

10 GEBOTE FUR DIE DEUTSCH-BRITISCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

I get by with a little help from my friends

or

We can work it out

100 year commemoration 1919-2019

British Chamber of Commerce in Germany

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Berlin, 12 September 2019

1. It is a great privilege for me to speak to you today. Before doing so I would like to pay tribute to Norbert Strohschen who has been mentioned already by Michael Schmidt as our previous chairman, a man who did much to put the Chamber on to a new footing over the past decade. He and Andreas Meyer-Schwickerath, to whom I would also like to pay tribute, formed a very strong team.
2. It's difficult to sum up 100 years of British German history in one 20 minute speech. I'm going to get by with a little help from my friends. There are three that I will call upon: the first is Marlene Dietrich since she has had an iconic relationship with the British for many reasons.. The second is the Beatles, for their popular music says much about the world of British-German relations ways that are highly prescient. And third is the city of Hamburg which has been closely tied up with the UK and Germany throughout history – both good reasons and bad - and has particularly strong links with the British Chamber of Commerce in Germany.
3. My main point is that the British and Germans are becoming more like each other; just at the time when the Britons are leaving the European Union, we are becoming more convergent. Or perhaps we are swapping characteristics in that confused and generalised way in which we speak about different countries' national traits. These are psychological, psycho-social processes. You could call it ein gegenseitiger Selbstwiderspiegelungsprozess or eine selbstbefruchtende Osmose durch wiederholte Wechselwirkungen . The Germans are becoming more rational, the British are becoming more hysterical.
4. In my speech I am not going to say anything about the current confusion over Brexit, I will leave that to the erudite panellists later. I am not going to mention the parallels between 1919 with the birth of the Weimar republic and the period of Weimarisation that some commentators and historians say is now dawning in the UK. I will not say anything about the extraordinary suspension of parliament for five weeks which is being contested in the courts. I would like to say, though, thank Heavens for Mr John Bercow. I do hope that the BCCG will invite him for next year's annual meeting,

and give him a medal of honour, for he has upheld the rights of parliament and parliamentarians at a critical time.

5. Stellen Sie sich mal vor, was geschehen wäre wenn z.B. mitten in der Einführung des Euro in Deutschland der Bundestag ausgesetzt worden wäre und der Bundestagspräsident – ein Mann von der Format eines Wolfgang Schäubles - gesagt hätte, diese sei ein Verstoß gegen die Verfassung gewesen. Was für ein Aufruhr in den englischen Zeitungen dies verursacht hätte! Imagine what would have happened had the German parliament been suspended, for example in the middle of the process of introducing the euro, and the Bundestag president, a man of the format of Wolfgang Schäuble, had called it a constitutional outrage. What a fuss this would have caused in the English newspapers.
6. Some of the former Tory MPs now expelled from the party, such as Dominic Grieve, Philip Hammond, Ken Clarke, Christopher Soames, will go down in history as statesmanlike figures, which is not what we can say about the present Prime Minister.
7. My talk today is on ‘Die Zehn Vorsätze / Gebote für die deutsch-britische Zusammenarbeit’ - 10 resolutions or commandments for German-British co-operation - as seen from a particular vantage point of popular music. I wanted to start in 1918 which was the year, more or less, when Marlene Dietrich started her career. She was born in Berlin Schöneberg but went to school in Wilmersdorf, as her photo from 1918 shows. PHOTO SCHOOL CLASS
8. Later she was to meet the most famous of all pop bands, The Beatles, who need no introduction, not least because of their music break in Hamburg. This is how they met Marlene in London at the Royal Variety Performance in 1963 PHOTO MARLENE DIETRICH AND THE BEATLES.
9. The Beatles’ stay in Hamburg in the early 1960s helped turn them into the phenomenon they quickly became. John Lennon later said, ‘I might have been born in Liverpool - but I grew up in Hamburg.’ It is worthwhile noting some features of the long and dangerous minibus trip to Hamburg on 17 August 1960, before the UK was part of the European Community. The 10 passengers - the then five Beatles plus five others - had not obtained German work permits, so they were incarcerated at Harwich for five hours on the way over - before convincing immigration officials they were students on holiday – guidelines for us all on how to behave in the event of a no deal Brexit. PHOTOS BEATLES HAMBURG GIGS
10. I should also like to mention another great example of British-German co-operation: the relationship with Astrid Kirchherr, the star Hamburg photographer – still living in Hamburg today, in her 80s - who gave the group their mop haircuts. PHOTO ASTRID KIRCHNER PLUS BEATLES
11. So let’s get on to these 10 Vorsätze. The first one is Learn the lessons of history. There are those who believe the British live in the past. George Bernard Shaw described why the English, not being a very spiritual people, invented cricket to give them some idea of eternity. Heinrich Heine in 1828 called the Germans ‘ein spekulatives Volk, Ideologen, Vor- und Nachdenker, Träumer, die nur in der Vergangenheit und in der Zukunft leben und keine Gegenwart haben.’ - ‘A speculative race, ideologists with fore- and aftersight, dreamers who live only in the past and future and have no present.’ He could have been speaking about the English today. The Beatles were very prescient: ‘Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away: Now it looks as though they're here to stay, Oh, I believe in yesterday.’
12. No 2 – Keep your keep on the ground, do not over-dramatise, stick to reality, auf dem Boden der Tatsachen bleiben, Let it Be. In other words: ‘Lass die Kirche im Dorf.’ Sometimes plain speaking can be helpful and admirable (if controversial, as with your President Heinrich Lübke in 1966 who

famously said, regarding the third goal in the England v West Germany World Cup final: ‘Der Ball war drin.’ The ball was in! The Beatles were right: ‘Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be, Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.’

13. No 3 - Practise reciprocity. Do as you would be done by. ‘Was du nicht willst, dass man dir tut, das füg auch keinem andren zu.’ Remember that we are all seen through a two-way looking glass. When we look at our own reflection, others are looking at it too. The Spiegelbild is seen and regarded by others in a different way to the one we view ourselves. The British should take care here. We must guard against double standards, I recall the minister from the foreign office – I will not say which one – who said in 1990, around the time of reunification: ‘I want the Germans to become more assertive – as long as they always agree with us.’ Trying to achieve standards of behaviour where each side treats each other fairly and equally is what diplomats try to do every day: ‘Please please me, whoa yeah, like I please you.’
14. Precept No. 4 is Honour diversity. Support tolerance. We can learn a lot from our Gegensätze . The song Get Back Was written partly as an ironic way of castigating racism on British society and politics in the 1960s. ‘Jojo left his home in Tucson, Arizona , for some California grass ... Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged.’ The slogan has been taken up again, in a non-tolerant way, by Donald Trump: ‘Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came.’
15. Sometimes manifestations of tolerance can go too far and can bring counterproductive effects. The Willkommenskultur policy of Chancellor Merkel in 2015 – ‘Wir schaffen das’ – although I respect the reasons why she did it - was the verhängnisvollster Satz – the most fateful sentence - in her 14 years as chancellor. And, indirectly, it helped fuel some of the hotly debated discussions leading to the British referendum decision in 2016.
16. No. 5 Seek complementarity. ‘Michelle’ from the Lennon-McCartney song: this applies to der Deutsche Michel and the English John Ball: they seem to be komplementär , ergänzend in many ways. When Stalin said in 1942: ‘Hitlers come and go, but Germany and the German people remain,’ he epitomised the timelessness of some of these self-fulfilling German character traits. Yet it is not only the Germans who can be contradictory and confusing. Just look at the British. They also have competing sets of principles and feelings: ‘Es schlagen nicht nur in Deutschland die zwei Seelen in der eigenen Brust. Bei der Referendumsentscheidung am 23. Juni 2016 haben wir die beiden Seiten zur Schau gestellt: der rationale, kühl kalkulierende, ökonomisch denkende Teil der britischen Psychologie sowie das romantische, abenteuerlustige Segment des nationalen Gehirns.’ (‘Not just the Germans have the two souls beating in one breast. In the referendum decision on 23 June 2016 we have demonstrated the two sides: the rational, coolly calculating, economic-thinking part of British psychology, and the romantic, adventurous segment of the national brain.’ That was something I said three years ago before the referendum – I thought it sounded more intelligent in German than in English).
17. ‘Michelle, ma belle, These are words that go together well, I need to, I need to, I need to, I need to make you see, Oh, what you mean to me, Until I do, I’m hoping you will know what I mean.’ These words have great resonance. During the time of German reunification, and also more recently during the negotiations over reforming the European union and now over the withdrawal treaty , British ministers and diplomats have had great difficulty in understanding what the Germans really mean.

18. No 6: Tackle misgivings. - There are prejudices, preconceptions everywhere, they need to be tested and questioned. Where they are unfounded, or exaggerated, we should make efforts to overcome them. International relations are a good place to apply this rule. No one knew this better than Helmut Kohl in 1990, after the fall of the Berlin wall, where he had to confront a wave of mistrust across Europe about the intentions of soon-to-be-reunited Germany. His words in his memoirs mark Germany's attempts to forge a united Europe to disarm fears about German dominance. – ‘ Je mehr Rechte Deutschland an die EG überträgt, desto weniger wirklich erscheint das Gespenst eines Vierten Reiches’ - ‘The more powers Germany transfers to the European Community, the less real will be the phantom of a Fourth Reich.’
19. There were doubts about whether the German would stay true. Some Germans themselves worried about what would happen if they became unhinged, untamed or unanchored from the West. ‘If I fell in love with you, would you promise to be true, and help me understand. ‘Cause I've been in love before, and I found that love was more than just holding hands.’
20. Anxieties about German hand-holding were on show in Margaret Thatcher's Chequers seminar on 24 March 1990 which unflatteringly (and neatly, in alphabetical order) summed up some allegedly abiding parts of the German character – ‘Angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex, sentimentality.’ As the record of gathering stated: ‘It still had to be asked how a cultured and cultivated nation had allowed itself to be brainwashed into barbarism. If it had happened once, could it not happen again?... all their institutions had not yet been seriously tested by adversity such as a major economic calamity. No one had serious misgivings about present leaders... but what about 10, 15 or 20 years from now? Could some of the unhappy characteristics of the past re-emerge?’ We must recall, too, General Hastings Lionel Ismay, Churchill's chief military assistant during the second world war, first Nato secretary general 1952-57: he stated the purpose of the alliance was ‘to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.’
21. Precept No 7: Be patient, then expect things to happen quickly . ‘The crisis takes a much longer time coming than you think, and then it happens much faster than you would have thought.’ This was the striking phrase of the German-American economist Rüdiger Dornbusch (who died in 2002) – applicable not just to unification, but also for the financial crisis that occurred seven years after his death. Walter Ulbricht – who said no one had any intention of building a wall – and Erich Honecker – who said the wall might last for 50 – 100 years – did not appear to have (at least on the surface) a sense of how things would turn out . ‘Die Mauer wird in 50 und auch in 100 Jahren noch bestehen bleiben, wenn die dazu vorhandenen Gründe nicht beseitigt werden.’
22. Did they not realise the fateful path leading to German reunification? Perhaps they did. ‘The long and winding road that leads to your door will never disappear; I've seen that road before. It always leads me here, lead me to your door.’ Perhaps there is this sense of Schicksalsgemeinschaft in the German-British relationship.
23. No 8 – Show sensitivity to the thoughts, the yearnings of others. Bruised feelings, miscommunication, but also the temptation of departure - Fernweh.- all of this is in the Lennon-McCartney lyrics: ‘Wednesday morning at five o'clock as the day begins, silently closing her bedroom door, leaving the note that she hoped would say more, she goes downstairs to the kitchen, clutching her handkerchief, quietly turning the backdoor key, stepping outside, she is free Daddy, our baby's gone. Why would she treat us so thoughtlessly? How could she do this to me?’
24. David Davis, Britain's first secretary for leaving the EU, appointed in 2016 after the referendum, did not appear to have antennae for understanding German sensitivities. An over-simplifier who failed

to consider the complexity of feelings on the other side. In 2016 everything looked deliciously straightforward: ‘Post Brexit a UK-German deal would include free access for their cars and industrial goods, in exchange for a deal on everything else.’

25. Charles Powell, Thatcher’s foreign policy adviser, realised post-reunification the PM’s monumental blind spot: the episode underlined her inability to understand what was driving the Germans. ‘She underestimated the strength of German national feeling. Helmut Kohl surfed the wave of German nationalism with great skill, and Margaret Thatcher got left behind.’
26. No 9 Seek long term solutions. ‘We can work it out.’ Churchill, when he expressed in 1934 the need for longer-term considerations on Germany and Europe was surely not prescient of the full horror of the coming war, but he did realise that there would be a time beyond the Nazis: ‘This is not the only Germany that we shall live to see – but we have to consider that at present two or three men have that wonderful, scientific, intelligent, docile, valiant people in their grip.’ (The words could, with a stretch of the imagination, be applied to the UK today).
27. ‘We can work it out’ – France and Germany had to come to an accord based on each other’s strengths and weaknesses – that must have been in de Gaulle’s mind when he told Chancellor Kiesinger in 1969 (shortly before the French president’s resignation and his death the following year): ‘France has a certain hesitancy and caution regarding Germany’s economic strength, as it does not wish to be inundated by German industry. That is the nature of Germany, that is the German reality.’
28. These statesmen had to wrestle with the conundrum in the Beatles’ song: ‘Try to see it my way, Do I have to keep on talking till I can't go on?, While you see it your way, Run the risk of knowing that our love may soon be gone.’ – the task of diplomacy throughout the ages.
29. No 10 - Know where your interests lie. Palmerston famously declaimed in 1848 that Britain had no eternal allies, and no permanent enemies. ‘Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.’ Kohl told me in 1989 that Germany had no interests of its own - they were all European. Palmerston and Kohl both exaggerated. The truth is somewhere between the two.
30. These political leaders were scrambling to find a way of defining their countries’ long-term interests and adapting their policies accordingly. One precondition is to recognise which countries are vital to each other: Germany and the UK are such a pair. ‘You treat me badly, I love you madly - You've really got a hold on me.’ That sums it up.
31. We can work it out. German and the UK have got a hold on each other. A state of *Aufeinander-Angewiesen-Sein*. There are many areas where the two countries can work together beyond Brexit. OMFIF has described these in the report that we produced for the British Embassy in Berlin at the end of March: Banking and financial services, infrastructure and development finance, services, climate change and sustainability, cybersecurity, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, education and research, specialised manufacturing, pensions, savings and stock markets. We shouldn’t overdramatise, either on the positive or negative side. Remember: ‘Es wird nichts so heiß gegessen, wie es gekocht wird.’ Or as Mr Schäuble famously said: ‘Things are rarely eaten as hot as they are cooked.’ The BCCG will be playing its full role in the future ‘Es gibt viel zu tun – packen wir es an!’ There’s a lot to do – let’s get on with it.