

## UK should expect no help from Germany

Merkel will prioritise European integration

by Joergen Oerstroem Moeller in Singapore

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On 25 January 1971 – six months after negotiations on Britain's accession to the European Economic Community began – President George Pompidou of France met Chancellor Willy Brandt of Germany to decide a landmark deal on Britain's finances. Pompidou did not trust Britain and did not expect it to share in the ultimate objective of European integration.

The core issue, then as now, was Britain's financial contributions. Before their meeting Pompidou let it be known that talks about finances had reached a 'humorous' and preposterous stage. Brandt disagreed and had the right to say so, given that Germany contributed the most to the community's budget. Europe developed a compromise which Britain could accept. Having removed the main issue, a result quickly fell into place.

Many in Britain seem to hope Chancellor Angela Merkel will follow Brandt's example. This is wishful thinking – Germany will not be the UK's intermediary as it tries to exit the European Union. Neither Merkel nor anybody else influencing Germany's Brexit position has so much as implied that they are willing to do so. The 24 September German election result dispelled any remaining hope of a repetition of 1971.

In the short term, Merkel will be burdened with the machinations of coalition-building. The expected partnership of her Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union, the Free Democratic Party and Green ecology party would be the first three-way coalition in the post-war federal republic's history. While these parties haggle, Germany will not be able to influence the Brexit negotiations.

Brexit, regardless, is not a priority for any German party. Some British ministers see the FDP as a potential ally, judging by past statements from the party, but this again is self-deception on the part of the UK. The FDP has advocated a tough line on giving financial support to other EU members. There is no reason why it would promote softening Germany's position on Britain's financial contribution, as the cost would fall on German taxpayers.

Furthermore, President Emmanuel Macron has made it clear that he is looking to Germany to help France strengthen European integration, which runs counter to Britain's own plans. After Brexit, the core EU countries will shy away from allowing outsiders like the UK to benefit unduly from the benefits of 'ever closer union'.

There are, in any case, restrictions on what one individual, even the German chancellor, can achieve. The options for Merkel are either to prioritise strengthening her EU partnerships or to expend political capital to help Britain procure a UK-friendly Brexit. Her probable coalition government and the influence of continental allies cut Merkel's choice down to one. European integration trumps Brexit.

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