

Chancellor of unity (Kohl) versus chancellor of division (Merkel)

Abstract

Helmut Kohl has done great service in restoring first the unity of the West, then Europe, as well as Germany. Angela Merkel has made a decisive contribution to the fact that the West, Europe and Germany are currently divided. Being and appearance in foreign policy can be worked out using these two examples.

Kohl, "the provincial from Oggersheim", achieved by far the best results of all German chancellors in foreign policy. Merkel, "the leader of the West", is exactly on the other extreme, she is the by far overrated politician who caused a lot of noise and smoke in foreign policy. While Kohl had to push through his policy against considerable resistance, Merkel always surfed the zeitgeist. Result: Kohl left a considerable foreign policy legacy. Merkel, "Kohl's girl", destroyed Kohl's legacy.

Merkel, on the other hand, has achieved top performance in political marketing. She produced beautiful pictures and even more beautiful political lyric for the poetry album. Kohl with his sometimes macabre images could not keep up with Merkel in this field.

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Preliminary remark: Comparison in political science

Comparison is one of the most powerful scientific methods of all. It can be used firstly to work out commonalities and secondly to work out differences. Since Aristotle, one of the founding fathers of political science along with Plato, comparison has been the most powerful and important method in political science as well. However, comparison is rejected by many, especially in politics, because some believe that an equation should be proven. Equality can hardly be established, since there is always a multitude of differences, of whatever kind, between different political systems, parties, states, etc. Only the comparison enables a historical classification of events and thus also makes it possible to learn from history.

In the following, a comparison of the foreign policy achievements of Kohl and Merkel will be undertaken. The foreign policy situation before the two chancellors came to power will be compared with the situation when they left office.

Kohl was very aware of Germany's existential dependence on NATO and the EU, as well as on Western integration as a whole. He was also aware that such alliances contained rights and obligations and that, above all, a selfish approach on the part of Germany was inappropriate. He had a sense for distinguishing between legitimate self-interest and selfish, parasitic behavior.

Merkel has pursued "Germany first" under the guise of multilateralism since the beginning of her chancellorship in 2005, even before Trump invented the slogan "America first". In doing so, she has contributed to the division of both the West and the EU, despite her flaunted multilateralism. Added to this is the division of Germany. Several examples will be used to illustrate this, from the following fields: defense, China, energy, technology and migration policy.

Situation in the West when Helmut Kohl took office

In the 1970s, the West found itself in the first serious crisis since World War II. The USA, the leading power in the West, was downright humiliated in Vietnam in 1975 and in Iran in 1979. Also in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. With these events,

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the Soviet Union, and with it the communist, so-called Second World, reached the climax of their power-political development.

The Soviet Union and its allies in the Eastern Bloc had also overtaken NATO militarily in the 1970s. It was mainly at the insistence of Helmut Schmidt, the German Chancellor, that NATO' Double-Track Decision was taken to maintain the balance of horror: NATO would refrain from armament if the Soviet Union disarmed medium-range missiles. Otherwise there would be a further armament of the West in order to restore the military equilibrium. Schmidt was no longer able to enforce this decision because his own party refused to support him.

Restoring the unity of the West

Kohl became chancellor in 1982 and pushed through the NATO Double-Track Decision against great resistance in Germany. In doing so, he played a decisive role in maintaining the unity of the West and thus made possible a successful containment of Soviet power aspirations. Largely because of this achievement and the confidence it inspired, Bush Senior offered Germany a "Leadership in Partnership" after the end of the Cold War. This achievement is usually swept under the rug, especially in Germany, due to ideological reasons. Kohl's achievements in uniting Europe and Germany, on the other hand, cannot be denied even by his greatest opponents.

Kohl, like no other German chancellor before and after him, established and maintained an excellent relationship with the United States, and indeed with all three American presidents (Reagan, Bush and Clinton) regardless of their political party (Republican or Democrat). At no time before or since has Germany's relationship with the United States been better.

Situation in the West at the beginning of Angela Merkel's reign

On the threshold of the 21st century, the West was simply unrivaled in every respect, culturally, militarily, technologically, economically, etc. A unipolar world prevailed, which had replaced the bipolar world that had existed since the Second World War. The EU was also at the peak of development after the Second World War. Furthermore, Germany was more popular abroad than ever in its history when Merkel

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followed in Kohl's footsteps. The 2006 soccer World Cup was a PR success, precisely because Germany had had such a good reputation for years. The foreign policy reputation at that time was based on very positive relations between Germany and all countries in the world.

Westlessness, after 16 years of Merkel

Today, in 2021, the West is in a much worse situation than it was in the 1970s, so a new term was created at the Munich Security Conference in 2020: Westlessness. The worst humiliation of the West was still to come – who would have thought that the humiliations of Saigon and Tehran could one day be topped.

First, the West is more divided than ever since the Second World War. Second, it is threatened by China, Russia and some Muslim states in a far worse way than from the Eastern Bloc and China in the 1970s. Third, NATO has suffered a crushing defeat. All of NATO has been driven out of Afghanistan by illiterate people with Kalashnikovs in their hands and eggs in their pants. Even worse, the West has to transfer billions of amounts annually to the Taliban as tribute, disguised as humanitarian payments. In the past, not even the most powerful sultans of the Ottomans could achieve such successes, although they attacked the West with superior military power.

Far more important is the fact that the USA, Great Britain and Australia have founded a new alliance, AUKUS. This is the most obvious way of documenting the split in the West. What is Germany's share in this split in the West, especially in the CDU-led Merkel governments?

Despite the widespread anti-Americanism within the political establishment, the USA was and still is Germany's most important ally. They offer Germany the necessary security policy support. Due to its export-oriented economy, Germany benefits by far the most from all NATO countries from securing the world's sea routes, without even remotely contributing to the necessary costs.

Germany, the greatest beneficiary of the Pax Americana, persistently refuses to provide an appropriate and contractually agreed share of the financing of the NATO alliance. For years, Obama asked the German government in an extremely friendly

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manner to aim defense spending in the direction of the agreed 2 percent of GDP. Trump did this extremely hurtfully. At the same time, extreme neglect and even worse ministers turned the Bundeswehr into a joke army. Germans tend to go to extremes: they once covered Europe in rubble and ashes with a lightning army (Blitzarmee), now with a joke army they can neither do justice to their own country nor to their obligations in NATO. Measure and middle ground are virtues that can only be found in politics in small periods of German history, the longest being the Bonn Republic (1949-1990).

In addition to neglecting defense efforts, there is also an extreme “Germany first” policy, which asserts Germany’s advantages, even if this is at the expense of the Western partners. Mainly at Merkel’s instigation, against the express will of the elected Biden administration, the EU has signed an investment agreement with China. Germany’s egoistic motives were decisive, as was the case with Nord Stream 2. Merkel spoke of European interests in both cases; in the end, both transatlantic and European interests were ignored by the German government. Merkel has thus contributed to Westlessness in at least two ways, firstly by failing to fulfill her alliance obligations by neglecting the army and secondly by enabling China and Russia to split the West with an investment agreement and Nordstream 2.

First Eurosclerosis (1966-1986), or the situation of the EU (then still the EC) when Kohl took office

The one-sided preference for the European level was one of the main reasons for the first Eurosclerosis. De Gaulle had temporarily brought European integration to a standstill by rejecting majority decisions at the European level. The Luxembourg compromise of 1966 guaranteed every member state a right of veto, meaning that decisions at the European level had to be unanimous. The dream of a European federal state was over for the time being, de Gaulle’s “Europe of the Fatherlands” stood for intergovernmental cooperation. This was the first major reason for the first Eurosclerosis.

The second main reason was the decline in international competitiveness, or rather, the inability to shape the economic change productively at the time. The importance of

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coal and steel declined rapidly and led to enormous upheavals. What was worse, however, was that the Japanese competition was not up to par by the EC. The Japanese took over entire economic sectors in the entertainment industry (cameras, televisions). In the 1980s even the German automotive industry was on the Japanese shopping list, a fact which few people know today. Only the fear of falling into the second division economically (militarily and politically, the Europeans had been playing in the second league since the Second World War, since they could not hold a candle to the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union) generated the necessary pressure to advance European integration (I discuss European integration from 1950 to today in more detail in the following article:

[Eurosclerosis 2.0: Creating ruins in peacetime?](#)

[Bigoted hurrah Europeans and hurrah nationalists drive the EU into the ground\).](#)

Further development of the European Communities (EC) into the European Union (EU).

The deadlock in the political system was overcome by introducing a complex multi-level system through the Single European Act (SEA, adopted in 1985 and entered into force in 1987). New decision-making procedures, especially the introduction of majority voting at the EU level, made it possible to realize substantial efficiency gains. The introduction of the subsidiarity principle as another structural principle of the EC helped overcome political decision-making blockades. The importance of all levels of government (European level, nation states, regions, as well as municipalities) was explicitly emphasized. Only problems that could not be solved at the lower levels were to be transferred to the EU level.

In addition, there was an important strategic reorientation: instead of relying solely on European harmonization, the focus shifted to also include the *mutual recognition of national rules*.

The *single market project* and *monetary union* led to the restoration of international competitiveness, from which the EU continues to benefit today. Of decisive importance for the practical implementation of the project were the detailed programs, the most

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effective of which was certainly the White Paper for the Completion of the Single Market of 1985, which envisaged the completion of the European single market by 1992.

It is important to note at this point that the national and regional levels, and not just the EU level, were greatly strengthened by these reforms. The strength of the EU is rooted in the fact that it can rely on strong nation states. At the same time, the nation states would be nowhere near as powerful if they were not part of the EU.

The single market program, and later the introduction of a common currency, the euro, as well as the enlargement policy to the east, set in motion an economic dynamic which today's prosperity is largely based on. The EU has been able to overtake not only Japan but also the USA in some areas. The economic success was enormous. Today, the German automotive industry is on par with the Japanese and can easily compete with them, and is even often superior.

Eurosclerosis 2.0: lack of international competitiveness and state failure

In 2021 a lack of international competitiveness is once again becoming apparent. The EU simply lacks international competitiveness in a digital knowledge society. Politicians both in Germany and at the EU level have been asleep at the wheel for this necessary change in both education and digital infrastructure policy. It is a paradox: although neostatism dominates both at the EU level and in most EU countries, international competitiveness has come about through state failure.

The 1985 Single Market program and the EU enlargement rounds led to enormous economic growth. Furthermore, the unleashing of market forces led to technological advances, with tremendous developments in many fields, not just the automotive industry.

The EU became the leader in cell phone production in the 1990s, with Nokia, Ericsson and Siemens accounting for well over 50 percent, and in some cases two-thirds, of global cell phone production at the beginning of the century. These companies supplied both the hardware and the software. Furthermore, the standards for the first

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two generations of mobile communications networks were also set by these European companies.

In the meantime, Europe has become insignificant in both cell phone production and networks and has been overtaken by two former developing countries, China and South Korea. The expansion of communication networks in the EU cannot keep up with the network expansion in East Asia. In Germany in particular, it is catastrophic: Germany ranks second to last in the EU in terms of expansion of fiber optic networks. Furthermore, the hardware needed to run the networks is built primarily in Asia, while the software for the cell phones comes from the USA.

The state can perform a wide variety of tasks that have an impact on the economy. One such task is as a *regulator*, formulating rules for the economy. Ordoliberalism believes that this should be the only task in this regard. But the state can also act as a *provider* of economic services through state-owned enterprises. The state also acts as a *customer* of economic services. It is primarily in this role that it has failed in the transition to the knowledge society.

The European states and the EU have not invested enough in the digital infrastructure or in the digitization of public administration. On top of that, the states have behaved like highwaymen. In Germany alone, in two decades private companies have had to pay the state billions for each network generation for the use of radio frequencies.

Germany first using the example of gas supply

The double standard of German politics is illustrated very clearly by the example of energy policy. Claims and reality have been extremely divergent in this policy area for two decades. In Berlin, quite a few people talk like Mother Theresa and act like Donald Trump. Germany always presents itself as a model student when it comes to European and international cooperation. But in gas supply, Germany has been pursuing a Germany-first policy for two decades, long before Trump invented the slogan “America first”, without regard for the interests of EU or NATO partners.

At the beginning of the century, the EU’s plans were to diversify the EU’s gas supply. Two new pipelines were to be built, the Nord Stream pipeline from Russia through the

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Baltic Sea to Germany, and the Nabucco pipeline. The latter was to bring natural gas from the Caspian Sea via Turkey to Italy and Austria. The first project was realized as Nord Stream 1 and inaugurated in 2011, while the second project was abandoned. Later two more projects were launched, Nord Stream 2, again from Russia to Germany, and South Stream. South Stream was to deliver gas from Russia through the Black Sea to the Bulgarian coast, and from there one pipeline was to go to Austria and the other to Italy, supplying gas to all southeastern European states. But Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 upset these plans. The EU imposed several sanctions on Russia in March as a result.

The German proponents of the Nord Stream 2 project claim, contrary to the truth, that it is a European project. The EU's main institutions, the Commission, Parliament and Council, have not only repeatedly spoken out against this project, but have also adopted concrete measures to prevent it. Germany, however, has selfishly asserted its interests against the EU and its European partner countries.

The countries of southern and southeastern Europe were unable to do so, although one of the largest EU countries, Italy, was also affected, along with Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Austria. In June 2014, the Commission initiated infringement procedures over South Stream against Bulgaria, which subsequently halted work. The EU Commissioner for Energy from 2010 to September 2014 was the German Günther Oettinger. No infringement procedure was opened against Germany. In December 2014, Putin buried the project. Now the gas is pumped through the Black Sea to Turkey through a pipeline named Turkstream. There are plans for a pipeline from Turkey to Greece that will eventually pump gas to Italy and Austria, if it is ever completed. The European part of this pipeline is now called Tesla. It has made Europe dependent on the whims of Turkey. Thus the goal of an independent supply for the EU was deliberately made more difficult by Germany. It is not Germany but its EU partners in southeastern Europe that are paying the price. Due to its energy policy, but also its financial and migration policy, Germany is sometimes rightly perceived as the selfish hegemon of the EU.

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EU neostatism

There are two main conflicts in the EU. One is the relationship between the market and the state, and the other is the relationship between the supranational and the national level.

The neostatism promoted by Merkel in Germany and the EU as well as the one-sided preference and promotion of the European over the national level has decisively led to Brexit and to the division of the EU. Not only hurray nationalists, but also hurray Europeans have contributed to the polarization of the political debate. Merkel, “the compromise machine”, has just failed to achieve a balance in these crucial questions for the EU.

Neoliberalism does not only have advantages, as highlighted above, but also has dark sides, like every ideology. As a reaction, a form of neostatism has become established, and not only in Germany, which wants to reverse all privatizations if possible and sees the state as the decisive actor. Neostatism has cost the EU its market leadership in mobile telephony and mobile phones. It would be important to have complementarity between the market and the state, as was the case in Rhineland capitalism in Germany from 1949 to 1990.

When one sees how hateful the EU or France on the one hand and Great Britain on the other hand approach each other over little things, one is reminded of the collapse of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia as well as the book by Christopher Clark, “The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914”.

As a sleepwalker, Merkel determined German and European politics for 16 years. No other European politician has played such a large part in the technological backwardness and in the disintegration of the EU and Germany (I further discuss overcoming Eurosclerosis 2.0 in the following article:

[European Union 2.0. Bringing the EU up to date](#)).

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Reunification and division of Germany

Kohl succeeded in state reunification. Nevertheless, he did not succeed in bringing about an agreement in all areas of life between East and West. Merkel has not only failed to overcome the division in Germany, she has intensified it through her many 180-degree turns in nuclear, financial, defense and above all in migration policy.

To date, there is no adequate, rule-based immigration policy either in the EU or in Germany. And migration policy is the biggest open wound in Germany and the EU. Merkel contributed most to this shortcoming. In the first ten years of Merkel's chancellorship, opportunism led her to advocate the CDU's unworldly policy that Germany is not a country of immigration. Germany hid behind the Dublin regulation for almost two decades. Asylum seekers had to submit their applications in the country in which they entered European soil. Since Germany only bordered on EU countries, the situation was comfortable. This was exploited in a very anti-social and selfish way. The calls for help, especially from Greece, Italy and Spain, were not heard and the dead in the Mediterranean were hardly noticed by Merkel, German politics in general and the public; for years there was no solidarity from Germany.

In 2015, Merkel make a 180-degree turn at the national level, from one extreme to the other, without consulting her EU partners. Suddenly she advocated a left-wing extremist "no border" policy. Merkel now demanded solidarity from the EU partners and wanted to distribute the migrants across all countries. Countries that did not want to take part in this swing were severely treated with moral acid. States and governments that adhered to the Dublin rules, which had been in force for almost two decades, were defamed. For example, Hungary was viciously attacked for erecting a border wall. For years there was no objection to the border fences that Spain had previously erected in the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and due to which many people died. Therefore, migration policy does not portray Merkel as a principled politician. It is precisely this policy area that shows Merkel's cynicism. Furthermore, it is a prime example that Merkel was only interested in Merkel. She always represented the opinion that was beneficial to her, once a backward-looking, right-wing populist party line in migration policy, then surfing the zeitgeist with a left-wing populist opinion.

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Migration policy has not only divided Germany further, it has also placed an extreme strain on relations with EU countries such as Hungary and Poland, but also with Italy, Greece and Spain. It also put a particular strain on the relationship with Turkey. Even more: the migration policy has developed into the Achilles heel of Germany and the EU, especially because Merkel took such extreme positions, lost a sense of measure and was unable to reach any workable compromise solutions on a central political issue. Rules-based migration, such as that practiced in Canada for decades, is still a long way off.

Relationship with European partners

During Kohl's reign Germany enjoyed very good relations with France, Great Britain, Italy, Greece, Poland, Hungary and Switzerland. Kohl succeeded with Margaret Thatcher, undoubtedly the most difficult prime minister of Great Britain, to renew the EU. Merkel was unable find any compromise solutions on difficult issues, leading to Brexit.

The EU is not only under "friendly fire" with Great Britain, but also with Switzerland, to the detriment of everyone. Relations with Italy and Greece for years have been worse than at any time since the Second World War. The same is true with Poland and Hungary.

At first glance, the relationship with France seems great. But that is only packaging: great pictures with hearty politicians, pathetic speeches on any occasion, no matter how trivial, skillfully deceive the public.

All European politicians are calling for new European impulses, and they are largely sidelined because of Germany's unfamiliarity with the world. This is particularly noticeable in European defense policy. The condition of the Bundeswehr speaks for itself and a defense without an efficient army is simply not possible. Furthermore, no progress is being made on armaments projects because the German side is usually blocking them. There are other fundamental differences that block any further development in financial and energy policy. In short: the much-invoked Franco-German engine of the EU has been stuttering since Kohl's time and has not initiated

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any noteworthy future-oriented strategies. What comes to mind at first glance is the division of the EU, especially Brexit, but also the poisoned way in which different EU countries act against each other in different policy areas.

Relationship to the Soviet Union, Russia and Turkey

The relationship with the Soviet Union was extremely strained in the 1980s, primarily due to NATO's Double-Track Decision. In addition, Kohl made a very defamatory comparison between Gorbachev and Goebbels, the head of Nazi propaganda. Nevertheless, Kohl managed to build an extremely good relationship with Gorbachev. Germany's peaceful unification would not have been possible without this achievement. After the Soviet Union disappeared from the world stage in 1991, Kohl was able to establish an equally excellent relationship with the new ruler in the Kremlin, the now Russian President Yeltsin. The withdrawal of the Russian armed forces from German soil was uneventful.

In Putin, Merkel had for the first time an extremely pro-Germany president as a negotiating partner. In contrast to Kohl, Merkel spoke Russian fluently, but unfortunately she had neither the empathy or the skills needed to make German-Russian relations even remotely as successful as Kohl was able to do. This also applies, to a lesser extent, to relations with Turkey, which have also been at an all-time low since the Second World War.

Merkel the most successful politician of the '68 generation

In an age in which communication is so highly valued, sweet words count more than responsible deeds; the main thing is to make a "*bella figura*". The '68 zeitgeist rewards late adolescents, i.e. people who have not made the leap into adulthood. It is not the content that is important, but the packaging. The main thing is to avoid unattractive images. Aestheticization and emotionalization favor politicians who above all focus on showing decency, taking a stand, and simulating consternation. One wave of indignation after another is staged almost daily. What is important above all is aesthetic and emotional appearance and not rational problem-solving competence. The result is extreme polarization (black and white thinking), which leads to an infantilization of

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politics. The bad consequences can be marveled at in the example of Merkel's foreign policy.

Merkel is the most successful politician of the 1968 generation. This generation has succeeded in a revolution: bourgeois society has been transformed into an infantile fun society (the main thing is fun).

A serious bourgeois society is characterized by two basic characteristics. Firstly, there is evolution and not revolution. Due to its complexity, the political system is further developed through continuous incremental improvements (kaizen) and innovations. The most obvious characteristic of Merkel's style of government are the 180-degree turns in important policy areas, that is, her revolutionary style. She enforced the TINA principle (there is no alternative) just as effectively as Margaret Thatcher before her. With the habitus of a factual, down-to-earth woman, she implemented revolutionary projects almost instantly and presented the changes as having no alternative.

Second, in a bourgeois society, a strict distinction is made between what is important and what is unimportant: "work is work, schnapps is schnapps" is a German proverb that sums up the bourgeois view of things. The appearance, the bourgeois packaging, has always been there with Merkel. Thanks to excellent political marketing, she was able to surf the zeitgeist like hardly any other politician. She presented herself as a principles-oriented, factual and unpretentious politician but practiced the opposite, as I have shown here using the example of foreign policy. This policy, which is also praised by some with the title "driving on sight", has destroyed any continuity and reliability. As a result, it has made a decisive contribution to the division of the West, Europe and Germany.

Conclusion: Kohl as chancellor of unity, Merkel as chancellor of division

Under Helmut Kohl's leadership, Germany was a reliable partner of the West as well as an essential pillar of NATO. He made a decisive contribution to overcoming the first great crisis in the West after the Second World War. Foreign relations were excellent, not only with Germany's most important partners and neighbors, the USA, France,

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Great Britain, the Soviet Union/Russia, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Switzerland, etc., but also with other countries. Furthermore, at the side of Margaret Thatcher and Francois Mitterrand, he succeeded in overcoming the first Eurosclerosis and guided the sustainable further development and vitalization of the EU. German reunification would never have been possible without this outstanding foreign policy context – indeed, it was the very precondition.

Merkel's popularity in foreign policy is based above all on an enormous amount of travelling, during which very beautiful pictures and even more beautiful political phrases and slogans, beautiful political lyric for the poetry album, were created. Kohl, with his sometimes macabre images (handouts in cemeteries), could not keep up with Merkel in this field.

But if one looks at the results, not the declarations of intent, Merkel leaves behind extremely bad conditions. Relations with all the countries mentioned above are bad, even much worse than in Kohl's time: the EU is divided and politically paralyzed, especially by Brexit, and has lost enormous clout. After Kohl, the EU was one of the most important players technologically and economically, along with the USA and Japan. In the meantime, the EU has been left behind in digitalization and has been overtaken by two developing countries (China and South Korea).

Angela Merkel has left behind a shambles not only in the EU, but in foreign policy as a whole: aspirations and reality are not in an appropriate field of tension, but are worlds away from each other. Merkel has turned Germany into an unreliable member of the West. In NATO, Germany is now the biggest freeloader, with a joke army. And in other fields such as energy, financial and migration policy, Merkel has also made 180-degree turns that have led to the division of the West, the EU and Germany.

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