



Wilton Park



Report

British German Forum 2022 Collaborating for Shared Opportunities

Monday 4 – Wednesday 6 July 2022 | WP2031

In association with:



Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
London



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Berlin



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The aim of the Forum, throughout its 37-year history, has been to deepen bilateral relations between Britain and Germany, by inviting future leaders from both countries to engage in new dialogues and build partnerships. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought European collaboration into sharp focus, the Forum is particularly important now at this critical time.

The 2022 British German Forum will take the UK-Germany Joint Declaration¹, the German election and coalition agreement, and the Covid pandemic as starting points from which to look further ahead and explore three areas: transforming economies to adapt societies to climate change and energy security, learning from the Covid pandemic and practising foreign policy based on ideas, causes and values.

This year's Forum will provide a space for participants to look at how to respond to these challenges and opportunities and explore three critical questions:

1. How could Britain and Germany cooperate to transform their economies to adapt to climate change and increase sustainability and energy security?
2. What could Britain and Germany be doing to identify, learn and enact the shared lessons from the Covid pandemic?
3. Where in practice is the common ground for Britain and Germany to work together on foreign policy?

As they explore these areas participants will be asked to consider both nations' aspirations for greater national inclusion, be it tackling rising inequalities and cost of living' or strengthening cultural relationships between cities and expanding urban diplomacy.

¹ Signed by Dominic Raab, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, UK and Heiko Maas, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, in June 2021

Executive Summary

- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated the need for increased security cooperation between the UK and Germany. While differences in strategic cultures between both countries are a reason for tensions, there is an opportunity for a common approach to the conflict. However, UK-EU relations must improve before Germany can commit to stronger political and economic ties.
- Covid-19 was a shared trauma for both countries, key issues like rising inequality and future health challenges need to be addressed. Global health rankings have shown to be largely irrelevant and underlined that the right policy is critical for success. Nevertheless, future challenges lie in adjusting redistribution systems and creating sustainable structures for expert and best-practice exchanges.
- The Green Transition is the first economic transition not driven by market forces but by policy. Both countries need to use creative-policy making to lessen the immediate socio-economic challenges associated with transition and convince the public to support the move away from a consumption-oriented societies.
- Common values in foreign policy are a basis for UK-German cooperation. Both countries need to identify shared values and set strategic goals, especially regarding increasing systemic rivalries in, for example, the Indo-Pacific region.

The War in Ukraine and Consequences for British-German Relations

1. The war in Ukraine has brought together western countries in their support of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. While preventing Russian territorial expansion in Ukraine is an urgent priority for both countries, strategic challenges between the UK and Germany lie in differing systemic and structural ideas for the outcome of the war.
2. Political challenges in bilateral relations increasingly stem from different leadership styles, and the relationship depends crucially on the UK-EU relations that remain fractured in the wake of Brexit. Specific issues like the Northern-Ireland Protocol are hindering future cooperation, while the 'Global Britain' strategy has been understood from a German perspective as a pivot away from Europe.
3. Both countries share the view that Europe needs to take more responsibility, and the German 'Zeitenwende' (Turning Point) has been seen as a positive step by the UK government. Furthermore, both countries agree that Europe's strongest allies are the US and other like-minded partners. However, both countries have different ideas about inter-governmental institutions and platforms (e.g., AUKUS, NATO, EU or UN).

Identifying Lessons from the Covid Pandemic

4. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a shared trauma for Britain and Germany. While both countries took different approaches to managing the spread of COVID, each country suffered similar effects on socioeconomic factors like inequality and unemployment. The pandemic also showed the need for preparedness, the importance of science and technology, and digitalisation.
5. To tackle these shared challenges, both countries need to enhance best practices through institutional and structural exchanges and closer collaboration with the EU.
6. To create more inclusive societies, we identified three lessons. First, tailored approaches are needed, while trust needs to be placed in common solutions. Second, a key challenge is to improve communication across communities and break barriers of understanding and languages. Lastly, stress tests need to be conducted to understand in detail the problems within societies to fine-tune political approaches.

7. Transnational collaboration is essential and can be split into three levels: Global, National and Micro. First, on a global scale, Germany and the UK need to support international efforts to combat health issues. Solutions can also be found on a national level but executed locally to be effective. Especially useful could be the exchange on a micro level to share best practices regarding different techniques, for example, on communicating measures.
8. Regarding inequality and levelling up, data could be a key to better understanding policy problems. For example, various lessons can be learned from the UK of data collection on ethnicity, social background and spoken languages. Furthermore, the UK can learn from successful German industrial strategies; an example is the former German coal area in the Ruhr Valley.
9. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that building preparedness is essential to successfully dealing with global health challenges. To achieve better preparedness, it is vital to conduct various simulations and stress tests, share information, and have a common communication strategy to mitigate fake news effectively.
10. Both countries need to increase preparedness for low probability and high-risk scenarios. These high-risk scenarios have wider geographical scopes and therefore require more collaboration on an institutional level. Increased cooperation can be achieved through more regional exchanges (e.g., joint exercises, staff sharing and academic exchanges), but also sharing risk information and country-specific data.
11. While the pandemic has coincided with a proliferation in data in the UK and Germany, extracting value from this data is essential. The capabilities of science and academia can be augmented by increases in government funding to advance data usage across different fields. Supporting better data capabilities can also be beneficial for a range of other purposes including green transitions and tackling crime.
12. While Brexit was a shock for bilateral relations, it can also be seen as a new driver of cooperation and competition. To see Brexit as a challenge and opportunity for new regulations, faster and more dynamic approaches could be beneficial for the EU to increase their policy-making speed.

Transforming Economies to Protect the Climate and Build Resilience

13. Critical challenges for the UK and Germany to achieve a net-zero future were identified in policy making. Various necessary policies toward a sustainable future will need extensive communication to be supported by the public. A key aspect identified was that previous economic market transformations (e.g., industrial age) were guided by markets through inventions that raised output, increased effectiveness, and gave drastic competitive advantages. The climate transformation is the first transformation that is not market but policy-driven. Therefore, we see policymakers as leading actors that must drive a successful transition.
14. The EU is uniquely positioned to act as a global environmental standard-setter. One potential avenue to achieve more global impact was identified as the newly proposed 'Green Club' of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Furthermore, we observed that the UK's dynamic and fast approaches benefit the EU's response, which would have been more sluggish otherwise.
15. Both countries face immense challenges in achieving a just transition and ensuring that no one is left behind. Climate change will increase inequality and other societal issues and policymakers must consider these issues when devising climate policies.

16. The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown the world how sensitive supply chains are to disruption. With increasing disruption expected through climate events, the UK and Germany, together with the EU, need to use their strong foundations in various sectors (e.g. automotive) to build up more local supply chains. However, the drive to reverse globalisation to an increasing national production has been identified as inefficient and counterproductive not least in achieving climate goals.

Foreign Policy: Perspectives on British-German Relations

17. While both the UK and Germany have different strategic cultures, they share similar values regarding foreign policy. This has been recognised as the most substantial factor for international cooperation between both countries.
18. Significant hurdles for better British-German relations are tied to Brexit and the outcome of the Northern-Ireland Protocol issue. Until these issues are resolved, we see only a limited potential for cooperation.
19. The war in Ukraine alongside the US-led shift toward the Indo-Pacific have shown that Europe needs to become more self-reliant in its defence structure. Both countries face the same threats in Europe and systemic challenges that are playing out globally and need to start to effectively use existing formats and successfully reinvest in defence.
20. Beyond Europe, Germany and the EU increasingly share the UK's concerns with China and identify the Indo-Pacific as a region of strategic importance. In this vein, the UK and Germany need to set strategic goals aligned with their shared values to respond to present and future threats from China.

Conclusion

Europe is experiencing the largest security crisis since the end of the Soviet Union. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting food and energy shortages will have a lasting global impact. This British German Forum reaffirmed that both the UK and Germany share the same fundamental values. While discussions often reflected the stark uncertainties of contemporary geopolitics, there was resounding agreement and evidence that innovative solutions can be found through enhanced collaboration between both countries.

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