When we reflect upon the current situation in the US, Germany and Israel, and review the developments of recent years, it is hard not to recall one of Bob Dylan’s early songs. *The Times They Are a-Changin’*. The US has repeatedly been involved in foreign wars: Korea, Vietnam, the fateful attack of 9/11, and military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. But at home, there was a democratic consensus.

One symbol of this consensus was Senator John McCain, who passed away in August. He is rightly remembered for his “reply to a supporter late in the 2008 campaign, who said she had heard that Barack Obama was an Arab.” “No, Ma’am,” McCain replied, “Senator Obama is a decent person.” President Donald Trump is indifferent to this form of democratic common sense, if not outright hostile to it. His political strategy is one of disruption. Trump seeks to strengthen his own hand by exacerbating political and social divisions.

His success is encouraging other politicians to follow his lead. These developments are increasingly fracturing the country’s democratic consensus and shipping away at what remains of common ground.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, West Germany became Europe’s leading industrial and economic power. This position rested upon the foundation of a stable democratic system and democratic political parties, who were staunch supporters of the liberal order. After 1990, this political and economic stability allowed West Germany to integrate the former communist East with relative ease. After reunification, Germany bolstered its reputation as a democratic force for peace. But beneath the surface, both the former East Germany and the West harbored a violent and xenophobic neo-Nazi scene.

Despite a spirit of goodwill and the mobilization of substantial financial resources, the influx of refugees in 2015 was the cause for considerable difficulty – people are never easy, especially those fleeing violence and war. In the wake of this upheaval, Germany’s political landscape began shifting. After the nationalist and populist AfD party continued to gain ground, and soon joined forces with neo-Nazi. The German model democracy is no longer as stable as it once seemed. Now more than ever, the country must mobilize a robust and confident commitment to democracy.

Israel’s new Nationality Law is wholly superfluous. Democracy is there. It is a result, calls from abroad for greater democracy in Israel have grown quiet. Germany and the US are both preoccupied, and have turned their attention inward.

The US Germany Israel

Self-Absorption

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GERMANY 2018

The Tired Republic: Reluctant to Reform

By Rafael Seligmann

Germany today has no existential fears to contend with. German society is free to bask in its self-made prosperity and indulge in fretful overreactions. No topic of debate is too small. Indeed, Germany was the only country that supported Merkel’s refugees. Germany was the most trivial of questions in an EU poll on whether daylight saving time should be abolished or not. Politicians, theologians and moralizers of all stripes are debating whether an open defense budget or a select few, but to everyone.

While time is frittered away debating trivialities and moral questions are deliberated into oblivion, important questions that will shape our future are avoided and ignored. In Germany, a nationalist provocation and aenstein that present the concerns of ordinary citizens but has so far failed to put forth either a policy platform or a charismatic leader has nonetheless managed to hoodwink millions of voters. Will the European Union survive Britain’s exit? Why are the member states unable to join forces to bring Britain back on board? Despite his occasionally erratic behavior, some of US President Donald Trump’s observations are very much on the mark – for example, his warning that Europe and especially Germany have long been shortchanging the support of poor and developing countries is commendable, Europe must nonetheless boost its defense capabilities. Germany, too, will need to significantly increase its defense budget.

Also, the awareness of citizens, and particularly the younger generation, needs to be raised. One year of compulsory military or national service for young people would help foster the appreciation of the needs of society and the community. The General Secretary of the Christian Democratic Party, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, floated this idea in August, but her proposal was dismissed as little more than a filler story for the slow news season.

Self-righteous lethargy

By contrast, the EU was unified in its condemnation of President Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. Likewise, Europe has spoken with one voice in its support of the International Atomic Energy Report that found Tehran continuing to comply with the nuclear deal. At the same time, however, Iran continues to develop its nuclear-capable ballistic missile program, acquire regional dominance over states such as Iraq and Lebanon, provide military support to the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in his total war against his own people, exacerbate the civil war in Yemen and persist in its outrageous threats of annihilation against Israel – whose security Chancellor Angela Merkel has said is part of Germany’s reason of state. Nonetheless, all of this is ignored in favor of what is being called “peace”.

In the fall of 2018, Germany is a fool’s paradise – mired in a kind of self-righteous lethargy. This desire to preserve the status quo, however, threatens to devolve into political inertia. After all, even the very meekest cannot be at peace if his ill neighbor will not let him rest. History has shown that such “ill neighbors” will always be with us. Many would prefer to ignore the lessons of history. But present circumstances offer ample proof that peaceful intentions do not always prevent aggression.

In Syria, some half a million people – among them hundreds of children – have been killed in Assad’s war of annihilation. Half of Syria’s population has been forced to flee their homes. The world’s democracies, including Germany, watched from a safe distance and provided humanitarian aid.

Remember the 1930s

Then, in 2015, Germany did not open its doors to 1.2 million refugees. Rather, it rejected asylum applications and intensified deportations. Germany, Europe, and all the countries of the Middle East could indeed benefit from a viable nuclear deal with Iran. But the prerequisite for such a deal is that Iran must acknowledge the right of all states to self-determination against Israel – whose security Germany was the only country that supported. Germany was the only opinion that matters. The European Union is a select few, but to everyone.

GERMANY’S TROUBLED EAST

The Dwindling Power of the 1989 Freedom Ideals

By Frank Bernbeck

In the September 2017 German federal election, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) became the strongest party in the eastern state of Saxony. This is a showing the far-right populists hope to repeat in next year’s state parliamentary election. The AfD is currently polling just behind the Christian Democrats. But why is that? In eastern Germany, many people feel that they are not being heard or understood – a sentiment that continues to strengthen the hand of the AfD. In the wake of the violent right-wing riots in Chemnitz, the residents of Chemnitz are now claiming that their town is being maligned as a “hotbed” of mob violence against foreigners. It would be tempting to simply blame the “ungrateful East Germans.” After all, it is the former East that continues to blur the boundaries between the so-called “besigerte Bürger” – or “worried citizens” – and far-right extremists. But if we wish to prevent further erosion of democratic parties and norms, we must seek to reach those who are not – or not yet – radicalized.

Economic anxieties

Many people in eastern Germany share a sentiment that is common in eastern European countries. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, many believed that they had finally found a home in the West. But by the start of the refugee crisis, if not before, some Germans in the former east felt that their home no longer belonged to them. Like a lot of Eastern European states, eastern Germans tend to be deeply skeptical of refugees, who they believe are stealing their share of the pie – a pie that they have acquired themselves only recently. Along with these economic anxieties, many in eastern Germany feel unjustly stigmatized by their fellow citizens in the West for their criticism of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s refugee policy.

To prevent further erosion of democratic parties and norms, we must seek to reach those who are not – or not yet – radicalized.

In many once fought so hard to achieve, memories of civil disobedience are being revived for a new purpose. After all, if East Germany once succeeded in overthrowing the hated regime, why not again? Others are propagating arcane theories of the “right to resist” and overthrow tyranny – as though Chancellor Angela Merkel were a dictator and not a freely-elected head of government.

The AfD and the Pegida movement may once have been motivated by criticism of Germany’s policy on refugees. Today, however, they are betraying the ideology that the population has been forced to support. The revolutions of 1989. Democracy does not mean that yours is the only opinion that matters. The slogan of the 1989 East German democratic uprising – “We are the people” – applies not only to a select few, but to everyone.
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Better an Imperfect Deal than No Deal at All
Foreign Minister on Israel’s security, the treaty with Iran and Germany’s responsibility

What has happened to Germany’s model democrats? They seem to be running scared of right-wing extremists, or throwing up their hands in resignation. And worst of all, some are even marching along the way...

For far too long, many people have been lulled into complacency, believing that Germany does not have any problems with racism or anti-Semitism to speak of. Thanks to social media and networks, we are now seeing the sad truth. This reality has long been ignored, largely because the debate within Germany has been dominated by purely economic issues in recent years. But now we have realized that we must urgently begin attending to the values that define us, and that have brought us a good life here in Germany. Freedom, democracy and the rule of law must not be taken for granted. We must make them our joint project, and stand up for them.

You want people to get up off their sofas, and get loud. What exactly do you mean by that?

We can all help in some way. We often encounter racism and anti-Semitism during our everyday lives – at home, at work, on the subway, on the soccer pitch. Then it is up to us. Either we pretend we didn’t hear what was said, and look away. Or we speak up. In many cases, even asking “why would you say such a thing?” is enough to signal disagreement. We must all be willing to take a stand against xenophobia and anti-Semitism. It’s not that hard.

When you visited Auschwitz in August, you said that we will need to choose between resignation, hopelessness, or drawling to take a stand against xenophobia and anti-Semitism. It’s not that hard.

Populism is on the rise worldwide – in the Philippines, Russia, the US, Turkey, Hungary. Why are we calling it populism, rather than nationalist egotism, chauvinism, or excessive nationalism...?

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Philippines, Russia, the US, Turkey, Hungary...?

Populism is a form of nationality – one that seeks to promote isolation and exclusion. It’s the opposite of what we must do in order to meet the challenges of our time. We will not be able to solve our problems alone - and that includes economic and social problems, as well as problems related to climate, security and migration policy. No country in Europe, be it large or small, will be able to solve these problems on their own. We can only do it together. That is why we need the opposite of populism and nationalism. We need international cooperation and shared rules and norms that we all adhere to.

You’ve called for a “balanced partnership” between Europe and the US. What are the central pillars of that partnership?

First of all, we must assume greater responsibility here, in Europe. That’s the only way we will succeed in preserving our own interests and values in those areas where President Trump has departed from our shared path and left a vacuum. We will have to join forces to succeed. Our response to “America first” must be “Europe united.”

What do you see as the future of the German-Israeli relationship?

The German-Israeli relationship will always be a very special one – when it comes to our international relationships, this one is unique. Even apart from our own history, one thing is very clear: the security and existence of Israel will always be part of Germany’s reason of state.

I am concerned and worried about the fact that a deal was reached with Iran in 2015 that is purely technical in nature. Would it not have been incumbent upon Germany, which has a special relationship to Israel, to say that we want the agreement to incorporate a statement affirming that every state in the region, including Israel, has a right to exist? Given that the US has withdrawn from the deal, could Germany not take up this issue again?

What we must remember is that these negotiations were being held to contain the looming threat of an acute nuclear crisis. The German government believed that preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power would increase not only our own security, but the security of Israel. That is why we decided to support the deal.

Under the current circumstances, wouldn’t it be best for us to insist on an affirmation of the right to exist? The German government acknowledges Israel’s right to exist in every interaction it has with Iran, at every level. It would be neither honest nor sincere for us to do something knowing full well that, given the current situation, there is no chance that we will succeed. Right now, our concern is whether this nuclear deal has a future at all. In the wake of the US withdrawal, we must ensure that Iran continues to abide by the agreement and prevent a possible nuclear escalation.

How can someone who is as aware of history and the past as you are be willing to allow a state to continue to publicly and without shame call the ‘existence of the State of Israel? An exception has been made, but it is an unhuman and politically dangerous one...

I cannot and will not reverse the decision that has been made. I’m more concerned about the potential for further escalation should this deal fail. The deal is not perfect, but we must do everything in our power to prevent such a dramatic escalation.

But Iran is waging a campaign of conquest and intimidation throughout the region... Together with France and Britain, we are devoting a great deal of attention to this topic, also because of the role Iran is playing in Syria and in Yemen. The same holds for Iran’s ballistic missile program, which is extremely problematic.

In the past, Iran and the Jewish state always had a good relationship. We have no common borders and no refugee problem. For Tehran, this is only a vehicle to gain power and esteem within the Islamic world. I believe that global pressure could bring Iran to the point where it would be willing to affirm the existence of all states. Honestly – even if we were to discuss this issue, how realistic is it that we could reach such an agreement under the current circumstances?

So it all looks quite bleak...

I hope that’s not the case. We also believe that what Iran is doing is unacceptable, both in Syria and with respect to its missile program. But let’s say Iran succeeded in developing a nuclear program with military capabilities – that would be a far greater escalation than anything we are witnessing now. A deal that gets Iran to agree to shelve its nuclear ambitions, at least for now, is better than no deal. An imperfect deal is better than no deal at all.

Heiko Maas talked to JVG editors Elisabeth Neu and Rafael Seligmann at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin
The greater the connections, the smaller the world.
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Rise up? We Must Dare to Disagree!
The CDU General Secretary issues a call to political leaders and committed democrats

By Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer

Our republic is in turmoil. Hatred and incitement are not confined to social media.

On the streets, we are witnessing incidents of incitement and abuse against people who are members of certain groups. Jewish restaurants are being vandalized, and Jews are being attacked. We are watching people performing the Nazi salute, hearing calls to violence and slogans reminiscent of the darkest moments of our history. Police officers are being attacked and our parliamentary inboxes are being flooded with mails and messages railing with violent fantasies. Anti-Semitism and xenophobia have found their way directly into the German Bundestag and other parliamentary bodies. All of this — and much more — is repulsive, offensive, and ignorant of the lessons of history. And all of this is quite rightly arousing indignation, refusal and resistance. We are hearing from all corners that it is time to take a stand. People calling for halting, calling foul, demanding that the offenders leave the field — signals that xenophobia and anti-Semitism have no place in Germany. So far, so good. Who would disagree?

Entrusted with a mandate

There is no question: a free society based on the values of responsibility, respect and civil society in our public interactions cannot remain silent and indifferent in the face of such desecration of our shared values. But I still listen with doubt whether such calls for civic resistance are an adequate response. Particularly when they are made in such a paternalistic and moralizing way. Here, I am also thinking of the demand that citizens should “get out of their comfort zones.” Is this really all that political leadership has to offer us? After all, these calls calling for halting, calling foul, demanding that the offenders leave the field — signals that xenophobia and anti-Semitism have no place in Germany. So far, so good. Who would disagree?

What is at stake is not simply our ideals of respectable and civil discourse and behavior; we must also ensure that our criminal justice system takes a very clear stand. A state that operates according to the principles of the rule of law must set limits and enforce them with vigor and impartiality.

To do that, however, we must assign adequate personnel and legal resources to the problem. Why, for example, do we not send additional public prosecutors to monitor certain demonstrations and rallies so that they can identify criminal activities as they are taking place, and initiate an appropriate police response? Such a direct and visible response on the part of our democratic state and its legal institutions would also help reassure our citizens that the state is willing and able to take action. But this also means that political leaders must ensure that our security forces are provided with the resources, staff, and equipment they need. We must allow our leaders to issue an appeal to civil society — and then fail to support our police forces and other institutions charged with maintaining security and the rule of law. The overriding principle is clear: any criminal offence will be met with a clear, unequivocal and firm response by the state and its legal authorities. And to be completely clear: this applies irrespective of the motives and the identity of the offender.

Target of defamation

Secondly, our political leaders must ensure that we cultivate and value the process of open, democratic debate. We must be able to tolerate differences of opinion and respectfully engage with people who do not agree with us. We must maintain civil discourse. And we must understand that compromise is essential to the maintenance of democracy in a free and open society. Democratic debate in Germany is foundering. The loudest voices today are the extremists, the dogmatists, the simplifiers: everyone in the state of Saxony is a Nazi, all asylum-seekers are criminals; anyone who speaks out against left-wing extremism is by definition an adherent of the far-right; anyone who does not repudiate all military interventions must be defined as a war-monger. Anyone who dissent or has a different opinion becomes the target of defamation or ridicule. Numerous opinions are drowned out. Only the most simplistic and dogmatic opinions are heard. This has created a culture of debate in which hate, incitement, fundamentalism and extremism can flourish — on all ends of the political spectrum. Anyone who believes hate can be fought with hate has already lost, has already ceded the terms of the debate.

What can we do? It is clear: We must stop allowing ourselves to be drawn into this spiral of outrage. Democratic debate must be more than simply proclamations of outrage and indignation; it is like a soft, warm blanket that allows me to withdraw into my safe, comfortable world view. Democratic debate forces me out of my comfort zone. Engaging with those who disagree with us is not always easy. But democratic debate requires that we address the questions and dilemmas of our day together. Democratic debate cannot be a one-way street.

Fact over emotion

The democratic center, its political leadership and institutions, must take up the mantle of responsibility. We are the ones who must lead by example. And that means valuing fact over emotion, and valuing nuance and complexity over simplistic slogans.

It means showing respect for those who disagree with us, rather than shouting them down and defaming them. And sometimes it means taking the time to think and reflect. I refuse to lose faith in the importance of robust public debate.

Democracy cannot function without it.

I have immense respect for everyone in this country who is willing to take a stand, who is taking a stand, who is taking to the streets in opposition to hate and incitement. They deserve our support — whether it be in the protest against right-wing extremism, the fight against anti-Semitism or homophobia, or the fight against left-wing extremism.
Stalemate or forward thinking?
Starting a family? Building a house? Or beginning a business?
You need courage to do any of these. We support curious people like you reliably, knowledgeably and with financial backbone. Still going strong after 128 years.
By Rafael Seligmann

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Forty-five years ago, on Yom Kippur at 2pm, the armies of Syria and Egypt simultaneously attacked Israeli positions at the Suez Canal and in the Golan Heights. It was the beginning of the Yom Kippur (or October) War. With the exception of the 1948-49 Israeli War of Independence, it would be the costliest armed conflict for Israel in its history. Some three thousand Israeli soldiers were killed in three weeks of fighting. Several thousand became prisoners of war, many of whom were abused or tortured. Some did not survive. As a percentage of the total population, four times as many Israelis fell in October 1973 than Americans did during the entire Vietnam War. Consequently, Israel's chief of staff David Elazar, military intelligence chief Eli Zeira, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and, finally, Prime Minister Golda Meir all resigned. The conflict became a national trauma from which Israeli society has yet to recover.

Understanding the impact of a war does not mean reconstructing battles with tin soldiers, topographical models or – today – computer animation, but analyzing the conflict's political and strategic significance. With his brilliant work On War, the Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) left us an array of instruments to analyze wars that remains sound even today. Clausewitz's philosophy is encapsulated in his assertion that "war is the mere continuation of politics by other means." Perhaps no other sentence is distorted or, especially, misunderstood at the political and strategic level as this one. With it, Clausewitz clearly establishes and repeatedly underscores the primacy of politics. This means that the outcome of the fighting, or the victory on the battlefield, is secondary. What matters more is what makes of military events. In the October War, no one grasped and vigorously exploited the political dimension of the fighting better than Egypt's president Anwar el-Sadat. The Israeli side did not have this deep sense of politics and strategy. This is all the more astonishing given that the Israeli chief of staff was Moshe Dayan, who was recognized around the world as an outstanding commander and shrewd politician. Yet before and during the war, Dayan and his government leader Golda Meir committed grave errors, both in judgment and decision. As a result, despite its military successes, Israel lost the war politically. And although his armies were defeated, Sadat won.

Misjudgments and arrogance

The Arab governments refused to accept defeat. Egypt began a campaign of attrition at the Suez Canal. The casualties Israel suffered from Egyptian shelling were unimportant in the long term. Israel therefore agreed to a truce on the basis of the status quo. The Israelis kept their side of the deal even after Egypt deployed its Soviet-made anti-aircraft systems the following night directly along the Canal. That effectively neutralized Israel's strongest weapon, its air force – because Israel wanted to avoid fresh casualties under any circumstances.

When Sadat, who became Egyptian president in 1970, offered Israel peace talks under the condition that it evacuate the Sinai Peninsula, the Israeli side refused. Israel kept this stance all through the following years, whilst Egypt and Syria rebuilt and modernized their armed forces with Moscow's help.

In early October 1973, Israeli intelligence reported that the Egyptian and Syrian armies were ready for war. Elazar, the Israeli chief of staff, clamored to mobilize the army. Yet Defense Minister Dayan dismissed the demand as unnecessary. Military intelligence chief Eli Zeira likewise saw little danger of war, pointing out that Israel's armed forces or IDF far outnumbered their Arab enemies. When Elazar insisted on reinforcing the troops at Suez and on the Golan Heights on the basis of intelligence reports, Dayan finally consented in a remarkable manner: Two hundred IDF tanks were to face 2,000 Syrian tanks. In the south, where 200,000 Egyptian troops and more than 2,000 Egyptian tanks stood poised to invade the Israeli-occupied east bank of the Suez Canal, Dayan authorized the deployment of 190 Israeli tanks. These IDF forces would suffice to deter the Arab armies and political leaders from attacking, Dayan believed, citing his victories in the 1961 Sinai War.

Dayan's decision was suffused with arrogance, perhaps even megalomania. He was certain that a modest amount of Israeli armor was enough to hold back an enemy with a ten-fold superiority in numbers. Dayan also counted on the Israeli Air Force as the ace up his sleeve. But Dayan's assessment was more than hubristic. His analysis was superficial strategically and, what is worse, ill considered. Along the 160 kilometers of the Suez Canal, Israel maintained only 12 bunker complexes manned by 1,000 troops in total. Even the most upbeat Israeli generals doubted that these would suffice to hold...
out against a direct attack by 100,000 Egyptian infantry supported by masses of artillery. The former commander in chief of the south front, Ariel Sharon, a proven commander during the Six Day War, considered the strategy of holding the Canal’s east bank with a handful of strong points “dangerous nonsense.” The inferior Israeli bunkers suffered at most for enemy observation. Sharon said, adding that they would never withstand an Egyptian attack. He recommended a more flexible approach instead. The IDF should pull back about 30 kilometers from the Canal to the Sinai mountains at the Mitla and Gidi Passes and await the Egyptians from secure positions there. Dayan agreed with his view from a military standpoint, but considered the flexible strategy politically unacceptable. For as soon as Israel withdrew from the Canal’s east bank, he was sure the Egyptians would occupy it and, from this advanced position, draw Israel into a conflict of pinpricks. Hence, the IDF had to hold out at the east bank for political reasons. The Israeli forces at the waterway were certainly outnumbered, but the IDF also counted on its greatly effective air force, which had determined the 1967 Six Day War.

Repeated warnings

During the night of October 6, military intelligence received direct information that Syrian and Egyptian forces would simultaneously attack Israeli positions the following day. In an emergency meeting at first light, chief of staff Elazar demanded authorization for a preemptive strike by the Israeli Air Force against the poised enemy positions. Prime Minister Meir and Defense Minister Dayan rejected the demand — Meir because she foresaw that Israel would need US support in any future war. Dayan, on the other hand, was sure that Israel’s highly modern air force would inflict such high casualties on the advancing Syrian and Egyptian armies that these would then be engaged and thrown back by Israel’s battle-ready ground forces. Despite repeated warnings from his chief of staff, Dayan did not budge from this position.

Darkest hour

On October 6 at 2pm, following a heavy artillery bombardment, 100,000 Egyptian infantry crossed the Canal in several waves. They soon overran the Israeli positions, with most of the Egyptian forces bypassing them to strike deeper into the Israeli rear. The Israeli armored units struck out at the invaders, but these were armed with anti-tank rockets. Within hours, the Israeli armor was knocked out. And the Israeli Air Force? The military branch Dayan considered his trump card was largely neutralized by the Soviet-built SAM-2 and SAM-3 antiaircraft missiles of the Egyptian army. Behind the shield of the advancing Egyptian infantry, engineers built pontoon bridges that soon allowed thousands of tanks and artillery pieces to cross to the Canal’s east bank. With this superior force, Egypt consolidated its position on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula.

Meanwhile, the Syrian army under the orders of President Hafez al-Assad attacked Israeli positions in the Golan. Syrian armor advanced following heavy artillery shelling. The Israeli armored units were too small to stop a Syrian force ten times their size. Israeli warplanes took heavy losses to prevent a Syrian breakthrough. After heavy fighting, Syrian paratroopers managed to occupy the Israeli positions on Mount Hermon. Syrian tanks in the Golan Heights attacked in the south, towards the Israeli Sea of Galilee, some 2,000 meters below them. During the night, Syrian armor broke through the Israeli front. Israel’s north lay open to the invaders. Dayan, having ignored earlier warnings, panicked. He declared this was the looming destruction of the “Third Temple,” meaning the modern state of Israel.

In this darkest hour, strong personalities rescued Israel from disaster. Prime Minister Meir recalled General Haim Bar Lev from retirement to command the southern front. The armored reserve was entrusted to the likewise reactivated Ariel Sharon, so that Elazar could finally send the IDF back on the offensive with a fighting spirit. For days Sharon searched for the Egyptian army’s weak point.

I wish all our Jewish citizens here in Germany and their friends and family across the world a happy and peaceful new year: Shana Tova!

Peter Altmaier
Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy
GERMAN BANK CRISIS

Reasons for Decline and a Way Out

No longer a big player on the global market

Von Michael Balk

What’s going on with Germany’s big banks? Ten years after the global financial crisis the country’s two leading lenders are in worse shape than ever. On the international stage, in their profitability and market valuation, Deutsche Bank and Commerzbank now play only a marginal role. Chaos in management and strategy, incessant scandals, nosediving share prices and, even the exit from Germany’s blue chip index have accompanied the former heavyweights’ downfall.

While Germany’s economy keeps growing at a healthy clip and the country remains Europe’s political and economic locomotive, its banks – i.e. the backbone of the economy – are caught lagging behind. As a European banking market slowly takes shape and the EU moves ahead with plans for a banking union, the German players watch from the sidelines, too preoccupied with their own problems.

Return to tried and tested strategies

Policy makers in Berlin worry that the two banks will become mere pawns in the looming consolidation of Europe’s banking sector instead of helping shape the transformations. A brief look at the German, French and Spanish lenders. Both France’s and Germany’s two leading lenders are in a strategic trap: Investment banking, which once guaranteed high profits, no longer works. And in retail and corporate banking, Deutsche does not have the necessary size.

Germany’s other big private sector bank offers a similarly bleak picture. Commerzbank had to be rescued from oblivion with billions of taxpayer euros in late 2008. Its takeover of Dresdner Bank shortly before Lehman Bros collapsed proved disastrous for Commerzbank. Several subsequent changes in strategy have since cost the bank its very identity. Breuer and Josef Ackermann failed to rein the investment bankers in. Tasked with rolling out a new business plan, Deutsche Bank’s former chief executive tandem of Jürgen Fitschen and Anshu Jain, installed by still-serving supervisory board chair Paul Achleitner, could not implement a new culture at the lender.

Frankfurt is Germany’s financial hub

A shoe that does not fit

In 2015, despite the bank posting billions in losses, it also paid out 2.4 billion euros in bonuses. Billions more in write-offs and massive legal costs for its scandals followed. Deutsche Bank is an illuminating case study of what happens when a company hurriedly adopts an Anglo-Saxon business model that does not lie only in the 2008 financial crisis. They were primarily homemade: mismanagement, chaos at the top, loss of trust. For Deutsche Bank things began to sour when Germany’s then-flagship lender joined the free-for-all adventure of investment banking. With the takeover of US investment bank Bankers Trust, then considered the bad boy of Wall Street, the heretofore antiquated Deutsche-bankers set themselves a challenge they would not rise to. Two worlds collided in the process: another small bank, once Germany’s second largest bank, is history.

Margins. France’s five biggest banks, including BNP Paribas, Société Générale and Crédit Agricole, account for over 80 percent of the domestic market there. Germany’s top three manage barely fifteen percent. The relatively profitable and stable retail market is firmly in the hands of state-affiliated savings and loan banks (Sparkassen) as well as cooperative Volks- and Raiffeisenbanken. Sparkassen alone take 40 percent of the domestic market.

Also, Germany is 'over-banked.' There is a branch for every 2,500 citizens. In Sweden that figure is 5,000, and in the UK even 6,000. That keeps costs high and binds capital that would otherwise go toward investment such as foreign expansion or digitization.

Both German big banks share a fear of being taken over from abroad. Switzerland’s UBS is reportedly interested in Deutsche, while BNP Paribas and Italy’s UniCredit are believed to have Commerzbank in their sights. The fates of Germany’s two big banks are not yet clear. Over the medium term a merger is very possible. A ‘Deutscher Commerzbank’ would be number three on the European market while fulfilling the wish for a German national champion. Yet a foreign takeover, including a hostile one, cannot be ruled out given the lenders depressed share values.

For the historian Abelshaufer there is only one way forward for Germany’s export-based economy: back to the roots, i.e. back to the business of financing corporations that leave their mark internationally.

Michael Balk is head of the business section of the daily Frankfurter Neue Presse

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**ECONOMY**

**CLOSE FRIENDS?**

**Economic Power – Political Weakness**

The EU must step up cohesion of its economic area to compete with the US

By Klaus D. Oehler

**Garage Gold – A Safe Investment?**

In the wake of the global finance crisis, fine art and especially vintage cars have seen a remarkable increase in value – up to five or even ten percent per year. This comes as no surprise given that the market for artwork and vintage cars is governed by a highly limited and finite supply coupled with virtually unlimited capital availability. In addition to the investment aspect, many such investors tend to be vintage car enthusiasts or even hobbyists. This element also helps explain why this very interesting asset class can be unpredictable and difficult to assess. A vintage Aston Martin, Bugatti or Ferrari is generally regarded as a very secure investment. These brands enjoy legendary prestige, and prices for vintage sports cars have risen steadily over the last three decades. However, many vintage cars are not secure investments. These include many pre-war vintage cars as well as the vintage Ford Mustang. At the major classic and vintage car auctions, such vehicles usually sell for well below their purchase price, if they sell at all. Investors who choose unwisely or base their purchases on faulty market projections are liable to incur a significant loss.

**THE SPUDY COLUMN**

**US Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross**

**Jens Spudy is executive partner of Spudy Family Office**
A PERSONAL APPEAL

Britain Must Stay in Europe

By Elisabeth Neu

The tea is piping hot and strong, the cucumber sandwiches are delicious, the lawn green and rolling. A perfect English late summer afternoon. But the mood is sombre. Like Belfast morning drizzle. “This is a nightmare. I voted out – but I am beginning to think that was a huge mistake,” muses Bob, a retired policeman.

“We were misled. Right now, it does not look like the promises of ‘Leave to Take Control’ will ever come true. Quite the contrary. We should not have listened to these charlatans.”

Claire, who runs the admission department in a private school in Cambridge, makes sure “to get as many international kids in as we can – to keep up the cosmopolitan atmosphere that was always our school’s trade mark.” And indeed that of Britain! Brexit itself has always been our school’s trade mark.”

But then things will look up again. And not a clever move but there you are.” Is George, the cab driver. “Perhaps that was the list of withdrawn financial capital, non-valid driving licenses, a stop to the flow of goods and work, and so on ... here we have the issue with the border to the Irish Republic. In Northern Ireland, where 56% voted ‘Remain’, this makes people uneasy. What will happen to the peace between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, which is only two decades young and by no means as stable as it might appear?

The recent assessment of a senior police officer in the Sunday Times that the forces are working 24/7 just to keep a lid on things is less than assuring. Will the old conflict, the old violence and hatred return? Back to London. As a financial hub, the city is especially dependent on close ties with Europe. Here, the fear of a hard Brexit is especially great. Hence Mayor Sadiq Khan cooked up the idea of a second referendum. He is not the only one. And he is not the only one who says “that this is not the only re-run of the referendum but the British people having a say for the first time on the outcome.” Bingo, Mr. Khan. Let’s give the Bobs and grandmas and grandpas and Georges a moment to re-think. And another vote to all those who were against Brexit in the first run: all the Claires and Michaels, the Olivers and Ingrids. All those who want to Remain.

And, above all, we are running out of time. A couple of months are a long time for child on a summer holiday. But a short time for grown ups in difficult negotiations. Hard Brexit, No Deal, Chequers Plan, Soft Brexit, Norwegian Model ... Stop the muscle flexing. Stop drawing up one emergency plan after another. Stop the nightmare. Use common sense. All sides – Deal!

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Unless otherwise stated, all information, descriptions and explanations are dated 22 June 2018.
**LACK OF ALTERNATIVES**

**Generation Bibi**

Young Israelis trust Netanyahu despite his shortcomings

By Sarah Fantl

J

erusalem – we humans are creatures of habit. We tend to be wary of the unknown. And embarking on something new requires courage, strength and faith. When it comes to trying a new café or experimenting with an unfamiliar recipe, we'll take that risk every now and then. The decision to end a relationship, though, requires a great deal more thought. And when it comes to electing a new prime minister, the plunge into the unknown is even more daunting. But this is precisely the problem Israel will soon find itself confronted with. Elections are slated for November 2019 – but may well be called even earlier.

The unknown is something that is especially feared by the “Bibi generation” – those Israelis who have little or no memory of any political leader before Benjamin Netanyahu, who was first elected Prime Minister in 1996, nine years before German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived on the scene.

Michael Cohen, a 23-year-old from Jerusalem, is part of this generation: “Bibi is a patriot. He knows this country, knows what needs to be done, and protects it.” And what about Netanyahu’s scandals? “If you’re prime minister, there will always be some who want to destroy you. If he did accept bribes, that’s not good. But it doesn’t affect Israel itself. His biggest flaw is his wife. He’s still the right man for the job though. In any case, who else could do it?”

No experiments

Such sentiments are common in the Jewish state, which lives under a permanent state of threat. Netanyahu is known for staking out bold positions, particularly in the area of foreign policy. Israel is now the strongest and most secure country in the Middle East, which is also a testament to Netanyahu’s leadership. Despite some domestic political difficulties, Israel is in a solid position. It boasts one of the world’s most vibrant start-up scenes. Bibi is a canny politician – he is charming, also willing to demonstrate strength and to protect Israel. With some interruptions, he has served his country for more than twenty years. So why should Israel risk a leap into the unknown – one which might even end in disaster?

Anna Avezova is a 36-year-old who made aliya from her native Germany five years ago. She also supports the reigning Prime Minister: “I can’t imagine anyone else in office. He knows how to lead this very complex country. That alone would be quite a lot to live up to. And as far as his scandals are concerned: who is completely free of scandal? Everyone has something to hide.” But the question remains – does the Bibi generation truly back the nearly 70-year-old charismatic statesman or do they simply see no viable alternative?

But perhaps there’s a simpler explanation: people can get used to almost anything. We grow familiar with the nooks and crannies of our homes, to the nation: people can get used to almost anything. We grow familiar with the kitchen, in the dark, half asleep. We grow used to our partner’s quirks and eccentricities and accept them, because the good outweighs the bad. Or perhaps because we are simply too lazy or fearful to leave and look for someone new. A leap into the unknown is a daunting and draining task. In the end, we may well find ourselves left with nothing but regrets and the wish that we could turn back the clock. And who among us doesn’t have all sorts of other things to worry about? So we stick with what we know. We choose Bibi, so at least we know what we’re getting. He might not be perfect – but who is?

45 Years Yom Kippur War

On the tenth day he discovered a gap between the Egyptian 2nd and 3rd Armies, and promptly attacked with his armor. Despite the encirclement of the Egyptian 3rd Army and the invasion of Africa, the Egyptian leadership became caught up in confusion, resignation and panic. The general staff wanted to pull all forces back to defend the capital Cairo. But, like his Israeli rival Golda Meir, President Sadat kept his nerve. He turned his attention from the units that were cut off in Suez and concentrated instead completely on the political field. In US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Sadat found a sympathetic partner to work toward a new peacetime order. The Egyptian’s efforts paid off because he believed the military was only a means toward a political end. Israel, on the other hand, suffered a long-term political defeat and heavy loss of life despite its victories on the battlefields.

**Foundations for peace**

Today Israel’s government is more careful. It resolutely strikes at Iran’s units and hardware in Syria. But against Russia’s modern weaponry, Israel is powerless. Hence, Benjamin Netanyahu tries to maintain cordial relations with Vladimir Putin. Yet Israel relies first and foremost on the United States, despite an erratic Donald Trump. The US has been Israel’s foremost partner – and foremost on the United

...
Hope in Auschwitz
The duty to counteract evil

By Rafael Seligmann

For many years, I was reluctant to visit the former death camp of Auschwitz. I was of course familiar with its historical background. In an isolated area of Eastern Poland, Nazi Germany established a labor camp, which was expanded by the establishment of a death camp the following year. More than a million people were killed there. Among the victims were my aunt Jente Hammersfeld, her husband Jechiel, and their children. I knew I would find a visit to the former death camp difficult to bear.

Heiko Maas has often said that it was Auschwitz that inspired him to go into politics, a sentiment with which I felt an immediate affinity. We all have to do our part to ensure that such a crime against humanity will never be repeated. The desire to kill is part of our human inheritance. The Bible tells of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel. “Thou shalt not kill” is one of the most important biblical commandments. And yet, it happens all the time and everywhere. In Greek mythology, Oedipus kills his own father. But the knowledge that murder, manslaughter, violence and war will always be with us must not lead to resignation. Those who seek to prevent it are worthy of our respect.

When I received an invitation to accompany Foreign Minister Maas on his visit to Auschwitz in late summer, I accepted it immediately, despite my deep misgivings. I traveled on a German military aircraft decorated with the Iron Cross of the Bundeswehr to Krakow. From there, I continued onward to Auschwitz, traveling on an air-conditioned bus. The journey was an unsettling experience. My thoughts turned to 75 years ago, and my aunt Jente and her family. How long were they forced to remain inside the cattle cars before they arrived at the ramps at Auschwitz, where Joseph Mengele or one of his fellow officers sent them to the gas chambers? What fears were they forced to endure? What forms of humiliation? The parents, the children, and countless other people.

In his memoirs, written from prison in 1946 and 1947, the commandant of Auschwitz Rudolf Höss described how two children entered the gas chamber, lost in play, suspecting nothing. Their mother asked Höss: “How can you bring yourself to kill such beautiful children? Have you no heart at all?” But most of the victims, as we know, died without a word and petrified.

Heiko Maas was guided through the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp by 92-year-old Auschwitz survivor Marian Turski, and listened to his account. At such a moment, every visitor is reduced to silence. But silence is not an option for a politician, who knows he is expected to make a statement. “I stood in the gas chamber … saw thousands of children’s shoes that were taken off on their way to the gas chamber, tons of human hair that was taken from people. … This is the most horrific place on Earth. It is a place where you must make a choice: either you lose faith in humanity. Or you find the hope and strength to stand up for the protection of human dignity.” Maas closed with the following words: “We need this place, because our responsibility will never end.” Visiting Auschwitz was the right choice. The Shoah was unique. But crimes are happening all the time, everywhere. We must not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by horror and succumb to resignation. It is our duty to confront evil wherever we find it.

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**Rediscovery**

**Face to Face with the New Woman**

Frankfurt’s Staedel Museum presents a solo exhibition of Lotte Laserstein

By Hartmut Bonhoff

Lotte Laserstein was a forceful and determined lady who told me frankly at the age of 11 that she would never marry, but devote her life to painting,” remembered Gertrud “Traute” Rose in her obituary of the artist. Said and done: Laserstein, who began “painting properly” when she was about nine, was one of the first women to study art at the Berlin Academy and embarked upon a bright career in Weimar Germany.

Born in Preussisch Holland, a small town in Eastern Prussia, in 1898, Lotte Laserstein was the eldest daughter of pharmacist Hugo Laserstein and her wife Meta, née Birmbaum, a piano teacher. After the early death of her father, her mother moved with her and her sister Käthe to their widowed grandmother in Danzig. Being from a bourgeois Jewish family, Lotte later remarked she was raised with “no religion.” Ten years old, she received her first drawing lessons from her aunt Elsa Birmbaum, who ran a private painting school. In 1912, the family moved to Berlin where Laserstein enrolled at Berlin’s Friedrich Wilhelm University, to study Philosophy and History of Art. From 1912 to 1917, she attended the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts where she was one of the first women to complete her master studies.

A brilliant talent

She soon succeeded in building a reputation with her sober neo-realistic style and immaculate technique. Art pages and critics acclaimed her as a “brilliant talent.” During Germany’s runaway inflation, she took a variety of odd jobs, including reducing oriental rug patterns for a carpet manufacturer, decorating china, and illustrating a massive anatomical textbook. The painter’s predominant theme was people, focusing on representations of the so-called “New Woman”; the female nude was one of her principal subjects. Her tennis coach Gertrud “Traute” Rose became Laserstein’s favorite model and lifelong friend. She features in many works: “Traute, being a natural athlete, was superb at holding long and difficult poses.”

From 1928 to 1931, Lotte Laserstein participated in 22 exhibitions and performed well in various competitions. In the course of the Prussian Academy of Arts’ spring exhibition in 1928, she sold her painting In the Tavern to the Berlin City Council. That same year, Laserstein participated in the competition “The Most Beautiful German Portrait of a Woman” organized by the cosmetics company Elida in cooperation with the Reich Association of Visual Artists. Out of the 360 works submitted, her painting Russian Girl with Compact, now in the collection of the Städel Museum, was nominated for the final round and exhibited together with twenty-five works by almost exclusively male artists in the prestigious gallery of Fritz Gurlitt in Berlin, where Laserstein’s first solo exhibition also took place in 1931.

After the National Socialists seized power, Laserstein’s nascent career ended abruptly. She was declared a “three-quarters Jew” and no longer able to exhibit. Her painting In the Tavern was confiscated as “degenerate art.” Dismissed from the board of the Association of Berlin Women Artists, she could present her works only within the frameworks of the Kulturkammern. She was accompanied on her journeys by her lifelong friend and former art teacher Elsa Birnbaum. Laserstein's masterpiece Evening over Potsdam was acquired by Berlin in 1937 on works from the collection of the museum, which in the past few years was successful in acquiring important works by the artist. With approximately forty paintings and drawings, the exhibition focuses on Laserstein’s artistic development. Emphasis is placed on works from the 1920s and 30s, which mark the peak of her artistic activity.

Sobriety and psychological depth

Laserstein’s oeuvre is one of the great recent art historical rediscoveries, featuring sensitive and compelling portraits from the final years of the Weimar Republic. This fall, the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main presents the artist’s first solo exhibition in Germany outside of Berlin. “Lotte Laserstein. Face to Face” builds upon works from the 1920s and 30s, which Laserstein’s work remained virtually unknown outside of her adoptive Sweden where she stayed extremely productive. In 1987, a solo show was mounted in London. In Berlin, the artist was rediscovered in 2003 through the exhibition “Lotte Laserstein. My Only Reality.” In 2009, the Nationalgalerie in Berlin acquired her monumental key work Evening over Potsdam from 1930.

In her portraits on show in Frankfurt, Laserstein brilliantly depicts the people of the interwar period, such as in Girl Leaning on Blue (1933) or The Mongolian (1927), whereby her works are characterized by sobriety, modernity and psychological depth. In her oeuvre, there are also motifs that speak of the enthusiasm of the time for technology and sports, although these are much fewer in number. In her portraits, Laserstein paints types from modern everyday life: athletic women, young girls putting on make-up, a motorcyclist in full gear and fashionably dressed city dwellers. Her masterpiece Evening over Potsdam shows five young people sharing a meal on their terrace, with Potsdam’s skyline arrayed in the far distance. The preparations for this picture were elaborate, as her model Traute recalled: “The very long canvas was first transported to Potsdam on the Berlin railway, and then by horse-drawn carriage to its destination with friends who had a roof garden overlooking Potsdam.” The mood is pensive with something melancholic about it.

“Face to Face” confirms Lotte Laserstein’s reputation as one of the Weimar Republic’s outstanding woman artists. After its launch at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main, the exhibition will travel to the Berlinische Galerie, where it will be complemented with, among others, works created by Lotte Laserstein while in exile.

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The Incomplete Status Report

Berlin exhibition avoids key questions

By Robert Kahn

K eeping things secret is the best way to keep them safe,” said Munich customs official Siegfried Kloble in 2013, one and a half years after the discovery of the Gurlitt trove. When the rest of the art found in the homes of Cornelius Gurlitt, all kinds of speculations were raised. Initial estimates placed their total value at more than $1 billion. Gurlitt died in 2014, leaving behind a tangle of questions about the vast art collection amassed by his father under the Nazis. In the past few years, only few answers have been found. The Gurlitt task force, a group of German researchers, has been trying to clarify the origins of what has been called the biggest artistic find of the postwar era. The task force has faced much criticism over the slow pace of the investigation. So far, the experts have been able to identify the former owners of only six paintings. The international sensation has been replaced by both discontent and more serious research on looted art.

This fall, an exhibition at Martin Groppius Bau in Berlin presents about 250 works of art from the Gurlitt collection, under the supervision of the German museum professional and art dealer Hildebrand Gurlitt (1895-1995), Cornelius Gurlitt’s father. Organized by the Bundeskunsthalle Bonn and Kunstmuseum Bern, Gurlitt: Status Report focuses on the campaign against ‘degenerate art’ and on the Nazi regime’s Europe-wide theft of cultural assets. It spans a wide range of eras and styles – from Dürer to Monet and from Cranach to Rodin. The exhibition also sheds light on the provenance of each of the works on show, the exhibition also presents the complex history of the individual objects. For example, “The provenances of the works shown here clearly demonstrate that he had no qualms about their often problematic origin,” the curators. “Their stories appeal to our political and moral obligation to address the issue of Nazi-looted cultural assets and their history in public and private collections with sensitivity and respect,” the organizers emphasize.

To facilitate the investigation of the provenance of the works and safeguard the transparency of the process, the suspect works were registered on the Lost Art Database. In most cases, however, the provenance has not yet been verified. This applies for example to Straßenbahn (Streetcar) by Bernhard Kretzschmar (1889-1972), a founding member of the Nese Dreidreh Sesession in 1932. His art was regarded as ‘degenerate’ during National Socialism. While the exhibition does not reveal the mystery of the reclusive Cornelius Gurlitt and his enigmatic father Hildebrandt, it sheds light on the fate of some of the previous owners – most of them Jewish collectors or art dealers. “Their stories appeal to our political and moral obligation to address the issue of Nazi-looted cultural assets and their history in public and private collections with sensitivity and respect,” the organizers emphasize.

“Political and moral obligation to address the issue of looted cultural assets

A Fresh Look at What Comes Next

Israeli artists are shaping their future in Germany’s cultural landscape

By Fanny Schlesinger

W hen we think of ‘Next Generation,’ we think of kids and their future,” explains Ohad Ben-Ari the theme of this year’s ID Festival. “Children are our future, says the cliché. So what is the next generation going to be like? I find this question fascinating, nonetheless what is just as intriguing: what is our world going to be like for the next Gen?” The Berlin-based Israeli-American pianist and composer is the founder of the interdisciplinary art event. Launched in 2015, the festival explores concepts of identity, particularly the identities of Israelis who live in Germany. Hence the telling name: ID, short for identity, stands also for Israel and Deutschland.

“When I moved to Berlin in 2010 I was amazed to meet so many Israeli musicians.” Ben-Ari recalls. While the festival serves as a showcase platform for the works of Israeli artists, it aims at celebrating diversity. Over the past years, it has addressed issues that matter to a wide audience. In 2013, the festival’s theme was identity. In 2016, reflecting on the refugees in Germany, the festival’s topic was migration. Building on the previous years of work, the 2017 theme was “Integration.” This year, from October 12-18, the ID Festival presents new artists and formats and tackles current debates on the present and future of German-Israeli coexistence. It touches upon issues like the motivation of many Israelis to emigrate, especially to Germany. Do they expect a promised land in Germany, where milk and honey flow? What does the rising anti-Semitism and openly expressed xenophobia mean for the Israeli living here – even in retrospect?

One highlight of the program is Cinderella, a ballet adaptation of an opera by 15-year-old composer Alma Deutscher, performed by the young dancers of Kinder Ballett Kompanie Berlin, founded in 2016 by David Simic. Deutscher has performed her own violin concerto and piano concerto as a soloist with orchestras around the world; her first full-length opera, Cinderella, was composed between 2013-17 and performed initially in Israel. The artist addresses their currently biggest challenge: how does one appeal to a younger audience?

Since the program starts on a Friday night, the audience is invited to participate in a special Kabbalat Shabbat celebration as an immersive experience. Shabbat is a taste of the World to Come, thus fitting in very well in the exploration of the next generation. Ohad Ben-Ari is convinced that the days of multi-genre artistic performances can usher in moments of the heavenly – but it can also be seen as a taste of our future here on earth, a future that we can shape ourselves by working hard all week long. A future of peace and prosperity, a next generation of coexistence.” The ID Festival is certainly a creative laboratory for progressive thinking.
Grant Peace to the World
Berlin-based Israeli composer revives synagogue music

By Elisabeth Neu

Grant peace to the world, goodness and blessing, grace, love and compassion for us and all the people of Israel... the blessing “Sim Shalom” features twice on the album “Heritage.” Just released on the eve of Yom Kippur, it is dedicated to “Treasures of Jewish-German Composers.” And it just sounds like a long and rich tradition is being continued by a young composer – Gilad Hochman, an Israeli who has found inspiration in Berlin.

Liturgical music is new grounds for Hochman. Acclaimed for his chamber music and his pieces for solo instruments and for symphony orchestra, Hochman by his own account “had never dealt with this kind of music before. I had never composed for a chazan or with the idea that my music will be performed in a synagogue. But after some time, music just started to surface.” He smiles. Suddenly, “there was a natural feeling about composing this old Hebrew text ... after all, it's not the first time I relate to Jewish topics – but there was an additional layer of spirituality being a part of the actual process of composing.”

Why “Sim Shalom”? When commissioned to contribute a piece for the collection “Heritage”, Hochman “started reading and was immediately captured by the Sim Shalom blessing which puts 'peace' at its centre by repeating the word several times.” And then, Gilad Hochman began talking to Azi Schwartz. The Israeli born celebrated cantor of New York’s Park Avenue Synagogue introduced Hochman to the rich tradition of Jewish liturgical music created in Europe. Much of it in Germany. Take Louis Lewandowski, the doyen of liturgical melodies, in his days deemed the “Mendelssohn of synagogue music.” His “Tsadik Katamar” features in “Heritage” as does Israel Alter’s “Etze Vinnuhatenu.” And then, there are fine samples of this very special worldly-spiritual music composed by those having left the old continent behind to become part of the New World. Richard Rodgers, born into a German-Jewish family in New York, one of America’s greatest composers of musicals. Or the amazing Kurt Weill, son of a cantor from Dessau. Both, his “My Ship” and “Kiddush” feature in “Heritage.”

Vastly different spiritual journeys through music.

The sound of silence

In his “Sim Shalom” Hochman, a classically trained composer, develops a dialogue between the chazan, steeped in Jewish tradition, and a choir, using specific modal scales, known in medieval tradition. The result of this experiment makes you hold your breath. Silence. Filled with tension, meaning, resolution, and ultimately redemption. Silence. As always in Hochman’s work. “I know that a piece works the moment there is no sound, silence,” Hochman says. And here these split seconds work towards “offering a bridge where people of different beliefs can find a common cultural and spiritual place.”

Hochman is very happy with the recording of his latest piece. Berlin’s RIAS Kammerchor, voted “one the world’s best ten choirs”, directed by the young British Conductor, Justin Doyle, has the range of purity, emotion and depth needed for liturgical music. “It was obvious to me that they love their work,” says Hochman, “Our connection was immediate.”

Why two renderings of “Sim Shalom” on one album? Max Janowski’s beautiful piece shows a certain restraint and seeks to hold, to preserve. Hochman’s finds doubt, departure, and hope. Grant peace to the world. “I am intrigued by the connection between the words Shalom (meaning peace) and the word shalem (meaning being complete, whole) ...” muses Hochman. Hopefully he will put his reflections on this connection into music soon.

GRANT PEACE TO THE WORLD
Berlin-based Israeli composer revives synagogue music

By Elisabeth Neu

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Vastly different spiritual journeys through music.

The sound of silence

In his “Sim Shalom” Hochman, a classically trained composer, develops a dialogue between the chazan, steeped in Jewish tradition, and a choir, using specific modal scales, known in medieval tradition. The result of this experiment makes you hold your breath. Silence. Filled with tension, meaning, resolution, and ultimately redemption. Silence. As always in Hochman’s work. “I know that a piece works the moment there is no sound, silence,” Hochman says. And here these split seconds work towards “offering a bridge where people of different beliefs can find a common cultural and spiritual place.”

Hochman is very happy with the recording of his latest piece. Berlin’s RIAS Kammerchor, voted “one the world’s best ten choirs”, directed by the young British Conductor, Justin Doyle, has the range of purity, emotion and depth needed for liturgical music. “It was obvious to me that they love their work,” says Hochman, “Our connection was immediate.”

Why two renderings of “Sim Shalom” on one album? Max Janowski’s beautiful piece shows a certain restraint and seeks to hold, to preserve. Hochman’s finds doubt, departure, and hope. Grant peace to the world. “I am intrigued by the connection between the words Shalom (meaning peace) and the word shalem (meaning being complete, whole) ...” muses Hochman. Hopefully he will put his reflections on this connection into music soon.
By Hartmut Bomhof

My mother tried to get me out of Breslau whenever Hitler visited the town. Once I went to a small village on the banks of the River Oder which was in flood, but the waters covering the meadows through which the village children and I waded were quite warm.

The memories of Kenneth Graupner, formerly Klaus Gräupner, come to mind at the travelling exhibition at the Berlin City Hall this fall, As Time Flows By. Twenty panels depict Jewish life along the River Oder, or Odra, from its beginnings to the present day.

The river has carried many conflicting narratives, memories, and allusions with it since Ptolemy referred to it in the second century C.E. Today, it is Poland’s third-longest river, running from the Czech Republic to the Baltic Sea. It flows through many cities and touches many Jewish sites. The landscape, with its changing dominional and national affiliations, has been a melting pot for centuries. Also German-Jewish and Polish-Jewish cultures crossed here. In modern times, nationalism, coupled with anti-Semitism, threatened this cultural diversity. National Socialism destroyed it.

After the Second World War, the Oder River became the German-Polish border. The German population from regions east of the river was expelled. Polish citizens found a new home here and for a short time it seemed that Jewish life could emerge again in Lower Silesia and Pomerania. Several tens of thousands of Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors settled here, but due to anti-Semitic violence most emigrated by the end of the 1960s. The centuries-long presence of Jews on the Oder fell into oblivion, their traces were often destroyed.

The exhibition has been designed by the German Culture Forum for Eastern Europe (Potsdam). The visitor learns that in regions which before WWII were part of Pomerania, of the Neumark area of Brandenburg, or of Silesia – all of which belong to the western region of Poland since 1945 – there was a Jewish cultural presence since the Middle Ages. It developed as a result of trade and of immigration from both East and West. Over centuries, the Oder region became a place in which different cultural influences crossed paths and mutually enriched one another. From at least the 19th century onwards, this led to a unique cultural and economic upsurge, which turned cities such as Breslau (today Wroclaw), Görlitz, Frankfurt and Stettin (Szczecin) into centers of art and culture, science, and business.
As Time Flows By explains how with the realignment of Europe after 1945, the history of the former German Eastern provinces has largely been forgotten. Jewish history was particularly affected by this. “The exhibition is dedicated to moments of Jewish history on both sides of the Oder,” explained the curators at its opening at Berlin’s city hall. “We want to stimulate reflection and conversation between the former and present inhabitants of the region. It is also an invasion to rediscover the German-Polish Jewish cultural heritage of this landscape.” Indeed, there are many Jewish spaces to explore alongside the border river. In Görlitz, the splendid synagogue from 1911 has recently been thoroughly renovated. In Groß Neuendorf, a small village in eastern Germany on the Polish border, one comes across a Jewish cemetery, the only visible reminder of the small Jewish congregation which thrived here in the 19th century; the former synagogue has been converted into a private home. In September, the Days of Jewish Music in the Baltic port city Szczecin met an enthused crowd when the Vox Varshe singers and organist Jakub Stefek renewed and transformed the musical tradition of Stettin’s pre-war Neue Synagogue, which is so closely connected with the Jewish composer Louis Lewandowski.

The hub of Jewish life on the Oder river is Wroclaw. Here the small Jewish community and its cultural attraction, the grand White Stork Synagogue, enjoy great interest. “Wroclaw can finally and proudly live as a city of many cultures and can find a new identity as a city of mutual respect,” hopes Aleksander Gleichgewicht, the Jewish Community’s president. Bente Kahan, whose foundation runs the synagogue, which underwent extensive reconstruction before being reopened in 2010, is grateful for lots of visitors every day. Kahan and her team set up another milestone event this October, the opening of the restored mikveh and spaces in the basement of the synagogue, including the new exhibitions “Jewish Lifecycle” and “Unfinished Lives.”

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FUTURE CONGRESS

‘Cause I Want to Live Here
New perspectives on Jewish identities in Germany

By Gideon Wollberg

Today’s diversity of Jewish life is a stroke of luck, enlivening the city in a way that one could only dream of, given the history of Berlin and the history of our country,” says Klaus Lederer, Mayor and Senator for Culture and Europe in Berlin. Still haunted by its Nazi history, the capital has become the epitome of personal freedom and a symbol for Jewish revival. It is the home of a diverse and sometimes divided Jewish population which wavers between seclusion and high visibility. The wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union multiplied Germany’s Jewish population in the 1990s and 2000s and boosted Jewish self-confidence. Thousands of young Israelis have been moving to Berlin in the past years, too. However, the official membership numbers of Germany’s synagogues are declining. While Jewish congregations are graying swiftly though, Jewish life outside synagogue walls is growing in importance and visibility. Findings say that one third of second-generation Russian Jewish immigrants believe that Jewishness is determined more by Jewish culture, festivals, movies, and music than by the Jewish religion. The same applies to many Israelis who have made Berlin their home. When questioned about the future of the Jewish community in Germany, many young adults express hope for a secular, pluralistic European Judaism. So what is the common denominator of Jewish identities in Germany today?

Consolidation and renewal

From November 5-8, the Jewish Future Congress in Berlin will serve as a forum that can provide impulses for the consolidation and renewal of Jewish life in Germany in all its diversity. Initiated by the Leo Baeck Foundation, Berlin’s Senate Department for Culture and Europe and the Federal Agency for Civic Education, the congress wants to link opinion leaders and activists and create a space for self-reflection. More than sixty speakers and panelists will share their ideas and encourage the audience to think out of the box. With many young Jews being satiated with clichés about them, “disintegration” has become a keyword for rejecting social attributes and reversing popular misperceptions of Jewishness. Bringing together a wide array of groups, the hope is that a broader sense of Jewish community will emerge. To stir discussions, a book will be launched by the conference organizers in mid-October, presenting young Jewish voices about Germany and Europe.

With the rise of both the far-right and of hatred from Muslim immigrants, its programmatic title, Weil ich hier leben will, suggests reasons for both concern and confidence – ‘Cause I Want to Live Here. The Jewish Future Congress will open up an overall social perspective for a new togetherness in Berlin, in Germany, and in Europe.

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The other day, I went to an amazing performance of “Cabaret,” the Weimar-era musical. As I heard “Tomorrow Belongs to Me” eerily played on stage, the chilling anthem reminded me that the story of the rise of the Nazis is far from dated. Today, German society is drifting apart, and our ingrained social cohesion is showing cracks. With far-right groups and the nationalist Alternative for Germany party making their presence felt, the lyrics of the catchy song appear in a new light: “Now Fatherland, Fatherland, show us the sign your children have waited to see.” Some call it premature to see parallels with today, but the musical production tells us what happens when those inside the cabaret ignore what is really going on outside.

In our polarized and fragmented society, we all live in our respective bubbles. It’s convenient to mock the neo-Nazis, to ignore them, or to be satisfied with futile gestures. Four years ago, thousands rallied in Berlin against anti-Semitism and all racism. And where are we now? We must get up to address, and confront, far-right issues in our neighborhood and our communities constantly. Many of our co-citizens have lost their sense of proportion in their pre-occupation with migration, and this includes synagogue members, too. However, instead of having ideology come between us, we need to support a strong sense of communal welfare and to advocate communal oversight as long as our economy is still booming.

Since the reunification in 1990, Jews around the world were always scared of a German state that is too strong. Today, it is the other way around: Jews are becoming afraid of a German state that is too weak to guarantee security. Those Jews who do support the right-wing AfD to have an anti-migration policy enforced are on the wrong track. The party might claim that the country’s Jewish population is safe, but in its program, it rejects rituals which are at the core of Jewish identity: circumcision and shechita.

Remember this scene in “Cabaret”? At first, the Kit Kat Club regulars are poking fun at the Nazis. Then all of a sudden the audience is dominated by party members, and after witnessing this growing support for the National Socialist movement, Brian asks Max, “Do you still think you can control them?” Later, Brian’s confrontation with a Nazi in the street leads to him being beaten up.

In the past decades, the Jewish community in Germany has been perceived as the ‘canary in the coal mine,’ heralding threats to tolerance and democracy. We do know that when a society turns on its minorities, it is usually a sign of wider ill health: What happens to the Jews will eventually befall everyone. We are trained to feel how open a society is. If Jews are concerned, it should concern the society. That is why the Jewish Future Congress taking place in Berlin in early November is of such great importance. It is an opportunity to speak up. 80 years after the November pogroms of 1938, Jewish life in Berlin is more diverse than could ever have been imagined after the Second World War and the Shoah. The past with the memory of the expulsion and annihilation of Jewish life meets a dynamic Jewish civil society today. Young Jews not only shape their own society but also Berlin’s society at large. The Jewish Future Congress will focus on the confidence and the concerns of the younger Jewish generation; it can spark debate and provide visions for a Germany more open to social change. Instead of just keeling over and dropping dead like a canary, we must raise our voices and have our say.

Have Your Say!

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“I Will Grant the Rain for You in Season”
Jewish traditions remind us to appreciate our water resources

By Rabbi Walter Homolka

Hittite years of drought, Israel is running out of water. Throughout the times, water was a limited resource in the Middle East, and the Talmud says in the words of Rabbi Yosef that the world’s dependence on rain for its sustenance is so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. Our sages tell us that the world is judged on its sustenance so total that rainfall is compared. The Talmud says in the words of Rabbi Yosef, “Bring the water for a blessing” is recited only in Temple times, the pilgrims had to return from Jerusalem to their homes before heavy rain would cause them hardship. And of course, there are no rules without exceptions; Babylonian Jews began requesting rain on the 60th day of the rain period, which marked the beginning of their rainy season. Whatever date and tradition we follow today: the prayer for Rain is an important reminder to appreciate and protect our water resources.