

European interview
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“Germany must have greater involvement in overcoming crises and conflicts”

Interview with Andreas Schockenhoff

1. On 27th November 2013 representatives of the CDU, CSU and the SPD signed a coalition agreement in Berlin. France particularly took note of the agreement over the minimum wage (8.50€/hour) and the reduction of the retirement age for some employee categories. Will the new government coalition follow a different economic and social policy from the previous conservative-liberal regime?

Germany has not had it this good in a long time. We have emerged quicker and stronger from the world economic and financial crisis than others. Social partners – employers and unions – have been crucial to this success, likewise astute policies beginning with Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010 which was followed by further reforms during the Grand Coalition of 2005-2009 and then those implemented by the CDU/CSU government. We shall continue along this successful path and effect vital modifications. This also means making necessary adjustments, for example correcting the misapplication of the labour law in the wake of its flexibilisation. These adjustments had already been decided upon during the previous government and now the Grand Coalition will decide on further changes. Furthermore we shall be making adjustments like the minimum wage. Hence the condition must apply whereby decent wages paid to people who have work today, should not mean that they will then become unemployed. As far as reducing the retirement age for some employee categories is concerned, the statutory pension insurance can afford this right now because of the comfortable employment rate that we have created. However we should not forget that with retirement at 67 we have already introduced an increase in a person's working life and that this concerns a majority of the population.

2. What are the new government's priorities as far as European policy is concerned?

Our concept is of a lively Europe that is close to its citizens. In her policy statement on 29th January the Chancellor clearly said that European policy had to put people at the centre. It should make people's everyday life easier; it should provide the environment to improve commitment, own initiative and entrepreneurship. Not every mission in Europe is a mission for Europe. Europe has to focus on missions which can only be addressed by Europe as a whole. Europe has to rally its strength and concentrate on major challenges. All European policies – energy, climate, the completion of the internal market, external trade relations and also the common foreign and security policy and finally the European defence policy must strengthen Europe's role in a globalised world. They must strengthen Europe's economic power and also contribute to its prosperity. We want a strong, confident European Union which will shape globalisation decisively, resolutely supporting peace, freedom and prosperity. Europe has to shape international policy and to do that assume a strong, independent role.

3. During his Paris trip in January 2014 German Foreign Minister Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that he wanted to provide the Franco-German relationship with “new impetus”. What do you currently think of the relationship – is the Franco-German partnership in crisis? How can the links between the two countries be strengthened?

Germany and France have a close relationship like no other. A hundred years after the outbreak of the First World War and 75 after that of the Second World War

it is anything but self-evident however. In Europe we have overcome the logic of hegemony and animosity and in their place we have introduced one of integration. In many of the present conflicts we are an example, which has not only made Europe strong but it is also an example for the world in the 21st century.

4. On 14th January 2014 during a press conference French President François Hollande announced that there would be a deepening in the Franco-German partnership in support of Europe, namely in three areas: economy/ taxation, energy transition and defence. How were these suggestions perceived in Germany?

We have not always shared the same view of economic, domestic and financial policy as far as supporting the internal market and the single currency are concerned. Our initial standpoints are also very different in terms of energy and defence but we feel that we should come to joint solutions. This is why it is worth looking at what your neighbour is doing in these areas and then draw up joint proposals for the European Union. Germany and France are, as they have always been, the biggest national economies which also form the critical mass in a wider Europe to initiate important progress in terms of integration.

5. In her policy statement on 29th January 2014 Angela Merkel said that Germany will be engaging more in Mali. Recently there have often been requests that Germany be more involved in finding solutions to international conflicts – the Defence Minister and the Foreign Minister have also asked this. However German citizens are mainly against increased involvement by the army in the shape of military intervention. To this backdrop how do you see the development of the German and European defence policy?

Firstly I can say that the speech delivered by the German President at the Munich Security Conference was a ground-breaking, courageous and encouraging speech in support of greater German responsibility in terms of foreign policy. But gradually this has to be translated into practical policy. The guiding principle must be:

"the culture of responsibility and solidarity" instead of "the culture of restraint". This means: Germany must step in earlier, more decisively and more substantially. Since over the past four years we have regressed on this we have to start discussions from scratch and gain the confidence of our allies once more. In terms of the policy for greater responsibility the principle "military intervention is the most extreme method" is valid – but it cannot be withheld if European and German interests are affected. The phrase set out in our coalition agreement applies here: *"More than ever before the EU needs a strategic discussion about what it wants or can achieve as a priority with civilian and also, if need be, military means."* To do this Germany must have greater involvement in overcoming crises and conflicts – not only when in terms of diplomatic, humanitarian, economic and development policy issues but also when it comes to strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy. Being able to assume greater responsibility also requires clearer conceptual and strategic ideas. This is why in my group we are seriously addressing the issue of how the requirements of our neighbouring continent, Africa, can be better met with political, humanitarian means, economic, development and security policies. This also means that at last we have a strategic discussion and that we must come to political agreement, whereby we perceive the dangers and strive to work closer together from a security point of view. With Africa in mind, I believe that we need a clearly drafted European Security and Defence Policy. I do not believe we need this for Asia or other regions in the world. The EU mission ATALANTA, the training mission in Somalia, the EU operations in Mali and CAR and the fact that most failed States are in our southern neighbouring continent, show that Europe's greatest security requirements emanate from Africa. But I cannot see that there is consensus over this yet in the European Union.

You quite rightly address the sentiment of the German people. This shows that the German Foreign and Security Policy and, to a greater extent, its realignment have to be clearer and more acceptable for a wider public. We need dialogue so that from now on the population's expectations are not shaped by the "culture of restraint" but by "the culture of responsibility and soli-

clarity.” This also means that we have to have regular, thorough foreign and security policy debates and not just debate about new or the continuation of existing Bundeswehr mandates. The President quite rightly said that the foreign and security policy debate belongs to society. I feel that this is a long term exercise. But we have a firm foundation for this after our most recent discussions on which we now have to build.

6. The Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine is in stalemate for the time being. The present situation in the Ukraine is worrying. What can the EU do to find a peaceful solution to the conflict? How do you see Russia’s role in the conflict and the present state of affairs between the EU and Russia?

I think that the EU’s High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy provided some important answers with her decision on 10th February. This is especially valid for the mediation work she has undertaken. The other important thing is the offer made by the EU and the USA to help Ukraine with short term financial aid to protect it from default – and I believe that this should be on condition that a new government in Kiev adopts reforms to improve human rights and the rule of law and also via structural reform which will revive the country’s economy. The declaration that we still want to sign the Association Agreement with Ukraine is important. In all events we should say it even more clearly that this would be the first step for greater rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU. And we should say just as clearly that according to Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty Ukraine has a clear perspective in the EU. We must make the idea of an EU perspective real for the people of Ukraine. By this I mean we should come to rapid agreement on further visa liberalisation – it would be even better to draft a calendar for total visa liberalisation. We also have to describe and explain more clearly and in a more open manner to the Ukrainian population what the European Union is.

As far as Russia is concerned dialogue between the EU and Russia has been faltering for far too long. In any event this has been because in recent times Russia has quite clearly communicated that it needs neither dialogue nor agreements with the EU. This kind of attitude helps no one, especially Russia. We would like the EU-Russia relationship to find new impetus. Hence we

would like dialogue and to work with Moscow more – where ever possible and in areas where it is necessary. In this context we are talking about a joint European economic and humanitarian area with Russia, an idea put forward by President Putin -- especially how we can achieve this area in the long term. Of course as we build our relations with Russia we have to take into account our neighbours’ justified rights. In other words, each of these neighbours must be able to decide, free of any political and economic pressure, whether they want to draw closer to the EU or not. In a common European area there is no room for hegemony. This is also true for Ukraine. Of course the EU should have discussed with Russia the impact of the Association Agreement with Ukraine on its economy earlier – this must now be repaired. But there can be no negotiations with Russia about whether Ukraine gradually wants to draw closer to the EU; that decision belongs to the Ukrainian people alone.

7. In May 2014 the European elections will be taking place. There is justified fear that populist, Eurosceptic parties will win a great many votes during this election. What can be done to counter populism and extremism?

Many European debates focus on how we integrate structures within the European Union. The greatest challenge of the 21st century is however Europe’s assertion as a power vis-à-vis other centre of power in the world. Europe means 7% of the world’s population, 25% of the world’s economic performance and more than 50% of the social spending worldwide. We have to defend our model of society, our model of the social market economy and to that end we have to be more effective abroad. No country in the European Union can achieve this with its own political tools alone. In order to make it clear to people that it is a question of our prosperity, our social security, our way of life – we must be able to point to real examples. Then people will understand that we need more Europe not less.

8. Regarding the election of the future President of the European Commission many have turned their attention to Chancellor Angela Merkel, who highlights the exact meaning of the Lisbon Treaty text and the decisive role of the European Council. Will the CDU be prepared to accept a candidate put forward by the European Parliament?

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I think the Treaties are clear, they point to the decisive role played by the European Council: the Lisbon Treaty also specifies that the result of the European elections will be taken into account. Long term we would like to achieve the election of the President of the Commission by direct suffrage.

9. The economic crisis has shown us the limits of the economic governance of the euro zone. Do you believe on the basis of the treaties as they stand that the economic and monetary union can be reformed or do the treaties have to be changed and what might these changes be?

It is good that the European sovereign debt crisis is no longer the focus of the daily news, and that we have already made some progress. But we should be quite level-headed and understand that the crisis is not yet over. If we want to avoid this kind of crisis in the future, economic policy coordination has to be improved significantly. Of course important steps have been

taken in that direction. I can honestly say that we must now catch up on what we neglected on the inception of monetary union, namely provide it with true economic union. To do this we also have to strengthen the European institutions. Above all though, we need more commitment for true economic union. We are working to ensure that the euro zone Member States conclude binding, enforceable, democratically legitimate, compatible reform agreements Europe wide. These agreements should enable the achievement of competitiveness goals, sound, sustainable, stable finances as well as growth and employment coupled with solidarity. Consequently the EU Treaties will also then have to be modified correspondingly.

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