
DON'T RELY ON GERMANY TO SOLVE BREXIT, IT DOESN'T NEED TO HELP BRITAIN

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Remember when Boris Johnson was telling you that Germany would force the EU to accept almost any conditions for Brexit – basically, Britain having its cake and eating it, too – because they need us more than we need them? Didn't happen. But, in desperate Brexit times the hope for a deus ex machina to solve the whole damn thing persists. Recently, there have been more suggestions that Angela Merkel will somehow rescue Theresa May by offering Britain a new and better deal. That isn't going to happen either. Here's why.

First, back to Johnson. He argued that Germany wanted to export cars to Britain, so it would make sure that Britain and Europe had free access to each others markets no matter what. True, Britons bought 768,896 German cars in 2017, almost every fifth car Germany exported. But car exports to Britain were down by 3%, whereas exports to China and Japan were up by 11% and 14% respectively. May talks about global Britain, but Germany thinks globally, too, and in the scheme of things, Asia and the US are more important. And by the way, while British politicians were bickering about whether the country should belong to a customs union, which supposedly stops Britain from striking free trade deals with global partners, the EU signed a free trade agreement with Japan which should bring Germany export gains of €8.6bn a year.

And talking about cars, German carmakers may not be happy about the prospect of Britain crashing out of the EU on 29 March or leaving the customs union in a couple of years, but those are blips compared to their real preoccupations: the diesel crisis and the rise of self-driving and interconnected electric cars. VW's CEO Matthias Müller wants to transform Volkswagen from an automaker into a globally leading mobility provider, and other German carmakers are following suit. Just a couple of days ago, Donald Trump announced proudly that VW would be building a state-of-the-art plant for electric cars in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Not in Crewe.

VW has a European supply chain: your German engineered car might have a Polish engine, a Spanish body, Italian seats and other components from Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. European integration and just-on-time delivery is essential for VW's competition with Toyota. Selling cars to Britain isn't.

But it's about so much more than cars. Take a look at the map, and you'll see why German politicians – except for a few on the far right and the far left – are integrationists. Germany has land borders with nine countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland and Denmark – and they are all open. (Switzerland is not an EU member, but belongs to the Schengen passport-free area.) With populist parties in power or on the

rise in many of these countries, Merkels government has zero incentive to offer Britain the kind of deal-sweetener that populists could point to as proof that leaving the EU neednt be so bad after all.

Germany doesnt want to punish Britain, although there is a certain amount of schadenfreude floating about in Berlin. But the prospect of nine different border regimes subject to the whims of nationalist parties is much more frightening than anything coming out of London. It wasnt pure bleeding-heart whimsy that led Merkel to keep the borders open at the height of the refugee crisis. Trucks piling up at border crossings while factories send workers home is something no German leader wants to see on TV.

Merkel has far more existential worries than Brexit, something she has resigned herself to. Internationally, theres the rise of China, Russian military aggression in the Ukraine and cyber-attacks on Europe, the trade war with the US and Trumps isolationism and volatility. Within the EU, Merkels main ally, French president Emmanuel Macron, has been weakened, Hungarys prime minister, Viktor Orbán, is stirring up trouble, and theres an unlikely but vocal Polish-Italian axis of Brussels-bashers. At home, 2019 will see the Eurosceptic Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) challenge Merkels Christian Democrats in three regional elections and the election to the European parliament. The AfD is demanding Dexit if the EU wont devolve itself back into a loose club of free-trading nations. The chancellor is not going to help the British achieve a status that might look like the AfDs model for Europe, especially as the feeling is growing in Berlin that they need us more than we need them and that Europe can afford to wait.

And this is precisely what Merkel is saying. There is still time for negotiations, she told the Bundestags foreign affairs committee after the Commons voted down Mays deal, but its up to the prime minister to tell us how things are going to move forward. Meanwhile, her finance minister, Olaf Scholz from the Social Democrats, tweeted that a hard Brexit would be the worst option, but: We are well prepared. Brexiteers should take him at his word.

- Alan Posener, a German blogger, writes for Die Welt and Welt am Sonntag

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