the cusp of an important new development, one the Bundesbank abhors. The US Federal Reserve has adopted a new programme of quantitative easing and has become much more determined in guiding future expectations. The European Central Bank, which Mr Draghi heads, has announced an unlimited – though conditional – programme of bond purchases; a programme that jars with everything the Bundesbank stands for and believes in.

Beyond these concrete actions, there is now a debate in the academic community about what could take us beyond hell – at least from the perspective of Faust and Mr Weidmann.

This is a debate about nominal income targeting, where a central bank no longer stabilises the inflation rate directly but focuses instead on stabilising nominal gross domestic product. You can think of nominal GDP as the sum of real GDP and inflation. If real growth falls, the central bank would thus have to drive up inflation. Conversely, if real growth rises, the central bank would have to bear down on inflation much harder than it would do under the pure inflation targeting regime used by central banks such as the ECB.

Now look at this from the perspective of a newspaper-reading German conservative, who for decades has been fed misinformation about the functioning of a modern economy. He has been told as a fact that a rise in the supply of money and the purchase of government debt both give rise to inflation in the medium term. Newspapers even give readers advice on how to protect themselves against the now certain debasement of the euro. By quoting Mephisto, Mr Weidmann is turning fear into hysteria.

The German economic community and Mr Weidmann have never accepted the theories underlying the policies of modern central banks. This is one of the reasons the ECB ended up with an analytical approach that has “two pillars”: one that looks at economic dynamics and shocks, the other at “monetary trends”. The former pillar was designed to be relevant for policy; the latter to pretend the ECB stood in the tradition of the Bundesbank. I shudder to think how a debate on nominal income targeting would play in Germany.

It should be clear by now what game Mr Weidmann is playing. He is sabotaging the euro through the most effective means he has at his disposal – by reinforcing people’s innate fears about the common currency. He cannot outvote the governing council of the ECB. He is in a minority of one. He also knows that he cannot overturn the ECB’s policy through the legal route. Anybody who decided to drag Mario Draghi in front of the European Court of Justice would lose. Mr Weidmann no longer has any pull over Angela Merkel, the German chancellor he once advised.

But make no mistake: he is very effective in encouraging a creeping euroscepticism among Germans. In doing so, he may well succeed in undermining the chance of the euro’s survival because euroscepticism limits the German government’s political room for manoeuvre. The situation reminds me very much of the way the political debate in Britain turned anti-EU in the early to mid-1990s.

It was probably inevitable that this long-lingering clash of economic cultures has finally come out into the open. As Europe’s recession gets worse, the ECB will soon have to adopt similar measures to those used by the Fed. It may even end up adopting a nominal income target, explicitly or implicitly, for the simple reason that the crisis in the eurozone is ultimately insoluble without annual nominal growth of at least 5 per cent. And I cannot see the Bundesbank support for any of it.

Despite its many design flaws, the ECB has reluctantly become a modern central bank. The Bundesbank is still obsessed with Mephistopheles. I do not have the foggiest how this conflict will end. You will certainly not find the answer in part two of *Faust*.

November 13, 2013 6:52 pm

Why Draghi was wrong to cut interest rates

91,17

By Hans-Werner Sinn

The move has had grave, unanticipated side effects, writes Hans-Werner Sinn

Europe fears the Japanese disease. In Japan, the gross domestic product deflator – a broad measure of the price level – fell by about 1.2 per cent a year from 1999 to 2013. Today it is as low as it was in 1980. This was a catastrophe, which Japan may only now be overcoming with its Abenomics aimed at a devaluation of the yen.

The eurozone GDP deflator was only 1.6 per cent higher in the second quarter of 2013 than a year before. The consumer price index by October had increased by merely 0.7 per cent. These are low figures indeed. Seen this way, the European Central Bank's fear of deflation – and last week's interest rate cut – is understandable.

However, deflation in parts of a currency union is not the same as deflation of a union as a whole, because its internal effects on competitiveness cannot be compensated for by exchange rate adjustments. In fact, Greece, Spain and Portugal need to devalue in real terms by about 30 per cent relative to the eurozone average in order to correct the distortions that were brought about before the crisis by the inflationary credit bubble created by the single currency and thus restore their competitiveness. The ECB should not act against moderate deflation in these countries, but rather aim to offset such deflation by inflating the northern eurozone – Germany, in particular. For this, restraint – not activism – is needed.

The market has been preparing for such a realignment of relative prices. German savers and institutions have turned towards their domestic property market, causing a construction boom that has made labour scarce, increased wages and could ultimately result in general pay and price inflation. The new boom has the potential to reduce Germany's much-criticised current account surplus.

Paradoxically, the ECB is actively operating against such a self-correction. With its Outright Monetary Transactions programme, through which it offers to purchase government bonds of troubled countries at the taxpayers' risk, the bank is escorting private German savings again to southern Europe, where they are reluctant to go voluntarily. The ECB has also been relocating its (electronic) printing presses from the northern to the southern central banks through its policy of allowing junk assets to be used as collateral for its lending to needy commercial banks. These schemes have exported more public capital from north to south than the official rescues.

Four-fifths of the eurozone's monetary base has been created through open-market and refinancing operations by the central banks of the six official crisis countries. None of the base has been created through such operations by the Bundesbank and practically none by the Bank of Finland. All central bank money issued in Germany effectively comes from abroad.

The money available at low interest from southern printing presses has calmed the capital markets. But this has come at the price of slowing the realignment of the relative prices of goods needed for improving competitiveness. As the International Monetary Fund notes, hardly any of the recent trade improvements in the south have come from increased competitiveness. Industrial production in Italy, Spain and Greece has fallen dramatically.

The ECB's policy may even be responsible for part of Germany's current account surplus. Money from the southern printing presses was used not only to buy goods and assets inside the eurozone and to redeem

eurozone debt. It also flowed to the international currency markets to buy assets and redeem non-eurozone debt. This depressed the euro exchange rate enough to allow Germany to run its disturbingly large surplus despite the deficits of southern Europe and Ireland disappearing. After criss-crossing the world, money from southern printing presses bought German goods.

Germany's current account surplus in the five crisis years from 2008 to 2012 was €798bn. Usually, such a surplus would lead to the accumulation of marketable foreign assets by the private sector. Not this time. Three-quarters of Germany's surplus, €585bn, was paid for with money created by the central banks of other eurozone countries. The Bundesbank acquired claims on other eurozone central banks in exchange, which now carry a mere 0.25 per cent interest rate.

This all calls to mind a doctor who does not understand the disease he wants to cure being surprised by grave, unanticipated side effects. The Maastricht treaty did not give the ECB a mandate similar to the US Federal Reserve's for a reason. Even the Fed never carried out the regional fiscal policy that the ECB governing council, with its semantic skills, has conducted in the name of monetary policy. If the ECB stuck to a more conventional definition of monetary policy it would give markets a better chance of correcting Europe's imbalances. The resulting German inflation, matched by a moderate southern European deflation, would do wonders to help avoid the Japanese disease.

The writer is president of the Ifo Institute for Economic Research

November 10, 2013 7:18 pm

ECB split stokes German backlash fears

91,19

By Peter Spiegel in Brussels and Stefan Wagstyl in Berlin



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The European Central Bank's headquarters in Frankfurt

Divisions at the heart of the European Central Bank over last week's rate cut have revived fears in Frankfurt of a German popular backlash against the bank's policy making, even as the ECB faces decisions critical to the eurozone's future.

People involved in the policy debates said divisions between northern and southern representatives on the ECB board have been mounting since market pressures on the eurozone relaxed, with council members freed up to revert to national interests.

Last week, two German members of the ECB's 23-member governing council led a six-man revolt against Thursday's move to cut the bank's benchmark lending rate by 25 basis points. The cut was quickly followed by public broadsides from Germany's influential conservative economist Hans-Werner Sinn and some mainstream financial media.

Among those who voted with the two Germans on Thursday were the heads of the Dutch and Austrian central banks. One senior official said at least a quarter of the governing council is splitting from Mario Draghi, ECB president, on many major policy initiatives.

Officials said the bank's leadership was even more concerned that growing anti-ECB sentiment in Germany could hamper Mr Draghi's ability to move aggressively against signs of deflation and on other issues sensitive to Berlin. These include the future of the EU's "banking union" and the provision of new cheap long-term loans to struggling eurozone banks.

"This indeed can be a problem for the coming difficult decisions," said one person involved in the discussions. "It shows a big problem: that the ECB is heavily losing trust and confidence in the largest country of the euro area, namely Germany."

Another person who has spoken with board members said the increasing anti-Italian bent of some ECB criticism in Germany was of particular concern. Mr Draghi is a former head of the Bank of Italy and the country is projected to end the year with the deepest recession of any of the five largest eurozone economies.

In an interview at the weekend with Bild, Germany's largest-circulation daily, Mr Sinn accused Mr Draghi of cutting the rate to help borrowers in the south who could not otherwise get low-priced loans, an apparent

reference to Italy. “Draghi abused the euro system by giving cheap loans to the southern countries, of the kind that they would not get on the capital market,” Mr Sinn said.

A commentary by the chief economist of the financial weekly *Wirtschaftswoche* called the decision a “diktat from a new Banca d’Italia, based in Frankfurt”.

Mr Draghi has won plaudits for resolving differences between Germany and the ECB over the bank’s eurozone crisis response. Two years ago, Jürgen Stark, then German member of the ECB executive board, and Axel Weber, head of the German central bank, resigned over the bank’s purchase of struggling eurozone countries’ sovereign bonds.

Although Jens Weidmann, Mr Weber’s Bundesbank successor, has publicly opposed Mr Draghi’s bond-buying plan, Mr Stark’s successor, Jörg Asmussen, backs the plan. Despite voting with Mr Weidmann against the rate cut, he is seen as a key bridge between Mr Draghi and Berlin.

Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, backed Mr Draghi on outright monetary transactions , but during an election rally in April, she said Germany would need an interest-rate increase if its economy were taken in isolation.

November 14, 2013

The Money Trap

By PAUL KRUGMAN

91,21

When Greece hit the skids almost four years ago, some analysts (myself included) thought that we might be seeing the beginning of the end for the euro, Europe's common currency. Others were more optimistic, believing that tough love — temporary aid tied to reform — would soon produce recovery. Both camps were wrong. What we actually got was a rolling crisis that never seems to reach any kind of resolution. Every time Europe seems ready to go over the edge, policy makers find a way to avoid complete disaster. But every time there are hints of true recovery, something else goes wrong.

And here we go again. Not long ago, European officials were declaring that the Continent had turned the corner, that market confidence was returning and growth was resuming. But now there's a new source of concern, as the specter of deflation looms over much of Europe. And the debate over how to respond is turning seriously ugly.

Some background: The European Central Bank or E.C.B., Europe's equivalent of the Federal Reserve, is supposed to keep inflation close to 2 percent. Why not zero? Several reasons, but the most important point right now is that an overall European inflation rate too close to zero would translate into actual deflation in the troubled economies of southern Europe. And deflation has nasty economic side effects, especially in countries already burdened by high debt.

So it's a source of great concern that European inflation has started dropping far below target; over the past year, consumer prices rose only 0.7 percent, while "core" prices that exclude volatile food and energy costs rose only 0.8 percent.

Something had to be done, and last week the E.C.B. cut interest rates. As policy decisions go, this had the distinction of being both obviously appropriate and obviously inadequate: Europe's economy clearly needs a boost, but the E.C.B.'s action will surely make, at best, a marginal difference. Still, it was a move in the right direction.

Yet the move was hugely controversial, both inside and outside the E.C.B. And the controversy took an ominous form, at least for anyone who remembers Europe's terrible history. For arguments over European monetary policy aren't just a battle of ideas; increasingly, they sound like a battle of nations, too.

For example, who voted against the rate cut? Both German members of the E.C.B. board, joined by the leaders of the Dutch and Austrian central banks. Who, outside the E.C.B., was harshest in criticizing the action? German economists, who made a point not just of attacking the substance of the bank's action but of emphasizing the nationality of Mario Draghi, the bank's president, who is Italian. The influential German economist Hans-Werner Sinn declared that Mr. Draghi was just trying to give Italy access to low-interest loans. The chief economist of the newsweekly *WirtschaftsWoche* called the rate cut a "diktat from a new Banca d'Italia, based in Frankfurt."

Such insinuations are grossly unfair to Mr. Draghi, whose efforts to contain the euro crisis have been little short of heroic. I'd go so far as to say that the euro probably would have collapsed in 2011 or 2012 without his leadership. But never mind the personalities. What's scary here is the way this is turning into the Teutons versus the Latins, with the euro — which was supposed to bring Europe together — pulling it apart instead.

What's going on? Some of it is national stereotyping: the German public is eternally vigilant against the prospect that those lazy southern Europeans are going to make off with its hard-earned money. But there's also a real issue here. Germans just hate inflation, but if the E.C.B. succeeds in getting average European inflation back up to around 2 percent, it will push inflation in Germany — which is booming even as other European nations suffer Depression-like levels of unemployment — substantially higher than that, maybe to 3 percent or more.

This may sound bad, but it's how the euro is supposed to work. In fact, it's the way it has to work. If you're going to share a currency with other countries, sometimes you're going to have above-average inflation. In the years before the global financial crisis, Germany had low inflation while countries like Spain had relatively high inflation. Now the rules of the game require that the roles be reversed, and the question is whether Germany is prepared to accept those rules. And the answer to that question isn't clear.

The truly sad thing is that, as I said, the euro was supposed to bring Europe together, in ways both substantive and symbolic. It was supposed to encourage closer economic ties, even as it fostered a sense of shared identity. What we're getting instead, however, is a climate of anger and disdain on the part of both creditors and debtors. And the end is still nowhere in sight.

November 19, 2013

Freeing Europe's Small Businesses

91,23

By JEFFREY ANDERSON and JOHN OTT

Europe's main economic engine — small and medium-size businesses — desperately needs attention if the Continent's nascent recovery is to gain momentum. To provide a boost, policy makers and the private sector must resolve the systemic problems that impede the flow of information, limit access to capital, and contribute to burdensome regulations that stifle growth and employment.

In France, for example, there are roughly 60 percent fewer companies with 50 employees than with 49 employees. Why? All things being equal, you would expect a normal distribution of companies by employee size, with no significant difference in the number of firms with 48 employees, 49 or 50. But, because of the regulations triggered by reaching 50 employees, a huge number of businesses deliberately do not exceed 49. Adding one more job involves coping with 34 more regulatory requirements — such as creation of a works council, a hygiene and security committee, and mandatory profit-sharing. That raises a company's costs by the equivalent of 4 percent, on average, of total payroll.

Small and medium enterprises, or SMEs, provide two of every three jobs in Europe and account for 58 percent of business activity. They range from tiny startups to small family-run firms to medium-size concerns supplying major manufacturers. For Europe to fully recover, policy makers need to understand what is blocking financing to such enterprises, find solutions and quickly implement them.

Consider the size of the challenge: New bank lending to small and medium enterprises in the euro zone as a whole (using loans of less than €1 million as a gauge) has declined by 36 percent since the April 2008 peak. This falloff was steepest from 2008 to 2010, but the decline has continued since 2010. With a heavy dependence on domestic markets, these businesses have been coping with a sharp slide in demand from consumers, other firms and governments.

To gain a clearer picture of what's hindering this critical sector, the Institute of International Finance and Bain & Co. conducted more than 140 interviews with a broad cross-section of small business associations, bankers, venture capitalists, academics and public officials in France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain, and at the European level. What emerged are four major sets of impediments to financing.

The first is the lack of easy access to low-cost information about creditworthiness. Such information often resides in too many places; Ireland and the Netherlands, for example, have no credit registry run by a central bank that would allow other banks to check their own exposure against a small firm's outstanding aggregate debt. Other regulations actually prevent the easy sharing of information to those that need it most. In Portugal, restrictions on accessing historical information about potential new clients hamper the ability of banks and investors to judge risk.

The second impediment consists of tax, legal and regulatory disincentives that hinder SMEs from achieving greater scale and financial health. That, in turn, limits their creditworthiness, because smaller firms are more susceptible to economic swings than larger ones. In Spain, for example, auditing regulations unintentionally stifle growth, notably through a requirement to have an external audit when a firm reaches annual revenues of €6 million.

The third and fourth impediments prevent banks and alternative sources of financing from fully serving demand, especially once European growth accelerates. Banks now can shoulder less credit risk than before the crisis, and they're in the midst of significant deleveraging. Even so, better credit guarantees and broader use of credit insurance could spur more lending.

Beyond banks, some countries lack the funding sources that firms should be able to tap at different stages of maturity, whether they are high-potential startups or firms that need to restructure. Britain and Italy have comparable populations and economic output, but British venture capital and private equity firms provide 20 times more funding than their Italian counterparts. Italy and other countries where small firms play a more prominent role, like Portugal, Greece and Spain, also suffer from weak supporting ecosystems of legal, accounting and regulatory participants.

Many initiatives throughout Europe have begun to help reduce these impediments. We found, however, that a best practice in one country was not necessarily well-known elsewhere. For instance, Standard Business Reporting, or SBR, a common, simple, digital language for business-to-government reporting, has worked well in the Netherlands since 2008. It allows a Dutch firm to submit its financial accounts to tax authorities, business registers and banks as an input to credit applications. If adopted elsewhere, SBR could significantly reduce information costs.

France offers another example via the impressive central credit registry run by the Banque de France, which also provides credit ratings on nearly 280,000 firms, most of them small and medium enterprises. Similar information in other countries could do a lot to lower the cost and improve the availability of information on creditworthiness.

We found equally promising initiatives in Italy, Ireland, Portugal and Spain involving credit guarantees, tax incentives for equity investments and bankruptcy restructuring.

So how can each country address these impediments? Most of the effort should be led at the national level. The solutions will be complex and require coordination across different groups. We recommend the establishment of technocratic, nonpartisan national task forces with participants from small business, the public sector, banks and providers of alternative financing, so that each task force can craft solutions tailored to its national environment.

This process won't be easy, but we believe it can succeed. Most of the potential solutions have already shown promise in one country or another. During our interviews, we heard enthusiasm for learning about what works abroad and how it can be adapted at home.

Europe needs small and medium-sized businesses that are globally competitive, highly productive and able to seize the benefits of the single market. Focused national task forces and better sharing of innovative processes will get Europe on the path to stronger job creation and economic growth.

Jeffrey Anderson is senior director for European Affairs at the Institute of International Finance in Washington. John Ott is a senior partner at Bain & Co. in London.

November 19, 2013

Unavoidable Answer for the Problem of Climate Change 91,25

By [EDUARDO PORTER](#)

Opponents call attention to the dire risks of nuclear energy, but in the push to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, it may be the world's best shot.

Japan's [announcement last week](#) that it would not meet its promise to sharply reduce its carbon emissions met a chorus of disapproval from around the world.

Delegates at the international climate talks in Warsaw, which end Friday, lamented Japan's move as a blow to worldwide efforts to slow global warming. In the Philippines, which is still collecting the dead from Typhoon Hayan, it served as yet another example of the indifference of the rich world to the plight of the world's poorest nations on the front lines of climate change.

But Japan's about-face on its climate promises — which followed the government's decision to shut down its nuclear power generators after the meltdown at the Daiichi nuclear plant in Fukushima — is also an opportunity for a reality check in the debate over how to slow the accumulation of greenhouse gases warming the atmosphere.

It brings into sharp focus the most urgent challenge: How will the world replace fossil fuels? Can it be done fast enough, cheaply enough and on a sufficient scale without nuclear energy? For all the optimism about the prospects of wind, sun and tides to power our future, the evidence suggests the answer is no.

Scrambling to find an alternative fuel to generate some 30 percent of its power, Japan had no choice but to turn to coal and gas. A few years ago, it promised that in 2020 it would produce 25 percent less greenhouse gas emissions than in 1990; last week it said it would, instead, produce 3 percent more.

Japan is unlikely to be the only country to miss its targets. In response to the Fukushima disaster, Germany shut down eight nuclear reactors and said it would close the remaining nine by 2022.

Everybody is promising to fill the gap with renewables. So far, however, coal and natural gas have won out. [CO2 emissions in Germany actually increased 1 percent last year](#), even as they declined in the United States and most of Western Europe.

Between 2010 and 2012, worldwide consumption of nuclear energy shrank 7 percent. Over the same period, the consumption of coal, the dirtiest fuel and the worst global warming offender, rose 4.5 percent. [Data released on Tuesday by the Global Carbon Project](#) confirmed that coal accounted for over half the growth in fossil fuel emissions in 2012.

With energy consumption expected to [grow by more than half over the next 30 years](#), the odds seem low that the world can avoid catastrophic warming without carbon-free nuclear power.

Opponents of nuclear energy say the case for nuclear power underestimates its costs and unique risks, including the fact that no other energy source can produce the sudden devastation of a nuclear meltdown. And they say that nuclear proponents overstate the challenge that renewable energy faces in replacing fossil fuels.

But while investment in renewable sources is crucially important to meet new energy needs, nuclear power remains the cheapest and most readily scalable of the alternative energy sources. Difficult as it may be to reduce dependence on coal, nuclear power is probably the world's best shot.

Take the [Energy Information Agency's estimate](#) of the cost of generating power. The agency's number-crunchers include everything from the initial investment to the cost of fuel and the expense to operate, maintain and decommission old plants. Its latest estimate, published earlier this year, suggests that power generated by a new-generation nuclear plant that entered service in 2018 would be \$108.40 per megawatt-hour. (A megawatt-hour is enough to supply an hour's worth of electricity to about 1,000 American homes.)

This is not cheap. Even if the government were to impose a carbon tax of \$15 per metric ton of CO₂, a coal-fired plant would generate power at \$100.10 to \$135.50 per MWh, depending on the technology. Plants using natural gas could produce electricity for as little as \$65.60 per MWh, even after paying the carbon tax.

Still, nuclear power is likely to be cheaper than most power made with renewables. Land-based wind farms could generate power at a relatively low cost of \$86.60 per MWh, but acceptable locations are growing increasingly scarce. Solar costs \$144.30 per MWh, the agency estimates. A megawatt-hour of power fueled by an offshore wind farm costs a whopping \$221.50.

Even these comparisons underestimate the challenges faced in developing wind and solar power on a large scale. They might be clean and plentiful sources, but they require expensive transmission lines from where the sun shines and the wind blows to where the power is needed. Moreover, the sun doesn't shine at least half the time. The wind doesn't always blow. And we don't yet know how to store electricity generated on hot summer days to use on cold winter nights.

The sun has provided half of Germany's power on some days. On others it has provided next to nothing. It's not easy to build a power network, let alone an economy, on the basis of such an unreliable energy source.

Perhaps the most levelheaded estimate of the relative cost of alternative fuels comes from the British government, which earlier this year published the price it was prepared to guarantee power generators as an incentive to develop [renewable sources](#).

The exercise underscored just how uncompetitive alternative sources of energy are, compared with coal and gas. It also revealed that nuclear power generated at a new plant in Somerset was expected to be [significantly cheaper](#).

The British government offered to guarantee a price of £92.50 per MWh of power generated at the Somerset plant. For offshore wind, the guarantees ranged from £155 per MWh at plants starting next year to £135 per MWh for those starting in 2018.

What about the danger of nuclear power? What about the fish swimming in cesium-laced waters off the coast of Japan or the tens of thousands of evacuees fleeing radioactive fallout?

In 2007 The Lancet medical journal published a study comparing deaths and illnesses associated with different sources of electricity — both from environmental pollution and accidents. [Nuclear energy, it found, was about the safest around](#). Nuclear energy was responsible for 0.003 accidental deaths per terawatt-hour generated. Coal-fired electricity accounted for 15 times as many.

“More than 10 years of operations would be needed before a single occupational death could be attributed to the plant” at a new French reactor, wrote the authors, Anil Markandya from the University of Bath and Paul Wilkinson from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Chernobyl, the worst nuclear accident in history, produced 50 additional deaths from cancer in 20 years, [according to a study by 100 scientists from eight United Nations agencies](#). Of 800,000 people exposed to its radiation, a maximum of 4,000 may eventually die from cancer, according to the World Health Organization.

Any such deaths are tragic, but there are downsides to all energy sources. The strongest evidence that nuclear energy is much safer than the public believes comes, of all places, from Japan.

In 1945, the United States dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since then, [500 of the 100,000 or so survivors — 0.5 percent — have died prematurely because of radiation exposure. Six decades worth of analysis of this population suggests the risks from radiation are unexpectedly low](#).

The climate change scientist James Hansen, former head of NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, argues that nuclear energy will save lives. In fact, [it has prevented some 1.8 million air pollution-related deaths](#) already.

The good news is that the sun and the wind are not the world’s only alternative to fossil fuels. There are risks associated with nuclear power, but it looks a lot better than the energy we’ve got.

November 19, 2013

Germany, France and Trade

91,28

Regarding “Big surplus brings plenty of criticism for Germany” (News, Nov. 14): Germany sticks to the basics, believing that a country’s prosperity lies in industrial production and exports, and that in a time of crisis one does not spend money. France ignores the basics, having abandoned the challenge of modernizing its industry years ago and instead opting for a service-oriented one. In Germany, workers participate in management to build excellent cars; in France, workers stage epic battles to preserve outdated technology.

The European economy is in a profound crisis: Every citizen is aware of this. To suggest that Germans should buy Alpha-Romeos and take vacations in Greece to solve the crisis is a joke. As in the past, France is making erratic choices by imposing more taxes that further strangle and depress its population. Is there any coherence in this?

Reginald Zell Bures-sur-Yvette, France

Germany is criticized for running a large trade surplus and is encouraged to consume more at home. But how can it be criticized for making things that people in other countries actually want to buy? And why encourage Germans to buy things they don’t need with money they don’t have? Truth be told, aside from being really well-made, German exports are extra-competitive in markets like the United States and China because the value of the euro is weighed down by the economic misfortunes of other nations using the single currency. If Germany still had the deutsche mark, its currency would have risen sharply by now, thanks to the country’s economic strength and export successes, and made German goods and services outside the euro zone more expensive and in turn somewhat less competitive. For now, however, Germany’s trade surplus and responsible spending habits should be commended — not condemned.

Sean King, New York

DW 5. Juni 2013-11-20

INTEGRATION

Keine doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft

91,29

Kinder ausländischer Eltern - vor allem aus der Türkei - müssen sich bei Volljährigkeit für eine Staatsbürgerschaft entscheiden. Ein Änderungsantrag der Opposition scheiterte am Widerstand der Regierungsparteien.



"Unwürdig und absurd", so kritisierte SPD-Politiker Thomas Oppermann das deutsche Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht am Mittwoch (05.06.2013). Nach derzeitigem Recht müssen sich in Deutschland geborene Kinder ausländischer Eltern bis zum 23. Lebensjahr entscheiden, ob sie die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft oder die ihrer Eltern annehmen wollen. Der Zwang gilt allerdings nur, wenn die Eltern aus Nicht-EU-Ländern stammen. Ein Antrag der Opposition, den seit 2000 geltenden Optionszwang abzuschaffen, wurde im Bundestag zum Teil laustark diskutiert - scheiterte aber am geschlossenen Widerstand der Regierungskoalition.

Volker Beck (Bündnis 90/Grünen) sprach von einer erzwungenen Entscheidung "zwischen der Tradition der Familie und dem Bekenntnis zu Deutschland." Der Optionszwang mache junge Menschen zu Ausländern in ihrem eigenen Land, wenn sie etwa im Urlaub in das Heimatland ihrer Eltern fahren, sagte die Grünen-Politikerin Renate Künast unter lauten Zurufen. Es sei ein "politischer Fehler", junge Menschen zu zwingen, eine Staatsbürgerschaft zu wählen. Sie wies darauf hin, dass 2 Millionen EU-Bürger und 3 Millionen Spätaussiedler, also deutsch-stämmige Einwanderer aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion, bereits über eine doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft verfügten. Auch für Kinder US-amerikanischer Eltern gilt die Ausnahme.

"Türkeifeindlichkeit" der Regierung

Nach Zahlen des Bundesinnenministeriums müssen sich bis Ende des Jahres 3400 junge Erwachsene, in der Mehrheit Kinder türkischer Eltern, für einen Pass entscheiden.. Das zeige, dass die Politik der Regierung "zielgerichtet in eine Richtung" gehe, so Künast. Noch deutlichere Worte kamen von der Politikerin Sevim Dagdelen (Linke). Sie warf der Regierung eine "Türkeifeindlichkeit" vor, die letztlich junge Menschen in die Arme von Islamisten und der konservativen Regierung in Ankara treiben könnte.

Für den Parlamentarischen Staatssekretär Ulrich Schröder ist das Optionsmodell dagegen ein "Erfolgsmodell". Die Tatsache, dass sich viele junge Menschen für die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft entschieden, sei ein Trend,

"der uns optimistisch stimmen sollte." Denn das Bekenntnis zu Deutschland sei ein Zeichen der Integration. Mehrstaatlichkeit könne zu großen Problemen führen: So könnten straffällige Menschen mit doppelter Staatsbürgerschaft sich in ihr Heimatland absetzen, um ihrer Strafe zu entfliehen. Die Opposition konterte mit lauten Zwischenrufen: "Das stimmt doch gar nicht."



Aber nur mit einem Pass: Einbürgerungskampagne in

Sachsen-Anhalt

Angst vor "Parallelgesellschaften"

Reinhard Grindel (CDU/CSU) mahnte, der Antrag der Opposition spiele der türkischen Regierung in die Hände. Denn diese dränge ihre Staatsbürger in Deutschland ganz gezielt zur Einbürgerung, um türkische Interessen in Deutschland besser vertreten zu können. Die doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft, so der konservative Politiker, führe zu einer "Parallelgesellschaft."

Der Koalitionspartner FDP stimmte geschlossen gegen den Antrag. Trotzdem sprach sich der FDP-Politiker Serkan Tören für eine doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft aus. Denn Deutschland müsse attraktiv bleiben, um in Zeiten von Fachkräftemangel etwa mit angelsächsischen Staaten zu konkurrieren, wo keine Optionspflicht besteht. Die doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft fördere die "Teilhabe" und "Integration", so Tören, der auch gegen den Antrag stimmte. Denn Loyalitätskonflikte, etwa bei der Frage nach dem Wehrdienst, seien längst durch Abkommen aus dem Weg geräumt worden.

INTEGRATION

"Doppelpass" nur bis zum 23. Geburtstag

91,31

Der erste Jahrgang deutscher Einwandererkinder muss sich 2013 für eine Staatsbürgerschaft entscheiden: die deutsche oder die der Eltern. Wegen der sogenannten Optionspflicht ist eine Binationalität nicht mehr möglich.



Weil sie hier geboren und aufgewachsen sind, entscheiden sich die meisten Betroffenen für den deutschen Pass

Zu ihrem 18. Geburtstag bekam Ebru Uzun Post. Inhalt des Briefes: Sie müsse sich bis zu ihrem 23. Geburtstag zwischen der deutschen und der türkischen Staatsbürgerschaft entscheiden. "Ich bin da relativ pragmatisch herangegangen", sagt Uzun, die am 2. April 23 Jahre alt wird, der DW. "Ich verreise viel und studiere jetzt im Ausland, und mit der türkischen Staatsbürgerschaft ist das einfach unpraktisch."

Die Tochter türkischer Eltern entschied sich bereits 2011 für die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft. Zurzeit macht sie ihren Master in Klinischen Neurowissenschaften am University College London. Ganz leicht ist ihr die Abgabe des türkischen Passes aber nicht gefallen. "Auf der anderen Seite ist das ja auch ein Teil meiner Identität, den ich da abgeben musste, und mir war nicht so richtig klar, warum. Es hat ja keine richtigen Nachteile für den Staat, wenn ich noch eine andere Staatsbürgerschaft habe", sagt Uzun.

Uzun ist einer von 3316 jungen Menschen mit Doppelpass, die dieses Jahr ihre Wahl treffen müssen. Betroffen sind Kinder ausländischer Eltern, die nach dem 1. Januar 1990 in Deutschland geboren wurden. Für sie gilt: Wenn die Eltern rechtmäßig seit acht Jahren in Deutschland leben, haben die Kinder ein Recht auf die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft. Das entsprechende Gesetz gilt seit dem 1. Januar 2000 rückwirkend bis zum Geburtsjahrgang 1990. Die meisten dieser Kinder haben nun zwei Staatsbürgerschaften: die deutsche und die ihrer Eltern.

Die Optionspflicht



Für 3300 junge Leute ist dieses Jahr Schluss mit dem "Doppelpass"

Spätestens bis zu ihrem 23. Geburtstag müssen sich die jungen Menschen aber für einen Pass entscheiden. Dann greift die sogenannte Optionspflicht. Wenn ihre Eltern aus der EU oder aus der Schweiz kommen, dürfen sie beide Pässe behalten, sofern sie dies bis zu ihrem 21. Geburtstag beantragen.

Wenn der zweite Pass aber aus einem Nicht-EU-Land kommt, ist es mit der Binationalität vorbei. Die Optionspflicht sieht zwei Möglichkeiten vor: Entweder, die jungen Menschen entscheiden sich für ihre ausländische Staatsangehörigkeit und geben die deutsche ab. Oder sie beantragen die Entlassung aus der Staatsbürgerschaft ihrer Eltern und bleiben somit Deutsche. Wenn sie die erforderlichen Papiere nicht rechtzeitig bei ihrer Einbürgerungsbehörde einreichen, verlieren sie mit ihrem 23. Geburtstag die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft.

Fatales Nichtstun

Beratungsstellen wie die Jugendmigrationsdienste wollen solche Extremfälle verhindern. "Unser Auftrag ist, die Menschen darauf hinzuweisen, dass die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft weg ist, wenn sie nichts tun", sagt Herbert Lücken, Leiter des Jugendmigrationsdienstes der Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO) in Bremen, der DW. "Wir müssen sie einfach noch mal darüber aufklären: Wenn du nichts tust, bist du ab übermorgen 'nur' noch Türke."

Genau das ist im Januar einer jungen Frau in Hessen passiert. Sie hatte es trotz mehrerer Aufforderungen der Behörden versäumt, rechtzeitig ihre Entlassung aus der türkischen Staatsbürgerschaft vorzulegen. Wie das Regierungspräsidium Darmstadt bekannt gab, verlor die junge Frau am 3. Januar 2013 ihre deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft. Wenn sie diese nun zurückerhalten will, muss sie das komplizierte deutsche Einbürgerungsverfahren durchlaufen und sogar einen Einbürgerungstest bestehen.

Wegen solcher Fälle hat sich die Bertelsmann-Stiftung gegen die Optionspflicht ausgesprochen. Der Integrationsexperte der Stiftung, Ulrich Kober, nannte es "aus Integrationsperspektive eine Katastrophe", wenn Menschen wegen Unkenntnis oder Fristversäumnis ihre deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit verlören. "Das ist kein gutes Signal für Offenheit oder Willkommenskultur", sagt Kober in einem Pressestatement vom 4. Februar zur Optionspflicht.

Binationalität erlauben?

Auch die AWO ist dafür, die doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft dauerhaft in Deutschland zuzulassen. "Ich sehe keine Gefahr für Deutschland, wenn Menschen zwei Pässe haben", sagt Herbert Lücken.

Im deutschen Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht ist die "Vermeidung von Mehrstaatigkeit" allerdings ein wichtiger Grundsatz. Diejenigen, die eine dauerhafte doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft ablehnen, weisen unter anderem auf mögliche Probleme bei der Auslieferung von Straftätern hin, wie kürzlich CDU-Fraktionschef Volker Kauder. Weitere Argumente der Doppelpass-Gegner sind Komplikationen im Privatrecht. Bei einem Scheidungsverfahren wäre es beispielsweise schwierig festzustellen, welches Recht auf Ehegatten mit zwei Staatsbürgerschaften anzuwenden wäre.

Deutsches Zugehörigkeitsgefühl



Die Wehrpflicht ist für viele ein Grund, den türkischen Pass abzugeben

Der Jugendmigrationsdienst der AWO in Bremen hat dieses Jahr bereits zehn junge Menschen in Fragen zur Entlassung aus der ausländischen Staatsbürgerschaft beraten. Insgesamt sind im Land Bremen dieses Jahr circa 30 Menschen von der Optionspflicht betroffen. Die meisten von ihnen hätten einen türkischen Hintergrund, sagt Lücken, und die meisten wollten den deutschen Pass behalten. Einer der Gründe sei die Vermeidung des türkischen Wehrdienstes.

Eine weitere große Rolle bei der Entscheidung für die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit spielt das Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zu Deutschland: Die Betroffenen sind hier geboren und aufgewachsen, und kennen die Heimat ihrer Eltern oft nur aus den Ferien.

La France, championne d'Europe des charges sociales pesant sur les entreprises

91,34

- Par Isabelle de Foucaud, Service infographie du Figaro
- Mis à jour le 20/11/2013 à 12:12 Publié le 20/11/2013 à 11:42

INFOGRAPHIE - Avec un taux d'imposition global de 64,7%, dont 51,7% pour les charges sociales, l'hexagone est l'un des pays qui taxent le plus leurs entreprises au monde. Les démarches administratives pour déclarer et régler ses impôts, en revanche, continuent de s'alléger.

La France reste peu attractive en matière de **fiscalité** des entreprises, mais fait figure de bonne élève sur le front de la paperasserie administrative. Voici, en résumé, les conclusions de **l'étude annuelle «Paying taxes 2014»** publiée par la Banque mondiale et le cabinet PwC*, qui compare les régimes fiscaux de 189 pays. Avec un taux d'imposition global de 64,7%, l'Hexagone est l'un des pays au monde qui taxent le plus leurs petites et moyennes **entreprises**. La moyenne mondiale s'établit à 43,1%. À l'échelle européenne, où le taux moyen s'élève à 41,1%, la France est le second pays le plus cher pour les entreprises, derrière l'Italie (65,8%). En tête des pays les plus séduisants, la Croatie (19,8%), le Luxembourg (20,7%) et Chypre (22,5%) devançant de loin le Royaume-Uni (34%), l'Allemagne (49,4%) ou la Suède (52%).

Ce taux global inclut l'imposition des bénéfices, les cotisations et les charges sociales supportées par l'employeur, ainsi que d'autres prélèvements comme la taxe foncière, l'imposition des dividendes, l'impôt sur les plus-values ou encore les taxes sur la collecte des déchets. Alors que la charge fiscale sur les bénéfices est «relativement basse» en France, à 8,7%, la performance du pays est plombée par le poids des **charges sociales**. Le taux français (51,7%) est le plus élevé d'Europe, devant la Belgique (50,3%) et l'Italie (43,4%).

«La réforme du système fiscal est essentielle et cette étude montre qu'il n'y a pas que l'impôt sur les sociétés qui compte. Il s'agit également de décider des modalités d'imposition: qui doit payer des impôts, comment et à quelle hauteur», commente Philippe Durand, avocat-associé chez Landwell & Associés, membre du réseau PwC. Un avis que partageront sans doute les chefs d'entreprises qui, exaspérés, dénoncent depuis plusieurs mois **les changements incessants des règles fiscales** et le poids excessif des impôts alourdissant le coût du travail. Entrepreneurs, agriculteurs, vétérinaires... La grogne fiscale a peu à peu **gagné tous les secteurs**, poussant Jean-Marc Ayrault à annoncer mardi **une «remise à plat, en toute transparence»** du système fiscal à la française.

132 heures pour remplir la paperasse

En attendant, tout n'est pas noir en France, où le poids des démarches administratives pour déclarer et régler ses impôts continuent de s'améliorer. Selon l'étude, les entreprises peuvent désormais s'acquitter de toutes leurs formalités fiscales en seulement 132 heures, contre 186 heures en 2004, et sept paiements, soit deux fois moins qu'il y a neuf ans! À noter que la moyenne mondiale s'élève à 268 heures pour remplir la paperasse et 26,7 paiements.

«À l'échelle mondiale, l'administration fiscale prend des mesures pour optimiser et moderniser les systèmes de paiement. Les contribuables de 76 économies peuvent à présent télé déclarer leurs impôts de quasiment partout dans le monde», explique Philippe Durand. Sur ce front-là, la France fait mieux que l'Allemagne (218 heures et 9 paiements), mais reste bien moins efficace que les Émirats Arabes Unis (12 heures et 4 paiements) ou le Qatar

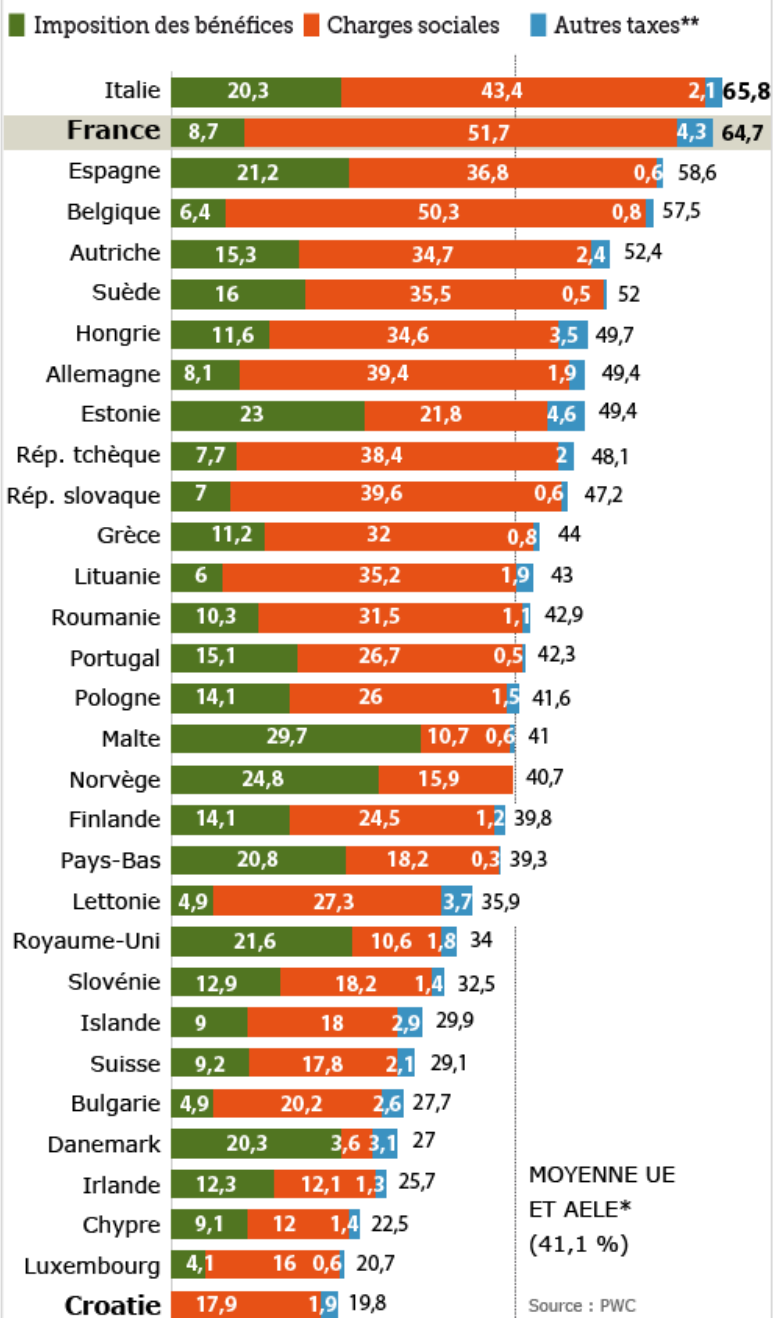
(41 heures et 4 paiements). Avec ses 2600 heures passées à remplir ses papiers, le Brésil en revanche se noie dans la gestion de ses impôts.

En prenant en compte les trois critères de l'enquête - taux d'imposition, nombre de paiements et nombre d'heures consacrées aux démarches - la France se place à la 53ème position sur le podium mondial et **conserve donc son rang de 2012**.

* Cette étude évalue les impôts et cotisations annuels obligatoires des petites et moyennes entreprises, sur la base d'une «société type», dans 189 pays.

Les charges sociales en France sont les plus lourdes d'Europe

TAUX D'IMPOSITION SUR LES ENTREPRISES DE L'UE ET AELE*, en %



*Association européenne de libre-échange

**Taxe foncière, impôt sur la transmission du patrimoine, imposition des dividendes, impôt sur les plus-values, taxe sur les transactions financières et taxes sur la collecte des déchets, taxes sur les véhicules et de circulation routière et autres droits et taxes accessoires

20/11/2013

11/20/2013 05:32 PM

Near Zero

ECB Interest Rate Cuts Hit Savings Hard

91,37

As the European Central Bank pushes interest rates to a new low, Germans are growing increasingly concerned about their savings. The money in their accounts is losing value and life insurance policies are yielding lower returns. Investors and central bankers feel trapped. By SPIEGEL staff

Jens Weidmann seemed visibly uncomfortable in the role of rock star. The officials with the Frankfurt Cooperative Association had taken great pains to stage last week's appearance of the president of Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank, as a show event.

The lights were dimmed in the "Jahrhunderthalle" convention center, the venue for an upcoming concert by the heavy metal band Motörhead. Trapeze artists hovered in the air as Michael Bockelmann, the association's chairman, set the tone with some sharp words against the European Central Bank (ECB). **Because of low interest rates, he said, more and more people are losing interest in saving for the future. Bockelmann left no doubt that Weidmann is the last hope for German savers.**

But the much-vaunted central banker began his appearance by tripping on the steps up to the stage, and then he **voiced his disapproval of the notion that the magical powers of alchemists could be ascribed to central bankers.** And when he finally took a cue from the man who had introduced him and invoked the dangers of a low interest-rate policy, **he sounded defensive, almost a little clueless.**

He could understand savers' concerns about "creeping expropriation," said Weidmann. He noted that low interest rates are a nuisance, and that relaxed monetary policy also creates risks for banks, insurance companies and the financial markets.

Reverberations of a Frankfurt Bombshell

But as consolation, Germany's top monetary watchdog could only offer a vague promise at the end of his speech, when he predicted that interest rates would eventually rise again.

It's been less than two weeks since ECB President Mario Draghi reduced the European base rate to the lowest level of all time. But **the reverberations of the Frankfurt bombshell are still audible today.** Until recently, politicians, investors and economists had hoped that the euro crisis would soon be over, as would the era of low interest rates. **Now it is becoming apparent that savers will have to endure even more pain, and that the economic divide within the euro zone is deeper than ever.**

In the north, savers and investors worry that the yields on their financial investments are close to zero. In the south, by contrast, rates on construction and commercial loans are still so high that there is very little new investment. The consequence is a persistent recession, which has also worsened the mood in Europe's monetary authority. **Sources at the ECB say that a serious conflict could erupt if Draghi tries to push interest rates down even further.**

The tense climate in the ECB Governing Council dovetails with the grim mood among German savers. The inflation rate is already higher than the rate of return on many investment products. Although this does not formally qualify as expropriation, **savings are gradually losing value because prices are rising faster than interest income.**

There is a growing sense of perplexity in the investment industry, which thrives on optimism and promises for the future. **The powerful insurance companies are at a loss as to how to achieve the returns they have promised to their investors.** Banks and savings banks are fighting with frustrated customers, and investors are desperately trying to figure out how to at least preserve the current value of their assets: with stocks, gold, or, perhaps even better, with the purchase of big-city real estate?

Prospects of a Comfortable Retirement Darkening

Only a few years ago, Germans were convinced that they could offset the cuts lawmakers had made to government-mandated pensions by saving more money on their own. They invested heavily in insurance policies and so-called **Riester retirement plans**, purchased shares in securities funds and paid portions of their salaries into company pension plans.

Now they are forced to look on as the euro crisis and the central banks' low interest-rate policies eat up the gains they had envisioned and darken the prospects of a comfortable retirement, especially at the lower levels of the income scale.

Sabine Müller (named changed), a secretary in Munich, knows all too well what this means. She bought a life-insurance policy when she started her first job in 1984. Even at that time, a statutory pension seemed everything but assured. Everything went smoothly at first. The anticipated benefits grew "slowly but surely," as Müller wrote in a recent letter to the Hamburg Consumer Center. In 2009, her insurance company told her that she could expect a sum of about €40,000 (\$54,120) when she retired. But by 2010, the sum had already declined to €38,000, and in 2012 the company was projecting a future benefit of €37,000. According to the latest notice, she can now expect no more than €34,000. **In other words, the secretary's assets have essentially declined by 15 percent in only four years.**

Many people are in the same position as Sabine Müller. **Over the decades, they have accumulated €5 trillion in monetary assets, along with more than €6 trillion in real estate and tangible assets. Because Germans tend to be risk-averse, they invest most of their money in savings deposits, life insurance and fixed-income products. Safety first was long the motto of German investors,** but that is precisely why their savings are now melting like an iceberg in times of climate change.

There is a picture of a severe-looking snowman hanging on the wall of chief economist Ulrich Kater's office on the 41st floor of DekaBank in Frankfurt. Kater, with his sharp nose, sideburns and friendly-looking face, explains the phenomenon of **"cold expropriation."**

"A person who has deposited €1,000 into a savings account is pleased to see his €1,000 still in the account at the end of the year." But that, as Kater explains, is an illusion, because the saver is ignoring the loss of purchasing power. **Savings can only grow in real terms if the interest rate is higher than the rate of inflation.**

Investing in Federal Bonds a Losing Proposition

Some €900 billion of monetary assets consist of deposits, which can be withdrawn immediately and earn an average of about 0.42 percent in annual interest. At an estimated inflation rate of 1.6 percent this year, these assets will see a 1.18-percent decline in value, or about €11 billion. The situation is slightly more favorable for

savings deposits or fixed deposits with terms of up to two years, but even here the real rate of interest is often negative. Investing in federal bonds is also a losing proposition for Germans. In the case of five-year bonds, for example, interest rates have also fallen below inflation.

This also affects many **insurance companies and pension plans**, which together account for more than €1.8 trillion of German monetary assets. They, too, invest most of their money in government bonds, which means that the returns on life insurance policies are declining from one year to the next. **Guaranteed interest rates, which were at 4 percent in 2000, had dropped to 1.75 percent by 2012.**

"Savers still benefit from the fact that their policies are backed by previously acquired bonds with higher fixed-interest coupons," Kater explains. **"But the longer the low-interest-rate phase lasts, the more fixed interest rates will expire, and the bigger the losses will become from year to year."** If the structure of monetary assets doesn't change and the low interest-rate policy continues for another 10 years, **the total loss to savers could grow to €60 billion.**

"In Germany today, people can no longer provide for their retirement by saving," says Walter Krämer. A statistics professor in the western city of Dortmund, Krämer initiated a call for protest by 282 German economists against the euro bailout policy last year, and this summer he followed up with a letter of complaint titled "Cold Expropriation."

Krämer assigns the blame to the ECB. **"Savers pay the price for the fact that the ECB is determined to rescue comatose banks,"** he says. According to Krämer, banks are being charged too little to gain access to ECB funds, so that they have no incentive to offer more to savers.

An Unsustainable Demographic Makeup

But that is only part of the truth. **The dilemma had its beginnings years earlier.** "Interest rates are as low as they are **today because the key economies loaded up on debt until 2007,**" says DekaBank economist Kater. In the financial crisis, it then became clear that these nations, as well as companies and citizens in many countries, had amassed too much debt, which could no longer be reduced by higher economic growth as it could in earlier years.

There are also **demographic reasons** for this. The percentage of young people in the population is shrinking, and yet they must generate greater economic output to reduce the debts they are inheriting from the current generation.

Because this is unsustainable, a redistribution from creditors to borrowers, or from savers to the state, is now occurring, as Kater explains. The operative expression is **"financial repression."** The government makes money when interest rates on government bonds are lower than inflation. Its debt burden is decreased, while savers are left to foot the bill, with their assets losing value in real terms.

The consequence is a massive redistribution. McKinsey, the consulting firm, has calculated that the governments of the United States, Great Britain and the euro zone already saved \$1.6 trillion between 2007 and 2012 as a result of low interest rates. This is offset by a loss to private households of \$630 billion. Older citizens are losing more than younger people, because the latter tend to have more debt and fewer savings.

As much as savers are being fleeced, there are also those who profit from low interest rates. **People who own real estate have benefited from increases in value in recent years, while stock owners have seen Germany's DAX share index climb from one record high to the next.** But this primarily benefits those who are not worried about having enough retirement income.

A Transfer of Assets From the Poor to the Rich

In this way, the low-interest-rate policy doesn't just lead to a transfer of assets from citizens to the state, but also from the poor to the rich. "This type of redistribution is an extremely anti-social instrument," says Kater. That's because affluent households are in a better position to shift their focus to stocks, real estate and other investments than those with average incomes.

The process is in full swing, as was evident last week at the Highlights International Art Fair held at the opulent former Munich palace known as the "Residenz," where the city's glitterati rubbed shoulders with the new moneyed elite from Asia and Russia. **A Picasso for €8.5 million? No problem.** And for the smaller budget, drawings by German-American painter Lyonel Feininger could be had for less than €100,000. Works by Max Beckmann, Joseph Beuys and others were priced somewhere in between.

"Because of the low interest rates, there has been a strong focus on tangible assets in recent years, which has also benefited the art market," says Peter Raskin, the head of international private banking at the Hamburg-based Berenberg Bank.

Nevertheless, it was probably more of a coincidence that a triptych by Francis Bacon (\$141 million) and Jeff Koons' "Balloon Dog" (\$58.4 million) fetched record prices at auction in the days following the reduction in the base rate. The art market is on a roll, apparently with no end in sight. "Despite the very high price levels and growing number of record prices, we still don't feel that the market is overheated," says Raskin.

But for both small investors and major capital investors, the art market is not an alternative. **Even the world's largest investor, the Norwegian Government Pension Fund, is experiencing how difficult it is to achieve a palpable yield with solid investments.** The fund's managers have more than €500 billion to invest, and they are investing less and less in government and corporate bonds. The share of these investments in total fund assets has declined considerably in the last few years alone, to the most recent figure of 35 percent. **The fund is increasingly investing billions in real estate and in booming stock markets, which enabled it to achieve an enviable return of more than 13 percent last year.**

Fighting a Losing Battle

Comparable returns are out of reach for most Germans. Instant access and passbook savings accounts, with their pitifully low interest rates, are still the most popular forms of investment. **Only one in nine Germans has invested money in the stock market, either in the form of individual stocks or mutual funds.**

No matter what happens to the markets, **there is one constant: Germans have an aversion to equities.** This explains why Martin Weber, a professor of banking management at the University of Mannheim, is probably fighting a losing battle.

In his lectures, he constantly advocates people investing a portion of their money in securities. "There is a fundamental misunderstanding in Germany," says Weber. **"We view stocks as a form of gambling, and yet they are nothing but investments in a company."**

Nevertheless, **the situation is surreal.** "We have the most successful companies in the world in many fields, and yet almost no one in this country wants to invest in them," says Andreas Beck, who founded the Munich Institute for Asset Accumulation. Foreign investors take a completely different view. They now own more than half of all shares in most companies listed on the DAX.

The longer the low-interest phase lasts, the more menacing it becomes for banks -- which should actually benefit from the ECB's policies -- and insurance companies.

Interest Earnings in Decline for Many Years

This is alarming to **Andreas Dombret**. A member of the Bundesbank Executive Board responsible for financial stability, last week he accomplished the feat of both appeasing and **issuing strong warnings to the financial industry**.

Because of intense competition in Germany, **interest earnings, once the most important source of income for banks, have been declining for many years**. Now the policy of cheap money is only exacerbating the problem. **Dombret also fears that banks, in their pursuit of higher returns, could accept excessively high risks in areas such as mortgage lending**.

Dombret believes the consequences of low interest rates are even more dangerous for insurance companies. For more than a year now, yields on long-term government bonds, in which insurers invest a large portion of their money, have been lower than the guaranteed interest rates on newly concluded policies. As a result, the policy providers are increasingly drawing on their assets for income. The Bundesbank has simulated scenarios in which up to 32 life insurance companies, with a market share of 43 percent, would no longer be able to fulfill statutory capital reserve requirements if the low-interest-rate phase continues. "Life insurance companies must examine the level of distributions and bolster their equity capital," Dombret warns.

He also fears that the low interest rates will lead to further growth in the poorly regulated shadow-banking sector. Recent figures prove him right: Last year the assets of hedge funds, money market funds and other providers in the industry, some of which are involved in commercial activities related to banking, grew by \$5 trillion.

Although cheap money reduces the revenues of banks and insurance companies, it also keeps financial groups and many companies that ought to have disappeared from the market by now artificially afloat. In light of the low interest rates, investments that generate very low returns are still worthwhile. In this way, capital is being wasted.

Fatal Consequences for the Entire Economy

This can have fatal consequences for the entire economy. When money is invested in a way that yields very small returns, economic growth declines in the long term, because zombie banks and companies are being supported. Japan, which has seen virtually flat economic growth despite years of low-interest-rate policies, is a case in point.

This presents a significant challenge to the ECB. On the one hand, there is a risk that the euro zone economy will slide into deflation, a spiral of constantly falling prices and shrinking economies. On the other hand, the ECB's loose monetary policy could ultimately exacerbate the risks already apparent today.

Not surprisingly, the rift within the monetary authority continues to grow. Countries in the **southern crisis** regions, in particular, are **pushing for even lower interest rates**, in the hope that this will provide cheaper money for their domestic economies. The cash-strapped governments of these peripheral countries also expect lower rates to give them greater access to funds.

Representatives of the northern member states, especially Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann, hold the opposite view. **They fear that the glut of money resulting from low rates will cause inflation and deter the ailing southern countries from enacting reforms**.

ECB President **Mario Draghi** vacillates between the two positions. In June, his chief economist, Peter Praet, proposed lowering interest rates to 0.25 percent. But then he abandoned his plan, at least for the time being, in the face of growing opposition from **Weidmann**, German Executive Board member **Jörg Asmussen**, Luxembourg member **Yves Mersch** and the heads of the central banks of **Austria, the Netherlands and Slovakia**.

Interest Rate Could Be Cut to Zero

In the week before last, Draghi decided that it was a favorable time to bypass the opponents of lower rates. A sharp decline in the rate of inflation had **prompted the Slovakian representative to change his position**.

The step is an alarm signal for the group headed by **Weidmann and Asmussen**, who would have preferred waiting another month to make the decision. **Now they fear that a majority in the ECB Council will want to push interest rates to zero when the ECB economists present their next forecast in December**. Based on current indications, they will likely predict an increase in prices of just below 1.5 percent for next year and the following year, which is much lower than the ECB's inflation target of close to 2 percent.

This is why a large segment of the ECB Council believes that there is plenty of latitude for pushing the base rate closer to zero in the near future.

Many council members from the south even advocate pushing rates on deposit accounts below the zero mark. In that case, banks that maintain liquidity with the ECB would effectively be paying a fee to hold onto their customers' money.

The proponents of this step speculate that the lenders will withdraw their balances from the central bank and instead will return to lending more money to each other. **In that case, citizens would literally be forced to raid their accounts and both consume and invest more**, which would in turn revive the economy in the entire euro zone. **"We want to frustrate savers," a central banker bluntly admits.**

Italian Credit Sector the Biggest Winner

Two worlds are colliding. Weidmann and his supporters from the north are attempting to protect their domestic savers from even greater harm. The central bankers from the south, on the other hand, are concerned about the sick economies and ailing banks in their countries.

The main beneficiary of the most recent interest-rate decisions is the **Italian credit sector**, large parts of which are in trouble. Lenders in Draghi's native country were greatly relieved when the costs of new loans from the central bank were cut in half.

But Draghi is also making it easier for the Italian government to raise money. Last week, yields on 12-month bonds fell to their lowest level since the end of World War II.

Possibly the most dangerous consequence of the most recent interest-rate decision is that it increases mutual mistrust within the euro zone. Citizens of the crisis-ridden countries are increasingly furious, because despite substantial austerity measures, they still see no light at the end of the tunnel. In the north, ordinary savers and retirees are noticing that they are now experiencing the first measurable losses as a result of the euro bailout policy.

The battle lines among economists are also as hardened as ever, as Marcel Fratzscher, president of the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) and Hans-Werner Sinn, president of the Ifo Institute for Economic Research, demonstrated in a SPIEGEL debate. Germany is "the greatest beneficiary" of the monetary union, claims Fratzscher. On the contrary, says Sinn, "Germany is no euro winner."

11/20/2013 05:10 PM

Top Economists Debate

The ECB's Controversial Euro Crisis Strategy

91,43

By Alexander Neubacher and Michael Sauga

In a joint interview, economists Marcel Fratzscher and Hans-Werner Sinn evaluate the ECB's policy of lowering interest rates and the euro-zone rescue strategy, and arrive at completely different conclusions. Fratzscher sees the ECB's strategy as the solution. Sinn sees it as part of the problem.

The opponents: Anyone looking to pass economic judgment on the euro crisis cannot ignore the heads of the two leading German think tanks. Sinn, 65, has led the Ifo Institute for Economic Research in Munich for almost 15 years. He appeared in front of Germany's Federal Constitutional Court to support the complaint against the European Stability Mechanism permanent bailout fund. Fellow economist Fratzscher, 42, worked at the ECB until 2012. He has been the president of the DIW economic research institute since the beginning of the year; a few weeks ago, he was part of an appeal for closer political union in Europe.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Fratzscher, Mr. Sinn, the European Central Bank (ECB) has reduced its base lending rate to 0.25 percent and money has never been cheaper in Europe. Should we be pleased about this?

Sinn: The problem is the extent of the ECB loans. The central bank has supplied the Southern European countries with over €700 billion (\$950 billion) in low-cost special loans. It's maintaining a huge fiscal bailout machine. The bank has thus exceeded its authority.

Fratzscher: I see this completely differently. The ECB has to supply the economy with liquidity to allow consumers to make purchases and companies to make investments. This is currently not happening to a sufficient extent, though, because loans in many euro-zone countries are too expensive and too scarce. That's precisely what the ECB intends to change, so reducing interest rates was the right decision.

SPIEGEL: In Germany interest rates are so low these days that they no longer balance out rising prices. This causes savings accounts to lose their value. Is this a case of creeping expropriation?

Fratzscher: It's true that today's investors only receive minimal returns. But there are alternatives. With stocks and real estate, for example, it's currently possible to make very good money in Germany. And when the economy in Southern Europe recovers, German savers will also benefit because growth and income will be bolstered in Germany.

Sinn: Debtors are delighted with falling interest rates. But Germany is a net creditor to other countries. Between 2008 and 2012, the bailout initiatives cost Germany over €200 billion in interest losses.

Fratzscher: Excuse me? How did you arrive at that figure?

Sinn: Our export surpluses were primarily no longer placed in savings. Instead, three-quarters of this money was paid with euros that other countries had borrowed from their own central banks. This borders on

expropriation. If we had been able to save our export surpluses at 2007 interest rates, we would be €200 billion richer today.

Fratzscher: Interest rates have not been artificially reduced due to the bailout policies, but rather because we were in a boom in 2007, and now all of Europe is in the grip of a serious crisis. The ECB has managed to pull the economy back from a cliff. It's thanks to the central bank that there is light at the end of the tunnel in Southern Europe.

Sinn: I don't see any light.

Fratzscher: Without falling interest rates, the economy would have suffered a far worse downturn. Let's run through the scenario: Higher interest rates mean fewer loans; fewer loans mean less growth; less growth leads to less employment, more bankruptcies and a deeper recession. This puts state finances under pressure and weakens the banks, which in turn grant even fewer loans. That's how you turn a liquidity crisis into a solvency crisis, a vicious circle that would also impact us in Germany. Indeed, your scenario, Mr. Sinn, would give us no benefits, but enormous costs.

Sinn: The euro in Southern Europe created an inflationary credit bubble, and when it burst, the ECB's policies prevented the affected countries from improving their competitiveness. Southern Europe is wasting away. Unemployment in Spain and Greece is approaching 30 percent, and as many as 60 percent of the region's young people are looking for work. Industry is crashing.

Fratzscher: Anyone who blames this crisis on the euro might just as well blame the police officer when there has been a burglary somewhere. But the opposite is true: Since 1999, the euro has made it possible for all member states to acquire loans under more favorable conditions, to invest more and thus to achieve greater prosperity. This opportunity was often missed, but that's not the euro's fault.

SPIEGEL: The euro crisis eased after ECB President Mario Draghi announced over one year ago that, if necessary, his bank would purchase unlimited quantities of sovereign bonds from European crisis-ridden countries. Was that a good thing?

Sinn: For capital investors yes, for taxpayers no. Bad investments wiped out huge amounts of savings capital in Southern Europe. That's why investors no longer want to go there. But the ECB would like to see capital continue to flow south, so it has moved the printing presses to Southern Europe. What's more, the bank gives buyers of southern sovereign bonds free insurance protection at taxpayers' expense. This is an investment intervention that no longer has much to do with a free market economy.

Fratzscher: The ECB does not direct the flow of capital. It was we Germans who first invested our money worldwide and lost some of it and then pulled out of Southern Europe. Now there is a huge liquidity gap, and the ECB is doing what it has pledged to do: It is supplying Southern European banks with money and preventing a liquidity crisis from becoming a solvency crisis.

Sinn: And the risk is borne by taxpayers as the owner of the ECB.

Fratzscher: The ECB has not heightened the risks in Europe. Actually, it has reduced them. It has averted the risk that Europe's economy could slide even deeper into recession. Consequently, the financial sector is no longer in such grave danger. There is now a reduced risk that assets worth trillions -- including those owned by German citizens -- could be destroyed in a euro crash. Indeed, capital is slowly returning to Europe. We can see that it is better to prevent an insolvency than to precipitate a collapse.

Sinn: Prolonging an insolvency is even worse.

Fratzscher: What insolvency are you referring to?

Sinn: I'm referring to the insolvency of individual countries and many banks in Southern Europe. The earlier you recognize an insolvency, the less the burden on taxpayers, and the earlier it is possible to get a fresh start.

Fratzscher: Fresh start? We would experience a scenario that is comparable with the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. It's good that we have been able to prevent something like this from happening.

'Even the Greeks Want to Stay in the Euro Zone'

SPIEGEL: Mr. Sinn, do you think it would be right for a number of countries to abandon the euro and return to their own currencies?

Sinn: Yes. Greece, Spain and Portugal are currently not competitive -- they must become 30 percent less expensive. But as long as they are in the euro zone, this is impossible without inflicting massive damage to their social systems. Exiting the euro zone -- combined with a debt haircut for banks and states -- would give these countries an opportunity to become competitive and pay back their foreign debts.

Fratzscher: I don't agree with your analysis and the markets don't either. The countries of Southern Europe are not bankrupt -- neither Spain nor Portugal nor Italy -- although they are all unquestionably suffering from a recession and have to reform. So I think the European Central Bank is doing the right thing with its monetary policy: It gives these countries time to enact the necessary reforms. We can plainly see that the crisis-stricken countries don't want to leave the euro zone. Even the Greeks want to remain.

Sinn: Because they don't want to lose access to the euro printing presses.

Fratzscher: Greece is a special case, but the other countries are on the right track. Ireland has shown that you can introduce tough reforms and improve your competitiveness without abandoning the euro. Spain and Portugal need time, but they will succeed. We should not forget that 10 years ago Germany was seen as the sick man of Europe. It also took us five, six years before we could keep pace. It's important for Europe to show that it is prepared to lend a hand.

Sinn: We have helped a great deal and now we are losing time. The aid is incredibly expensive and is postponing the day when these countries have to take matters into their own hands. Ireland has reformed because it entered the crisis earlier and initially received no aid.

SPIEGEL: What do you propose?

Sinn: We need tougher private and public budget restrictions. Countries that cannot cope with this should be helped to exit. We should construct the euro zone as a breathing monetary union, with structured rules for coming in and going out -- for entering and exiting. Leaving is, of course, not the end of the world. It's possible to reenter once the situation has improved.

Fratzscher: Tell the unemployed in the crisis-ridden countries that it would not be the end of the world if even more people lost their livelihoods. In my view, your proposal would only provide disadvantages. We would have a return to foreign-exchange crises in Europe. The costs would be immense. We Germans should be particularly glad that the exchange rate risk has disappeared due to the launch of the euro.

SPIEGEL: What do you propose as an alternative?

Fratzscher: We need -- and Mr. Sinn is correct on this point -- clear regulations to deal with bankrupt banks, and we need more budgetary discipline among member states. That's why I support stronger European institutions, such as a more autonomous European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which can discipline countries that don't respect the rules. And we need a European government that can push through these joint regulations.

SPIEGEL: Has Germany benefited from the euro?

Fratzscher: Yes. We are the major beneficiaries. Thanks to the euro, trade and the internal market have grown together more, which has greatly benefited German companies. We are better off today than all other Europeans because we have benefited from this openness like no other country.

Sinn: Germany is no euro winner. In 1995, when the definitive decision was made to adopt the euro, our economic strength ranked second per capita among today's euro-zone countries. Today we are in seventh place, despite the boom of the last three years. We have long suffered from capital flowing out of Germany toward Southern Europe. We had mass unemployment and had to institute tough reforms.

SPIEGEL: Wouldn't it be better if Germany exited the euro zone?

Sinn: No. Not every unhappy marriage has to end in divorce. We would jeopardize or lose all of our public and private loans. We should repair the euro, not abandon it.

Fratzscher: I prefer to see us Europeans as siblings. Spouses can choose each other, siblings cannot. We Europeans have to shape our future together, and we cannot allow ourselves to forget our past. We will always be our closest trading partners. The euro had birth defects, no doubt about it. But we should not abandon it. Instead, we should remedy these birth defects.

Sinn: The European Union has proven itself as an effective free-trade zone and a force for peace. But the euro is endangering these achievements. The swastikas that are brandished against Germany at some demonstrations in Southern Europe are a stab in the heart. I cannot imagine that Poland or the Czech Republic or Sweden or the UK will join the euro club in the foreseeable future. The way the euro is constructed today, it is merely divisive.

SPIEGEL: Can it be repaired?

Sinn: Yes, but I'm not very optimistic that there is sufficient awareness among politicians.

Fratzscher: I'm optimistic. Ten years from now, we will have more countries in the euro zone than today. The euro will be more stable than it is today. We will have learned important lessons from the crisis. In 10 years, the world will look to us and say: Congratulations, you pulled it off.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Fratzscher, Mr. Sinn, thank you for this interview.

40 milliards de tonnes : les émissions de CO₂ atteignent un niveau record

91,47

LE MONDE | 19.11.2013 à 11h06 • Mis à jour le 19.11.2013 à 11h32 | Par **Stéphane Foucart**



Le monde émet toujours plus de gaz à effet de serre et la courbe des émissions s'installe désormais au-dessus du pire scénario imaginé par les experts. Dans son bilan annuel, publié mardi 19 novembre, le Global Carbon Project (GCP) – un consortium scientifique conduit par l'université d'East Anglia (Royaume-Uni) – estime que l'humanité aura émis 9,9 milliards de tonnes de carbone (GtC) dans l'atmosphère au cours de l'année 2013 (soit 36 milliards de tonnes de dioxyde de carbone).

Cette estimation tient compte de la combustion des ressources fossiles et de l'activité des cimenteries, mais non de la déforestation dont les projections pour l'année se situent autour de 0,8 GtC. Au total, donc, ce sont 10,7 GtC qui auront été produits en 2013 par les activités humaines (soit près de 40 milliards de tonnes de CO₂).

LES AMERICAINS EN PREMIÈRE LIGNE

Ce nouveau record marque une croissance de 2,1 % par rapport à 2012, année dont le GCP publie le bilan complet. Ce dernier constate, sans surprise, la poursuite de la montée en puissance chinoise. La Chine a vu ses émissions globales égaler celles des Etats-Unis en 2005. Et sept ans plus tard, Pékin pèse presque deux fois plus lourd que Washington dans le bilan carbone mondial. En 2012, la Chine a été responsable de 27 % des émissions mondiales, contre 14 % pour les Etats-Unis, 10 % pour l'Union européenne et 6 % pour l'Inde.

Rapporté à la population, la Chine reste néanmoins toujours loin derrière les Etats-Unis. En 2012, un Américain émettait en moyenne 4,4 tonnes de carbone par an contre 1,9 pour un Chinois - au même niveau qu'un Européen. « *Il faut bien voir que les émissions chinoises servent en partie à produire des biens qui sont consommés ailleurs dans le monde* », précise toutefois Pierre Friedlingstein (université d'Exeter, Royaume-Uni), coauteur du rapport.

Entre 2011 et 2012, la Chine a vu ses émissions bondir de près de 6 %, tandis que l'Union européenne les a réduites de 1,3 % et les Etats-Unis les ont vues tomber de 3,7 %, en partie en raison de la montée en puissance du gaz de schiste, qui s'est développé outre-Atlantique aux dépens du charbon.

Or ce dernier demeure le principal facteur d'émission au niveau mondial. Il compte pour 43 % des émissions, contre 33 % pour le pétrole, 18 % pour le gaz et 5,3 % pour la production de ciment. A ces émissions - soit 9,7 GtC pour l'année 2012 - s'ajoutent celles issues de l'utilisation des sols. La déforestation a contribué pour 0,8 GtC en 2012.

PRÉVISIONS ALARMANTES

Seule nouvelle rassurante du bilan publié, les émissions dues à l'utilisation des sols ont tendance à décroître depuis les années 1990, où elles se situaient à environ 1,5 GtC par an.

Le consortium estime en outre que les océans continuent à jouer un rôle majeur dans l'absorption d'une part du carbone anthropique : en 1960, les mers « ingéraient » 1 GtC par an, contre près du triple en 2012.

Au total, le GCP estime que, depuis 1870, l'humanité a émis 550 GtC. « *Selon le dernier rapport du Groupe d'experts intergouvernemental sur l'évolution du climat, il ne faut pas excéder 790 GtC pour avoir une chance de demeurer de manière "probable" sous la barre des 2° C de réchauffement, explique M. Friedlingstein. Au rythme actuel, c'est-à-dire sans tenir compte d'une possible poursuite de la croissance des émissions, ce seuil sera atteint dans vingt-cinq ans.* » Pour l'heure, la courbe des émissions humaines au cours de la décennie place le climat terrestre sur la trajectoire d'un réchauffement de 3,2°C à 5,4°C à l'horizon de la fin du siècle, selon les scénarios du GIEC.

Printing money not the way out of crisis, ECB's Weidmann says

91,49

FRANKFURT Wed Nov 20, 2013 9:41am EST

(Reuters) - Printing money is not the way out of the euro zone crisis, European Central Bank policymaker Jens Weidmann said, resisting the possibility raised by others at the ECB of buying assets to aid a weak recovery.

Two senior ECB policymakers have said in the last week that asset buying - or quantitative easing (QE) - is a policy option to bring inflation closer to the ECB's target, and financier George Soros threw his weight behind the idea on Wednesday.

But Weidmann, chief of Germany's Bundesbank and leader of the hawkish camp of policymakers on the ECB's Governing Council, pushed back against the idea of the central bank pumping more money into the euro zone economy.

"We have lowered interest rates and are offering banks unlimited liquidity. But there are no easy and quick ways out of this crisis," he told German weekly Die Zeit in an interview to be published on Thursday.

"The money printer is definitely not the way to solve it. It will still take years until the causes of the crisis are eliminated."

On Tuesday, the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) called on the ECB to emulate U.S.-style quantitative easing to help the single currency area avoid a deflationary spiral like that seen in Japan.

The ECB's economics chief, Peter Praet, who first put the possibility of QE on the agenda last week, also said on Tuesday there was no risk of deflation visible in the euro area, and that inflation expectations were firmly anchored.

But Soros said the economic adjustment policies being pursued by some euro zone countries were deflationary.

"Economic policy that is currently being proposed is creating conditions of deflation which need to be resisted and the ECB is determined to do it," the billionaire told a conference in London. "But without support from Germany, it will not be able to do it."

Joerg Asmussen, the ECB's other German policymaker, opposed a rate cut in May and this month. Asmussen sits on the ECB's Frankfurt-based, six-man Executive Board, which forms the nucleus of the broader 23-man Governing Council.

Referring to Asmussen, Soros said, "you can see there is going to be a lot of resistance from Germany in taking the active monetary steps that the ECB would have to take to counteract deflation".

Asmussen said on Tuesday the ECB could act again if needed to keep inflation in the euro zone on target.

TOO SOON

A Reuters poll of economists found on Wednesday that the ECB was unlikely to embark on its own bond-buying program but would offer banks another wave of cheap cash early next year through long-term loans.

The ECB cut interest rates to a record low earlier this month and said it could lower borrowing costs further still. Weidmann said it was too soon to signal any further easing.

"The Council has only just eased monetary policy further, so I do not think it is sensible to immediately herald the start of the next round," he said.

"Technically we are definitely not at the end of our possibilities. But the question is: what is sensible? The debate about further measures leads away from the real causes of the crisis."

The euro zone's prolonged crisis was rooted in a lack of competitiveness in some member countries, high government debt and troubled banking systems, he told the paper.

"Only politics can solve these problems, the central bank cannot," Weidmann said.

(Additional reporting by Carolyn Cohn in London; Writing by Paul Carrel; Editing by Catherine Evans)

ECB Official Calls Asset Purchases an Option

91,51

Central Bank's Constâncio Says Quantitative Easing Hasn't Been Discussed in Detail

By CHRISTOPHER LAWTON and BRIAN BLACKSTONE

Nov. 19, 2013 1:59 p.m. ET

FRANKFURT—A top European Central Bank official said the ECB could make asset purchases if needed, as euro-zone policy makers increasingly float the prospect of deploying a tool that is commonly used by other major central banks but stirs deep divisions in Europe.

The comments, by ECB Vice President Vitor Constâncio, are the latest in a string of assurances by top officials at the central bank that it still has an array of policy options in its arsenal, even after reducing interest rates to record lows earlier this month.

Recent ECB references to the idea of asset purchases, known as quantitative easing, are "only as a possibility and nothing else. Everything is possible. That was what Peter Praet said," Mr. Constâncio told reporters on the sidelines of the 16th annual Euro Finance Week in Frankfurt.

He was referring to comments made last week by fellow ECB executive board member Peter Praet http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303289904579196133875052674?KEYWORDS=peter_praet_mark_carney in an interview with The Wall Street Journal.

"If our mandate is at risk we are going to take all the measures that we think we should take to fulfill that mandate," Mr. Praet, who also heads the ECB's powerful economics division, said in the interview last week. "The balance-sheet capacity of the central bank can also be used," he added. "This includes outright purchases that any central bank can do."

The officials gave no indication that such a policy is under serious consideration now. Mr. Praet said in the interview that inflation risks are balanced after the ECB's rate cut, which brought its main policy rate to 0.25%. Mr. Constâncio on Tuesday said the ECB hasn't discussed how it would conduct quantitative easing technically. The euro largely shrugged off his comments.

Still, simply raising the idea of quantitative easing marks a significant shift in rhetoric from the central bank. ECB President [Mario Draghi](#) sidestepped a question about the policy at his monthly news conference on Nov. 7, saying only that the ECB had "a whole range of instruments" that could be activated before hitting the floor on interest rates.

It is "remarkable how the attitude of some ECB Governing Council members toward [quantitative easing] has changed," [BNP Paribas](#) [BNP.FR +0.22%](#) economist Ken Wattret said in a research note. "What was once a taboo, then a last resort is now an option under consideration."

Quantitative easing has been used by other major central banks including the Federal Reserve, the Bank of England and the [Bank of Japan](#) [8301.TO -1.12%](#) to shore up their economies and keep inflation from falling too low. These countries all posted much faster growth during the third quarter than the euro zone did.

But the policy is met with deep skepticism in Germany, where easy-money policies from the central bank have stirred long-standing fears of inflation.

One of Germany's top representatives on the ECB, executive board member Jörg Asmussen, said Tuesday that the central bank can act further if needed, though he didn't mention quantitative easing. "We are not at the end of our monetary policy possibilities," Mr. Asmussen said in an Austrian radio interview.

One option, he said, would be to reduce the interest rate on bank deposits parked with the ECB—currently zero—into negative territory. "I would be very cautious with this instrument, but I don't want to completely exclude" its use, he said.

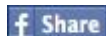
The ECB's latest rate cut, and subsequent comments by ECB officials that all policy options are on the table, came days after a report showed annual euro-zone inflation slowed to a mere 0.7% in October, well below the ECB's mandate of a little under 2%.

That raised concerns in the financial markets that the euro zone was at risk of a vicious cycle of falling consumer prices—known as deflation—and stagnant economic activity. Fears were further fanned by data released last week showing that gross domestic product in the euro zone grew just 0.4% at an annualized rate during the third quarter.

Germany's "Dangerous" Current Account Surplus

November 20, 2013

91,53



[Germany's "Dangerous" Current Account Surplus](#)

by *Frank Hollenbeck* on November 20, 2013

The US government and the European Commission (EC) recently slammed Germany for running large current account surpluses. Paul Krugman jumped in with this beauty of a quote:

The problem is that Germany has continued to maintain highly competitive labor costs and run huge surpluses since the bubble burst — and that in a depressed world economy, this makes Germany a significant part of the problem.

Only in today's surreal world of economic policy could being highly competitive be deemed detrimental. This criticism of Germany is not new, but we are no longer living in the 1950s. Germany does not have its own currency, and there is little that is "German" in a German export.

A BMW produced in Germany but sold in Spain contains parts coming from all over the world. Most, but not all, of the labor will be German, but technological innovations have reduced labor cost to about 10 percent of the price of a car. The return of capital will go to bond holders and shareholders who may be anywhere in the world. BMW may distribute a dividend to a Spanish shareholder who may use those euros to purchase Spanish goods. To say a BMW is a product of Germany alone is a stretch.

Germany is also part of a common currency. To talk about a current account surplus of a region within a common currency zone is like complaining about Florida's current account surplus or, Jacksonville's bilateral surplus with Miami.

We can bring this down to the individual level to make this argument crystal clear and highlight the silliness of the argument. We run a current account surplus with our employer and a current account deficit with our supermarket. Our employer buys more from us than we buy from him and the reverse is true about our relationship with our supermarket. However, we are not running to the supermarket and demanding that the manager buy more of our goods or services.

Furthermore, Germany's current account surplus with other Europeans or euro zone members has been cut in half between 2007 and 2012, and Germany's surplus with the rest of the world has more than tripled. This is what we would expect from the opening up of trade, gains from the division of labor, and specialization made possible by focusing on areas of comparative advantage. To criticize this trend is to criticize the stated reasons behind the European Union's creation in the first place.

For reasons that are hard to understand, the European Commission has a rule that it must intervene if a member country has a current account surplus over 6 percent of output over a three year period. Germany's was 7 percent last year, and it probably will record a similar number this year. If the free exchange of goods and services and free movement of capital leads to a 10 percent, 20 percent, or greater surplus, where is the problem? Why does this rule even exist? Why would the EC impose a constraint that limits the movement of goods and services or capital? Wasn't the EU created to foster the elimination of unjustifiable constraints? The EU should not be surprised that countries want to leave when it imposes such illogical rules.

TODAY'S OTHER
MISES DAILIES

[Are Bubbles Caused by Psychological Problems?](#)

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by *Joseph T. Salerno*

[The Skyscraper Curse Hits New York](#)

by *Mark Thornton*

Underlying this criticism of Germany is mercantilism rearing its ugly head again. Within the mercantilist mindset, we must have a winner and a loser and not just winners resulting from mutually beneficial voluntary exchange. Germany is supposedly producing more than it's consuming. Of course, this is playing on a common fallacy which some exploit for political gain. Every euro that is spent on a German car or other product will be received as income by someone who will spend that income. There is a direct link between production and expenditures. Say's law tells us that (the right) supply creates its own demand. Consumption never needs encouragement: everything that is produced is consumed, either to produce other goods (investment) or for personal satisfaction (consumption).

Of course, the "solution" to this imagined problem is to have Germany boost government spending to spur growth in other EU countries. Never mind that Germany already has a debt to GDP ratio of 82 percent, well above the 60% that had previously been viewed as excessive. It is a standard Keynesian solution that constantly runs up against the logic of the "crowding out" effect. Every dollar that the government spends must be a dollar that would have been spent by someone else. The government can alter who gets a piece of the economic pie, but it cannot increase the size of the pie.

Even when Germany had its own currency this criticism never held water. Back then, a current account surplus would have meant an equivalent capital outflow, financing Italian or French government spending, or investments in plants and equipment in Spain, Italy, China or elsewhere. Again, words like surplus or deficit are remnants of our mercantilist past and have absolutely nothing to do with being good or bad.

If Germany has competitive labor costs and can build a better widget, where is the problem? Wasn't the EU created to make Europe more competitive by allowing resources to move (e.g., labor to Germany) where they are most efficiently used? The criticisms by the EC and the IMF are even more out of line when you look at the reasons given for their existence.

The German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, a member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) was absolutely right when he said, "The German current account surplus offers no reason for concern for Germany, the euro zone or the world economy." In reality, Germany should be praised not scolded. Its productive prowess is one of the few things moving the world economy forward.

November 20, 2013

Germany, Austerity's Champion, Faces Some Big Repair Bills 91,55

By [SUZANNE DALEY](#) and [ALISON SMALE](#)

PADERBORN, Germany — When inspectors decided a few months ago that the aging bridge over the Kiel Canal in northern Germany was too weak for heavy truck traffic, Holger Dechant, hired to deliver giant wind turbines to the other side, was at a loss.

He did eventually come up with an alternative route. But it is telling of the sorry state of some of Germany's roads and bridges: His company is driving the turbines to a ferry, shipping them north to Denmark and then driving them south again back into Germany.

“That's how bad it is,” Mr. Dechant said recently, explaining the 186-mile detour in his office here. “We just haven't invested enough. And now there is trouble because there is no easy button to fix it all.”

Germany was once known for its superfast autobahns, efficient industry and ability to rally public resources for big projects, like integration with the former East Germany. But more recently, it has been forced to confront a somewhat uncharacteristic problem: Its infrastructure — roads, bridges, train tracks, waterways and the like — is aging in a way that experts say could undermine its economic growth for years to come.

As it has been preaching austerity to its neighbors, Germany itself has kept a tight rein on spending at home. Now critics abroad, including the European Union and the United States, are pressing it to do more to stimulate its own economy, and Chancellor Angela Merkel's likely partners in a new coalition government, the left-leaning Social Democrats, are seeking more money for a variety of domestic programs.

A good place to start plowing money into, many experts say, is the nation's physical underpinnings. A government-appointed commission recently concluded that it needed to spend 7.2 billion euros a year, or \$9.7 billion, for the next 15 years — roughly 70 percent more than it spends now — just to get existing infrastructure back into shape. Others say that even more is needed for schools, for instance, and for extending fiber optic cables to less populated areas.

“If we don't spend,” said Kurt Bodewig, who heads the government commission, “then I think that Germany will fall behind. If we don't spend, then the next factories will not be built here.”

An earlier report by the German Institute for Economic Research was even harsher in its assessment, saying that other European Union countries were doing far more to ensure their futures. “It is high time that Germany handles its lack of investment,” the report said.

It is not clear where the money might come from, especially given the aversion of Ms. Merkel's conservatives to higher taxes. The \$270 million budget surplus projected for next year, even if given over entirely to roads and bridges, would not be nearly enough to match

what the government commission said was needed, and there are many other issues competing for funding. One solution may be a highway toll. Ms. Merkel's conservative partners in Bavaria are insisting on such a tax, which could be paired with reductions on existing taxes on domestic drivers and businesses but affect millions of foreign citizens and businesses traversing Germany.

Some critics worry that even if additional money starts flowing in soon, it may not come in time to avoid major problems, which are already beginning to surface. A year ago this month, inspectors found tears in the steel supports under a major highway bridge outside Cologne, Germany's fourth-largest city. Officials quickly restricted traffic and banned heavy trucks, forcing detours to four other bridges around the city that, officials now say, will need \$202 million worth of repairs. The detours were costly to local businesses and backed traffic up for miles each day.

Almost immediately, companies in the area began pressing the Federation of German Industry do something. The business association, which is now pushing for spending at least an additional \$5.4 billion a year on maintenance, has calculated that the partial closing of that bridge cost local industry 60 million to 80 million euros (about \$80 million to \$110 million) during a three-month period.

Regional officials worry that the area's aging infrastructure will prompt industries to move elsewhere or make their products less cost-competitive. Mr. Dechant, for instance, said the route through Denmark cost 50 percent more than a delivery over the Kiel bridge.

"It can take 20 years to build a new bridge," said Michael Groschek, the transport minister for North-Rhine Westphalia, the state that encompasses Cologne and includes dozens of bridges built 50 or 60 years ago, when average truck loads were lighter. "And we don't know whether the current bridges can last that long."

From 1991 to 2012, Germany reduced its budget for maintenance by 20 percent, according to Gernot Sieg, a transportation expert and professor at the University of Muenster. It now spends 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product on maintenance, compared with a European average of 2.5 percent. About 46 percent of Germany's bridges, 41 percent of its streets and 20 percent of its highways need repair, Dr. Sieg said.

Roads around major cities are routinely blocked with traffic. Crowded trains are often late. Last summer, a stretch of aging concrete highway in the south buckled in the heat, killing a motorcyclist and injuring four people. There are still track switches in Germany that must be operated manually. Its busy waterway systems depend on antiquated locks and lifts that have been around more than a century, making them susceptible to breakdowns and generally too small for modern boats.

Germany went on a building spree when the East and the West were reunited in 1990. Most of the spending was directed to the East, which was in dire need of modernization. The problem, experts say, is that the West got short shrift, even as many former East Germans moved West looking for jobs. In a short period of time, roads and bridges in the West began taking a pounding they were never built for. The bridge with the tear near Cologne was built for 35,000 cars a day, but now handles 120,000, officials said.

In its report, the German Institute took issue not only with a lack of maintenance for roads, bridges, trains and waterways, but with the government's lack of investment in schools and day care centers as well as its failure to create incentives for private investment in energy and telecommunications sectors.

Germany, experts say, has been slow in establishing a high-speed fiber optic network, for instance, and is now behind countries like Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania. Officials in small towns in the rural north have grown so tired of waiting for a plan, they have started on their own to get fiber optic cables laid down, with residents coughing up 1,000 euros, more than \$1,300, each.

"We have a steel company, for instance, that wanted to move to another community where the Internet is better," said Holger Jensen, the mayor of Lowenstedt, a village of 650 near the Danish border. "We realized something had to happen quickly."

Though the issues are certainly on the table in the talks on a new coalition government, not everyone is convinced that serious changes will be forthcoming.

"It's all a question of money," Mr. Groschek said. "Without it, all these reports are just a Christmas list."

November 20, 2013

European Parliament Votes to Choose Single Meeting Site 91,58

By [JAMES KANTER](#)

BRUSSELS — The European Parliament voted on Wednesday to choose a single meeting place, showing its frustration with monthly commutes between Brussels and Strasbourg, France, that are seen by many lawmakers and citizens as a colossal waste of money and an embarrassment at a time of painful austerity across the European Union.

The vote was advisory only, so there will be no immediate move to scrap a system that is responsible for maintaining two vast modern buildings with duplicate offices, meeting rooms and debating chambers in Strasbourg and Brussels, where many lawmakers spend a majority of their time.

France indicated Wednesday that it would staunchly defend the seat in Strasbourg under the current European Union treaties. Any change would require member states to vote unanimously in favor.

Proponents of creating a single location still hailed the resolution — which commits the Parliament to using powers it gained four years ago to suggest amendments to the European Union’s treaties — as the most determined attempt to date to scrap a system that requires 766 lawmakers and legions of staff members, as well as lobbyists and politicians, to shuttle 430 kilometers, or 270 miles, between the two cities on a monthly basis for much of the year.

“Today’s vote is not the end of the traveling circus, but it may be the beginning of the end,” Ashley Fox, a British member and a co-author of the resolution, said in a statement after the vote. Lawmakers meeting in Strasbourg voted 483 to 141 in favor, with 34 abstentions.

Mr. Fox said at a news conference later on Wednesday that the Parliament would clarify a demand for a single location during a process to update the union’s treaties to streamline management of the European economy, which he expected during the next five years.

“I think euro zone states are going to want treaty changes to manage their own economic governance, and the French government will be one of those states that wants those changes,” Mr. Fox said. “They will find the European Parliament a willing partner but with some demands of its own.”

Mr. Fox conceded that any change would ultimately rely on some kind of agreement with the French. He suggested a possible deal in which some of the savings realized by ending the Strasbourg sessions could be used to endow a new French university in the city.

“We clearly need to offer the French something, but that really is for the future,” he said.

The pushback by Paris was immediate and categorical.

“Our position remains the same: that we are attached to the E.U. seat in Strasbourg,” Romain Nadal, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France, said by telephone. “It is a matter involving not only France but all Europeans. Strasbourg is a symbolic city, one of Europe’s capitals.”

The resolution does not specifically ask for the single seat to be in Brussels, leaving room for the French to still make a convincing case for Strasbourg. It would be “more effective, cost-efficient and respectful of the environment if it were located in a single place,” the resolution states.

Even so, Gerald Häfner, a German member and the co-author of the resolution with Mr. Fox, suggested during the news conference that Strasbourg would preserve its status even if it lost the Parliament.

Strasbourg “already has a very prominent role as the city of justice, not just European justice, but international justice,” Mr. Häfner said, referring to the presence of the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe.

The resolution noted that the additional annual costs resulting from having staff and buildings in three locations, including Luxembourg, where there are translators and administrators, was 156 million to 204 million euros, or about \$209 million to \$274 million.

It said the emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, associated with transfers among the three spots was between 11,000 and 19,000 tons annually.

The resolution also called on the so-called Bureau, a body made of senior members of the Parliament who decide administrative and organizational matters, to commission a professional polling service to carry out a survey of citizens’ views on maintaining the current setup.

The Parliament, which is the only directly elected part of the apparatus that runs the European Union, has long fought marginalization and irrelevance. Voter turnout to choose members — elected every five years in ballots held across the member states — has declined from more than 60 percent of eligible voters to just over 40 percent.

The Parliament was engulfed in scandal in 2011 when three members were caught on camera apparently preparing to propose amendments in return for cash in a sting operation conducted by The Sunday Times of London.

The fight over Strasbourg itself represents something of a lobbying battle between the French authorities and Edward McMillan-Scott, a member of Parliament from Britain, who has helped lead a campaign for a “Single Seat” that is separate from the resolution agreed on Wednesday.

The Parliament accumulated important powers under the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, including the right to veto international treaties and take a more prominent role in appointing people to top jobs in the European Union. It also gained the right to suggest amendments to the treaties to governments in the bloc.

Yet there are now acute concerns that rising populism and discontent with how the union’s leaders have managed the economic crisis could lead to an influx of lawmakers from the far right and far left in elections next spring. That could make it even more likely that the next parliament will be eager to wield its new powers to confront institutions in the bloc over its direction — including removing wasteful expenditures.

Maïa de la Baume contributed reporting from Paris.


EZB erwägt offenbar negativen Zins

91,60

21.11.2013 · Wie weit geht die EZB in der Niedrigzinspolitik? Eine Nachrichtenagentur meldet, dass es schon Überlegungen gibt, wie genau ein negativer Einlagensatz aussehen könnte, also ein Strafzins für Banken, die ihr Geld bei der EZB parken.

Artikel Bilder (1) Lesermeinungen (16)



© DPA  Werden künftig Banken bestraft, die ihr Geld lieber bei der EZB parken, anstatt es weiterzuverleihen?

Die Europäische Zentralbank (EZB) zieht offenbar in Betracht den Einlagensatz erstmals in der Geschichte in den Negativbereich zu drücken. Das jedenfalls geht aus einem Bericht der Nachrichtenagentur Bloomberg hervor. In dem Bericht werden zwei „mit der Debatte vertraute“ Personen zitiert, die sagen: Falls die EZB den Zins noch einmal senken sollte, dann in einem kleineren Zinsschritt als üblich und zwar von derzeit null auf dann minus 0,1 Prozent.

Die Überlegung klingt wie eine theoretische. Doch allein, dass ans Licht kommt, dass sich die Zentralbank schon mit einer solchen hypothetischen Situation auseinandersetzt dürfte die Banken nicht gerade in Entzücken versetzen. Denn ein Negativzins bestraft alle, die ihr Geld lieber sicher parken, statt weiterzuverleihen.

Mit einer Zinssenkung auf minus 0,1 Prozent würde die in Frankfurt ansässige Zentralbank von ihrem bisherigen Muster bei den Änderungen ihrer Leitzinsen abweichen. Bislang haben sich die Zinsschritte der EZB immer auf mindestens 25 Basispunkte belaufen.

Durch eine Rücknahme des Einlagensatzes um weniger als ein Viertel Prozentpunkt könnte die EZB die neue Strategie testen und zugleich mögliche Störungen an den Finanzmärkten minimieren, erklärte eine der Personen weiter. Über das neue Konzept, das von Mitgliedern im EZB-Rat besprochen wurde, besteht den Kreisen zufolge aber noch kein Konsens. Ein Sprecher der EZB wollte keinen Kommentar abgeben.

Anzeichen mehren sich

Die EZB hatte ihren Leitzins in diesem Monat um 25 Basispunkte auf das Rekordtief von 0,25 Prozent gesenkt, ließ den Einlagensatz aber unverändert bei null Prozent. Nun mehren sich die Anzeichen dafür, dass die EZB einen Negativzins erwägt: EZB-Präsident Mario Draghi hatte schon am 7. November gesagt, die Zentralbank sei „technisch“ für einen negativen Einlagensatz bereit, wenn der Wirtschaftsausblick dies rechtfertigen sollte. Eine Woche später erklärte Direktoriumsmitglied Peter Praet in Hongkong, dass ein Satz unter null möglich sei.

Die Welt 21. November 10:30

"Anne Will"

"Wenn die Demenz kommt, beende ich mein Leben" 91,61

Tod als Rettung: Der Theologe Hans Küng will sich das Leben nehmen, wenn seine Parkinson-Erkrankung schlimmer wird oder er Anzeichen von Demenz zeigt. Ins Heim oder ein "Demenz-Dorf"? Niemals! Von Alexander Jürgs



Foto: Screenshot Die Welt Anne Will (l.) diskutierte mit ihren Gästen über Sterbehilfe. Hier ist sie im Einzelgespräch mit dem an Parkinson erkrankten Theologen Hans Küng zu sehen

Vom Tod seines Vaters erfuhr Tilman Jens am Telefon. Seine Mutter hatte ihn angerufen, hatte ihm mitgeteilt, dass sein Vater, der berühmte Intellektuelle Walter Jens, nach langer Demenzkrankheit verstorben war. Das erste, was Tilman Jens daraufhin tat: Er machte eine Flasche besten Rotwein auf.

"Für uns war sein Tod eine unglaubliche Erleichterung", beschrieb Tilman Jens diesen Moment nun noch einmal in der Talkshow von Anne Will. Über das langsame Sterben des Vaters hat der Journalist auch schon ein viel beachtetes Buch mit dem Titel "Demenz: Abschied von meinem Vater" veröffentlicht.

Jens zeigte sich sicher, dass sein Vater sich einen schnelleren Tod gewünscht hätte. Darum plädiert er heute dafür, Sterbehilfe in Deutschland einfacher zu machen. "Das lange Leiden hätte ich meinem Vater gerne erspart", sagte Jens. In die Traueranzeige, die er und seine Mutter nach dem Tod von Walter Jens veröffentlichten, schrieben sie dann die Worte: "In Dankbarkeit". Und eben nicht: "In tiefer Trauer".

"Gibt es ein glückliches Sterben?": Über diese Frage diskutierte Anne Will mit ihren Gästen. Die Sendung war Teil der ARD-Themenwoche, die sich in diesem Jahr dem Glück widmet. Sie bestand ausnahmsweise aus zwei Teilen: Zunächst gab es einen Talk mit vier Gästen. Neben Tilman Jens waren noch die Psychotherapeutin Angelika Kallwass (bekannt durch die Sendung "Zwei bei Kallwass"), [Ex-MTV-Chefin Christiane zu Salm](#), die als ehrenamtliche Sterbebegleiterin tätig ist, und der CDU-Politiker Hubert Hüppe eingeladen. Das sagten die Gäste von Anne Will ^{1/5}

**Hans Küng,
Theologe und Kirchenkritiker:**

"Ich möchte so sterben,
dass ich noch
voll Mensch bin."

Im Anschluss an die Diskussion wurde ein Gespräch ausgestrahlt, das Anne Will im Vorfeld mit dem katholischen Theologen und Kirchenkritiker Hans Küng geführt hat. Küng hat vor kurzem öffentlich bekannt gegeben, dass er am Parkinson-Syndrom erkrankt ist. Und er hatte erklärt, dass er seinem Leben ein Ende setzen will, wenn die Krankheit ein für ihn nicht mehr verkraftbares Stadium erreicht.

"Wenn ich irgendwelche Zeichen von Demenz spüre", dann wäre für Hans Küng der Moment da, sein Leben zu beenden. In ein Heim oder gar in ein sogenanntes Demenz-Dorf will er auf keinen Fall gehen: "Für mich ist das eine schreckliche Vorstellung."

Hans Küng hat sich ganz bewusst dazu entschieden, sein Vorhaben öffentlich zu machen. Er will damit "ein Zeichen setzen, einen Anstoß geben". Von der Kirche forderte er ein Umdenken: Sie solle die Menschen, die sich für diesen Weg entscheiden, in Schutz nehmen anstatt sie zu verurteilen.

Es war ein bewegendes Gespräch, das Anne Will mit Hans Küng geführt hat. Man hätte sich eigentlich gewünscht, dass es vor dem Talk gezeigt worden wäre – vor allem auch deshalb, weil in der Diskussion mehrfach darauf Bezug genommen wurde. Doch wahrscheinlich war die Angst, dass ein Einstieg mit einem Zweiergespräch sich negativ auf die Quote auswirken würde, zu groß.

Kallwass begleitete ihre Mutter in den Tod

Wie Jens, Kallwass, zu Salm und Hüppe über das Sterben diskutierten, war aber ebenfalls sehr spannend – und oft auch berührend. Angelika Kallwass berichtete davon, wie sie ihre Mutter aus dem Krankenhaus holte, um sie beim Sterben zu begleiten. Weil die lungenkranke Mutter sich weigerte, Essen oder Getränke zu sich zu nehmen, hätte sie in der Klinik eine Magensonde eingesetzt bekommen sollen.

Diese lebensverlängernde Maßnahme wollte Kallwass ihr ersparen. "Meine Mutter wollte nicht mehr leben. Sie hatte mich sogar gebeten, ihr Zyankali zu besorgen", erzählte Kallwass. Doch die Pfleger der sterbenden Frau machten der Psychotherapeutin schwere Vorwürfe: "Sie lassen ihre Mutter verdursten." Kallwass blieb bei ihrem Entschluss. Ihre Mutter starb kurze Zeit später zu Hause – friedlich, ruhig, in den Armen der Tochter.

Würdevolles Sterben, aber auch würdevolles Altern: Dafür setzt sich die Medienmanagerin Christiane zu Salm ein. Seit einigen Jahren engagiert sie sich als Sterbebegleiterin. Auch sie plädiert dafür, nicht immer mit allen Mitteln zu versuchen, den Tod hinauszuzögern. "Es gibt in Deutschlands Krankenhäusern zu viel Schläuche und zu wenig Seele", stellte Christiane zu Salm fest.

"Selbsttötung sollte verboten bleiben"

Ist die Zulassung der Sterbehilfe also ein guter Weg, um das Sterben für viele Schwerkranke zu erleichtern? Der CDU-Abgeordnete Hubert Hüppe, Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für die Belange behinderter Menschen, verneint das. "Ich habe Angst, dass wir damit ein Tor aufstoßen würden", sagte er.

Hüppe befürchtet, dass der Wert eines Lebens durch die Erlaubnis der aktiven Sterbehilfe an Bedeutung verlieren würde. "Ich glaube nicht, dass Töten eine Hilfe darstellt. Organisierte Selbsttötung sollte verboten bleiben", sagte der Politiker.

Tilman Jens widersprach ihm: "Wenn jemand, nach einer langen Depression etwa, sagt, ich halte das nicht mehr aus, dann soll er das Recht haben, sein Leben zu beenden." Dass es sich Familienangehörige dabei auch nur ansatzweise leicht machen würden, bezweifelte er vehement. "Die Belastung für die Familien ist in jedem Fall groß", erklärte Jens.

Herdentrieb

So funktioniert Kapitalismus. Ein Blog



Soll Weidmann die Verfassung brechen?

91,63

VON Mark Schieritz 17. NOVEMBER 2013 UM 22:04 UHR

Politik bedeutet, Entscheidungen zu treffen. Wir leben nicht im Schlaraffenland. Was genau also soll die Europäische Zentralbank nach Meinung derjenigen tun, die die vermeintliche Enteignung – bei 1,7 Prozent risikolose Rendite auf zehnjährige Staatsanleihen und 20 Prozent, etwas riskanter, auf Aktien – des deutschen Sparers anprangern?

Vielleicht hilft ja ein Blick ins Grundgesetz. Da steht nämlich:

Der Bund errichtet eine Währungs- und Notenbank als Bundesbank. Ihre Aufgaben und Befugnisse können im Rahmen der Europäischen Union der Europäischen Zentralbank übertragen werden, die unabhängig ist und dem vorrangigen Ziel der Sicherung der Preisstabilität verpflichtet.

Steht da irgendetwas von den deutschen Sparguthaben? Eben! Die Aufgabe der EZB ist es, das gesamtwirtschaftliche Angebot und die gesamtwirtschaftliche Nachfrage so auszutariieren, dass Geldwertstabilität gewährleistet ist. Geldwertstabilität wiederum ist definiert als eine Inflationsrate von "nahe, aber unter zwei Prozent" in mittlerer Frist.

Man kann sich auch andere Zieldefinitionen vorstellen, aber dann muss die Regel offiziell geändert werden. Das sollten eigentlich gerade Ordoliberaler verstehen können, die sonst immer auf Einhaltung aller möglichen Regeln drängen.

Wie auch immer: Dieses Ziel wird bei einer Inflationsrate von derzeit 0,7 Prozent nicht eingehalten und nach allen derzeitigen Prognosen wird es auch in den kommenden beiden Jahren nicht eingehalten werden. Und was macht eine Zentralbank, wenn sie die ihr aufgetragenen Ziele nicht erreicht? Sie setzt den Zins so, dass sie erreicht werden. In diesem Fall bedeutet das eine Zinssenkung.

Was das für den deutschen Sparer oder das deutsche Gaststättengewerbe oder den Hund des Notenbankpräsidenten bedeutet ist VOLLKOMMEN irrelevant. So einfach ist das. Und wer will, dass sich Jens Weidmann zum Anwalt der Sparer macht, der fordert ihn zum Verfassungsbruch auf.

Ich sammle übrigens schon Material für den Fall, dass die Inflation einmal über zwei Prozent steigt.

BUNDESBANKPRÄSIDENT

Weidmann verweist auf die Vorteile niedriger Zinsen

91,64

Debatten über die Enteignung deutscher Sparer durch Niedrigzinspolitik hält der Bundesbankpräsident für zu einseitig. Der Bürger profitiere von der guten Wirtschaftslage.

20. November 2013 15:35 Uhr [13 Kommentare](#)

Bundesbankpräsident Jens Weidmann hat die Debatte über die Enteignung deutscher Sparer durch niedrige Zinsen kritisiert. "Der Sparer muss sich darauf verlassen können, dass wir den Wert des Geldes stabil halten", sagte Weidmann der ZEIT. "Es ist aber nicht unsere Aufgabe, eine bestimmte reale Rendite, also eine Rendite nach Abzug der Inflation, zu garantieren."

Er könne die Sorgen der Sparer zwar nachvollziehen, sagte Weidmann. Es sei aber wichtig zu sehen, dass die Bürger nicht nur Sparer seien. "Wir sind auch Arbeitnehmer, wir wollen vielleicht eine Immobilie kaufen, wir sind Steuerzahler. Und in diesen Rollen profitieren wir von den niedrigen Zinsen, weil sie vielleicht unseren Arbeitsplatz sichern, Baugeld günstiger machen und den Staatshaushalt entlasten." Das gehe in der aktuellen Debatte oft unter.

ANZEIGE

Die Europäische Zentralbank (EZB) hatte Anfang November den Leitzins auf ein Rekordtief von 0,25 Prozent gesenkt. Besonders deutsche Banken und Versicherungen kritisierten die Entscheidung. Für sie wird es bei einem derart niedrigen Zinsniveau noch schwerer, Erträge zu erwirtschaften und ihre Rendite-Versprechen zu halten.

Weidmann gegen weitere Zinssenkungen

Weidmann sprach sich gegen eine weitere Lockerung der Geldpolitik aus. Nach der letzten Zinssenkung halte er es nicht für sinnvoll "gleich schon die nächste Runde einzuläuten", sagte Weidmann der ZEIT. Die EZB könne zwar noch mehr tun, doch sei dies nicht angebracht. "Technisch sind wir sicher nicht am Ende unserer Möglichkeiten. Die Frage aber ist: Was ist sinnvoll? Die Debatte über weitere Maßnahmen lenkt doch von den eigentlichen Krisenursachen ab", sagte Weidmann.

Zugleich äußerte Weidmann Verständnis für die letzte Zinssenkung der EZB. "In der Tat haben wir es mit sehr moderaten Inflationsaussichten zu tun, und daher ist eine expansive Geldpolitik gerechtfertigt", sagte er. Es sei vor allem um den Zeitpunkt gegangen und nicht um die Entscheidung als solche. Weidmann hatte der Zinssenkung nicht zugestimmt.

Berichte, wonach der Rat der Notenbank gespalten sei, wies er zurück: "Es ist gut, wenn wir im Rat um die richtige Entscheidung ringen, denn das führt am Ende zu besseren Ergebnissen. Kontroverse Debatten gibt es auch bei der amerikanischen Notenbank oder der Bank of England. Doch darüber wird viel unaufgeregter berichtet."

Das vollständige Interview mit Jens Weidmann lesen Sie in der aktuellen Ausgabe der ZEIT.

UMFRAGE

Bundesbürger misstrauen europäischer Krisenpolitik

91,65

Schlechtes Zeugnis für EU und EZB: Laut einer Umfrage heißen nur wenige Deutsche deren Strategie in der Euro-Krise gut – auch aus Angst um ihre Altersvorsorge.

16. November 2013 12:08 Uhr [19 Kommentare](#)

Die Menschen in Deutschland stellen der europäischen Krisenpolitik ein verheerendes Zeugnis aus. Auch wenn sich die Finanzmärkte zuletzt beruhigt haben und Irland und Spanien den Euro-Rettungsschirm bald verlassen wollen: Nach einer repräsentativen Onlineumfrage des [Meinungsforschungsinstituts YouGov](#) misstrauen 72 Prozent der Bundesbürger der Krisenstrategie von Regierungen, EU und [Europäischer Zentralbank](#) (EZB). Nur 15 Prozent vertrauen Politik und Notenbank.

Insbesondere die Niedrigzinspolitik der EZB macht den Menschen zu schaffen. 56 Prozent der Befragten machen sich Sorgen um ihre [Altersvorsorge](#). Die niedrigen Zinsen machen es auch Lebensversicherern immer schwieriger, die Garantieverzinsung zu erwirtschaften. Davor hatte unlängst auch der Bundesverband der Deutschen Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken (BVR) gewarnt: Die deutsche Spar- und Vorsorgekultur stehe vor einer Erosion, wenn die niedrigen Zinsen zum Dauerzustand werden. Genau danach sieht es derzeit aber aus: Die EZB hat den Leitzins inzwischen nochmals gesenkt – [auf das neue Rekordtief von 0,25 Prozent](#).

Die Reaktion der Bundesbürger hält sich aber zumindest unmittelbar in Grenzen. Laut YouGov hat bislang eine Mehrheit von 62 Prozent der Befragten weder ihr Spar- noch ihr Konsumverhalten geändert. "Ein Großteil der Leute spart so wenig, dass sich der Aufwand gar nicht lohnt, etwas anzupassen", sagte YouGov-Finanzexperte Guido Kiell. Viele Menschen wollten sich mit dem Thema Geldanlage auch lieber gar nicht beschäftigen oder sie legten ihr Geld automatisiert in Sparplänen an. "Da reagieren die Menschen nicht so schnell, wenn sich die Zinsen ändern."

Bundesbank-Präsident [Jens Weidmann](#) hatte erst am Mittwoch gesagt, dass er die Sorgen vor einer "schleichenden Enteignung der deutschen Sparer" nachvollziehen könne. Allerdings sei es ja gerade das Ziel der expansiven Geldpolitik, [kurzfristig die Nachfrage zu stärken](#). Aus den Sparern sollten so vorübergehend stärker Konsumenten und Investoren gemacht werden. "Entsprechend ist die deutsche Sparquote derzeit auf dem niedrigsten Niveau seit Anfang 2002."

Neuer Appell

Deutsche Ökonomen werfen der EZB Staatsfinanzierung vor 91,66

11.09.2013 · Die Anleihekäufe der Europäischen Zentralbank sind besonders in Deutschland umstritten. Sogar das Bundesverfassungsgericht verhandelt darüber. Ein neuer Ökonomen-Aufruf geht hart ins Gericht mit der Politik der Notenbank.

Von PHILIP PLICKERT

In der Diskussion um die umstrittenen Anleihekäufe der Europäischen Zentralbank (EZB) gehen die Ökonomen, die dagegen sind, abermals in die Offensive. In einem von 136 deutschen Wirtschaftsprofessoren unterzeichneten Aufruf (Originaltext siehe unten), der der Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung vorliegt, werfen sie der Zentralbank „monetäre Staatsfinanzierung“ vor an. „Die Anleihekäufe der EZB sind rechtswidrig und ökonomisch verfehlt“, heißt es in dem Aufruf.

Die EZB hat von Mai 2010 bis Anfang 2012 für mehr als 220 Milliarden Euro Anleihen Griechenlands, Portugals, Irlands, Italiens und Spaniens gekauft. Alle genannten Länder hatten während dieser Zeit mitunter große Finanzierungsschwierigkeiten - mit Ausnahme Italiens bekommen alle mittlerweile Finanzhilfe ihrer europäischen Partnerländer und des Internationalen Währungsfonds. Im Sommer des vergangenen Jahres kündigte EZB-Präsident Mario Draghi dann an, die Euro-Notenbank werde notfalls unbegrenzt Staatsanleihen von Ländern in Not kaufen. Die EZB begründet ihr sogenanntes OMT-Programm mit geldpolitischen Zwecken, nämlich um den beschädigten „Transmissionsriemen“ wiederherzustellen: Die Zinsen und Risikoaufschläge der Krisenländer waren stark gestiegen, obwohl die Zentralbank den Leitzins auf ein Rekordtief gesenkt hatte.

Die nun protestierenden Ökonomen bezweifeln das. „Wenn die Anleihekäufe der EZB geldpolitisch motiviert wären, würde die EZB ein repräsentatives Portefeuille aller Staatsanleihen der Mitgliedstaaten oder auch privater Anleihen kaufen. Das tut sie aber nicht. Sie kauft nur Anleihen überschuldeter Mitgliedstaaten. Das ist monetäre Staatsfinanzierung“, argumentieren sie. Monetäre Staatsfinanzierung sei zu Recht verboten, weil sie die Unabhängigkeit der Zentralbank gefährde.

„Auch die EZB ist ans Recht gebunden“

Initiiert wurde der aktuelle Aufruf vom Mannheimer Ökonomen Roland Vaubel. Unterzeichnet haben es zum Beispiel der Präsident des Ifo-Instituts, Hans-Werner Sinn, der frühere Vorsitzende des Sachverständigenrats, Jürgen B. Donges, der Bonner Geldtheoretiker Manfred Neumann, der Vorsitzender des Wissenschaftlichen Beirats beim Bundeswirtschaftsministerium war, sowie der Finanzwissenschaftler und frühere Ministerpräsident von Sachsen, Georg Milbradt (CDU), der heute an der TU Dresden lehrt.

Die 136 Professoren stellen sich nicht nur gegen die Argumentation der Zentralbank. Sie wenden sich auch gegen einen anderen Ökonomen-Aufruf, indem europäische und amerikanische Wissenschaftler sich vor die EZB gestellt hatten. Dieser Aufruf wurde initiiert von Marcel Fratzscher, dem Chef des Deutschen Instituts für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW). Die Ankündigung des OMT-Anleihekaufprogramm sei „eine der geschicktesten und erfolgreichsten geldpolitischen Kommunikationsmaßnahmen seit Jahrzehnten“ gewesen, hieß es darin. Zugleich warnten dessen Unterzeichner das Bundesverfassungsgericht davor, der EZB beim Anleihekauf Beschränkungen aufzuerlegen. Dies wäre „eine Einladung für Spekulanten“ gegen den Euro.

Der neue Aufruf richtet sich gegen die Auffassung, Karlsruhe dürfe nicht in den EZB-Kurs eingreifen. „Wir halten dem entgegen: auch die EZB ist an Recht und Gesetz gebunden!“, schreiben die 136 Professoren. Initiator Vaubel hat sich Verfassungsbeschwerden gegen den Euro-Krisenfonds ESM und das OMT-Programm angeschlossen. Ifo-Präsident Sinn und DIW-Präsident Fratzscher traten im Juli als Sachverständige während der mündlichen Verhandlung in Karlsruhe auf.

Wettstreit um die öffentliche Meinung

Das Urteil des Verfassungsgerichts wird für die Zeit nach der Bundestagswahl erwartet. Die Ökonomen-Aufrufe gehört nun zum Kampf um die öffentliche Meinung. Dabei spielt auch eine Rolle, welches Lager mehr und bedeutendere Ökonomen hinter sich bringen kann. Den Fratzscher-Aufruf haben inzwischen mehr als 240 Volkswirte aus Universitäten auf der ganzen Welt, aber auch aus Banken unterzeichnet. Ifo-Chef Sinn sprach dennoch von einer „schwachen Resonanz“, vor allem unter deutschen Ökonomen, die weniger als ein Viertel der Unterstützer ausmachen.

Bemerkenswert sei, dass der Aufruf in den zuständigen geld- und finanzwissenschaftlichen Fachausschüssen des Vereins für Socialpolitik, des Verbandes der deutschsprachigen Volkswirte, keine Unterstützung finde. Vom geldtheoretischen Ausschuss, der 61 Mitglieder hat, hätten nur vier unterschrieben. „Aus dem finanzwissenschaftlichen Ausschuss mit seinen 113 Mitgliedern stellte sich ein einziger hinter den Aufruf“, schrieb Sinn. Der neue Aufruf hat in diesen Ausschüssen sechs beziehungsweise sechzehn Unterzeichner gefunden.

An ECB Negative Deposit Rate? Don't Hold Your Breath, Says Citi 91,68

Submitted by Tyler Durden on 11/20/2013 13:18 -0500

While the FOMC Minutes due out in less than an hour is what everyone is looking forward to, the big surprise announcement of the day was the repeat of a rumor released initially 6 months ago, namely that the ECB is considering negative deposit rates - a concept we first speculated about back in June of 2012. Alas, just like last time, the latest incarnation of the NIRP rumor appears to be merely more hot air (and certainly will be exposed as such once the non-compliant mostly German ECB members hit the tape). One person who says not to hold your breath for an ECB negative rate, is Citi's Valentin Marino, who says not only is a negative deposit rate unlikely before the results of the AQR and stress tests as it would accelerate bank deleveraging, but that it ***"could worsen the pervasive credit crunch and add to the growth headwinds and deflation risks in the currency block. It would erode investors' confidence in Eurozone's financial institutions and accentuate their relative underperformance."***

Which of course makes sense: just like in the summer of 2011 when the ECB was leaking rumors left and right just to gauge which would have the highest market impact and be the most sticky (a plan subsequently adopted by Japan in late 2012 and early 2013), this is just a "market test" by the ECB to see how much credibility its jawboning still has with the market, and how much of an impact it could derive should it truly go down this unprecedented path (which by the way would incinerate the European money market and crush short-dated funding).

But for now, following today's 100 pip drop in the EURUSD, it appears to have saved European corporations for at least one more day (recall earlier today we reported just how crushed European corporate profits have been as a result of the soaring Euro). Tomorrow is another day.

Finally, there is another issue: should the ECB overshoot and send the Euro plunging, then that scary spectre of the summer of 2012, ***redenomination risk***, would promptly arise again, setting off a chain reaction that would necessitate the "use" of that non-existent ECB *deus ex machina*, the OMT - something absolutely nobody in the ECB would be willing to risk, especially not with the German constitutional court decision still pending.

Full note from Citi:

EUR and the ECB – this time may mean business

Recent media reports indicated that the ECB is considering introducing negative rates of 0.1% on banks' excess cash. The measure remains highly controversial ahead of the Eurozone banks' AQR and stress tests. The headlines do highlight the resolve of the Governing Council to respond to persistent disinflation on the back currency appreciation. This should keep EUR under pressure going into the December policy meeting.

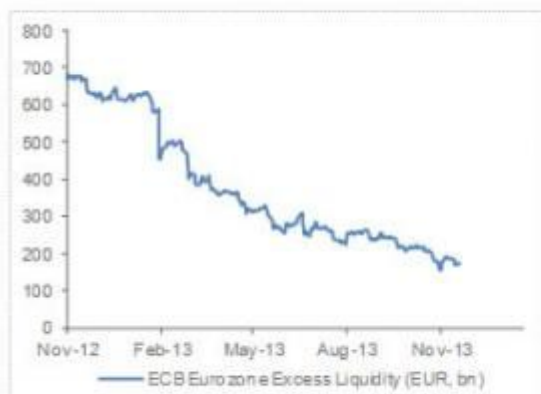
EUR came under selling pressure following media reports that the ECB is deliberating negative rates of -0.1% on the banks excess cash. If confirmed the policy should be seen as very negative for EUR with investors effectively being paid to spend EUR cash. Weaker EUR could help stimulate Eurozone exports and growth.

The above being said, we suspect that the measure remains highly controversial given concerns about the impact of the measure on banks' profitability and willingness to lend. The amount of excess liquidity in the Eurozone is EUR174bn at present which implies losses of more than EUR170mn (Figure 1).

A potential penalty could lead to accelerated deleveraging by Eurozone banks ahead of the Asset Quality Review (AQR) and stress tests next year. The measure could worsen the pervasive credit crunch and add to the growth headwinds and deflation risks in in the currency block. It would erode investors' confidence in Eurozone's financial institutions and accentuate their relative underperformance. All that could reflect badly on EUR (Figure 2).

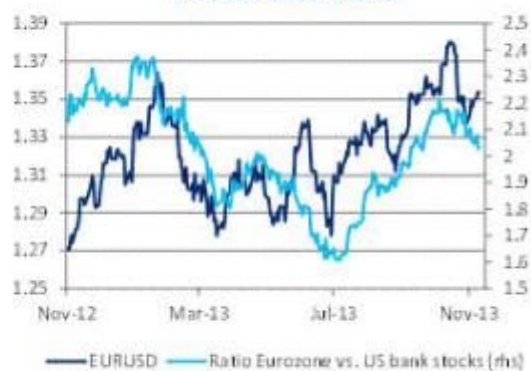
We think that the ECB may want to wait for the outcome of AQR and the stress tests for the Eurozone banks before considering the negative deposit rate measure. Going into the December meeting the Governing Council may consider some of the options below. All that should keep the cyclical headwinds for EUR firmly in place:

Figure 1 Eurozone excess liquidity



Source: CitiFX

Figure 2. EURUSD and ratio between Eurozone and US bank stock indices



Source: CitiFX

1/ LTRO - the Governing Council could indicate it is working on a long-term refinancing program that will help anchor rate expectations, alleviate any liquidity pressures in the Eurozone banking sector ahead of AQR and stress tests and avoid renewed funding tensions in the periphery. So far the Governing Council has been rather vague about any new long-term liquidity measures so that the timing of the announcement could come as a dovish surprise and could weigh on euro.

2/ QE - Indications that the Governing Council is looking into more aggressive policy options like QE and negative deposit rates. Recent comments by ECB's chief economist Peter Praet signaled that such measures could be considered. Media reports over the summer seemed to suggest that the ECB may be looking into buying GDP-weighted amounts of Eurozone bonds potentially in the same way it purchased bonds under the SMP program. Indications by President Draghi that QE is among the options considered alongside LTRO could be perceived as quite dovish and send EUR lower.

3/ A refi or depo rate cut or indications that the ECB deliberated more cuts of refi or deposit rate. If the experience of the FOMC or the SNB is anything to go by, the Governing council may opt to introduce a band

for the refi rate between zero and 25bp. Negative deposit rates seem less likely to us for the time being. The ECB may want to wait for the outcome of AQR and the stress tests for the Eurozone banks before considering the measure. Signals that more rate cuts are coming could also keep cyclical headwinds in place for the euro.

***4/ FX market intervention** – with the EUR TWI index close to multi-year highs some clients were discussing the possibility of unilateral or concerted intervention in the euro. The ECB engaged in concerted interventions in the FX markets to arrest the sharp EUR depreciation in 2000. The actions came on the back of decisions by Eurozone finance and economy ministers. An FX intervention seems less likely at present given that the G20 countries have agreed to refrain from actions that could target exchange rates. What is more, G20 central banks have agreed to pursue domestic goals (fighting disinflation) by using domestic instruments (no Forex). We suspect that it would take excessive EUR appreciation in combination with severe escalation in market volatility for FX interventions to be considered.*

Axe ‘travelling circus’, MEPs tell EU leaders

91,71

20/11 18:39 CET

VIDEO

The EU should ditch the European Parliament’s costly monthly sittings in Strasbourg, MEPs said in a motion passed on Tuesday.

The EU’s only directly-elected body also convenes in Brussels for a number of meetings.

Four hundred and eighty-three parliamentarians backed the resolution for a single seat, whilst 141 voted against.

British Conservative MEP Ashley MEP has long been a vocal critic of the so-called travelling circus.

“Today’s has been a very successful day, a very good result if you are a tax payer in Europe, because this deal will save you over one billion euros over the next 7 years, and it will also save many thousand of tons of carbon dioxide,” he told reporters in the eastern French city.

But the vote is not binding upon EU leaders The bloc’s treaties say the decision must be taken unanimously by all national governments.

So any change needs the support of France. Yet French politicians are in no hurry to surrender this source of national pride.

“Where should the parliament sit? The parliament sits in Strasbourg, as EU treaties state,” said Sandrine Bélier, a French Green MEP.

“The question doesn’t need to be asked. We know where the European Parliament sits.”

The monthly ferrying of MEPs, staff and documents costs 180 million euros a year, and 19,000 tonnes of CO2.

Draghi Says ECB Needs to Ensure Safety Margin on Inflation

91,72

Euro Rises on Comments Which Appear to Play Down Hopes of Negative Interest Rates Soon

By ANDREA THOMAS Nov. 21, 2013 8:00 a.m. ET

BERLIN—European Central Bank President Mario Draghi defended the bank's recent interest rate cut to record-low levels, saying the bank needed to ensure that there is a safety margin on inflation to guard against consumer-price drops known as deflation.

He also said the ECB discussed the possibility of setting negative rates on its deposit facility at its monthly meeting two weeks ago "and there are no news since then."



Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank, defended the bank's recent interest rate cut. The euro rose on Mr. Draghi's comments, which appeared to play down hopes that the ECB would consider setting negative interest rates soon.

His comments at a conference of business leaders organized by Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper Thursday came after the ECB reduced its key interest rate to 0.25% earlier this month.

"We need this buffer away from zero [rate of inflation] to provide a safety margin against deflationary risks at the euro area level," Mr. Draghi said. "The context of this decision was a gradual but sustained downward drift in inflation that we had observed over several months."

The bank faces growing pressure to consider negative deposit rates or asset purchases, known as quantitative easing, a tool that is used by other major central banks but which is controversial in Europe.

The ECB Is Ready to Fight Deflation

91,73

Structural reform: the best protection is the best defense against the risk of a lost decade.

By CHRISTIAN NOYER

Nov. 20, 2013 4:03 p.m. ET

There is a lot of talk nowadays about the risk of a "lost decade" in the euro zone, with a conjunction of no growth and deflation. Current forecasts point to very low inflation in the foreseeable future. For the euro area as a whole, inflation is projected to remain at around 1.5% in the coming year.

However, low inflation is very different from deflation. Deflation is a cumulative process of decreasing prices, wages and output fueled by negative expectations. Deflation is a pernicious spiral. It increases the burden of debt and creates an incentive to defer consumption and investment. Deflation is especially dangerous because once the process becomes entrenched, it becomes very difficult to stop.

At the moment there are no signs of general deflation in the euro area and most indicators point to a very low risk. Inflation expectations in particular remain firmly anchored in positive territory and, for the long term, stand at levels close to the European Central Bank's definition of price stability.

As usual, inflation rates vary in the different economies of the euro area. In some peripheral countries, inflation is particularly low. This, in a way, is a good thing, as it contributes to restoring their competitiveness, as witnessed by their strong export growth. However, the lower inflation is, the greater the risk that unexpected shocks could push the economy into deflationary territory. Since this could, in turn, have consequences for overall euro-area inflation, it is perfectly justified to ask what should be done to minimize that risk.

The best protection and the first line of defense against the risk of a lost decade is structural reform. Structural reforms stimulate private consumption and make investment more profitable. In particular, they increase the return on capital and, as a consequence, the economy spontaneously moves towards an equilibrium with higher interest rates. In turn, higher equilibrium interest rates would make it easier for the European Central Bank to set its own policy rate at levels consistent with those needed by the economy. The chances that monetary policy becomes constrained by the lower bound of 0% interest rates are reduced. Higher equilibrium rates also benefit savers, a legitimate concern in many countries. Basically, savers have a claim on future output. They are best protected when growth is sustained and widespread, allowing them to earn high returns and diversify their risks.

That said, deflation, like inflation, is ultimately a monetary phenomenon. And central banks must fight all risks to price stability with determination. Under the Eurosystem mandate, which is the cornerstone of all our actions, price stability is our priority objective. The definition of price stability is therefore an essential feature of our monetary framework. Originally, when the euro was created, price stability was defined as a "less than 2%" increase in the overall price index. That would theoretically allow for zero or even negative inflation.

The definition was described as "asymmetric," meaning that the Eurosystem would react to excess inflation but would be indifferent to low inflation or even deflation. But that was never the intention. In 2003 the definition was adjusted in order to eliminate any ambiguity. Price stability is now defined as "less than but close to 2%." The current definition is therefore fully symmetric. It makes it clear that the central bank is equally concerned by inflation that is too low or too high.

This is not only a question of semantics. Central banks' perceived objectives determine expectations and the behavior of private agents. If a central bank is seen as equally intolerant of both high and low inflation, the

economy will more easily stabilize within the acceptable inflation range. Stability of inflation expectations has improved the capacity of euro-area economies to absorb the post-Lehman shock: While inflation became negative for a few months in 2009, expectations did not change and deflation was never a threat. This episode illustrates the credibility achieved by the Eurosystem in approaching price stability in a symmetric fashion.

Together with the definition of price stability, the "two pillars" approach is another important feature of the Eurosystem's framework. In parallel to assessing future economic prospects, the European Central Bank's governing council looks independently at the dynamics of money and credit aggregates. This has proved very useful in the past to detect long-term risks to price stability, in both directions. The message today is clear: both money and credit are growing very slowly in the euro area as a whole. The M3 money-supply aggregate grew by 2.1% in September. These trends do not signal deflation, but warrant monitoring and vigilance when facing an uncertain future.

Obviously, intentions may not always suffice and must be backed, when necessary, by appropriate and timely actions. Recent decisions by the governing council regarding both policy rates and liquidity provision show that we are ready to make the necessary decisions. Many instruments remain available should further risks materialize. There should be no doubt that the Eurosystem will ensure that price stability, as currently defined, will be maintained in the euro area.

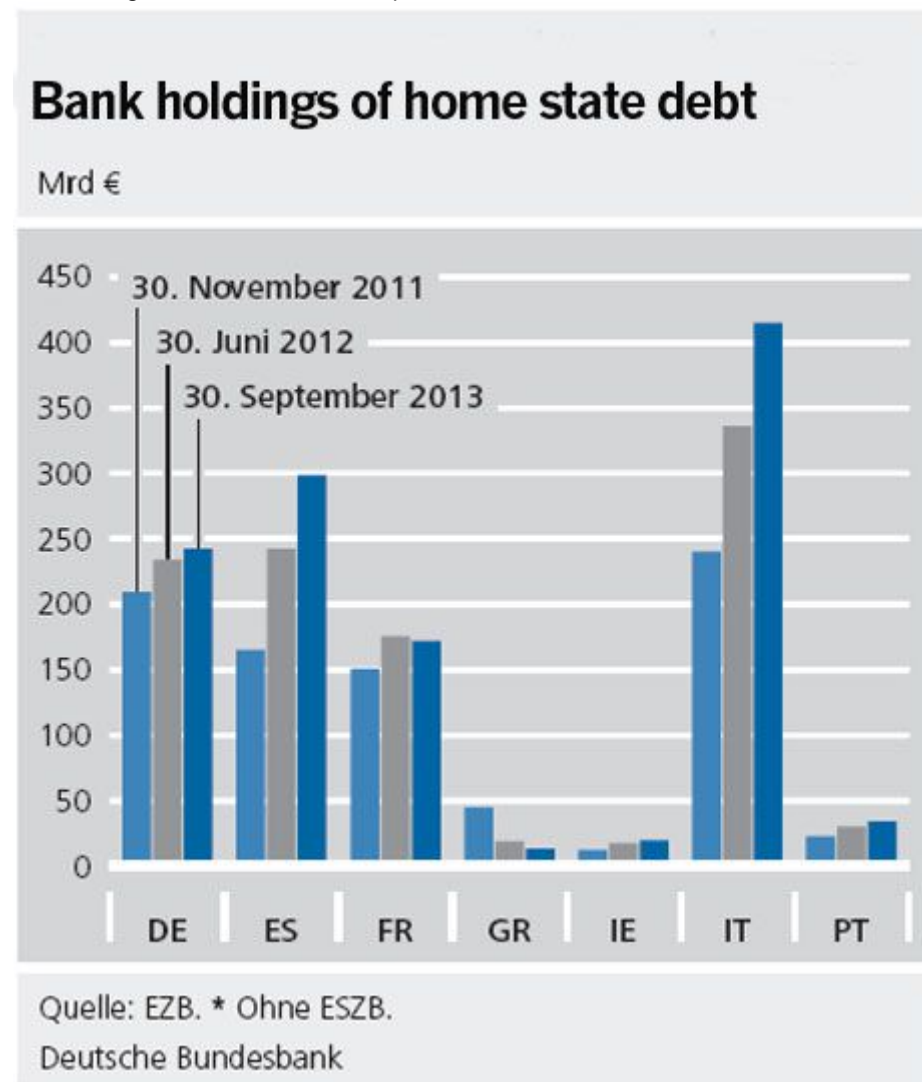
Mr. Noyer is governor of the Banque de France.

Bundesbank says Italian and Spanish banks still hooked on home state debt 91,75

By **Ambrose Evans-Pritchard** **Economics** Last updated: November 18th, 2013

259 Comments [Comment on this article](#)

The Bundesbank always like to spoil the party. Tucked away on page 33 if its November monthly report is a reminder that the banking systems and sovereign states of southern Europe remain stuck in a vicious circle:



Italian banks have increased their holdings of Italian public debt from €240bn to €415bn since November 2011 (+ 73pc).

Spanish banks have raised their holdings of Spanish debt €166bn to €299. (+81pc). Ditto Irish banks, up 60pc; and Portuguese banks, up 51pc.

The EU summit pledge made in June 2012 to end this dangerous and incestuous linkage has come to little. As the Buba report said testily, "the mutual dependency of the banks and the state sector has grown most in those countries where the links were already particularly high at the start."

It is not a crisis as such. It is a chronic malaise. There is still an acute credit crunch for small business in Italy and Spain. The banks are hunkering down and living off their coupons from the state, even as the rest of the economy screams for credit. Their appetite for sovereign debt – boosted first by the ECB's €1 trillion long-term loans (LTRO), then by Mario Draghi's debt backstop (OMT) — is touted as a sign of recovery, but it is equally a sign of deformed EU policy.

Note too that these banks are buying the bonds of sovereign states where the debt trajectory is rocketing upwards, an effect made worse by Euroland's slide towards deflation. Italy's public debt has jumped from 119pc to 133pc of GDP since 2010, and average maturity has been sliding for two years as the treasury relies more heavily on short-term debt backed by the ECB. Spain's debt has risen from 62pc to 94pc. The longer the banks keep betting on this state debt, the greater the risk.

We heard this morning from the Bank of Spain that bad debts in the Spanish banking system have reached 12.68pc, the highest since records began half century ago. Loans under water have reached €188bn.

Daragh Quinn and Jaime Hernandez at Nomura warn that a number of Iberian banks look vulnerable under the Texas Ratio. This is the rule of thumb used in America's S&L crisis in the 1980s when 130 banks failed in Texas. The ratio is calculated by taking bad loans and property assets divided by tangible equity and total provisions. A ratio above 100pc typically leads to failure.

Nomura says the ratio for Banco Popular is 123pc (up from 109pc last year). Nationalised Bankia is off the charts at 372pc. Sabadell is near 100pc.

As for Italy, the Banca d'Italia's Financial Stability Report this month says the banks are facing a "rapid increase in non-performing loans, principally to businesses, as a result of the protracted recession." Banca d'Italia warned that tensions could "resurface next year" as the ECB's three-year loans draw to a close.

Nothing has really been resolved. There will be a crunch in 2014 when the ECB carries out its next stress tests, with no proper EMU-wide backstop yet in place, or likely to be in place. Eurozone ministers agreed last week to "burden-sharing" rules that put investors in the front line for the first hit if there is a shortfall in bank capital.

Fair enough, but ex-ECB board member Lorenzo Bini-Smaghi says this risks repeating the sort of error made by Angela Merkel and Nicholas Sarkozy at the walk on the beach in Deauville, when they famously changed their minds and decided to impose a haircut on holders of Greek debt (against vehement ECB advice) – without first putting in place any safety net to deal with the panic that was sure to follow.

The national governments will have to swallow the next layer of losses, if necessary with a loan from the ESM bail-out fund, even if they are dire trouble themselves and cannot safely take on more debt.

We don't know yet whether this burden-sharing (or bail-in) will be limited to junior debt, or senior debt as well as the Germans want. Nor do we know exactly what will happen to depositors (Cyprus again?), when push comes to shove. This is surely a recipe for trouble.

A monetary reflation blitz along the lines of Abenomics in Japan would make it a great deal easier to cope with this bad debt legacy. All the ECB has to do is target nominal GDP growth of 5pc a year (easily within its power) — or 5pc M3 growth, to mimic the effect – and a big part of the problem would disappear.

As I have written many times, the health of banking system and debt structure in both Italy and Spain is a simple mathematical function of the denominator effect. The higher the nominal GDP path, the easier it is to outgrow the debt burden. A real central bank can achieve this with a flick of the fingers. If it wants.

Italy and Spain are formidable countries. They are entirely savable within EMU under expansionary policies, yet all too easily lost under contractionary policies.

If I were an Italian or a Spaniard, I would have a few caustic words to say about the Bundesbank's report today. Had Frankfurt not pushed for two premature and destructive rate rises in 2011, and had it not opposed any pre-emptive stimulus over recent months to avert incipient deflation, and had it not let eurozone M3 money growth go negative over the last five months, the banks in Italy and Spain would now be in far better shape.

Verfassungsgericht entscheidet erst 2014

91,77

21.11.2013 · Die Europäische Zentralbank hat letztes Jahr mit dem umstrittenen OMT-Programm die Finanzmärkte beruhigt. Das Bundesverfassungsgericht wird erst 2014 entscheiden, ob sie das durfte.

Artikel Bilder (1) Lesermeinungen (14)



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Der zweite Senat unter Gerichtspräsident Andreas Voßkuhle.

Das Bundesverfassungsgericht wird in diesem Jahr kein Urteil mehr zu den Klagen gegen das Euro-Rettungsprogramm der Europäischen Zentralbank ("OMT") verkünden. Dies sagte Gerichtssprecher Bernd Odörfer in Karlsruhe. Der Zweite Senat strebe aber weiter an, in dieser Sache so zügig wie möglich zu entscheiden, fügte er hinzu.

Die Verfassungsrichter beschäftigen sich mit der Frage, ob der im Sommer 2012 von der EZB in Aussicht gestellte mögliche unbegrenzte Kauf von Staatsanleihen aus Mitgliedsländern der Währungsunion gegen das Grundgesetz verstößt. Zu klären ist, ob mit dem Programm, das bisher nicht angewendet wurde, Finanzrisiken für Deutschland verbunden sind und dies das im Grundgesetz verankerte Haushaltsrecht des Bundestages verletzt.

Staatsfinanzierung?

Geklagt hatten unter anderem der CSU-Politiker Peter Gauweiler und der Verein „Mehr Demokratie“ um die ehemalige Justizministerin Herta Däubler-Gmelin (SPD). Sie argumentieren, die Euro-Notenbank überschreite ihre Befugnisse und verstoße gegen das ihr im EU-Vertrag auferlegte Verbot der Staatsfinanzierung.

Der Richterspruch hat enorme Bedeutung. Sollte Karlsruhe das Programm kippen, rechnen Ökonomen damit, dass wieder Panik an den Finanzmärkten ausbrechen könnte. Außerdem wird das Urteil unter Vorsitz von Gerichtspräsident Andreas Voßkuhle wegweisend dafür sein, welche Konsequenzen ein EU-Mitgliedstaat aus einem Bruch des EU-Vertrages ziehen kann.

Les exportateurs français de volaille à Bruxelles pour plaider leur cause 91,78

Publié le 22/11/2013 à 06:00

Le commissaire européen chargé de l'Agriculture, Dacian Ciolos, a rappelé aux acteurs français de la filière avicole qu'ils avaient eu sept ans pour se préparer à la fin des subventions européennes pour les exportations de volaille, et que cette décision était irrévocable.

Les volaillers Doux et Tilly-Sabco, accompagnés du ministre de l'Agriculture Stéphane Le Foll, sont aujourd'hui à Bruxelles, avec l'espoir d'esquisser des solutions pour faire face à la fin des aides européennes à l'export.

La délégation française, composée des deux volaillers, de représentants de la Confédération française de l'aviculture (CFA) et de la Fédération des industries avicoles (Fia), sera reçue en fin de matinée par le Commissaire européen à l'Agriculture Dacian Ciolos. La Commission européenne avait annoncé en juillet la fin des «restitutions», ces aides à l'export qui permettaient aux poulets congelés européens d'entrée de gamme de concurrencer les volailles brésiliennes sur le marché international, au Moyen-Orient notamment. «L'idée n'est pas de plaider la remise en place des restitutions, mais de voir quels mécanismes peuvent soutenir une filière qui a du potentiel», explique à l'AFP le directeur de la CFA, Christian Marinov.

Les volaillers français Doux et Tilly-Sabco étaient les derniers bénéficiaires de ces subventions, d'un montant d'environ 55 millions d'euros par an, dont la suppression avait été actée dès 2005 et confirmée en 2008. Au ministère de l'Agriculture, on s'agace de l'inaction des industriels, qui savaient bien que ces aides s'arrêteraient. «Je constate aujourd'hui, alors que tout le monde savait que ces restitutions allaient disparaître, que personne n'a tenu compte du fait qu'on allait finir par ne plus (les) avoir», s'étonnait début novembre Stéphane Le Foll.

Même son de cloche du côté de Bruxelles: le commissaire européen chargé de l'Agriculture, Dacian Ciolos, a tenu à rappeler jeudi aux acteurs français de la filière avicole qu'ils avaient eu sept ans pour se préparer à la fin des subventions européennes pour les exportations de volaille, et que cette décision était irrévocable. «Si sept ans ne constituent pas un temps suffisant pour se préparer (à la fin des subventions) alors je ne vois pas combien de temps il faut», a déclaré Dacian Ciolos au cours d'un point de presse,

Multiplication des actions en Bretagne

De fait sous la pression de Tilly-Sabco et de ses employés, qui ont multiplié les actions en Bretagne début novembre dans un climat déjà explosif dans cette région, le ministre de l'Agriculture s'était engagé à obtenir un rendez-vous à Bruxelles pour défendre le dossier avec les représentants de la filière.

Car sans les restitutions, le poulet français ne fait plus le poids: les coûts de production s'élèvent à 1,80 euro/kilo quand il se vend 1,30 euro, soit à peine de quoi couvrir les frais de production du poulet vivant, souligne le PDG de Tilly-Sabco, Daniel Sauvaget. L'entreprise a d'ailleurs déjà dû réduire sa production de 40% en août et menace de la suspendre complètement en janvier, mettant au chômage partiel la quasi-totalité des 340 employés. Mais sa décision n'est pas encore totalement arrêtée et il attend la réunion de vendredi. «J'espère pouvoir corriger ma décision très rapidement», assure-t-il à l'AFP.

Pour lui, la solution passerait notamment par des aides fléchées sur «l'amont de la filière», qui permettraient aux éleveurs de vendre leurs poulets moins cher aux industriels. Les éleveurs de leur côté voient la solution dans «le mécanisme de gestion de crise. Est-ce qu'on peut l'utiliser seulement en cas de crise sanitaire, ou aussi quand une filière est attaquée sur la monnaie?», demande Christian Marinov. Car outre la fin des restitutions, le poulet européen est mis à mal par l'effondrement du real, qui rend le poulet brésilien encore plus bon marché.

Chez Doux, on préfère ne pas s'avancer, arguant être concentré à 100% sur la décision du tribunal de Quimper le 26 novembre qui doit valider -ou pas- le plan de continuation du groupe en redressement judiciaire. Même si «bien évidemment, on n'est pas resté inactifs dans les échanges avec Bruxelles», complète le porte-parole du volailler.

À la Commission européenne, on évoque seulement des aides au développement rural, dans le cadre de la future Politique agricole commune (PAC, 2014-2020). Ces aides, appartenant au second pilier de la PAC, peuvent permettre la modernisation des bâtiments d'élevage. Un sujet crucial pour la filière qui estime avoir besoin de 100 millions d'euros par an pour se remettre à niveau, mais qui ne suffira pas, selon la CFA.

Gaz de schiste: des risques maîtrisables, selon l'Académie des sciences 91,79

○ Par [Cyrille Vanlerberghe](#) Publié le 21/11/2013 à 19:40

Les académiciens demandent un « effort de recherche » sur un sujet qu'ils jugent crucial pour l'économie.

L'**Académie des sciences** s'est lancée de plain-pied dans la polémique sur les **gaz de schiste**, en publiant jeudi un rapport qui demande qu'un « effort de recherche » national soit mené sur le sujet afin d'envisager une exploitation sûre et non polluante de ces ressources. L'institution demande pour cela la création d'une « autorité scientifique indépendante et pluridisciplinaire » qui évaluerait le niveau des réserves existantes ainsi que les méthodes d'exploitation.

Contrairement aux gaz naturels dits « conventionnels », qui sortent tout seuls du sol lors d'un forage, les gaz de schiste sont piégés dans des roches peu perméables. Ils ne peuvent être exploités qu'en fracturant la roche qui les contient, et cette fracturation est faite en injectant de grandes quantités d'eau. Or, la loi du 13 juillet 2011 interdit l'usage de la **fracturation hydraulique**, ce qui empêche toute exploration qui pourrait permettre d'estimer de manière fiable les réserves exploitables dans le sous-sol français.

« Les conséquences positives pour l'économie qui pourraient résulter, pour la France, d'un développement des gaz et huiles de roche-mère (aussi appelés gaz et huiles de schiste, NDLR) sont trop importantes dans la situation de crise actuelle pour qu'on puisse rejeter a priori, sans un examen attentif, cette ressource potentielle », affirment les académiciens. Sans en faire une énergie miracle, le rapport explique que le gaz de schiste est moins polluant que le charbon pour compenser l'intermittence des sources d'énergies renouvelables.

Le document rappelle que les terrains sédimentaires du Bassin parisien ainsi que du sud-est de la France contiendraient jusqu'à 5 100 milliards de mètres cubes de gaz de schiste, ce qui représenterait 115 fois la consommation annuelle française de gaz. Les chiffres cités sont ceux donnés en 2011 par l'Agence internationale de l'énergie, qui les a révisés à la baisse de plus de 20 % dans son rapport de juin 2013, à 3 900 milliards de mètres cubes. Cette baisse brutale des estimations illustre à quel point les connaissances sont grossières sur le sujet. Les académiciens insistent d'ailleurs sur l'importance de mener des recherches pour avoir une meilleure évaluation des réserves dans notre pays.

L'injection d'eau dans le sous-sol peut produire des secousses sismiques mais cette sismicité reste sans danger

Le rapport est rédigé en des termes prudents et mesurés (il a été soumis à la relecture de l'ensemble des membres de l'Académie des sciences avant publication), mais tous les arguments techniques avancés montrent que les rapporteurs sont convaincus que l'exploitation des gaz de schiste, même par la technique de la fracturation hydraulique, peut se faire d'une manière sûre, à la fois pour les personnes et pour l'environnement.

« Nous nous sommes concentrés sur l'aspect scientifique de l'estimation des risques, en évitant d'avoir une approche simplement émotionnelle », précise Sébastien Candell, président du comité de prospective en énergie de l'Académie des sciences. « De manière générale, nous avons trouvé que les risques associés à l'extraction du gaz de schiste peuvent être maîtrisés avec une réglementation adaptée. »

Sans aller jusqu'à demander clairement la fin du moratoire sur la fracturation hydraulique, les auteurs du rapport estiment que les autres techniques étudiées en remplacement « ne constituent pas une alternative à la fracturation hydraulique utilisable en pratique ». Il faut donc mener des recherches sur l'amélioration de cette technique existante.

Sur la question hautement sensible des pollutions possibles des nappes phréatiques, l'Académie estime que « le risque de contamination directe due à la fracturation hydraulique est peu probable » car les gisements de gaz sont à plusieurs centaines de mètres en dessous des aquifères, largement hors de portée des plus longues fissures provoquées par la fracturation. Les éventuelles fuites dans les nappes par les tubes de forage peuvent « aussi se produire pour les gisements conventionnels », fait remarquer le rapport, en précisant que « ce risque est bien identifié et maîtrisé par l'industrie du gaz et du pétrole ».

L'analyse de l'Académie reconnaît que l'injection d'eau dans le sous-sol peut produire des secousses sismiques, mais que cette sismicité reste sans danger (de magnitude inférieure à 3) avec les quantités d'eau nécessaires pour l'exploitation des gaz de schiste. « Les niveaux sont plus faibles que ceux ressentis naturellement ou que ceux qui sont liés aux activités minières », affirme le document, qui précise que, par prudence, « cette sismicité doit être surveillée » au cours de l'extraction des gaz.

La fracturation hydraulique strictement interdite en France depuis la loi de 2011 91,80

○ Par Marielle Court Publié le 21/11/2013 à 19:58

Le sujet de la fracturation hydraulique divise la population, tout comme la classe politique.

Le rapport de l'Académie des sciences sur le gaz de schiste est-il susceptible de relancer le débat sur l'exploitation de ce gaz non conventionnel en France? La question peut se poser à quelques mois des municipales. Le sujet, en effet, divise la population, tout comme la classe politique. Il oppose industrie et ONG.

Lorsque les Américains délivrent, à la fin des années 1990, des projections faisant état de ressources importantes en France en matière de gaz de schiste, des demandes de permis d'exploration sont lancées par les grandes compagnies pétrolières. Un certain nombre sont accordées au début des années 2000, notamment en région parisienne.

Les Américains, pour leur part, se sont lancés depuis longtemps dans cette exploitation. Mais ce nouvel eldorado énergétique outre-Atlantique sert très vite de repoussoir pour les associations écologistes et les autorités politiques de l'époque. Ils dénoncent les dégâts environnementaux liés à la seule méthode existant à ce jour pour extraire le **gaz de schiste**: la **fracturation hydraulique**. Le 13 juillet 2011, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, alors ministre de l'Écologie de Nicolas Sarkozy, fait adopter une loi qui interdit toute exploitation du gaz de schiste dès lors qu'elle fait appel à cette méthode. Fraîchement nommé à l'Élysée, François Hollande confirme cette position. Et, **en octobre dernier, le Conseil constitutionnel, saisi par les pétroliers, dont les permis ont été suspendus, valide à son tour la loi**. Elle est désormais «incontestable», se félicite le chef de l'État. Les ONG se frottent les mains. Mais les pétroliers réclament au moins que soit mise en place la Commission nationale d'orientation, de suivi et d'évaluation des techniques d'exploration et d'exploitation des hydrocarbures également prévue dans la loi. Las! Les ONG refusent d'y siéger. La commission n'est jamais constituée.

L'opposition, toutefois, reste prudente. Jean-François Copé, le président de l'UMP, dénonce la position du président de la République, qui interdit même l'idée d'exploration, mais il rappelle systématiquement que cela doit être fait en respectant l'environnement. L'élu, il est vrai, est concerné au premier chef, puisque le gaz de schiste se trouve notamment dans sa circonscription de Seine-et-Marne.

«Faire un inventaire»

Il y a peu, **Anne Lauvergeon**, ancienne présidente d'**Areva**, réclamait de son côté que «l'on regarde d'abord si les gaz de schiste existent ou pas, que l'on commence par faire un inventaire... Avant de se battre sur comment on va les exploiter.» Mais, pour explorer correctement, il faut fracturer! Au mois d'octobre, le club de réflexion de l'UMP La Boîte à idées estimait dans un document que «compte tenu des progrès techniques réalisés et du recul dont on dispose aujourd'hui sur la fracturation hydraulique, la prudence qui était légitime en 2011 ne l'est plus».

L'interdiction de la fracturation hydraulique s'inscrit «dans le cadre de la transition énergétique», répond **Philippe Martin**, le ministre de l'Écologie. «Les gaz de schiste sont aussi des énergies fossiles... Les brûler c'est davantage de gaz à effet de serre, davantage de réchauffement climatique.» Au grand dam d'Arnaud Montebourg, son collègue du Redressement productif, qui, pour sa part, y voit un relais de croissance.

November 21, 2013

Germany's Risky Populism 91,81

By CLEMENS WERGIN

BERLIN — From the European Commission in Brussels to the United States Treasury Department in Washington, lately it seems almost everybody has been bashing the Germans for their high trade surplus. But those who think that this imbalance is dangerous need to relax. The next German government, currently being negotiated between the two leading parties, will address it — by hamstringing German competitiveness.

Germany spent the last decade working its way out of a regulatory straitjacket that kept unemployment high and competitiveness low. That's why Berlin has spent the last few years lecturing countries like Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal about the benefits of austerity and structural reforms like deregulating labor markets, scaling back welfare systems and cutting pensions to adapt to demographic decline.

But if the terms of the negotiations are any indication, it looks as if Germany has been preaching water while planning to take another deep sip from the populist wine: Chancellor Angela Merkel's center-right Christian Democrats and the left-leaning Social Democrats want to raise pensions, regulate the labor sector and dole out ever more money for questionable social benefits.

According to some estimates, the additional spending decided on by the different working groups in the talks already amounts to 50 billion euros.

On the surface, these steps might seem to make sense: Germany is a rich country, so why shouldn't it open the fiscal taps? But each proposed measure presents a significant risk.

For example, the Social Democrats want a national minimum wage, at €8.50, or about \$11.45, a level that some economists estimate could cost hundreds of thousands of jobs in the low-skilled labor sector, which is the most vulnerable.

And they insist on scaling back policies that enhance labor-market flexibility, which have been key to the recent success of Germany's export industry.

Meanwhile, both parties want more pension payouts: If the government comes through, the conservatives will get a pension increase for mothers, while Social Democrats want a boost for "mini pensions," and possibly even an earlier retirement age, at just 63, down from the current 65.

Such expansive spending will load even more unpaid bills onto the younger generation, which, in a dramatically aging society, will probably never retrieve the money in its old age that it is now forced to pay into the state pension system. And spending is only one part of the negotiations' anticompetitive agenda: It is also unclear whether the new government would seriously tackle Germany's rising energy prices, which are already driving some companies out of the country.

In a recent report, the Council of Economic Experts sharply criticized these plans, fearing that Germany might reverse the competitiveness gains that resulted from the hard-won reforms under Ms. Merkel's predecessor, Gerhard Schröder, a Social Democrat of the Clinton and Blair mold. "The German government," the council wrote, "should not give the impression that it expects — or even demands — painful adjustment processes from other countries, but shies away from unpopular measures for Germany."

There are many ways to explain the populist turn away from the recipes that resulted in the breathtaking decline of unemployment over the last decade.

One is the feeling that Germany is in good shape and that it is ordinary citizens' turn to get some benefits after years of bailing out the fat cats in finance. Now that voters have pushed the free-market Liberal Democratic Party out of the Bundestag, the German Parliament is left with four parties that are either socialist or social democratic: the radical Left party, the leftist Greens, the Social Democrats and the conservative Christian Democrats, whom Ms. Merkel has taken so far to the left that their economic and welfare policies today, in American terms, would put them to the left of Bill Clinton.

That is the irony of today's Germany: It is a country that rides the waves of the global free market better than many other countries of the developed world, but its Parliament is full of parties that believe that state activism is the right answer to real (and imagined) problems of German society.

To be fair, during the coalition negotiations Ms. Merkel demanded that the financial feasibility of all proposals be tested before clinching a final deal.

But Ms. Merkel cannot undo a basic fact of these talks: Whenever the two major opposing parties of German politics are forced into a coalition, you will never get a coherent government program. And the usual way to paper over ideological differences in European politics is to grant every side its respective pet projects — and let others pay the bill, preferably the younger, smaller and often less vocal generation.

In recent years many people in and outside of Germany have come to believe that fiscal populism is an illness unique to southern Europe. In reality, all postmodern Western societies have a tendency to overconsume now and let the following generations foot the bill. It's just that this populist impulse is better constrained in some countries than in others. The coalition talks in Berlin give ample proof that Germany is in no way immune to the sort of structural overspending and overregulation that is known to diminish national competitiveness.

By reducing Germany's trade surplus, the measures agreed to under the coalition negotiations might appease the critics in Brussels and Washington. But it is hardly in Europe's interest to weaken its biggest economy in the face of fierce competition from beyond the borders of the old Continent. All of Europe will lose if Germany becomes another calcified France and returns to being the "sick man of Europe" it was just 10 years ago.

Clemens Wergin is the foreign editor of the German newspaper group Die Welt and the author of the blog Flatworld.

November 21, 2013

Facing Russian Threat, Ukraine Halts Plans for Deals with E.U. 91,83

By [DAVID M. HERSZENHORN](#)

MOSCOW — Under threat of crippling trade sanctions by Russia, Ukraine announced Thursday that it had suspended its plans to sign far-reaching political and trade agreements with the European Union and said it would instead pursue new partnerships with a competing trade bloc of former Soviet states.

The decision largely scuttles what had been the European Union's most important foreign policy initiative: an ambitious effort to draw in former Soviet republics and lock them on a trajectory of changes based on Western political and economic sensibilities. The project, called the Eastern Partnership program, began more than four years ago.

Ukraine's decision not to sign the agreements at a major conference next week in Vilnius, Lithuania, is a victory for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. He had [maneuvered forcefully](#) to derail the plans, which he regarded as a serious threat, an economic version of the West's effort to build military power by expanding NATO eastward. In September, similar pressure by Russia forced Armenia to abandon its talks with the Europeans.

European leaders reacted with fury and regret, directed at Kiev and Moscow. "This is a disappointment not just for the E.U. but, we believe, for the people of Ukraine," Catherine Ashton, the European Union's foreign policy chief, said in a statement. Calling the pact that Ukraine was walking away from "the most ambitious agreement the E.U. has ever offered to a partner country," Ms. Ashton suggested the country would suffer financially.

"It would have provided a unique opportunity to reverse the recent discouraging trend of decreasing foreign investment," she said, "and would have given momentum" to negotiations for more financial aid from the International Monetary Fund. Ukraine faces a growing economic crisis, and it is widely expected to need a major aid package soon.

Others were more pointed in blaming Russia. "Ukraine government suddenly bows deeply to the Kremlin," the Swedish foreign minister, Carl Bildt, wrote [on Twitter](#). "Politics of brutal pressure evidently works."

In Brussels, Stefan Fule, the European Commission's senior official responsible for relations with neighboring countries, canceled a trip to Ukraine that he had announced just hours earlier, suggesting that officials saw little hope in reversing the decision. "Hard to overlook in reasoning for today's decision impact of #Russia's recent unjustified economic & trade measures," he wrote [on Twitter](#).

Ukraine's announcement came in the form of a decree issued by the cabinet of ministers ordering the government "to suspend" preparations for concluding the agreements with Europe and instead begin planning for new negotiations with the European Union and Russia.

At virtually the same time, President Viktor F. Yanukovich, who was on a visit to Vienna, issued a statement saying, “Ukraine has been and will continue to pursue the path to European integration.”

In a move emblematic of Ukraine’s often inscrutable politics, Mr. Yanukovich barely acknowledged the developments in Kiev and, responding to a reporter’s question about the pacts with Europe, said, “Of course, there are difficulties on the path.”

Because Mr. Yanukovich was supposed to sign the accords in Vilnius, some officials seemed to hold out the faint possibility he might find a way to resurrect the agreements. Those hopes seemed to fade Thursday night as the reactions in Europe grew angrier, and Russia said it would gladly join in negotiations if the accords were postponed.

The decree by the cabinet of ministers followed the Ukrainian Parliament’s overwhelming rejection of legislation that would have freed the country’s jailed former prime minister, Yulia V. Tymoshenko, and allowed her to seek treatment in Germany for back problems. Ms. Tymoshenko is a bitter political rival of Mr. Yanukovich’s.

The West has long criticized the conviction of Ms. Tymoshenko on abuse of authority charges and her seven-year prison sentence, saying they were a politically motivated effort to sideline her. Her release was widely viewed as a condition of signing the agreements, although the European Union never officially declared it to be a requirement.

The Parliament, which is controlled by Mr. Yanukovich’s Party of Regions, defeated six different bills related to the treatment of prisoners that were intended to address Ms. Tymoshenko’s case.

Opposition leaders in Parliament, including members of Ms. Tymoshenko’s Fatherland party and leaders of the nationalist Svoboda party, accused Mr. Yanukovich of torpedoing Ukraine’s chances for integration with Western Europe.

“President Yanukovich is personally stopping Ukraine’s movement to Europe,” said Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, a former minister of economy and foreign minister, who is the leader of the Fatherland party in Parliament.

Moldova, the poorest country in Europe, is expected to move forward with the agreements in Vilnius even though Russia has banned imports of Moldovan wine, one of the country’s most important exports, and has threatened other repercussions including an immigration crackdown on more than 100,000 Moldovans working in Russia.

Georgia, which fought a brief war with Russia in 2008 and remains in conflict with Russia over the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is also planning to move forward with the accords. At his inauguration on Sunday, the country’s new president, Giorgi Margvelashvili, said Georgia hoped to join the European Union and NATO.

Ukraine’s domestic politics are deeply entwined with the country’s relationship with Russia, and Mr. Yanukovich is widely viewed as calculating the implications of his decisions for his plans to seek re-election in 2015.

Mr. Yanukovich's political base is in the largely Russian-speaking southern and eastern sections of the country, which generally favor closer relations with Russia. Younger voters, and those in the central and western sections of the country, are more likely to favor integration with Europe; he would need their support to win a second term.

At the same time, Ukraine is facing severe economic problems and will probably need a large infusion of credit. Those problems were certain to worsen if Russia followed through with threats of wide-ranging trade sanctions as retaliation for signing the deals with Europe.

It was unclear if the Kremlin had given Mr. Yanukovich any assurances of financial assistance. It seemed probable that Ukraine would face difficulties obtaining additional help from the International Monetary Fund after backing out of the agreements with Europe.

On Thursday, several hundred protesters gathered in Independence Square in Kiev. Carrying European flags, they chanted, "Ukraine is Europe!"

Linas Linkevicius, the foreign minister of Lithuania, which currently holds the European Union's rotating presidency, said that if Ukraine passed up the chance of signing a deal at the conference next week in Vilnius, it would have very little chance of doing so in the future. "The probability is likely close to zero," he said.

Andrew Higgins contributed reporting from Brussels, and Alison Smale from Berlin.

November 21, 2013

Greek Budget Forecasts Growth, but Skeptics Abound 91,86

By NIKI KITSANTONIS

ATHENS — Greece on Thursday outlined a 2014 budget that predicts a return to economic growth after six straight years of recession, putting the country's prospects in an optimistic light.

But it came just two days after the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development forecast that the Greek economy would shrink again next year. And the budget, which was presented to Parliament, has not received the necessary approval of the country's trio of international creditors.

On Thursday, representatives of those creditors left Athens without an agreement with the government on the size of a projected budget gap next year and on the possible need for additional spending cuts.

At a news conference later on Thursday in Brussels, Simon O'Connor, a spokesman for one of those creditors, the European Commission, said there were still "issues to be resolved" before those lenders could approve the Greek budget.

It was a reminder that Greece — which has received two rounds of international bailouts totaling 240 billion euros, or \$323 billion, since 2010 — is still far from autonomous when it comes to managing its finances.

The Greek economy, which has shrunk by one-fourth since 2007, is projected to grow 0.6 percent next year, according to the government's budget that was released on Thursday. But earlier this week the O.E.C.D., which represents the world's most advanced economies, forecast that the Greek economy would contract 0.4 percent next year.

The government projections "aim to create some optimism in Greece, and in the markets, but they are precarious — they depend on so many variables, such as whether Greeks will pay their taxes and other uncertain factors," said Manos Giakoumis, an economist and head of equity research at Euroxx Securities, a brokerage firm in Athens. "It's far from certain that these targets can be reached."

The government blueprint also predicted a primary surplus — a budget surplus that excludes debt payments — of €812 million for this year and €2.95 billion for 2014. That was an upward revision from previous forecasts of €344 million and €2.8 billion.

Unemployment, according to the government, would improve slightly, to 24.5 percent next year from 25.5 percent this year.

"It is a blueprint that takes into account the first positive signs seen in 2013, which are the outcome of the major sacrifices of Greek society," Christos Staikouras, a deputy finance minister, told reporters. He added that the conditions were being created for Greece to return to the international bond markets next year, after three years of reliance on bailout loans.

Outside experts do not necessarily share his optimism. “Greece will have difficulties returning to the markets before some kind of reduction to the country’s debt, which, as we know, creditors are reluctant to offer,” said Mr. Giakoumis, the economist.

But the budget is only theoretical at this point. Parliament plans to vote on it on Dec. 7 or Dec. 8. After that, it will require revision as Greece and its creditors continue to haggle over how to close a fiscal gap for next year. The lenders currently peg the gap at more than €1.5 billion — three times Greece’s original estimate.

The impasse has fueled speculation in the Greek news media about the need for further austerity measures, though government officials have insisted that any gap would be plugged with “structural reforms” rather than further spending cuts. Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras said in Parliament on Thursday that there would be “no more horizontal measures,” a reference to the across-the-board cuts to salaries and pensions that have lowered Greek living standards.

In a joint statement on Thursday morning, Greece’s three international creditors — the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund — said “good progress has been made, but a few issues remain outstanding,” adding that the review would resume in early December.

Greek government officials have said they hope a deal will be reached with the creditors before a meeting of the Eurogroup of euro zone finance ministers on Dec. 9. But the creditors are getting restless. In comments to Greece’s Ta Nea daily that were published on Thursday, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the head of the Eurogroup, said a deal must be reached quickly because “many euro zone finance ministers have started to lose patience.”

Apart from the looming fiscal gap, negotiations between Greece and foreign auditors have also snagged on issues including [an unpopular property tax](#) that combines several levies, including one attached to homeowners’ electricity bills. The creditors have said that they doubt it will raise enough money.

Nor, before they left Athens, did the creditors reach an agreement on the economic overhauls that Greece must enforce to secure its next installment of bailout money, worth €1 billion. These changes include a plan for forced transfers and layoffs in the Civil Service and the streamlining of EAS, an unprofitable state-owned producer of military equipment.

Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, who faces the difficult task of satisfying foreign creditors while keeping an increasingly fragile coalition government together, is set to meet in Berlin on Friday with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. Ms. Merkel, speaking at an economic conference on Thursday, said Greece had achieved “very noteworthy reforms.”

Mr. Samaras is expected to emphasize his government’s inability to impose further austerity measures amid growing political and social tension. This month, his coalition’s wafer-thin majority in Parliament [was reduced to four seats](#), after a coalition lawmaker backed a motion by a leftist opposition party, Syriza, for a vote of no confidence in the government and was ejected from the coalition. The leftists, which oppose Greece’s bailout, lost the motion but are gaining in opinion polls.

In comments to reporters on Thursday, after a meeting in Athens with Penny Pritzker, the United States commerce secretary, Mr. Samaras said the first signs of recovery in Greece — including projections for a primary surplus, a current-account surplus and a foreign trade balance — “offer major investment opportunities in our country.”

Ms. Pritzker said she saw “many opportunities” for the United States and Greece to do more business together, and called on the government “to increase transparency in public procurements” to help non-Greek companies compete for government contracts in sectors like energy and health care.

November 21, 2013

France May Slip Back Into Recession

91,89

By [JACK EWING](#)

FRANKFURT — Hopes that the euro zone could be emerging from years of torpor suffered another setback on Thursday when an indicator of economic activity in the region slipped unexpectedly and suggested that France could be sliding back into recession.

The indicator, a survey of purchasing managers published by the research firm Markit, fell to 51.5 in November from 51.9 in October, according to preliminary data, as the decline in France offset further improvement in Germany. Economists had expected the composite index for the euro zone, which tracks both manufacturing and service sectors, to rise to 52, according to Barclays.

A reading above 50 is considered a sign that the euro zone economy is growing. But the index for France fell to 48.5 in November from 50.5 in October, the latest sign of shrinkage in the French economy, the second-largest in the euro zone behind Germany's. It would be difficult for the euro zone to grow with any vigor if France were in recession.

Over all, the survey data suggested that, even though the euro zone as a whole pulled out of recession in the second quarter of this year, the recovery lacks momentum and is vulnerable to shocks, such as a sag in demand from China and other emerging markets.

“Any improvements were largely confined to Germany,” said Chris Williamson, chief economist at Markit. “France, on the other hand, showed further signs of being the ‘sick man of Europe.’ ”

The improvement in Germany, with the index rising to a 10-month high of 54.3 from 53.2 in October, was led by service providers, though manufacturers also reported that business was better. Services tend to be driven by domestic demand, a possible sign that Germany is becoming less dependent on exports for growth.

But the unexpectedly strong performance of Germany had a downside, because it highlighted the growing gap between competitive countries concentrated in Northern Europe and a group of sclerotic countries exemplified by Italy and now, it seems, France.

Germany's growing wealth during the misery that prevails in much of the euro zone is likely to intensify calls for it to invest more of its enormous trade surplus at home, to stimulate German demand for imports from the rest of the euro zone.

Germany, however, argues that it imports as much from euro zone countries as it exports to them, and that its huge trade surplus comes from exports to countries outside Europe.

France's poor performance will add to pressure on President François Hollande to confront the country's structural weaknesses, like labor regulations that are widely seen as an impediment to hiring and firing.

“Make no mistake about it, France has been knee-deep in a crisis for the past few years, and one which has been exacerbated by President Hollande’s tax-driven fiscal consolidation program and his extremely weak leadership,” Nicholas Spiro, managing director of Spiro Sovereign Strategy, said in a note to clients. “Indeed, the ever bleaker economic data in France is now the most conspicuous example of the severity and protracted nature of the downturn in the euro zone.”

The euro zone emerged from recession in the second quarter of this year, but growth has since been barely perceptible. On Tuesday, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development forecast that the euro zone economy would expand a modest 1 percent next year, slightly less than the organization’s economists forecast six months earlier.

This month, the European Central Bank cut its benchmark interest rate to a record low of a quarter of 1 percent in response to slow growth and a rate of inflation that some economists consider perilously close to deflation, a ruinous downward spiral in prices.

In a speech in Berlin on Thursday, Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank, defended Germany against criticism that its economic success came at the expense of other euro zone countries.

“The answer to the problems of the euro area is not to weaken its stronger economies,” Mr. Draghi said. “Rather, it is to strengthen its weaker economies.”

But Mr. Draghi also appeared to side with those who say Germany should focus less on cutting debt and put more emphasis on repairing aging bridges, roads and schools. German investment is lower than it was in 2007, Mr. Draghi said.

“Generating higher investment is ultimately the job of the private sector,” Mr. Draghi said. “But public authorities have to create the conditions that facilitate and encourage this process.”

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Some Economists Believe Bailouts Have Taken Euro Zone in Wrong Direction



By

GABRIELE STEINHAUSER

Nov. 21, 2013 5:26 p.m. ET

In their quest for closer financial integration, the 17 countries that use the euro have to go full speed—into reverse.

That is at least what Ashoka Mody, a former deputy director at the International Monetary Fund, argues. Mr. Mody is a member of a growing group of economists who believe the euro-zone bailouts of the past few years

have taken Europe in the wrong direction.

Instead of sharing the burden of outside debts of some countries among all of the bloc's members, they want governments to take back responsibility for their own fiscal affairs and for private holders of bank and sovereign debt to face the consequences if those investments turn sour.

Closer integration has been at the center of the euro zone's crisis fighting. The currency union has set up common bailout funds, tightened restrictions on national spending and economic policies and is now struggling to build a system that can prevent bank failures from ruining the finances of individual governments. Those efforts—driven primarily by European institutions in Brussels and the IMF in Washington—have been accompanied by demands for common euro-zone bonds, a central euro-zone budget or a mixture of the two.

But the results have been far from perfect. Germany and other "Northern" countries don't want to pay for other states' debts, while France and others in Europe's "South" chafe at the erosion of their sovereignty.

"Countries are responsible for their fiscal affairs," is how Mr. Mody sums up his take-away from the past 60 years of European integration. "That is one theme that you can just not walk away from." Instead, he says, solidarity efforts have resulted in a bitter mixture of loans resented by both borrowers and creditors and hard-to-enforce rules that some see as too rigid, while others complain they are too weak.

The bailouts have paid off private investors and transferred a large part of poor countries' government debt to the hands of fellow euro-zone members and other international institutions. The economic hardships caused by rapid spending cuts and economic overhauls, meanwhile, have eroded trust in the national and European political process, the very opposite of the civic dreams that were at the root of the European project.

Faced with such resistance, Mr. Mody says the euro zone needs to stop striving for further flawed integration and, instead, chisel away at the notion that guided governments when they moved to bail out Greece 3½ years ago: That a country's debt is ultimately a safe investment.

Apart from the restructuring of Greece's privately-held government debt—an episode that many euro-zone policy makers now brand as a mistake—that tenet has been upheld and many market players now regard euro-zone sovereign bonds as safe, despite doubts over debt sustainability.

In an essay published this week in the traditionally pro-integration Brussels-based think tank Bruegel, Mr. Mody says the euro zone needs to treat debt restructuring as a less dramatic and more predictable process.

To do so, governments should start issuing bonds whose terms are linked to their economic performance. Once debt reached a certain level, those bonds would come due later and carry lower interest—similar to bank bonds that can be turned into equity when a bank runs into trouble.

That idea was also endorsed in a paper published this week by four economists at the Bank of England and the Bank of Canada, though the authors stress their views aren't necessarily in sync with their institutions. They propose two changes to sovereign-bond contracts: one that automatically extends maturities when a country asks for international help, and another that lowers repayments if gross domestic product drops below a certain level.

"This predictable and transparent means of bailing-in creditors would increase market discipline on sovereigns to prudently manage their debt," they write. The central-bank economists cautioned they don't see their proposals as an answer to the euro zone's current problems and still accept, albeit smaller, international bailouts.

Mr. Mody, meanwhile, says performance-linked bonds have to come hand-in-hand with credible no-bailout commitments. And he sees no way around messy write-downs of existing government and bank debts that are holding back the euro zone's recovery.

The euro zone's incomplete integration, though, means that such write-downs would likely have to be deeper and be borne mostly by countries that have suffered the most from the debt crisis. Northern European banks have cut their exposure to the euro zone's weak members, while cheap central-bank liquidity has allowed southern European banks to bulk up on their own nations' bonds.

"The question is: Just because something improper was done four years ago, do you not prevent something worse from happening four years from now?" Mr. Mody asks.

Mr. Mody doesn't see his proposals as an obstacle to future integration, he says, but as a precondition. Only once Northern European countries know they won't be bank-rolling their Southern neighbors, governments can decide whether they want to integrate.

The Resurgence of European Patriotism

91,93

How to ruin the day of bureaucrats and politicians in Brussels.

By GEERT WILDERS

Nov. 21, 2013 3:50 p.m. ET

Here is a tip if you want to ruin the day of the bureaucrats and politicians in Brussels. Just mention next year's European elections and they will become extremely nervous and agitated. They will fume with anger and warn you about rising populism, a threat to democracy.

Next May's European elections, in which almost 400 million people in the 28 EU member states will be allowed to cast their votes, will in all likelihood produce a landslide against the Eurocrats. What will manifest itself, however, is not a rise of populism, but a victory for democracy.

For decades, Brussels has been able to do what it pleases. That period is over. People have finally come to realize that so-called europhiles aim to destroy Europe's nations, the homes of national democracies. And people are not going to let it happen. They are no longer buying the lie that patriotism is dangerous, that it is a vice and not a virtue. They are reasserting their national pride and identity.

Robert Schuman, who was one of the EU's founding fathers 60 years ago, used to say that the aim of European integration was "to make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible." But the idea that Germany, France, Britain and other nations in the past went to war because they were sovereign nations is simply ridiculous. They went to war because they had fallen for totalitarian ideologies. Democracies do not go to war against each other; they trade with one another.



Robert Schuman in 1960. *Getty Images*

Schuman and his contemporary followers, who are still trying to abolish the old European nation-states and replace them with a federal pan-European superstate, are politicians of the past. The EU represents the old political order. Today, a new generation of voters and politicians has emerged. I am one of them. My hero is not Robert Schuman, but the American visionary Ronald Reagan, who in his farewell address advocated a resurgence of national pride, which he called the "new patriotism." As Reagan had it, this meant "a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions."

The euro crisis of the past five years has worked as a catalyst. Europe's citizens, from Finland to Portugal and from Ireland to Greece, have noticed that Brussels has been unable to solve the economic crisis. It imposed austerity solutions that resulted in higher taxes and only made matters worse.

The EU did not bring Europe peace; NATO did. The EU did not bring economic prosperity; free trade did. Switzerland is the most competitive economy in the world and Norway is the most prosperous country. Neither of them are in the EU. Both belong to the European Free Trade Association, or EFTA.

The EU did not bring Europeans more democracy and freedom, either. On the contrary: The EU is a prison of nations. It undermines our national democracies. It resembles an EUSSR.

In referendums in 2005, the Dutch and the French electorates rejected the European Constitution, which aimed to turn the EU into a genuine state. But Brussels refused to take no for an answer. It went ahead with its plans for a constitutional treaty, notwithstanding the people's opposition. Brussels thinks it knows better than the people. Next May, it will realize that people who have been cheated do not forget.

This has nothing to do with populism; it is all about democracy. Democracy on a supranational level is simply impossible. In order to have democracy, there needs to be a nation. The European Union cannot be compared to the United States. America is a nation, but Europe is not. Europe is a continent of many different nations with their own identities, traditions and languages. Robbing them of their national democracies does not create a European democracy—it destroys democracy in Europe.

For months my party, the Party for Freedom, has been leading in the Dutch polls. We are a young party. We want the Netherlands to leave the EU, join EFTA and, like Switzerland, negotiate bilateral trade agreements with the EU and the rest of the world. We are going to win next May's European elections.

In other countries, too, the EU has never been as unpopular as it is today. Trust in the EU has fallen to its lowest level ever. Six out of 10 Europeans tend not to trust the EU, according to the EU's own polling. They are going to vote accordingly. The old order of the complacent elite in Brussels is crumbling.

In Britain, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), wants to lead Britain out of the EU. It is polling at almost 20%. In France, the National Front, under its new leader Marine Le Pen, wants to return sovereignty to Paris from Brussels and has, in turn, become the most popular party in the polls.

Europe is on the verge of a glorious revolution—non-violent and democratic. Next May, all over Europe voters will rebel at the ballot box. They will reject the supranational experiment of the European Union. They will cast their votes for a restoration of national sovereignty.

They are not extremists, they are democrats.

Mr. Wilders, a member of the Dutch Parliament, is the leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV).

Have Larry Summers And Paul Krugman Just Had Their Dimon/Dudley Moment? 91,95

Submitted by Tyler Durden on 11/21/2013 19:32 -0500

Submitted by F.F.Wiley of Cyniconomics blog,

With my kids getting older, I no longer get much chance to play “What’s wrong with this picture?” This is the game you’ll occasionally find on a children’s menu that’s based on a picture with, say, a guy holding an upside-down umbrella while pulling a child on a leash and pushing a dog in a stroller.

A new opportunity arose, though, with Larry Summers’ recent speech at the IMF and Paul Krugman’s follow-up blogging. The two economists’ messages are slightly different, but I’ll combine them as if they came from the same person, whom I’ll call SK. And then I’ll try to figure out what’s wrong with their “picture,” which SK might boil down like this:

*The fact that CPI inflation was subdued in the last decade tells us there’s something missing in our understanding of the housing bubble. Without inflation, there couldn’t have been excess demand or irresponsible monetary policy. But how is this reconciled with the recovery’s inadequacy? If demand was normal and policy responsible, why is the economy in such bad shape? [Dramatic pause.] Well, maybe, the “natural” real interest rate is about -2 or -3%! And because the zero lower bound prevents us from achieving this rate, we need even more stimulus (of all types) than we thought. Essentially, **we need to manufacture bubbles to achieve full employment equilibrium.***

With this new line of reasoning, SK have completely outdone themselves, but not in a good way. Think Jamie Dimon’s infamous “that’s why I’m richer than you” quip. Or, Bill Dudley’s memorable “but the price of iPads is falling” excuse for increases in basic living costs. (Dudley needed to be reminded that you can’t eat an iPad.) Dimon and Dudley managed to encapsulate in single sentences much of what’s wrong with their institutions. Yet, they showed baffling ignorance of faults that are clear to the rest of us.

Being academic economists, SK haven’t managed to reduce their Dimon/Dudley moment to a one-liner. But in the argument above, they’ve collected in a single place a remarkable number of the flaws in their approach. I’ll take a crack at listing them below, or at least a few of the more obvious ones. Here are five possible problems with SK’s “picture”:

#1: Low inflation does not equal reasonable demand and responsible policies

As we discussed here, the Fed misinterpreted the consequences of disinflation throughout the boom. Greenspan and Company lowered interest rates when inflation threatened to fall below their target of 1 to 2%, and this only worsened the malinvestment that continues to hold back the economy today. But inflation was subdued because a certain country lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty by building new factories and paying wages of a few dollars a day. And this country then loaned us the proceeds from its cheap exports, adding to our credit boom.

In other words, the Fed’s interpretation of inflation was more flawed than usual, even backwards. Disinflation was explained by cheap imported goods, which meant abundant foreign capital, which meant a larger credit boom, which meant too much demand. Contrary to SK’s narrative, policymakers made huge errors by not only failing to recognize that this dynamic is unsustainable, but by encouraging it with cheap money.

#2: The Phillips curve? Really?

In addition to applying the faulty logic of the Fed's inflation target, SK revert to early Keynesian misconceptions. They rely on the idea that inflation becomes a problem if and only if stimulus continues beyond full employment (and even in the short-term). This Phillips curve thinking was discredited in the 1970s. We saw then that high inflation can coexist with high unemployment and weak demand. We saw more recently that low inflation can coexist with low unemployment and excessive demand. In either case, inflation is clearly more complicated than SK believe it to be.

#3: Mandating Keynesian planners to achieve “equilibrium” is just asking for trouble

As part of their embrace of the Phillips curve in the 1960s, Keynesians estimated that the unemployment rate could be pushed as low as 4% without triggering inflation, and set out to do just that. In other words, 4% was said to be a “full employment equilibrium.” But this notion of equilibrium is deeply flawed, as is the Keynesians' confidence in achieving such a target. Their first instance of active policymaking – in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations – led eventually to the Great Inflation that was said to be impossible, while we're still waiting on that 4%. Since the Great Inflation, Keynesians redesigned their theoretical models while concocting many variations, but none of them explain the economy's true behavior.

One fundamental problem with the Keynesian approach is this: The benefits of policy stimulus are invariably followed by costs that the models fail to capture and planners fail to consider. In the world of Keynesian theory, for example, an economy can cruise along at its full potential without ever suffering the consequences of a reversal of past stimulus. In the reality of a modern credit-based economy, on the other hand, good times lead to imbalances that accumulate like dead wood in a dry forest, which then ignites after stimulus turns to restraint. And not only have Keynesian (including monetary) stabilization policies repeatedly led to instability, but there's an enormous pile of dead wood at the Treasury Department (public debt) that's yet to catch fire.

There are many other dimensions to this topic, but I'll leave it alone for now to address other specifics in SK's hypothesis. I do recommend reading Arnold Kling's "PSST" theory, though, which is a quicker and more current counter-argument to Keynesian equilibrium concepts than, say, the two volumes and 1095 pages of Joseph Schumpeter's *Business Cycles*.

#4: Your father's natural interest rate doesn't fit the SK narrative

While there are different notions of “natural interest rates” embedded in specific Keynesian models, Krugman claims that his use of the term matches Knut Wicksell's classic definition from 1898. Wicksell's natural rate arises from the preferences of private borrowers and lenders in the absence of central bank interventions, or even money, for that matter. In other words, it's a purely market-driven rate for private, not public borrowers. Although Wicksell theorizes that several different formulations equate to the same figure (for example, his natural rate is also the marginal return on capital), none of these could plausibly be said to have been negative through the last cycle, as SK speculate.

Worse still, Wicksell held that prices are neither rising nor falling at the natural rate, implying that SK's logic is upside-down. Under Wicksellian thinking, positive inflation suggests that natural real rates would have to *be higher*, not *lower*, than observed market rates, in order to come closer to his stable price criterion.

#5: Umm, bubbles are really not a sensible route to full employment

We're clearly in Dimon/Dudley territory here, and Tyler Durden already posted the ultimate rejoinder. I'll just add an observation.

Recall that Krugman was widely lambasted for this housing bubble recommendation he offered in 2002:

*[My] basic point is that the recession of 2001 wasn't a typical postwar slump, brought on when an inflation-fighting Fed raises interest rates and easily ended by a snapback in housing and consumer spending when the Fed brings rates back down again. This was a prewar-style recession, a morning after brought on by irrational exuberance. To fight this recession the Fed needs more than a snapback; it needs soaring household spending to offset moribund business investment. (By "moribund," I mean that investment falls chronically short of savings at the existing interest rate, which is higher than the natural rate, and this prevents the economy from reaching full employment equilibrium.) And to do that, as Paul McCulley of Pimco put it, **Alan Greenspan needs to create a housing bubble to replace the Nasdaq bubble.***

Okay, full information: That's not the exact excerpt. I added the sentence in parenthesis, just to show that Krugman's latest call for bubbles uses the same logic as the 2002 recommendation.

Now, Krugman tried with all his might to convince us after the bust that he didn't really mean what he wrote. But it's easy to see through these denials – there's no other way to interpret the 2002 article. And today, he's making virtually the same recommendation once again.

These inconsistencies beg the question: What does Krugman really want us to believe? Does he recommend bubbles for a stagnant economy, or not?

To explore possible answers, I'll turn to my usual speculation about personal incentives and motives. As soon as I saw the renewed call for bubbles, I wondered what was behind it. At first, I saw nothing more than a refreshed case for more stimulus. But maybe there's more to it?

Consider that both economists take regular hits for their complicity in the mess we're in today – Krugman for his housing bubble advice and short-termism, Summers for blocking financial regulation while leading the charge against those who suggest our banks are a tad unsafe.

Consider also Krugman's observation that "[Summers] says, a bit fuzzily but bravely all the same, that even improved financial regulation is not necessarily a good thing – that it may discourage irresponsible lending and borrowing at a time when more spending of any kind is good for the economy."

Can you see where I'm going with this?

If SK convince their peers that a bubble was actually needed in 2002, while regulation would have been counterproductive, they can pull off a 180° on their legacies. Instead of being "bums who brought us the housing bust," they can be "heroes who delivered full employment despite a negative natural real interest rate." Even without broad acceptance of their new idea, they can at least rationalize past decisions in their own minds.

Now, I have no idea if this is really what's driving them. They may themselves be unaware of their motivations. But it seems reasonable to point out that their new narrative overturns past errors. You can almost imagine SK in zebra stripes, emerging from a booth review to inform the crowd there was no foul on the previous play. Thanks to the notion that bubbles are not only within the rules, but encouraged, Keynesians retain the ball with their field position intact.

And up in the luxury boxes, by the way, sits Jamie Dimon, as he's richer than you. His guest, Bill Dudley, quietly gnaws on an iPad.

Welcome to today's economy.

Savers And The 'Real' \$10.8 Trillion Cost Of ZIRP

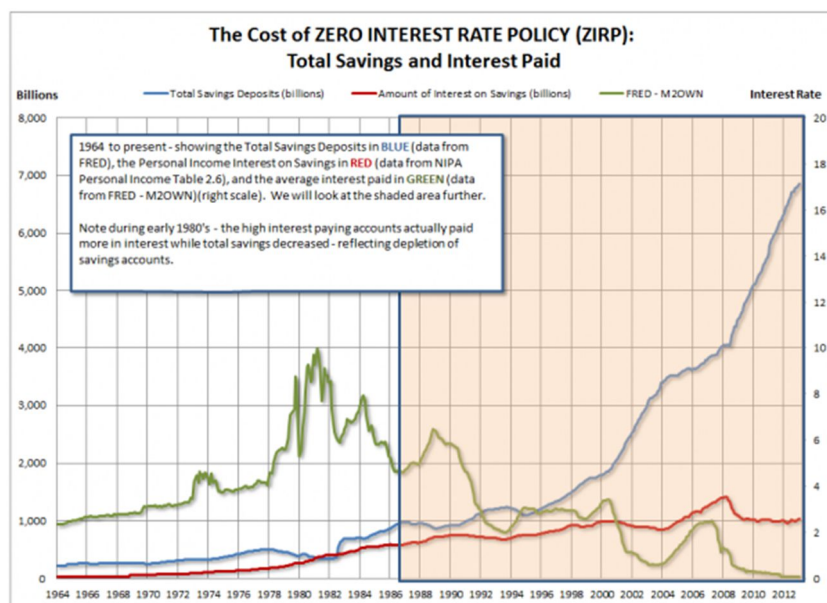
91,98

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 07/17/2013 21:25 -0500

As a reprisal, let's revisit the financial impact from Zero Interest Rate Policy (ZIRP) as it applies to responsible savers. From the previous post, we just need to make a couple adjustments. To assist in charting and calculations, the following data sets provided ample information:

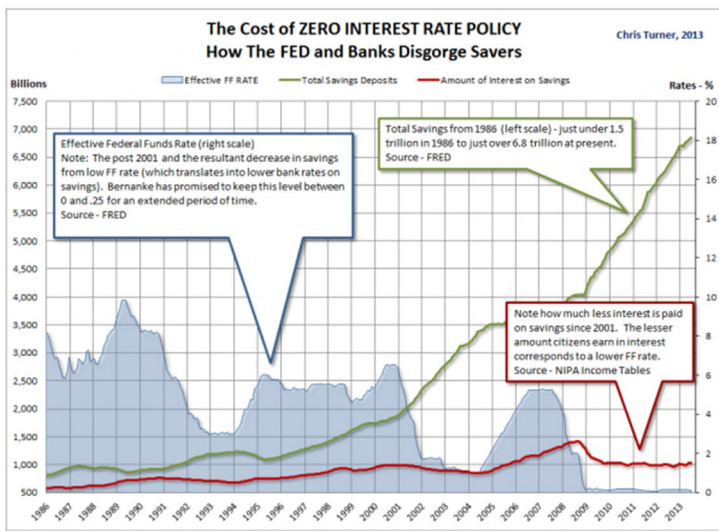
1. Total Savings – FRED
2. Average interest rates on savings deposits – FRED (M2OWN)
3. Interest Income – IRS tax stats, NIPA tables
4. Effective Federal Funds Rate (FRED)

The good news behind the bottom 85% of close-to-retiree status Baby Boomers that participate in the “markets” via sub \$50,000 retirement money is that at some point, the voters might actually get smart and get mad at how much money has been siphoned from them. Consult the chart below to see a historical relationship between total savings and amount of interest income earned on the savings.



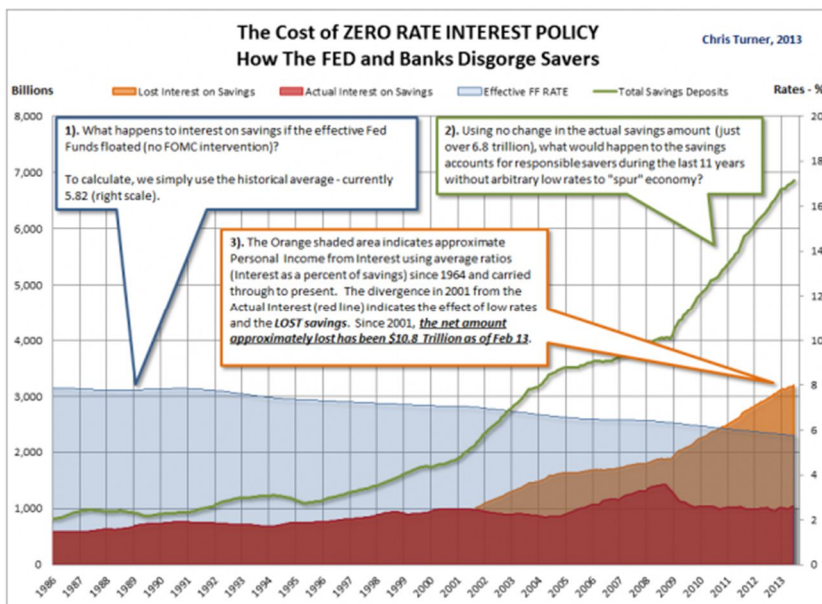
Note that prior to 2001, as savings increased (blue line), interest income received increased (red line) proportionally. However, after 2001, the interest earned stopped increasing. The green line shows the effective interest paid on interest bearing accounts.

Scaling into the shaded area representing 1986 to present, the following chart depicts the actual Fed Funds rate determined by FOMC.



As savings increased when Fed Funds rate remained around 5%, interest income continued to rise. However, post 2001, the interest income received stopped growing at the same rate. With the exception of 2005 to 2008 when rates went back to “normal” in the 5% range – the interest income earned has remained stable at just under 1 trillion (Ben Bernanke is so smart).

Let’s apply some thought experiments and make a couple calculations – what would happen if the FOMC were removed and the Fed Funds rate “floated?” Using average historical rates from the 1920’s for the 10 year note– the mean rate would sit around 5.82%. With a floating Fed Funds rate, banks would be competing for money and providing responsible savers with some interest income. Voila, a calculation is borne:



By calculating the estimated interest income from historical ratios (orange shaded area), we can see that as of July 2013, approximate interest income would be just over 3 trillion (1/5th of GDP) on savings of 6.8 trillion (using the left scale). Whereas the actual interest income reported by NIPA remained at 1.1 Trillion, the difference in interest received and lost interest equals roughly 2 Trillion. Remember, this is interest income to SAVERS forever lost since 2001. **By aggregating the entire shaded orange area, SAVERS have missed out on a whopping 10.8 Trillion in earned interest usage.** The final chart above makes a loud and clear statement toward the beneficiaries of the low interest rate environment.

Einhorn: "Fed Policy Is A Headwind To The Economy"

91,100

VIDEO on FED policy and effect on savers

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 11/21/2013 16:56 -0500

David Einhorn begins his discussion on the market warning that "**certain aspects of the market are very much in bubble,**" with investors "dismissing valuation metrics." "The market is confused," between useful products and real profit streams, he suggests for a number of headline-grabbing highly speculative names. More broadly, Einhorn believes real damage has been done by Fed policy, and is "**not convinced if or when they will ever taper.**" Crucially, he adds, we may see another rollover/recession and "the Fed will pour more fuel on the fire." The cognitive bias he exposes is that most people believe the Fed policy is supporting the economy (in some way), whereas ([as we noted here](#)) there are real costs and as Einhorn notes "Fed policy is a headwind to the economy," as he quantifies the hundreds of billions in lost interest income relative to wealth gains. **Owning gold makes sense, he adds, "in case they lose control."**

"I'm not convinced when — or if they'll ever taper," he said. "I don't know. We may go into the next crisis, the next depression/recession rollover, and the next move might be to pour more fuel on the fire. It wouldn't surprise me in the slightest."

Einhorn's broad market thoughts begin at 5:30,

And his gold comments begin at 10:30,

Average:

"I Have A Helicopter" - Bernanke's Legendary Central-Planning Sermon Turns 11

(cf. Weimar)

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 11/21/2013 14:43 -0500

Who can forget the following immortal paragraphs from Bernanke's: "[Deflation: Making Sure "It" Doesn't Happen Here](#) "

*The Fed can inject money into the economy in still other ways. **For example, the Fed has the authority to buy foreign government debt, as well as domestic government debt.** Potentially, this class of assets offers huge scope for Fed operations, as the quantity of foreign assets eligible for purchase by the Fed is several times the stock of U.S. government debt.*

*I need to tread carefully here. Because the economy is a complex and interconnected system, Fed purchases of the liabilities of foreign governments have the potential to affect a number of financial markets, including the market for foreign exchange. In the United States, the Department of the Treasury, not the Federal Reserve, is the lead agency for making international economic policy, including policy toward the dollar; and the Secretary of the Treasury has expressed the view that the determination of the value of the U.S. dollar should be left to free market forces. Moreover, **since the United States is a large, relatively closed economy, manipulating the exchange value of the dollar would not be a particularly desirable way to fight domestic deflation**, particularly given the range of other options available. Thus, I want to be absolutely clear that I am today neither forecasting nor recommending any attempt by U.S. policymakers to target the international value of the dollar.*

*Although a policy of intervening to affect the exchange value of the dollar is nowhere on the horizon today, it's worth noting that there have been times when exchange rate policy has been an effective weapon against deflation. A striking example from U.S. history is Franklin Roosevelt's 40 percent devaluation of the dollar against gold in 1933-34, enforced by a program of gold purchases and **domestic money creation**. The devaluation and the rapid increase in money supply it permitted ended the U.S. deflation remarkably quickly. Indeed, consumer price inflation in the United States, year on year, went from -10.3 percent in 1932 to -5.1 percent in 1933 to 3.4 percent in 1934. The economy grew strongly, **and by the way, 1934 was one of the best years of the century for the stock market**. If nothing else, the episode illustrates that monetary actions can have powerful effects on the economy, even when the nominal interest rate is at or near zero, as was the case at the time of Roosevelt's devaluation.*

Each of the policy options I have discussed so far involves the Fed's acting on its own. In practice, the effectiveness of anti-deflation policy could be significantly enhanced by cooperation between the monetary and fiscal authorities. A broad-based tax cut, for example, accommodated by a program of open-market purchases to alleviate any tendency for interest rates to increase, would almost certainly be an effective stimulant to consumption and hence to prices. Even if households decided not to increase consumption but instead re-balanced their portfolios by using their extra cash to acquire real and financial assets, the

resulting increase in asset values would lower the cost of capital and improve the balance sheet positions of potential borrowers. A money-financed tax cut is essentially equivalent to Milton Friedman's famous "helicopter drop" of money.

*Of course, in lieu of tax cuts or increases in transfers the government could increase spending on current goods and services or even acquire existing real or financial assets. **If the Treasury issued debt to purchase private assets and the Fed then purchased an equal amount of Treasury debt with newly created money, the whole operation would be the economic equivalent of direct open-market operations in private assets.***

And there you have it: in five paragraphs, or just 590 words, Bernanke predicted not only the deflationary crisis its policies would create, but its one and only recourse: injecting gobs of liquidity into the system.

More importantly, since the Fed will once again fail at its task - to reallocate capital from the market and into the economy - it also gave us a flowchart of the next steps: monetization of not only US but **foreign** debt, as well as outright monetary finance, in the form of either a money-financed tax cut funded through even more QE, or, a Treasury program to purchase private assets. **In other words: the Fed's remaining "Helicopter Drop" tools will make Weimar seem like a walk in the park.**

And all this happened 11 short years ago today on [November 21, 2002](#).

Guest Post: The Money Bubble Gets Its Grand Rationalization 91,103

Submitted by Tyler Durden on 11/21/2013 12:47 -0500

Submitted by John Rubino of the Dollar Collapse blog.

Late in the life of every financial bubble, when things have gotten so out of hand that the old ways of judging value or ethics or whatever can no longer be honestly applied, a new idea emerges that, if true, would let the bubble keep inflating forever. During the tech bubble of the late 1990s it was the “infinite Internet.” Soon, we were told, China and India’s billions would enter cyberspace. And after they were happily on-line, the Internet would morph into versions 2.0 and 3.0 and so on, growing and evolving without end. So don’t worry about earnings; this is a land rush and “eyeballs” are the way to measure virtual real estate. Earnings will come later, when the dot-com visionaries cash out and hand the reins to boring professional managers.

During the housing bubble the rationalization for the soaring value of inert lumps of wood and Formica was a model of circular logic: Home prices would keep going up because “home prices always go up.”

Now the current bubble – call it the Money Bubble or the sovereign debt bubble or the fiat currency bubble, they all fit – has finally reached the point where no one operating within a historical or commonsensical framework can accept its validity, and so for it to continue a new lens is needed. And right on schedule, here it comes: Governments with printing presses can create as much currency as they want and use it to hold down interest rates for as long as they want. So financial crises are now voluntary. They only happen if a country decides to stop depressing interest rates – and why would they ever do that? Here’s an article out of the UK that expresses this belief perfectly:

Our debt is no Greek tragedy

“The threat of rising interest rates is a Greek tragedy we must avoid.” This was the title of a 2009 Daily Telegraph piece by George Osborne, pushing massive spending cuts as the only solution to a coming debt crisis. It’s tempting to believe anyone who still makes it is either deliberately disingenuous, or hasn’t been paying attention.

The line of reasoning goes as follows: Britain’s high and rising public debt causes investors to take fright and sell government bonds because the UK might default on those bonds.

Interest rates then spike up because as less people want to hold UK debt, the government has to pay them more for the privilege, so that the cost of borrowing becomes more expensive and things become very, very bad for everyone.

This argument didn’t make sense back in 2009, and certainly doesn’t make sense now. Ultimately this whole Britain-as-Greece argument is disturbing because it makes the austerity project of the last three years look deeply duplicitous.

If you go to any bond desk in the City that trades British sovereign debt, money managers care about one thing – what the Bank of England does or doesn't do. If Governor Mark Carney says interest rates should fall and looks like he believes it, they fall. End of story.

Why? Because the Bank directly controls the interest rate on short-term government debt, so it can vary it at will in line with any given objective. Interest rates on long-term government debt are governed by what markets expect to happen to short term rates, and so are subject to essentially the same considerations.

It doesn't matter if investors get scared and dump government bonds because this has no implication for interest rates – it is what the Bank of England wants to happen that counts.

If investors do suddenly decide to flee en masse, the Bank can simply use its various tools to bring interest rates back into line.

The simple point is that since countries like the UK have a free-floating currency, the Bank of England doesn't have to vary interest rates to keep the exchange rate stable. Therefore it, as an independent central bank, can prevent a debt crisis by controlling the cost of government borrowing directly. Investors understand this, and so don't flee British government debt in the first place.

Greece and the other troubled Eurozone countries are in a totally different situation. They don't have their own currency, and have a single central bank, the ECB, which tries to juggle the needs of 17 different member states. This is a central bank dominated by Germany, which apparently isn't bothered by letting the interest rates of other nations spiral out of control. Investors, knowing this, made it happen during the financial crisis.

On these grounds, the case of Britain and those of the Eurozone countries are not remotely comparable – and basic intuition suggests steep interest rate rises are only possible in the latter.

Britain was never going to enter a sovereign debt crisis. It has everything to do with an independent central bank, and nothing to do with the size of government debt. How well does this explanation stand up given the events of the last few years? Almost perfectly. The US, Japan and the UK are the three major economies with supposed debt troubles not in the Eurozone.

The UK released a plan in 2010 to cut back a lot of spending and raise a little bit of tax money. The US did nothing meaningful about its debt until 2012, and has spent much of the time before and since pretending to be

about to default on its bonds. Japan's debt patterns are, to put it bluntly, screwed – Japan's debt passed 200 per cent of GDP earlier this year and is rising fast.

But the data shows that none of this matters for interest rates whatsoever. Rates have been low, stable and near-identical in all three countries regardless of whatever their political leaders' actions. These countries have had vastly different responses to their debt, and markets don't care at all.

By the same token, the problems of spiking interest rates inside the Eurozone have nothing to do with the prudence or spending of the governments in charge.

Spain and Ireland both had debt of less than 50 per cent of GDP before the crisis and were still punished by markets. France and the holier-than-thou Germany had far higher debt in 2007, and are fine.

The takeaway is that problems with spiking interest rates amongst advanced countries are entirely restricted to the Eurozone, where there is a single central bank, and have no obvious relation to the state of public finances.

So what we have, then, is a disturbingly mendacious line of reasoning . Back in 2010 the Conservative party made a perhaps superficially plausible argument about national debt that was wrong then and is doubly wrong now. They then – sort of – won a mandate to govern based on this, and used it to radically alter the size of the state. The likelihood that somehow this was all done in good faith beggars belief.

Britain has had a far higher proportion of austerity in the form of spending cuts than tax rises relative to any comparator nation. On this basis austerity is a way of reshaping the state in the Conservative image, flying under the false flag of debt crisis-prevention.

If the British public had knowingly and willingly voted for the major changes made under the coalition in how the government taxes, spends and borrows, this wouldn't be such a great problem.

Instead, they were essentially conned into it by the ridiculous story of Britain as the next Greece.

Some thoughts

What's great about the above article is that it doesn't beat around the bush. Without the slightest hint of irony or historical sense, it lays out the bubble rationale, which is that central banks are all-powerful: *"If you go to any bond desk in the City that trades British sovereign debt, money managers care about one thing – what the Bank*

of England does or doesn't do. If Governor Mark Carney says interest rates should fall and looks like he believes it, they fall. End of story."

So this is the end of history. Interest rates will stay low and stock prices high and governments will keep on piling up debt with impunity – because they control the financial markets and get to decide which things trade at what price. Breathtaking! Why didn't humanity discover this financial perpetual motion machine earlier? It would have saved thousands of years of turmoil.

At the risk of looking like a bully, let's consider another peak-bubble gem:

"The simple point is that since countries like the UK have a free-floating currency, the Bank of England doesn't have to vary interest rates to keep the exchange rate stable. Therefore it, as an independent central bank, can prevent a debt crisis by controlling the cost of government borrowing directly. Investors understand this, and so don't flee British government debt in the first place."

The writer is saying, in effect, that **the value of the British pound – and by extension any other fiat currency – can fall without consequence, and that the people who might want to use those currencies in trade or for savings will continue to do so no matter how much the issuer of those pieces of paper owes to others in the market.** If holders of pounds decide to switch to dollars or euros or gold, that's no problem for Britain because it can just buy all the paper thus freed up with new pieces of paper.

This illusion of government omnipotence is no crazier than the infinite Internet or home prices always going up, but it is crazy. Governments couldn't stop tech stocks from imploding or home prices from crashing, and when the time comes, the Bank of England, the US Fed, and the Bank of Japan won't be able to stop the markets from dumping their currencies. Nor will they be able to stop the price of energy, food, and most of life's other necessities from soaring when the global markets lose faith in their promises.

Average:

Is France the New Italy?

91,107

By the Editors Nov 18, 2013 12:00 AM GMT+0100

If U.S. President Barack Obama thinks he's having a difficult autumn, then maybe he should consider the season French President Francois Hollande is experiencing. Paris in springtime may have been lovely as usual, but fall has been horrible.

The French unemployment rate stands at 11 percent. After growing tepidly in the second quarter, the economy shrank again in the third. Standard and Poor's just downgraded the government's debt -- for the second time in less than two years. Hollande's Socialist administration faces protests over taxes and burdensome regulation not just from business leaders, as you might expect, but also from farmers, shopkeepers, teachers, truck drivers and soccer players.

The European Commission recently called on the government to speed up economic reform. Speaking from its conveniently located Paris headquarters, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development restated the message in a detailed report issued last week: "In recent years, a significant adjustment has been under way in several European countries that have accelerated the introduction of essential reforms. This adjustment hasn't yet happened in France."

The White House is concerned that some recent polls have shown Obama's approval rating dropping below 40 percent. For Hollande, who was elected only last year, it stands at 15 percent.

Even discounting for the French flair for umbrage, the backlash against Hollande is extraordinary. The economy -- the second-biggest in the euro area after Germany -- is in deep trouble, and the government looks helpless. Seemingly intractable problems and a lack of effective leadership threaten to turn France into Europe's new Italy.

Hollande was unlucky to come to power while the wider European Union economy was still on its knees, and he inherited an array of bad policies from his predecessors. French industrial competitiveness fell sharply in the years before he took office. But his initiatives have mostly made matters worse. In an effort to be populist, he introduced a temporary 75 percent tax on earnings of more than 1 million euros (\$1.3 million) -- a measure that's largely self-defeating from a revenue-raising point of view. He then undid any political benefit with an array of smaller tax increases, leaving much of the country feeling as preyed upon as the rich.

Leaning heavily on higher taxes, the government has been slow to get public spending under control. France's ratio of public spending to gross domestic product is now 57 percent -- the highest in the euro area.

Heavy-handed regulation is another drag on the economy, and it's a main focus of the OECD's complaints: Product regulation in France is stricter than in most other European countries, and labor-market rules raise costs to well above the EU average. Taxes account for an estimated 50 percent of labor costs.

Hollande has made some feeble efforts to improve competitiveness -- notably, a package of tax relief for businesses. The OECD reckons it will reduce the tax disadvantage French employers face but won't eliminate it. Other opportunities for reform, including a review of pension rules, have been allowed to slip by.

Germany could help France -- and the rest of Europe -- by backing a more expansionary monetary policy for the euro area. With or without new monetary stimulus, though, France needs reform. To spur growth, the government has to curb its spending, moderate its tax demands and start liberalizing the economy.

That's a difficult prescription to apply while unemployment is high and the economy is shrinking, and not one that comes easily to a Socialist administration under simultaneous attack from both the left and the right. It requires a strong leader, too. In foreign policy -- on Syria, for instance, and on Iran -- Hollande has been willing to assert himself. In domestic policy, he hasn't.

He had better rise to the challenge, because the alternative is grim. Financial markets haven't yet focused on France's difficulties -- Europe has many other economies whose problems are harder to ignore -- but that could change quickly. If it does, the problems will multiply.

How to Resolve the Fiscal Problems of Southern Europe?

91,109

Author: [Kirill Rodionov](#) · November 21st, 2013 · [Comments \(0\)](#) [Share This](#) [Print](#) 21 16

The Southern European fiscal mess has triggered the crisis on the continent. In January 2010, the European Commission discovered falsifications of the Greek budget statistics (Arganda and Caselli 2012). It has undermined investors' confidence in the country's debt securities. A sharp increase in bond rates forced Brussels to rescue Greece from default. The Greek government received a multi-billion support package in exchange for structural reforms in the economy. During the time of the first bailout (2010-2012), the country received €240 billion. In October 2011 private investors agreed to write off €105 billion of Greece's debt. By 2016 the country will have to receive yet €130 billion. The effectiveness of these measures is under a big question. Since the outbreak of the crisis, the country's debt has risen from 133.3% of GDP in the first quarter of 2010 to 156.9% of GDP in the fourth quarter of 2012. The unemployment rate has increased from 10.9% in January 2010 to 27.1% in January 2013. As a result of the continued slowdown, the economy has shrunk by a quarter over the last five years. The crisis has been accompanied by political instability. Since 2009, four different governments have held power in the country.

Latvia has chosen another model of anti-crisis policy. In 2009 the Baltic republic had the same problems, as Greece. It was the year when the economy shrank by 17.7%, the unemployment rose up to 21%, and the budget deficit totalled 9.8% of GDP. In March 2009 Valdis Dombrovskis headed the country's government. At that time, some economists thought that the currency devaluation would be inevitable (Krugman 2008). However, the Dombrovskis government refused to devalue the lat, because it could increase inflation. In 2008 the inflation rate was recorded at 15.6% – a clear evidence of the economy's overheating. There was a consensus among the parliamentarians on the entry to the Euro area. The currency devaluation could delay it for years. As a result, the government has implemented the so-called "internal devaluation" (Aslund and Dombrovskis 2011). In 2009-2010 the Dombrovskis Cabinet cut public expenditures by 13% of GDP. Such radical measures have become possible thanks to a number of factors. First, the expenditure cuts have been applied to all income groups. Thus, the prime minister's salary has been cut by 35%. One third of the civil servants have been ousted. Second, the anti-crisis programme has been implemented quickly: its peak was in 2009. As the Greek case shows, citizens cannot endure privations for a long period of time. The Latvian government had a short window of opportunity to implement extraordinary measures. Third and finally, Latvia had recently overcome the transition crisis. A significant part of the country's population remembers the hardship of belt tightening. Citizens of the Western European countries have never had such an experience.

The programme has resulted in a success. The growth of the Latvian economy in 2011 (5.5%) and 2012 (5.6%) is an evidence of it. In February 2013, the annual inflation rate dipped to 1.8%. By December 2012, the unemployment had fallen to 14.3%. In 2014 Latvia will become the 18th member of the Eurozone. However, the crisis has caused a significant emigration from the country (Apsite, Krisjane and Berzins 2012). During the last four years, Riga has lost one hundred thousand of its citizens. Latvia is a member of the European Union, and therefore the Latvians can work freely in any EU country. Such a huge emigration has resulted in the erosion of political support for the Unity party, which had a majority in the government. During the parliamentary elections of September 2011, this party took the third most votes. However, Dombrovskis has held the PM post. The two other Baltic republics, Estonia and Lithuania, have followed Latvia's path. The Austerity programmes in these counties have not resulted in a mass emigration. Unlike the countries of Southern Europe, all the three Baltic republics have not accumulated a large public debt. At the end of 2012, the debt to GDP rate in Estonia (10.1%), Latvia (40.7%) and Lithuania (40.7%) was below 60%. Thanks to this, Estonia joined the Euro area in 2011. That's how the republic has underlined its status as a leading transition

economy. Lithuania may join the Euro in 2015 (Aslund 2012). The example of the Baltic republics shows that voters can make a responsible choice in a crisis time.

A possible solution of the fiscal problems of the Southern European countries can be found in reforming their tax systems and cutting their public spending. As the Latvian case shows, taxpayers can support an Austerity programme, but the implementation of anti-crisis measures should not be extended in time. A flat tax reform could also help the countries of the region to overcome the crisis. There's no secret that the current financial turmoil has been caused in part by the tax evasion practices in the PIGS countries (Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain). Russia experienced the same problem in the mid-1990s (Gilman 2012). After the 1998 default, the government introduced the flat income tax of 13%. It has resulted in a radical growth of the budget revenues. Some other transition countries have followed the Russian example. The Brussels officials would probably consider such a measure as a radical solution. However, there is no better time for non-standard measures than a deep crisis.

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The Thermidor: Push Back Against Germany

91,111

On Germany's isolation

Author: [Marc Chandler](#) · November 20th, 2013 · [Comments \(0\)](#) [Share This](#) [Print](#) 12 0

European officials found a compromise between those wanting to allow the ESM to recapitalize banks directly, until the bank financed resolution funds has adequate resources, and those that who were opposed. German opposition was most vocal and the compromise was to allow the German parliament veto power over any direct aid from the ESM.

Others may find comfort in the Bundesbank's monthly report that appeared to endorse the ECB's accommodative stance, despite reports suggesting that BBK President Weidmann and Asmussen, the German representative on the ECB's Executive Board, opposed the recent rate cut.

Yet, below the surface, there appears to have been a shift in the balance of power between the creditors and debtors in the euro area. First, the EC and ECB joined forces to defeat the German push to exempt the landesbanks from the ECB's regulatory authority.

Germany can argue that the landesbanks are not systemically important, but this is to give too much credence to the superficial populist coverage as opposed to the more rigorous analysis. **Much ink has been spilled on too-big-to-fail. While there is much to be concerned about, the fact of the matter is that in the euro-area, the substantial threats emanated not from the TBTF, but from the smaller, arguably, less supervised banks, such as Allied Irish in Ireland, the cajas in Spain and Laiki in Cyprus.** German regional banks have received among the largest bailouts in the euro area.

Second, as noted, the ECB cut rates over German representatives' objections. Compounding the injury with insult, the French representative on the ECB's Executive Board has been touting the possibility of outright bond purchases by the central bank. Recall that in protest to the ECB's bond purchases under then-President Trichet, two German (Weber and Stark) ECBers resigned. Weidmann has objected to Draghi's Outright Market Transaction (OMT) scheme, which while not deployed, has helped bolster sentiment and helped diminish the existential nature of the euro area crisis. We do recognize that OMT was conditional on a program with the Troika and was not as subjective as Trichet's SMP effort.

Third, the EC announced it would initiate a formal review of the German current account surplus, which is above monitoring levels. This seems to have irked the German establishment more than the rate cut, which Asmussen assured that the real issue was only about the timing.

The EC review follows on the heels of similar misgivings from the IMF and the US Treasury report on the foreign exchange market last month. One of the perennial German fears, that of being isolated, has been borne out. For its part, German officials see the current account surplus as evidence of its economic prowess and competitiveness.

Others see the German surplus as a symptom of its compression of domestic demand, through miserly wage increases, reluctance to boost public infrastructure investment, and the failure to liberalize services. Essentially, this view sees Germany as unwilling to offset the austerity in the periphery by pursuing more stimulative policies at home.

This pressure on Germany reflects a shift in the balance of power in Europe. Although France's Hollande is terribly unpopular at home, Brussels and the ECB seem to be taking up his charge in trying to get Germany to

pursue policies that benefit EMU as a whole. Separately, note that France will be selling bonds this week for the first time since last month's S&P downgrade (to AA) on Nov 8.

France had wanted the ESM to be available to direct recapitalization of European banks if needed, especially following the ECB's asset quality review and stress tests. Several of the creditor nations were reluctant, wanting national backstops, if banks could not raise capital through retained earnings and capital markets. If those national authorities could not act as the backstop (again not too big to fail, but too big for national officials to aid), then it would have to accept conditionality associated with a memorandum of understanding with the Troika.

An agreement before the end of the year was seen as important in order to give the European parliament sufficient time to approve it before dissolving ahead of next May's election. The resolution mechanism needs to be in place prior to the results of the asset quality review. Without it, the risk is that the reports trigger a new crisis of confidence. The German ability to negotiate appears hamstrung by the lack of a government (CDU and SPD a moving toward a grand coalition government but it is not yet in place). While the ESM will be able to lend directly to the banks, German parliament has retained the veto.

This may look like a German victory, but it may not really be one. Consider a situation where Country X is in a crisis, and several of its banks no longer have access to the capital market. The amount of funds it needs outstrip the sovereign's ability to deliver, without risking its fiscal objectives. Many of the periphery countries want to it go to the ESM and relieve the pressure they may be feeling as well (collateral damage). Would the German parliament really prevent this and risk a widespread crisis in Europe?

With the UK re-thinking if it wants to be in the EU any more, and the US pivoting toward Asia, Germany can be the unchallenged hegemon in Europe. However, it is finding it increasingly difficult. We had anticipated that it would seek to exert its influence through European institutions. Weber's resignation prevented Germany from taking the helm of the ECB. In the more democratic institutions, it has been frustrated by the fact that a majority are debtors.

- See more at: <http://www.economonitor.com/blog/2013/11/the-thermidor-push-back-against-germany/#sthash.js0QG57J.dpuf>

Bundesagentur für Arbeit

Jeder dritte Arbeitslose hat ausländische Wurzeln

91,113

23.11.2013 · Mehr als ein Drittel der Arbeitslosen in Deutschland hat ausländische Wurzeln, drei Viertel davon erhalten Hartz IV, zeigen neue Zahlen der Bundesagentur für Arbeit. Und es gibt riesige Unterschiede zwischen den Bundesländern.

Von SVEN ASTHEIMER

[Artikel](#) [Bilder](#) (1) [Lesermeinungen](#) (106)



© DPA Bei den Arbeitslosen sind Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund überproportional vertreten

Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund sind in Deutschland überdurchschnittlich oft arbeitslos. Nach den aktuellen Daten der Bundesagentur für Arbeit hatten im vergangenen Juni fast 36 Prozent der Arbeitslosen ausländische Wurzeln. Damit sind sie unter den Erwerbslosen deutlich überrepräsentiert, denn nach Angaben des Statistischen Bundesamtes beträgt ihr Anteil an der Gesamtbevölkerung lediglich gut 20 Prozent.

Dass die spezielle Arbeitslosenquote unter Ausländern erheblich über der von deutschen Bürgern liegt, ist schon seit langem bekannt. Der etwas technisch klingende Begriff „Migrationshintergrund“ geht jedoch über das Unterscheidungskriterium der Staatsangehörigkeit hinaus. Nach offizieller Definition fallen darunter alle nach 1949 nach Deutschland Zugewanderten, also etwa Deutsche aus den Nachfolgestaaten der Sowjetunion; zudem alle in Deutschland geborenen Ausländer sowie alle als Deutsche Geborene, die mindestens ein zugewandertes oder als Ausländer in Deutschland geborenes Elternteil haben.

Die Arbeitsagentur ist seit vergangenem Jahr dazu verpflichtet, alle gemeldeten Erwerbslosen auf einen Migrationshintergrund zu befragen, um daraus Schlüsse für die Arbeitsmarktpolitik ziehen zu können. In der letzten Fragerunde kamen von 2,8 Arbeitslosen in etwas mehr als 2,1 Millionen Fällen (90 Prozent) nutzbare Antworten zurück, auf die sich die Angaben der Agentur beziehen. Demnach gab es im Sommer in ganz Deutschland 1,37 Millionen Arbeitssuchende ohne und rund 760.000 mit Migrationshintergrund, was zu einem Anteil von 35,7 Prozent führt.

Zwei Drittel haben keinen formalen Berufsabschluss

Die regionalen Unterschiede sind allerdings enorm. Während Westdeutschland auf eine Quote von fast 43 Prozent kommt, sind es im Osten nur 18 Prozent. Zieht man davon noch die Hauptstadt Berlin ab, bleiben gerade mal 9 Prozent übrig. In den alten Bundesländern liegt Baden-Württemberg (51,5) vor Hessen (49,3) und Hamburg (49). Dort hat also gut jeder zweite Arbeitslose einen Migrationshintergrund. Allerdings sind dort die

Arbeitslosenzahlen wegen der florierenden Wirtschaft auch vergleichsweise gering. Die niedrigsten Werte weisen Sachsen-Anhalt (8,1), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (8,8) und Thüringen (8,9) auf.

Insgesamt werden knapp drei Viertel aller Arbeitslosen mit Migrationshintergrund von Jobcentern betreut und sind damit im Hartz-IV-System. Das heißt, dass sie vorher keinen Anspruch auf Arbeitslosengeld I in einem Arbeitsverhältnis erworben haben. Zwei von drei Personen haben zudem keinen formalen Berufsabschluss aufzuweisen. In der Gruppe ohne Migrationshintergrund ist es lediglich ein Drittel. Viel spreche dafür, dass die fehlenden Berufsabschlüsse ein Hauptgrund für die hohe Arbeitslosigkeit unter den Migranten ist, heißt es von der Arbeitsagentur.

Ein weiterer Unterschied der beiden Gruppen zeigt sich mit Blick auf die Altersstruktur: Während Arbeitslose ohne Migrationshintergrund eher älter und besonders stark in der Altersklasse 45 bis 55 Jahre vertreten sind, stellen die mit Migrationshintergrund den größeren Anteil in der Gruppe zwischen 35 und 45 Jahren.

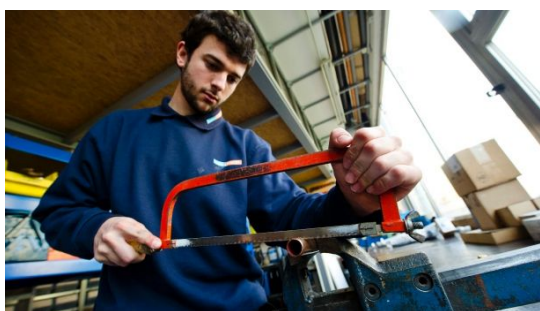
Suche nach Stabilität

Krise zieht mehr Zuwanderer nach Deutschland

91,115

21.11.2013 · Immer mehr Menschen aus dem Ausland suchen ihr Glück im wirtschaftlich stabilen Deutschland. Mehr als eine halbe Million Menschen kamen im ersten Halbjahr 2013. Viele sind gut ausgebildet - und auf dem Arbeitsmarkt gesucht.

Artikel Bilder (1) Lesermeinungen (23)



© DPA Auf der Suche nach Arbeit: Auch aus Spanien kamen wieder viele Zuwanderer nach Deutschland.

Das wirtschaftlich stabile Deutschland zieht immer mehr Zuwanderer an - vor allem aus Osteuropa und den Euro-Krisenländern. Im ersten Halbjahr zogen 555.000 Menschen in die Bundesrepublik. Das seien elf Prozent mehr als ein Jahr zuvor, teilte das Statistische Bundesamt am Donnerstag mit. Gleichzeitig zogen 349.000 Personen weg.

Die Mehrzahl der ausländischen Zuwanderer kam abermals aus Polen (93.000), gefolgt von Rumänien (67.000) und Bulgarien (29.000). Auch aus den Krisenländern des Euroraums - die unter hoher Arbeitslosigkeit leiden - zog es viele Menschen nach Deutschland: Aus Spanien wanderten 39 Prozent mehr ein als im Vorjahr, aus Portugal 26 Prozent und aus Italien 41 Prozent mehr. Aus Griechenland nahm die Einwanderung dagegen um 4,5 Prozent ab. Aus dem vom Bürgerkrieg gezeichneten Syrien kamen ebenfalls mehr Menschen nach Deutschland: Ihre Zahl stieg um 178 Prozent auf 6000.

Gut ausgebildete Menschen für den Arbeitsmarkt

Die kräftige Zuwanderung hat die Zahl der Beschäftigten in Deutschland im September erstmals über die Marke von 42 Millionen steigen lassen. „Die Firmen finden die benötigten Arbeitskräfte zunehmend nicht mehr im Pool der verbliebenen Arbeitslosen, sondern im Ausland“, sagte Ökonom Christian Schulz von der Berenberg Bank.

Das verwundert nicht, angesichts der Tatsache, dass offenbar immer mehr gut ausgebildete Menschen nach Deutschland einwandern. Im Frühjahr hatte eine Studie des Arbeitsmarktforschers Herbert Brückner Aufsehen erregt, in der er herausfand: Die Einwanderer in die Bundesrepublik verfügen inzwischen über ein höheres Bildungs- und Qualifikationsniveau als die deutsche Stammbevölkerung. Die Neuzuwanderer haben häufiger einen Techniker-, Meister- oder Hochschulabschluss als die Deutschen.

Berlin ne pratique pas le « dumping social »

91,116

LE MONDE | 21.11.2013 à 15h40 | Susanne Wasum-Rainer (Ambassadrice d'Allemagne en France)



L'Allemagne est actuellement pointée du doigt pour l'excédent de sa balance courante. Ces critiques sont injustifiées. **En effet, la performance des exportations allemandes ne repose pas sur des interventions de l'Etat.** Le surplus du compte courant allemand est plutôt **le fruit de la libre concurrence sur les marchés mondiaux.**

Selon les prévisions de la Commission européenne, la balance des paiements courants devrait enregistrer cette année un surplus de 7 % du produit intérieur brut (PIB), avant de revenir à 6,4 % en 2014 et 2015.

Il est vrai qu'en matière de commerce international l'Allemagne se porte bien aujourd'hui, mais **il faut également se rappeler que le solde des comptes courants était encore négatif il y a peu, tout particulièrement durant les années qui suivirent la réunification.**

REVENUS PROVENANT DE L'ÉTRANGER

Ce que les détracteurs de l'Allemagne oublient, c'est qu'environ un tiers de l'excédent courant est généré par les revenus provenant de l'étranger. Cela signifie qu'un tiers de cet excédent ne repose pas sur le commerce extérieur, mais sur des revenus issus de capitaux allemands investis ou placés à l'étranger par le passé. En ce qui concerne les deux tiers restants – pour l'essentiel **de la balance commerciale** –, une quelconque intervention planificatrice n'est ni possible ni souhaitable dans le cadre de l'économie sociale de marché. Faut-il le rappeler, l'économie planifiée a déjà connu par le passé un échec retentissant en Allemagne.

Les excédents allemands témoignent plutôt de la forte compétitivité de l'économie et du fait que les marchandises made in Germany sont très demandées dans le monde. **L'Allemagne est tout particulièrement présente dans les régions à forte croissance, avec des produits de qualité et une gamme attrayante.**

Ses partenaires commerciaux profitent de cette situation. Lorsque les entreprises allemandes exportent, leurs sous-traitants à l'étranger et en Europe en profitent très largement. **Tandis que la part des exportations allemandes a finalement diminué dans la zone euro, les excédents d'exportations augmentent dans les pays non européens. Notons tout particulièrement l'importance croissante du marché nord-américain.**

Les excédents des opérations courantes sont donc le fruit de l'activité économique ; ils ne sont en rien favorisés par l'interventionnisme, voire le protectionnisme de l'Etat. En tant que membre de l'union monétaire européenne, l'Allemagne ne peut pas non plus – contrairement à d'autres pays – améliorer ses chances à l'exportation par une dévaluation artificielle de sa monnaie.

Diverses instances internationales vont d'ailleurs dans ce même sens. Ainsi, le **Fonds monétaire international**, dans une étude publiée en août, constate que l'excédent de la balance courante de l'Allemagne n'est pas dû à des dérives de sa politique économique. **La cause en serait plutôt les déficits fiscaux et structurels de ses partenaires commerciaux.**

COMPÉTITIVITÉ HORS PRIX

Déjà, en 2011, la Commission européenne soulignait que les excédents courants n'ont aucun effet déstabilisateur pour la zone euro. Les prix des marchandises allemandes **ou le niveau salarial – fixé par les partenaires sociaux sans consultation de l'Etat** – ne représente qu'un facteur parmi d'autres pouvant influencer le surplus de la balance courante.

Ainsi, en décembre 2012, la Commission européenne constatait que l'évolution des salaires outre-Rhin ne joue qu'un rôle mineur dans les excédents des transactions courantes. **Un autre facteur déterminant** réside dans la **compétitivité hors prix, comme par exemple la qualité des produits allemands.**

Par ailleurs, dans le secteur industriel de la zone euro, **il n'y a qu'en Belgique que le coût horaire du travail (41,91 euros) est supérieur à celui de l'Allemagne (36,98 euros).** Le reproche selon lequel l'Allemagne pratiquerait un **dumping salarial en vue d'améliorer ses chances à l'exportation est donc infondé**, comme le montre aussi l'actuel rebond de la demande intérieure.

Il est donc faux de prétendre que la politique budgétaire allemande, qui vise à réduire les déficits, bride la demande intérieure de manière artificielle. Pour les deux années à venir, la Commission européenne prévoit en effet un budget allemand proche de l'équilibre. Mais la réduction de la dette publique par rapport au PIB s'appuie donc sur une croissance solide de celui-ci.

La zone euro profite elle aussi des finances publiques saines de l'Allemagne : sur les marchés financiers internationaux, la solvabilité allemande constitue la clé de voûte des plans de sauvetage européens. Si elle creusait fortement sa dette publique afin de stimuler sa demande intérieure, sa solvabilité – et, au final, la stabilité de toute la zone euro – risquerait d'être remise en question.

La critique des excédents courants allemands est infondée car ceux-ci ne sont pas alimentés par l'intervention de l'Etat. Le solde de la balance courante de l'Allemagne est le fruit de milliers de décisions individuelles prises par les acteurs de l'économie de marché et de processus d'ajustement qui s'inscrivent dans la concurrence mondiale.

Grâce à l'actuelle dynamique de son économie intérieure, l'Allemagne apporte une contribution importante à la stabilité européenne et à la réduction des déséquilibres. D'autres réformes structurelles visant à renforcer la compétitivité sont nécessaires pour accélérer cette réduction des déséquilibres dans la zone euro.

Susanne Wasum-Rainer (Ambassadrice d'Allemagne en France)

<http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21590589-germans-are-avid-savers-they-do-not-invest-under-mattress>

German financial habits

Under the mattress

91,118

Germans are avid savers, but they do not like to invest

Nov 23rd 2013 | BERLIN | [From the print edition](#)

AT THE beginning of 1923 the German mark stood at 7,260 to the dollar. By October, hyperinflation had pushed that rate to 65 billion. Fixed incomes and savings became worthless. But one readily available investment retained its value. According to Frederick Taylor, the author of a new history of the period, **shares in German firms, by and large, kept pace with the inflation, protecting from ruin the lucky few who had invested in them.**

Ninety years later it is dangerously low inflation that threatens Europe. Yet one thing has not changed: most Germans still do not invest in local firms. Whereas over half of Americans own equities in some form, only 15% of Germans own shares directly, while a partly overlapping 21% own mutual funds. The omission is all the more striking since Germany's main share index, the DAX, is at a record high and interest rates are at record lows.

From the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008 to the end of October 2013, the DAX has risen by 42%, and the MDAX (an index of smaller firms) has risen by 93%. Ten-year German-government bonds would have returned 31% over the same period, and corporate bonds 29%. Yet Germans still prefer to put their money in safe-seeming but far less lucrative savings accounts. The most common sort, the *Sparbücher*, earned a mere 3.1% over the past five years.

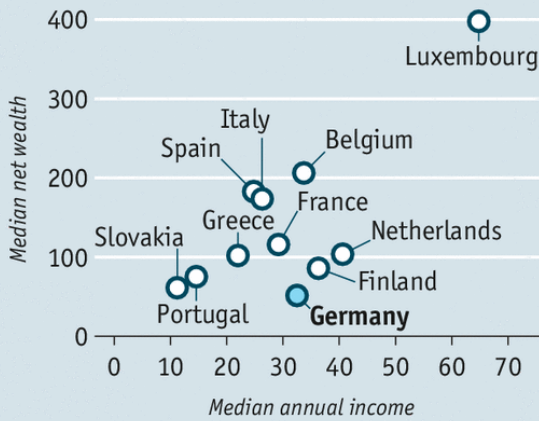
Germans tend to see share ownership as a kind of gambling. Americans have 24-hour business-news channels with excitable hosts shouting stock tips at the middle class. The closest equivalent in Germany is Dirk Müller, a Frankfurt trader known as "Mr DAX". He is a ubiquitous television pundit and his books sell well, but he is a rare voice trying to get Germans to venture beyond *Sparbücher*. He considers these "one of the lousiest products your bank can offer you", with their limits on the frequency and size of withdrawals, and interest rates below the level of inflation.

Few Germans are listening. According to a 2011 poll for the Association of German Banks, Germans said they were saving "for old age" (30%), "for emergencies" (27%) and "for major purchases" (27%). Only 7% mentioned "building wealth". Asked about the most important criterion for an investment, 60% said "security"; only 15% said "returns".

Instead of switching to more rewarding investments, Germans have responded to low interest rates by cutting back on saving. German household saving rose steadily between 2000 and 2008, to a high of 11.5% of take-home income. But it has dropped since, reaching 10.3% last year. Postbank, a retail bank, expects these numbers to fall still further.

Wealth defect

European households, 2010 or latest, €'000



Source: European Central Bank

Public policy does not help, by treating investment in securities as dangerous or even illicit. The government maintains a public register of all “investment advisers” which includes all employees at banks, however lowly, and which lists any complaints that have been made against them. Georg Fahrenschon of the German Savings Banks Association says that even those with unblemished records feel as if they have “one foot in prison”. Furthermore, customer-protection laws require advisers to read the same litany of basic advice (“stocks can go down as well as up”) every time they meet clients, even informally. They must also make a formal record of every meeting, a process that takes about an hour.

All this has a big effect. Germans have relatively high incomes, yet their median net wealth is just €51,400 (\$69,221). This, as the chart shows, is not only lower than in France (€115,800) and the Netherlands (€103,600), but also Greece (€101,900) and Slovakia (€61,200). Low rates of home ownership are the main reason, but the dismal returns Germans earn on their prodigious savings also play a part. The DAX, meanwhile, hit a new record this week.

"We Will Soon Learn How Strong The QE Trap Has Become" 91,120

Submitted by [Tyler Durden](#) on 11/22/2013 20:28 -0500

Submitted by Derrick Wulf via [NoEasyTrade](#) blog.

Reading between the lines of recent Fed communications, it's becoming increasingly clear to me that the Fed wants to exit its quantitative easing policies as soon as possible. **Though they're loath to admit it, the architects of quantitative easing now recognize that their efforts are achieving diminishing marginal returns while at the same time building up massive imbalances, distortions, and speculative excesses in the capital markets.** Moreover, they're realizing that the eventual exit costs are also likely much higher than they had previously thought, and continue to rise with each new asset purchase. Implications for the markets, which may not yet be fully prepared for this outcome, are likely to be significant. In short, *we would expect yield curves to steepen, the dollar to strengthen, equities to fall, credit spreads to widen, commodities to weaken (the metals in particular), and volatility to rise.* How the Fed will then respond to these developments will be very telling indeed. **Their hand will be forced, and we may all soon learn how strong the QE trap has become.**

Reading between the lines of recent Fed communications, it's becoming increasingly clear to me that the Fed wants to exit its quantitative easing policies as soon as possible. **Though they're loath to admit it, the architects of quantitative easing now recognize that their efforts are achieving diminishing marginal returns while at the same time building up massive imbalances, distortions, and speculative excesses in the capital markets.** Moreover, they're realizing that the eventual exit costs are also likely much higher than they had previously thought, and continue to rise with each new asset purchase. Never was this more clear than when the Fed first hinted at tapering its large scale asset purchases over the summer: equity prices fell, interest rates rose, volatility increased, and huge sums of hot money were repatriated from various emerging markets, causing significant disruptions to local overseas economies and currencies in the process.

The market's strong reaction to the mere hint of a taper also threw cold water on the widely held belief among Fed officials that the primary impact of their asset purchases comes through the accumulated "stock" of their holdings rather than the ongoing "flow" of purchases. This sudden and unexpected realization among policymakers has forced a complete rethink of their strategy. Indeed, one of the most basic premises of their monetary policy assumptions has been shown to be false. Markets are, in fact, forward looking.

Fearing the economic impact of an unwanted tightening of financial conditions, the Fed quickly stepped back from the tapering abyss in September. Since then, FOMC officials, along with their staff researchers and economists, have been working diligently on devising a new strategy, floating numerous trial balloons along the way. **Their primary objective is to allow for a taper and ultimate exit from QE while somehow minimizing the flow impacts of such a shift in policy.** There has been a renewed focus on the Fed's other policy tools – namely the overnight lending rates and forward guidance – as a means to that end. There have been active discussions about lowering unemployment thresholds, increasing inflation tolerances through "optimal control," and cutting interest on excess reserves to help guide market expectations towards a lower future path of interest rates.

It is my belief that one or more of these options is likely to be adopted alongside a modest tapering of asset purchases, perhaps even as early as December. While central bank officials don't want to disrupt the fragile economic recovery through a premature tightening of monetary policy, they are also well aware that the longer they wait, the more difficult it will become later on. In a word, they're starting to feel trapped. They want to wriggle themselves free of this as soon as conditions will possibly allow.

I expect to see more public comments and newspaper articles indicating as much in the coming days and weeks. Economic data – namely the November employment report – will clearly play a very important role in shaping expectations as well, but **barring a material deterioration in the employment and growth outlook, I expect**

a tapering announcement, coupled perhaps with an IOER cut or more aggressive forward guidance, to come sooner rather than later.

Implications for the markets, which may not yet be fully prepared for this outcome, are likely to be significant. In short, I would expect yield curves to steepen, the dollar to strengthen, equities to fall, credit spreads to widen, commodities to weaken (the metals in particular), and volatility to rise. How the Fed will then respond to these developments will be very telling indeed. Their hand will be forced, and we may all soon learn how strong the QE trap has become.

My preferred strategy until then is to buy inexpensive volatility, either directly or indirectly through longer-dated options, and to continue to trade the Euro and Yen from the short side.

I also like maintaining a **core curve steepener, preferably in 5s / 30s** (or long FVZ against a duration-neutral USZ short), and establishing some equity shorts near trend resistance around 1810 in ESZ (see [yesterday's note](#) for charts). On the curve, with 5s / 30s now having cleared resistance at 240, I expect to see 300 tested again before much longer, with new wides to follow.



The first two major episodes of the current multi-year steepening trend – the crisis and the response – both widened the 5s / 30s curve by 200 basis points. If the third episode, the exit, follows a similar trajectory, we could see eventually see 5s / 30s hit 390.

Dr. Jens WeidmannPräsident der Deutschen Bundesbank

Möglichkeiten der Geldpolitik

91,122

Rede beim Führungstreffen Wirtschaft 2013 der Süddeutschen Zeitung

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- 4 Die Gefahr der finanziellen Dominanz
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1 Einleitung

Sehr geehrter Herr Kister,
sehr geehrter Herr Schäfer,
sehr geehrter Herr Beise,
meine sehr verehrten Damen und Herren,

ich freue mich, auch in diesem Jahr wieder beim Führungstreffen der Süddeutschen Zeitung dabei zu sein – diesmal zwar nicht in Form eines "Kreuzverhörs", aber ich stelle mich dennoch im Anschluss an diesen Vortrag gerne Ihren Fragen.

Eine Überschrift in der Süddeutschen Zeitung von vergangener Woche Donnerstag lautete: "Weidmann hält sich zurück". Ich bin mir nicht sicher, ob aus dieser Überschrift Erleichterung oder Enttäuschung spricht. Das hängt wohl sehr vom Standpunkt des Betrachters ab.

Dass die Geldpolitik weltweit im Rampenlicht der Öffentlichkeit steht und Berichte über die Arbeit und Interna der Notenbanken nicht mehr nur auf den hinteren Seiten des Wirtschaftsteils, sondern auf den Titelseiten zu finden sind, ist sicherlich der Finanz- und Staatsschuldenkrise geschuldet.

Die Öffentlichkeit hat erkannt, über welche machtvollen Instrumente die Notenbanken verfügen, beobachtet den zunehmenden Druck, immer mehr Aufgaben zu übernehmen, setzt Hoffnung auf ihr Handeln oder sorgt sich um die Risiken und Nebenwirkungen, die damit verbunden sind.

In den akuten Zuspitzungen der Krise im Euro-Raum galt die EZB manchen Beobachtern sogar als einzig handlungsfähiger Akteur im Euro-Raum, ausgestattet mit einem Werkzeugkasten von Krisenbekämpfungsinstrumenten, die zum Teil so wichtig scheinen, dass sie in der Presse regelmäßig mit diversen Kriegswaffen verglichen werden.

Insgesamt ist festzustellen: Trotz der vielen ergriffenen Maßnahmen befindet sich die europäische Geldpolitik noch immer im Krisenmodus. Um die wirtschaftlichen Folgen der Krise abzumildern, hat der EZB-Rat seit Ausbruch der Krise nicht nur die Zinsen drastisch gesenkt, sondern auch eine Reihe sogenannter unkonventioneller geldpolitischer Maßnahmen beschlossen.

Nach wie vor und so lange wie nötig erhalten die Banken so viel Liquidität, wie sie wollen, sofern sie über ausreichende Sicherheiten verfügen. Diese Politik der Vollzuteilung soll seit Beginn der Finanzkrise ein

Sicherheitsnetz für solvente Banken darstellen. Dabei wurden auch die Anforderungen an die Qualität der geldpolitischen Sicherheiten mehrfach gesenkt und die Restlaufzeit der Refinanzierungsgeschäfte deutlich ausgeweitet. Derzeit beträgt sie etwas über ein Jahr, während sie vor der Krise im Schnitt weniger als einen Monat betrug.

Darüber hinaus hat das Eurosystem Staatsanleihen von Krisenstaaten und gedeckte Bankschuldverschreibungen erworben. Die Stabilisierung einzelner Kapitalmarktsegmente sollte helfen, die Transmission geldpolitischer Impulse zu gewährleisten.

Einige dieser Krisenmaßnahmen haben aber aus meiner Sicht die Trennlinie zwischen der Geldpolitik und der Finanzpolitik zu stark verwischt. Das Eurosystem agiert mit einzelnen Maßnahmen zumindest im **Grenzbereich seines Mandats.** Dieses Handeln wurde in der Öffentlichkeit hinterfragt und führte auch zu Diskussion über das Mandat selbst.

Es ist natürlich offensichtlich: Auch andere Notenbanken haben in der Finanzkrise nicht nur die Zinsen drastisch gesenkt, sondern im Rahmen eines Quantitative Easing umfangreiche Bestände an Staatsanleihen gekauft. So hält die Bank of England mittlerweile rund 27% der umlaufenden britischen Staatsschulden, bei der Fed beträgt dieser Anteil immerhin rund 23%.

Mit diesen Käufen sind freilich nicht die Probleme verbunden, die Staatsanleihekäufe im Euro-Raum so heikel machen. Denn im Euro-Raum führen Käufe von Anleihen gerade der bonitätsschwachen Länder dazu, dass Solvenzrisiken zwischen den Steuerzahlern der einzelnen Mitgliedstaaten umverteilt werden. Dies ist aufgrund der **No-Bail-out-Klausel** im bestehenden Ordnungsrahmen der Währungsunion im Grunde aber nicht vorgesehen. Entscheidungen über die Umverteilung von Haftungsrisiken sollten wenn überhaupt von den Parlamenten und Regierungen getroffen werden.

Aber sind Diskussionen über das Mandat der Notenbanken, über die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Geldpolitik, nicht fehl am Platz, wenn die getroffenen Maßnahmen die Chance haben, zu helfen? Schließlich diskutiert die Feuerwehr doch auch nicht während eines Einsatzes den (möglichen) Löschmittelschaden der Brandbekämpfung!

Abgesehen von der Frage, welcher der politischen Akteure das Feuer löschen sollte oder darf, meine ich, dass diese Diskussionen berechtigt sind, und wir müssen uns ihnen stellen. Ich würde mir jedenfalls wünschen, dass die Feuerwehr sich vor ihrem Einsatz Gedanken über das richtige Löschmittel macht und ich mich darauf verlassen kann, dass der Löschmittelschaden den potenziellen Brandschaden nicht übersteigt. Oder anders: Dass der Brand zwar zunächst gelöscht wird, aber das Haus dadurch instabil ist, weil das Löschwasser ins Fundament sickert.

Genau deshalb diskutieren wir im EZB-Rat so intensiv über die richtige Strategie zur Krisenlösung. Solche Diskussionen sollten nicht als Schwäche eines Entscheidungsgremiums angesehen werden, sondern als Stärke. **Auch in anderen Notenbanken wird intensiv um den angemessenen Kurs gerungen.** Und sie lassen mit der zeitnahen Veröffentlichung der Sitzungsprotokolle die Öffentlichkeit sogar noch intensiver teilhaben als es im Euro-Raum der Fall ist.

Deshalb gibt es auch im Euro-Raum Forderungen, die Sitzungsprotokolle des EZB-Rats zu veröffentlichen. **Aus meiner Sicht würde eine Veröffentlichung von Protokollen, aus denen die Argumentationslinien der Diskussion klar erkennbar werden, das Verständnis der Öffentlichkeit über die Art und Weise verbessern, wie geldpolitische Entscheidungen im EZB-Rat getroffen werden.** Die Veröffentlichung sollte zeitnah erfolgen, also jeweils vor der nächsten geldpolitischen Sitzung.

Eine intensive Erläuterung der Vorgehensweise **ist vor allem dann wichtig, wenn Notenbanken unabhängig sind**. Denn wenn es keine politische Kontrolle gibt, ist es umso wichtiger, dass zum einen ein konkretes Mandat vorliegt und zum anderen die Öffentlichkeit, die Entscheidungen nachvollziehen kann. Transparenz kann helfen, Vertrauen zu stärken. Und Vertrauen ist das wichtigste Kapital, das Notenbanken besitzen.

Unabhängigkeit von Zentralbanken ist in demokratischen Ordnungen eine Besonderheit und bedarf daher immer der ausführlichen Rechtfertigung.

Aus der Unabhängigkeit von Notenbanken folgt für mich die klare Verpflichtung, das geldpolitische Mandat im Zweifel eng auszulegen. Nur so wird vermieden, dass ein vermeintliches Demokratiedefizit als Grund herangezogen werden kann, die Unabhängigkeit einzuschränken. Dies würde die Gewährleistung von Preisstabilität langfristig gefährden.

In Anlehnung an die Definition von Freiheit von Jean Jacques Rousseau lässt sich sagen, dass Notenbankunabhängigkeit nicht **bedeutet, dass die Notenbank tun kann was sie will, sondern dass sie nicht tun muss, was sie nicht will und was sie nicht darf.**

Mit Blick auf die Krisenpolitik der Notenbanken werden in der internationalen **Diskussion bereits Zweifel geäußert, ob unabhängige, auf das Mandat der Preisstabilität festgelegte Notenbanken überhaupt noch zeitgemäß sind.** Stephen King, der Chefvolkswirt von HSBC – und nicht etwa der gleichnamige Schriftsteller – stellte bereits fest: **"Die Ära unabhängiger Notenbanken ist vorbei."**

Dabei kommt die Kritik von zwei Seiten. Von Seiten derer, für die sich die Notenbanken in der Krise schon viel zu stark engagiert haben und von denen, die fordern, dass die Notenbanken eine noch stärkere Rolle in anderen Politikbereichen spielen sollen.

Für einige Ökonomen, wie den Amerikaner John B. Taylor, ist die Geldpolitik schon viel zu weit gegangen. Dem müsse Einhalt geboten werden. Im Kern entspricht dies der Haltung **Milton Friedmans**, der bekanntlich sagte: **"Unser Geld ist zu wertvoll, um es Notenbankern zu überlassen"– und daraus die Forderung nach einer strikt regelgebundenen Geldpolitik ableitete.**

Für das andere Lager steht der Wirtschaftsnobelpreisträger **Stiglitz**. Er rät: **"Notenbanken sollten sich bei der Festlegung ihrer Ziele nicht allein auf die Inflation beschränken. Sie müssen den Fokus auch auf Beschäftigung, Wachstum und Finanzstabilität legen. Und die Geldpolitik muss auf die Fiskalpolitik abgestimmt sein."**

Aus Sicht des **Euro-Raums** könnte man solchen Forderungen, die gelegentlich auch von europäischen Politikern erhoben werden, **entgegenhalten, dass in der Währungsunion die Unabhängigkeit des Eurosystems und das Primat der Preisstabilität in den Europäischen Verträgen festgelegt sind – ebenso wie das Verbot, dass das Eurosystem die Europäischen Institutionen oder die einzelnen Mitgliedstaaten finanziert.**

Wenn ich diese Regeln und Verabredungen betone, dann geht es mir nicht um eine vermeintlich deutsche Prinzipienreiterei oder darum, das "Erbe der Bundesbank" zu sichern. Nein, dahinter stehen handfeste ökonomische Gründe! **Trifft doch die gemeinsame Geldpolitik auf 17, in Kürze 18 eigenständige Finanzpolitiken. Welchem finanzpolitischen Herren sollte die Geldpolitik also dienen?**

Anders ausgedrückt: **Der Maastricht-Vertrag beruht auf dem Prinzip der Eigenverantwortung.** Wichtige nationale Politikbereiche verbleiben in nationaler Hand, dafür soll auch auf nationaler Ebene für die Folgen dieser Politik gehaftet werden. **Dieses Haftungsprinzip ist entscheidend für die Währungsunion.** Wird es untergraben, können die Verschuldungsanreize überhand nehmen, und es wird schwer, die Währungsunion als Stabilitätsunion zu erhalten.

Dass dieser Ordnungsrahmen die Krise nicht verhindert hat, lag nur zum Teil an Lücken, die die Gründungsväter der Währungsunion übersehen und die gravierende Auswirkungen auf die Stabilität des Euro-Raums haben: **zum Beispiel die schleichende Erosion der Wettbewerbsfähigkeit einzelner Länder, die zu hohe Verschuldung auch im privaten Sektor oder die ungenügende Finanzmarktregulierung und die zu laxen Bankenaufsicht.**

Die Schwierigkeiten mit dem Ordnungsrahmen liegen auch darin, dass die getroffenen Verabredungen nicht eingehalten wurden. Das ist besonders offenkundig auf dem Gebiet der Finanzpolitik. **Trotz der Regeln des Stabilitäts- und Wachstumspakts lagen die Haushaltsdefizite bereits vor Ausbruch der Finanzkrise im Jahr 2007 in sechs von damals 16 Euro-Ländern über 3 %.** Gerade die großen Mitgliedstaaten haben das Defizitziel besonders häufig verletzt. **Mit sechs Verstößen ist Deutschland nur wenig besser als Frankreich mit acht und Italien mit neun.** Die staatlichen Schuldenquoten lagen zumeist nicht deutlich unterhalb der Obergrenze von 60 %, sondern teilweise noch gravierend darüber.

Der Umgang mit den Fiskalregeln zeigt aus meiner Sicht eindrucksvoll, dass der Ordnungsrahmen der Währungsunion nicht getrennt davon gesehen werden kann, wie die Entscheidungsträger die Regeln anwenden. Ich bin mir sicher, jeder fiskalpolitische Regelverstoß wurde mit einem vermeintlich überzeugenden Argument begründet. Im Zweifel wurde gesagt, die getroffenen Maßnahmen seien notwendig, um eine Zuspitzung wirtschaftlicher Probleme zu verhindern.

Für die Fiskalpolitik gilt aber wie für die Geldpolitik: Mit jeder Krisenmaßnahme wird die Gefahr größer, sich weiter vom ursprünglichen Ordnungsrahmen zu entfernen. Das trifft insbesondere für solche Krisenmaßnahmen zu, mit denen die Gemeinschaftshaftung faktisch ausgeweitet wurde.

Umso wichtiger ist es, den bestehenden Handlungsrahmen zu stärken **und dem Prinzip der Eigenverantwortung wieder mehr Gewicht zu verleihen.**

Eine andere Möglichkeit wäre es, ein Mehr an gemeinschaftlicher Haftung mit einem Mehr an gegenseitiger Kontrolle zu verbinden. Die Mitgliedstaaten müssten also letztlich dazu bereit sein, nationale Souveränitätsrechte zugunsten der europäischen Ebene aufzugeben und damit die Währungsunion zum Beispiel um eine Fiskalunion zu ergänzen.

Für den dafür notwendigen Übergang nationaler Souveränitätsrechte auf die europäische Ebene sehe ich derzeit aber keine breite Unterstützung in den Mitgliedstaaten. Weder in der Politik noch in den Bevölkerungen.

Im Rahmen der **Bankenunion** geht immerhin die Bankenaufsicht über die rund 130 signifikanten Banken im Euro-Raum auf die europäische Ebene über. Allerdings ist auch hier auf den Gleichlauf von Kontrolle und Haftung zu achten. Daraus folgt dann zwar eine gemeinsame Verantwortung für zukünftige Fehlentwicklungen – aber es sollte nur in dem Maße gemeinsam gehaftet werden, wie die Ursachen dafür nicht in national verantworteter Politik liegen. **Es gibt also gute Gründe für einen weiterhin erheblichen nationalen Haftungsanteil.** Schließlich ist es auch Ziel des gemeinsamen Restrukturierungs- und Abwicklungsmechanismus, in erster Linie Eigentümer und Gläubiger der betroffenen Banken in die Haftung zu nehmen.

Nach oben

2 Geldpolitik im Spannungsfeld

Die Geldpolitik bewegt sich in einem stetigen Spannungsfeld mit dem Ordnungsrahmen und anderen Politikbereichen, insbesondere der Fiskalpolitik, der Finanzmarktpolitik und der Strukturpolitik.

Eine auf Preisstabilität ausgerichtete Geldpolitik agiert daher unter Voraussetzungen, die sie nicht selber schaffen kann. Sie wird ihr Ziel dauerhaft und friktionsfrei nur in einem Umfeld solider Staatsfinanzen, stabiler Finanzsysteme und einer wachstumsfreundlichen Strukturpolitik erreichen.

Die geldpolitischen Impulse der Notenbank werden nur dann ohne weiteres in der Realwirtschaft ankommen, wenn die Politik den Übertragungsweg frei von Hindernissen hält, also zum Beispiel die Fiskalpolitik das langfristige Zinsniveau nicht durch eine exzessive Staatsverschuldung nach oben treibt. Umgekehrt beeinflusst natürlich auch die Geldpolitik die Fiskalpolitik. Erhöht die Geldpolitik die Zinsen, steigt unter anderem die Zinsbelastung auch für die öffentlichen Haushalte.

Unbestritten ist, dass die Geldpolitik kurzfristig die Wirtschaftsaktivität anregen kann. Langfristig kann die Geldpolitik die Wirtschaft freilich nur um den Preis immer steigender Inflationsraten stimulieren. Der beste Beitrag der Geldpolitik für langfristiges Wachstum besteht also darin, Preisstabilität zu gewährleisten. Am Ende entscheidet vor allem die Wirtschaftsstruktur – also insbesondere die Leistungsfähigkeit der Unternehmen und der Beschäftigten – über das Wachstumspotenzial einer Volkswirtschaft.

Die so genannte Tinbergen-Regel besagt, dass man für jedes wirtschaftspolitische Ziel mindestens ein unabhängiges Instrument benötigt. Ein Spediteur, der vier Pakete an vier völlig unterschiedliche Orte transportieren muss und nur einen Lieferwagen besitzt, wird auch nicht alle Pakete gleichzeitig abliefern können.

Im Zusammenhang mit den Zielen "Preisstabilität", "Tragfähigkeit der Staatsverschuldung" und "Stabilität des Finanzsystems" wird sogar schon von einem "neuen Trilemma" der Notenbanken gesprochen.

Die klassische – oder konventionelle – Geldpolitik alleine kann diese drei Zielen langfristig freilich nicht gleichzeitig erreichen, denn sie besitzt nur ein Instrument: den Notenbankzins.

Und auch unkonventionelle geldpolitische Maßnahmen wie etwa eine sehr langfristige Mittelbereitstellung an Banken oder die Erwartungsausprägung, den Notenbankzins auf absehbare Zeit nicht zu erhöhen (Forward guidance), können dieses Problem nicht beseitigen. Ihr Beitrag für die Geldpolitik liegt darin, noch dann zu wirken, wenn die Möglichkeiten der Zinspolitik erschöpft sind. Entweder weil die Zinsen schon sehr niedrig sind oder weil der Zinsimpuls nicht weitergegeben wird.

Angesichts der geschilderten Spannungsverhältnisse und der begrenzten Möglichkeiten bedarf es aus meiner Sicht einer klaren Zielhierarchie für die Geldpolitik. Die Geldpolitik kann zwar zur Finanzstabilität beitragen, im Zweifel muss aber das Ziel Preisstabilität Vorrang haben – und so steht es auch im Mandat des Eurosystems.

Das bedeutet allerdings nicht, dass Notenbanken nicht maßgeblich daran mitwirken können, die Stabilität des Finanzsystems zu gewährleisten.

So sind die Notenbanken in der Europäischen Union schon seit einigen Jahren Mitglieder im Europäischen Ausschuss für Systemrisiken (ESRB) und damit maßgeblich in die Überwachung der Finanzstabilität in Europa einbezogen. Bei Gefahren für die Finanzstabilität kann der ESRB entsprechende Warnungen abgeben und Empfehlungen aussprechen.

Und in Deutschland besitzt die Bundesbank seit diesem Jahr ein makroprudenzielles Mandat. Das bedeutet, dass sie laufend die für die Finanzstabilität maßgeblichen Sachverhalte analysiert und mögliche Gefahren für die Finanzstabilität identifiziert. Gegebenenfalls erarbeitet sie Vorschläge, wie diese Gefahren abgewehrt werden können.

Darüber hinaus wird in knapp einem Jahr die Bankenaufsicht über die signifikanten Institute auf die Europäische Zentralbank übertragen. Damit wird sie dann ganz entscheidende Verantwortung für die Stabilität der wichtigen Banken im Euro-Raum tragen.

Aber noch einmal: Diese Aufgaben sind von der Geldpolitik zu trennen. Auf Basis des bestehenden Rechtsrahmens wird dies allerdings am Ende nicht strikt möglich sein, denn die Letztverantwortung für die Geldpolitik wie auch die Bankenaufsicht trägt der EZB-Rat.

Nach oben

3 Die Gefahr der fiskalischen Dominanz

Nun wäre es sicher naiv, die bestehenden Interdependenzen zwischen den verschiedenen Politikbereichen zu ignorieren.

Die Fiskalpolitik und die Geldpolitik weisen schon alleine deshalb Berührungspunkte auf, weil die Notenbanken grundsätzlich in der Lage sind, öffentliche Schulden zu finanzieren. Entweder durch Kredite an den Staat oder durch den direkten Erwerb von Staatsanleihen.

Eine ausufernde Finanzierung des Staats durch die Notenbank erhöht letztlich auch die Geldschöpfungsmöglichkeiten der Banken. Am Ende kann dann eine monetäre Staatsfinanzierung in höheren Inflationsraten münden.

Spätestens dann, wenn die Geldpolitik faktisch gezwungen ist, die Solvenz des Staates zu sichern, und die Geldwertstabilität nicht mehr gewährleisten kann, würde man von gefährlicher fiskalischer Dominanz sprechen.

Die in den Europäischen Verträgen verankerte Unabhängigkeit des Eurosystems und das Verbot der monetären Staatsfinanzierung sollen diese Gefahr bannen.

Ein Zustand der fiskalischen Dominanz kann aber auch auf anderem Weg eintreten. Nämlich dann, wenn auf die Notenbank Druck ausgeübt wird, über eine "laxe" Zinspolitik den realen Gegenwert steigender Staatsschulden durch eine höhere Inflationsrate zu stabilisieren. Die nominalen Staatsschulden würden dann mit Hilfe einer auf Inflation ausgerichteten Geldpolitik entwertet.

Erwarten die Menschen, dass die Notenbank bei Erreichen einer bestimmten Höhe der öffentlichen Schulden dem Druck der Fiskalpolitik nachgeben wird, dann werden sie schon heute ihre Inflationserwartungen entsprechend nach oben anpassen. Das wird die tatsächliche Inflationsrate dann über kurz oder lang mit sich ziehen, zum Beispiel über höhere Lohnabschlüsse.

Natürlich wird eine Anhebung des Inflationsziels vom EZB-Rat einhellig abgelehnt. Der Rat fühlt sich geschlossen dem Ziel der Preisstabilität in der bestehenden Definition verpflichtet.

Entscheidend ist aber, gar nicht erst den Verdacht aufkommen zu lassen, in eine Welt zu geraten, bei der die Geldpolitik der Solvenzsicherung des Staats untergeordnet wird. Zum Beispiel dadurch, dass der Notenbankzins länger niedrig bleibt, als es unbedingt notwendig ist, um Preisstabilität zu erreichen. Oder indem Staatsanleihen in großem Stil aufgekauft werden, weil Solvenzschwierigkeiten der Staaten und deren Auswirkungen auf die Anleiherenditen als geldpolitisches Problem angesehen werden.

Für das Vertrauen in uns Notenbanken als unabhängige Wächter der Geldwertstabilität ist entscheidend, dass wir nach dem Beispiel des ersten EZB-Präsidenten Wim Duisenberg vorgehen. Auf die Frage, wie er mit Forderungen der Finanzminister umgehe, antwortete er: "Ich höre sie, aber ich höre nicht auf sie."

Das Verbot der monetären Staatsfinanzierung und die Unabhängigkeit der Notenbank sind also kein Selbstzweck. Sie sind theoretisch gut begründet. Ihnen liegen aber auch historische Erfahrungen zugrunde:

Damit meine ich weniger die deutschen Inflationserfahrungen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, sondern vielmehr die Lehren aus den 1970er und 1980er Jahren: Weltweit befanden sich damals Notenbanken im Schlepptau der Fiskalpolitik, was sich in teilweise zweistelligen Inflationsraten niederschlug.

Hierzu ein Beispiel: In Italien war die Notenbank formell bis 1993 eine Anstalt öffentlichen Rechts. Bis zur sogenannten "Scheidung" vom Finanzministerium im Jahr 1981 musste die Banca d'Italia die in Auktionen übriggebliebenen Staatspapiere aufkaufen. Das dürfte dazu beigetragen haben, dass Italien in den 1970er Jahren Inflationsraten in Höhe von durchschnittlich 12,5 % hatte. Die Raten lagen zwischen 1973 und 1984 nie unter 10 %. Erst als sich die Banca d'Italia von der Fiskalpolitik gelöst hatte, gelang es ihr die Inflation niederzuringen und die Lira zu stabilisieren.

Aber man muss nicht in die 1970er Jahre zurückblicken, um ein Land zu finden, in dem die Notenbank von der Politik ausdrücklich in Pflicht genommen wird. Die drei Pfeile der so genannten Abenomics-Politik zeigen gerade das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Fiskalpolitik, Geldpolitik und Strukturpolitik auf. Während die Geldpolitik aber ihre expansive Ausrichtung bereits forciert hat, sind die vorgesehenen strukturpolitische Anpassungsmaßnahmen bislang nur angedeutet worden.

In allen großen Währungsräumen muss die Geldpolitik meiner Meinung nach sorgfältig darauf achten, dass die Politik die Voraussetzungen für stabiles Geld schafft, zum Beispiel die Staatsfinanzen in den Griff bekommt oder notwendige Strukturreformen auf den Weg bringt. Ansonsten riskiert die Geldpolitik zur Gefangenen der Politik zu werden.

In diesem Zusammenhang erinnere ich an die Worte von Peter Ustinov, der einmal sagte: "Die Menschen, die etwas von heute auf morgen verschieben, sind dieselben, die es bereits von gestern auf heute verschoben haben."

Nach oben

4 Die Gefahr der finanziellen Dominanz

In der Finanzkrise haben die Notenbanken den Geschäftsbanken in großem Stil Liquidität bereitgestellt, um krisenbedingten Liquiditätsengpässen entgegenzuwirken.

Im Euro-Raum erfolgte die Liquiditätsbereitstellung auch mit sehr langen Laufzeiten. Dabei ist allerdings immer wieder zu beachten, dass den Banken Liquidität zur Verfügung gestellt und nicht die Kapitalmarktfrefinanzierung ersetzt werden soll.

Die Refinanzierung bei der Notenbank darf deshalb nicht dazu führen, dass Strukturprobleme im Bankenbereich ungelöst bleiben, weil die für Marktwirtschaften so wichtige Möglichkeit verhindert wird, dass Banken ohne Überlebensperspektive aus dem Markt ausscheiden.

Aber auch mit Blick auf die Gefahr der finanziellen Dominanz gilt hier wieder: Die Geldpolitik darf nicht den Eindruck erwecken, sie wäre in der Verantwortung für die Solvenzsicherung der Banken.

Bei der Ausgestaltung der Refinanzierungsoperationen sollten wir darauf achten, der Kapitalmarktfinanzierung nicht ins Gehege zu kommen. Die Konditionen sollten im Vergleich zu den Marktbedingungen folglich nicht zu großzügig sein. Ziel der Liquiditätsbereitstellung sollte darüber hinaus sein, die Kreditvergabe an den privaten Sektor zu ermöglichen. Die Liquidität sollte nicht dazu verwendet werden, weitere Staatsanleihen anzuhäufen.

Diese Bestände sind aber, wie der November-Monatsbericht der Bundesbank zeigt, in den Krisenländern in den vergangenen zwei Jahren immer weiter gestiegen anstatt zurückzugehen.

Meine Damen und Herren,

die geldpolitische Rolle von Notenbanken ist von ihrer Rolle als Kreditgeber der letzten Instanz (Lender of Last Resort) zu unterscheiden. Bei vorübergehenden Liquiditätsengpässen können die nationalen Zentralbanken des Eurosystems Banken gegen Sicherheiten vorübergehend Notfallliquidität in eigener Verantwortung und auf eigenes Risiko zur Verfügung stellen.

Aber auch hierbei ist darauf zu achten, dass Notfallliquidität nur für einen kurzen Zeitraum gewährt wird – und an überschuldete Institute schon gar nicht.

Der EZB-Rat hat jüngst die Veröffentlichung der Regelungen für die Gewährung von Notfallliquidität beschlossen. Diese Regeln stellen aus meiner Sicht vor allem eine Art Schutz der Notenbanken im Eurosystem vor den Erwartungen der Banken und der Öffentlichkeit über eine zu großzügige Gewährung von Notfallhilfe dar.

Um zukünftig Situationen zu vermeiden, in denen das Eurosystem gedrängt wird, strauchelnden Banken zur Seite zu springen, sind zwei Baustellen fertigzustellen:

1. Die Verlustabsorptionsfähigkeit des Finanzsektors muss gestärkt werden. Das geschieht durch härtere Eigenkapitalanforderungen, wie sie zum Beispiel im Rahmen der Basel III-Regelungen bereits beschlossen wurden.
2. Die starke Verbindung zwischen Staat und Banken muss im Euro-Raum gelockert werden. Nur so wird verhindert, dass wankende Staaten Banken in den Abgrund ziehen und strauchelnde Banken einzelne Staaten an den Rand der Zahlungsunfähigkeit führen. Hier kann die Bankenunion mit ihren beiden Säulen "einheitliche Bankenaufsicht" und "einheitlicher Restrukturierungs- und Abwicklungsmechanismus" einen wichtigen Beitrag leisten.

In diesem Zusammenhang plädiere ich dafür, die regulatorische Vorzugsbehandlung von Staatsanleihen in den Bankbilanzen abzuschaffen. Wenn Banken die Ausleihungen an Staaten im Euro-Raum ebenso risikoadäquat mit Eigenkapital unterlegen müssten, wie andere Kredite auch, würde der Appetit der Banken auf Staatsanleihen gezügelt. Das würde auch dazu beitragen, die Fiskalpolitik der betroffenen Länder zu disziplinieren.

Nach oben

5 Fazit: Mandat möglichst eng auslegen

Um die Risiken der Krisenpolitik für den Handlungsrahmen in der Währungsunion möglichst gering zu halten, muss das geldpolitische Mandat möglichst eng ausgelegt werden. So schützt das Eurosystem am besten seine Unabhängigkeit und reduziert die Gefahr, in den Verdacht zu geraten, einer fiskalischen oder finanziellen Dominanz zu unterliegen.

Deshalb sollten besonders die Aufgabenbereiche der Geld- und Fiskalpolitik wieder schärfer voneinander abgegrenzt werden. Die Geldpolitik kann zwar im Rahmen ihrer Möglichkeiten zur Finanzstabilität beitragen, im Zweifel muss aber die Wahrung der Preisstabilität eindeutig Vorrang haben.

Die Krise im Euro-Raum ist noch nicht ausgestanden. Verlockungen, die Geldpolitik vor den Karren der Fiskalpolitik zu spannen, werden auch zukünftig bestehen. Dem muss die Geldpolitik widerstehen. Für das

Lösen der Krise sind die Regierungen und Parlamente verantwortlich. Sie müssen handeln, zur Not auch schnell. Denn nur sie sind demokratisch legitimiert, die gegebenenfalls sehr weitreichenden politischen Entscheidungen zu treffen.

Für den Erfolg der Geldpolitik ist das Vertrauen in die Stabilitätsorientierung des Eurosystems von entscheidender Bedeutung. Oder um es wie folgt auszudrücken: "Kurzum, verantwortungsvolle Führung war und ist für die EZB die Einhaltung unseres Gründungsvertrags, ohne auf die Stimmen zu hören, die uns drängen, 'mehr zu tun' oder 'weniger zu tun'; stets unser Mandat im Blick zu haben, Preisstabilität für die Bürger des Euro-Raums zu gewährleisten." Darin kann ich Mario Draghi nur zustimmen.

Ich danke Ihnen für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit und übergebe das Wort an unseren Moderator, Herrn Kister.

* * *

Les actes islamophobes à nouveau en hausse

91,131

- Par Le Figaro.fr avec AFP
- Publié le 23/11/2013 à 15:32

Les actes islamophobes ont enregistré une hausse de 11,3% sur les neuf premiers mois de l'année, par rapport à la même période en 2012, a dénoncé samedi l'Observatoire national contre l'islamophobie, qui s'inquiète notamment des agressions de femmes voilées. De janvier à fin septembre, l'Observatoire répertorie 157 actes islamophobes, un chiffre englobant actions et menaces, contre 141 sur la même période l'an dernier, dans un communiqué.

"Après une certaine accalmie durant l'été, les chiffres repartent à la hausse pour octobre et novembre", regrette le président de l'Observatoire, Abdallah Zekri. Il s'inquiète d'un "nouveau phénomène", à savoir l'agression des femmes portant un foulard, répertoriant 14 agressions de ce type entre les incidents d'Argenteuil et Trappes, en région parisienne, et Reims.

Les chiffres communiqués par l'Observatoire concernent "uniquement les actes pour lesquels il y a eu dépôt de plainte et main courante dans les commissariats et gendarmeries", souligne l'Observatoire, estimant qu'ils sont "en dessous de la réalité" en raison des réticences de "nombreux" musulmans à porter plainte. L'Observatoire, placé sous l'autorité du Conseil français du culte musulman (CFCM) s'inquiète aussi d'une "forte augmentation" de l'islamophobie "via la cyber-haine", évoquant des courriels en chaîne qui propagent "des mensonges" sur l'islam et les musulmans et "prônent la haine".

November 22, 2013

Central Bank Chief Urges European Unity

91,132

By *JACK EWING*

FRANKFURT — Mario Draghi, the president of the European Central Bank, issued a plea for European unity on Friday and criticized what he said was a “nationalistic tone” in the reaction to recent central bank policy moves.

Speaking to an audience of bankers in Frankfurt, Mr. Draghi beseeched European leaders to overcome their differences and keep making progress to address the flaws in the design of the euro zone. He also defended the decision by the E.C.B. to cut interest rates earlier this month against criticism from Germany.

In particular, Mr. Draghi called on political leaders to create a mechanism for closing down sick banks, a so-called resolution authority. Such an authority is essential for the E.C.B. to carry out its new role as central bank supervisor for the euro zone, Mr. Draghi said. Political leaders meeting in Brussels have been struggling, so far unsuccessfully, to agree on how a resolution authority should be structured.

“It is essential we do not retreat into purely national perspectives with a narrow view of our interests,” Mr. Draghi said.

Mr. Draghi’s comments before a well-attended gathering of bankers came amid increased concern that European leaders, now that they are no longer under intense market pressure, have lost the will to address underlying flaws in the euro zone. Instead, they have blamed each other for economic stagnation in Europe. The Germans accuse the French and Italians of not doing enough to make their economies competitive, while the others attack Germany for focusing too much on exports and not enough on stimulating demand within Europe.

On Friday, official statistics showed that German growth in the most recent quarter was due to increased domestic demand rather than foreign trade, supporting the German argument that the economy is already achieving a better balance between imports and exports.

Two weeks after the E.C.B. cut its main interest rate to a record low of 0.25 percent, Mr. Draghi answered criticism from Germany, including the president of the country’s central bank, that ultralow official interest rates penalize savers. While it is true that low interest rates are hard on pensioners, Mr. Draghi said, a weak economy is worse because it prevents people from building up savings in the first place.

“Rates are low because the economy is weak,” he said.

In recent speeches, Jens Weidmann, president of the German Bundesbank, has called attention to the disadvantages of low interest rates. Mr. Weidmann, a member of the E.C.B.’s rate-setting governing council, is believed to have argued against a cut earlier this month but has avoided criticizing the decision directly.

Mr. Draghi did not say where he thought nationalistic commentary he referred to was coming from. But he appeared to be reacting to suggestions in the German press that the E.C.B. is pursuing policies designed to bail out trouble countries like Italy. Mr. Draghi insisted that members of the E.C.B. governing council, which includes the heads of all 17 national central banks in the euro zone, act in the interest of Europe as a whole.

“In their deliberations and decisions governing council members are neither German, nor French, nor Spanish, nor Italian,” said Mr. Draghi, who is Italian. “They are European.”

Mr. Draghi also called on bankers in the audience to cooperate fully with an in-depth review that the E.C.B. is conducting during the next year of bank assets, in an attempt to identify which banks are weak and must be recapitalized or closed.

“For banks, it offers a unique opportunity to restore confidence and attract private investors,” Mr. Draghi said.

Jürgen Fitschen, co-chief executive of Deutsche Bank, said that banks understood the importance of the E.C.B. review.

“We understand that the next 12 months might be the most decisive since the crisis broke in 2008,” Mr. Fitschen said in brief remarks to the gathering.

EZB spielt Risiken von Staatsanleihen herunter

91,134

24.11.2013 · Mario Draghi weicht der Debatte über Risiken aus Staatsanleihen aus. Der EZB-Präsident will seine Glaubwürdigkeit als künftiger Bankenaufseher nicht verlieren. Doch der öffentliche Druck wächst.

Von PHILIPP KROHN

Wissenschaftliche Berater bei der Europäischen Zentralbank (EZB) arbeiten in einem Spannungsfeld: Einerseits sollen sie auf Risiken für die Stabilität der Finanzmärkte hinweisen, andererseits bewegen sie sich auf politisch vermintem Gelände. So erging es nun einer Gruppe um die Wirtschaftsweise Claudia Buch und den Max-Planck-Forscher Martin Hellwig. In einer Expertise für den bei der EZB angesiedelten Europäischen Systemrisikorat (ESRB) hatten sie darauf hingewiesen, dass Banken zu große Risiken eingehen könnten, weil sie Investitionen in Staatsanleihen nicht mit Eigenkapital besichern müssen. Vielmehr gelten diese aufsichtsrechtlich als risikolose Kapitalanlage. Wollte man dieses Klumpenrisiko von Banken und Staaten mindern, könne man eine Grenze für Investitionen in Staatsanleihen einführen oder die Titel verpflichtend mit Kapital unterlegen, schrieben die Fachleute, wie der „Spiegel“ in seiner aktuellen Ausgabe berichtet.

Doch EZB-Präsident Mario Draghi hat diese Empfehlung demnach als politisch zu heikel befunden und gab das Schreiben zur Überarbeitung an seine Urheber zurück. Auch er bewegt sich in einem Spannungsfeld: Einerseits will er Staats- und Regierungschefs nicht brüskieren, andererseits will er seine Glaubwürdigkeit als künftiger Bankenaufseher nicht vorzeitig aufs Spiel setzen. Will die EZB keine Autorität in ihrer künftigen Rolle als Bankenaufsicht verspielen, darf sie existierende Bankenrisiken nicht kleinreden. Spätestens beim anstehenden großen Banken-Stresstest wird sie diese Prüfung bestehen müssen. Die derzeitige Europäische Bankenaufsicht (EBA) leidet bis heute darunter, dass sie in einem Stresstest Kreditinstitute als sicher eingestuft hatten, die später strauchelten.

Unterschiedliche Einschätzung der Bonität

Die Eurostaaten aber haben den Vorschlag einer Kapitalunterlegung für Staatstitel schon mehrfach zurückgewiesen, weil sie den Eindruck vermeiden wollten, es gebe vom Ausfall stärker gefährdete Schulden einzelner Euromitglieder. Der schon erfolgte Schuldenschnitt für griechische Gläubiger dagegen und auch die deutlich abweichenden Risikozuschläge für Anleihen der Peripheriestaaten sind Beleg dafür, dass die Bonität durchaus unterschiedlich eingeschätzt werden kann. Bundesbank-Präsident Jens Weidmann hat sich in dieser Frage deshalb klar positioniert: Für Banken und Versicherer müsse die Eigenmittelunterlegung ihrer Investments die wahren Risiken widerspiegeln, damit es nicht zu Fehlanreizen kommt und am Ende zu viel Geld in die Staatsfinanzierung fließt. Es sieht so aus, als könnte es über diese Frage noch einigen Streit in Europa geben.

Zudem steht Draghi mit dem EZB-Rat unter wachsendem öffentlichen Druck. Auf einer Veranstaltung in Berlin warnte jüngst der Ko-Vorstandsvorsitzende der Deutschen Bank, Jürgen Fitschen, vor den Folgen des billigen Geldes. Er habe zwar Verständnis dafür, dass die Notenbank mit niedrigen Zinsen versucht, Wachstum zu schaffen und die Finanzierungslast der Staaten zu mildern. Diese Medizin sei aber langfristig ungesund. „Jeder, der glaubt, dass er mit einer fortgesetzten Periode des billigen Geldes Probleme löst, dem ist nicht zu helfen“, sagte er am Wochenende. Europa habe Zeit gewonnen, ihr geldpolitisches Pulver habe die EZB aber weitgehend verschossen.