



Virtual discussion summary

British German alumni: staying connected in 2020

International relations in a changed world

Tuesday 28 April 2020 | WP1789

A virtual discussion was held in association with the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the British Embassy in Berlin and with support from the Sir Heinz Koepler Trust and Bridge International Dialogue.

Participants were joined by expert panellists Sir Sebastian Wood, the British Ambassador in Berlin; Rt Hon Gisela Stuart, Chair, Wilton Park and Non-Executive Board Member for the UK Cabinet Office; and Julia Gross, Chargé d'affaires, German Embassy in London.

Headlines

The key points which emerged from this virtual discussion include:

- UK and German responses to global pandemic and to new or changing international issues are closely aligned. They have **worked closely together in response to the current global pandemic**. The UK Foreign Secretary and German Foreign Minister worked closely in the run up to recent G7 meeting to **shape an international response** organised around certain key priorities eg **public health cooperation; supply chain support; and vaccine exploration**.
- In terms of how they position themselves internationally, **the instinctive reactions of the UK and Germany are very close** on almost every difficult issue that arises – Covid-19 being one of the most recent. For instance, the UK and Germany worked very closely in the run up to the 2019 NATO summit, assisting in a good outcome, despite doubts beforehand about the Summit's likely success.
- At the beginning of the COVID crisis there was a **tendency for European countries to have a narrow focus** and react with national-facing measures. The pandemic has since shown that there is a **great need for international cooperation, coordination and solidarity**.
- The UK and Germany share many similar values of promoting multilateralism, a right and rules based approaches, tackling climate change and a fair trading environment amongst others.
- Key challenges they will face on the international stage in the post Covid-19 period are expected to include **pandemic resilience, climate resilience, trans-Atlantic security** and **global relations with China** to ensure there is no cold war.

- **Pandemic resilience:** Lessons learned from the crisis include the need to be better prepared and **strengthening of international systems** to support crisis response, especially as this will not be the last pandemic. Covid-19 provides the opportunity to forge new – and better – cooperation, particularly youth-led.
- **Trans-Atlantic security:** The pandemic has reinforced the need to work closely with the US, however the US cannot currently be relied upon to lead international strategies. More regional cooperation across Europe is anticipated, both in and outside of the EU.
- **Global relations with China:** One sixth of world's population and 40% of global economic growth this year. Critical for international community to not be too confrontational with China. Importance of Chinese trade, particularly regarding concerns over supply chains and uncertainties over US positioning. The UK and Germany are encouraged to work together on a European policy (separate to EU) towards China.
- Looking ahead, there are many **opportunities for the two countries to work together** on a range of pressing issues, including climate change with the UK hosting COP26, and on that and wider issues through the G7, with the UK holding the presidency in 2021 and Germany taking over the following year.
- There is also an opportunity to **strengthen German and British cooperation** in practical ways **through international organisations**, such as the Council of Europe, especially on critical issues as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cybercrime. Currently, within the Council of Europe, both countries have strong emphasis on media and press freedom, and freedom from discrimination.
- Understanding each other does not necessarily mean you agree on everything. Although there are many areas of agreement, **there are areas of potential misunderstanding between the countries**. One reasoning for difference in outlook is that Germany is surrounded by nine land borders. There is recognition that the **two countries have different social contracts**. There is a lot that each country can learn about, and from, each other, including in how to respond to the pandemic.
- There is an **opportunity, and a role, for an increasing range of discussions** between the two countries. **Bilateral relations based on post-WWII ambitions for cooperation now have less driving force**. Important to consider vital structures to strengthen cooperation between the two countries.
- There is a **growing need for dialogue at all levels** between the two countries, from government and business, to society-to-society dialogue. This could include **thematically focused bilateral conversations**, revising some of the **innovative town twinning** (including Universities etc), as well as **increasing student, academic and alumni links**.
- Important to **include people who are not usually involved in the bilateral conversations** to include wider voices than the often 'like-minded' who tend to come together. This is crucial to understanding the range of views within both countries. Also, a **need to encourage the curiosity of the younger generation**, especially curiosity of looking at other national systems.

Alice Baker

Wilton Park | 10 June 2020