Max Otte: Europe at Breaking Point - EU Will Not Survive

Max Otte is an entrepreneur, political economist, investment manager, philanthropist and political activist. With 141 votes, he was the runner-up for the election of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany on 13 February 2022. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: https://gofund.me/09ea012f Buy Diesen merchandise: https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL 00:00 The Current State of Europe 09:33 Economic Crisis as a Catalyst for Change 19:38 The Legitimacy Crisis in European Leadership 24:01 Future of US-Europe Relations 25:16 The Challenge of Consensus in Democracies 26:36 Germany's Independent Path: A New Approach 30:05 Navigating Energy Security and Economic Interests 34:07 The Future of the Euro and European Integration 39:03 Germany's Relationship with Russia: A Path Forward

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined today by Professor Max Otte, who came in second in the 2022 German presidential election, running as a representative of Alternative für Deutschland, or AfD. He's also an economist, financial analyst, and best-selling author. So welcome back to the program.

#Max Otte

Thank you, Professor Diesen. It's always a pleasure.

#Glenn

I wanted to start off by asking about what is happening now across Europe. There are a lot of differences in terms of the growing political, economic, and social crises. We have the protests, which have spread a bit from France to Germany and could possibly even trigger a larger financial crisis. And now, of course, we have Poland, which could create a lot of problems as well. I was wondering, how do you read these problems we're currently having in Europe?

#Max Otte

Well, Europe certainly is at the breaking point. I mean, the elites in power have tried everything to stabilize the situation. We've seen what's going on in Romania. I mean, the presidential candidate has been arrested. I'm happy this hasn't happened in Germany so far. We've seen the attempted coup in Poland. We've seen the uprisings and unrest in France, and we see, of course, widespread discontent in Germany. In Britain, again, which is not quite Europe but also somewhat Europe, we see widespread arrests for thought crimes. So Europe is certainly at a breaking point. I'll start with this general observation.

It needs a common enemy, and that's, in some ways, how the Europeans have tried to emancipate themselves from the U.S.: by making Russia their common enemy and thereby distancing themselves from the Trump administration. "We're Europeans going our own way." But in the end, by doing that, they're playing into the hands of the U.S., because it's in the U.S.'s geostrategic interest to have Europe divided between Russia and the rest of Europe, and then also internally divided. So we see this breaking point. We can see what is next. We've seen the unrest in France. And basically, the EU falls if France falls or if Germany falls. I mean, France has been living, to be honest, on German capital and German subsidies since the financial crisis, at least.

It hasn't had a balanced budget for decades. And, I mean, there are the direct transfers, but there are also the TARGET2 balances in the ECB, which are basically credits we are giving to the Eurosystem that don't really bear interest. There are the nuclear power plants in France that serve the German market, and Germany is destroying its own power plants. So all these are hidden transfers to France. And there are a lot of hidden transfers from Germany to the U.S. But this, of course, also has a limit. And if France really falls, then Europe falls. And Germany, of course, also has a limit. So if Germany gets into trouble, then Europe also falls. I personally think that a severe economic crisis is the only chance for Europe to reform.

That, of course, always comes with the danger of an escalation into a war against Russia if the European elites really get crazy. I mean, Macron and Merz are at their lowest public approval ratings ever, something like 15%. So who knows what they will think of? By the way, there's another presidential election coming up in Germany in February next year. I won't stand. The one I did was costly enough, but we can be quite interested and excited to see who will be, let's say, the populist candidate, or the candidate who is basically standing for a radically different approach to Europe, to national interests, and to cooperation between states. So that can also be an indicator of a change in Germany. But at this point, we're still on the brink. In such a fragile situation, we don't know where we will actually end up.

#Glenn

It's interesting what you mentioned about this contradiction: the assumption that if we have Russia as a common enemy, this will bring unity within Europe. And it will also bring the Americans back and keep them in Europe. But making Russia into an enemy also creates an economic crisis and a

security crisis. This only makes the Europeans weaker and more dependent on the US, which means that the US has less interest. And the Europeans themselves become more fragile and, unavoidably, more divided.

So it doesn't look like a very sustainable plan, at least in the long run, to build a continent based on trying to redo the Cold War or cosplay World War II or whatever they're doing now. When you say "breaking point," what do you think is going to give here? Is it Europe's economy? Because we are sinking. Is it the lack of political legitimacy? Because this is also a huge and growing problem, especially when state leaders are down to 10–15% approval ratings. Or is it just social upheaval, or...?

#Max Otte

Let's go back to Europe versus Russia. I mean, if Europe reunites in a new Cold War against Russia, it could hold Europe together for a while. And it does not necessarily have to bring the US closer to Europe, because then the US can step back and say, okay, the Europeans are pinned down in this Cold War against Russia. We can get out. We can concentrate on our economic interests. And so, actually, it would be an ideal scenario for the Americans. But what are the breaking points? Certainly French public finances. I mean, we've seen bond rates spike markedly in the past weeks, and that is just the beginning, because we are at the turning point of a more than 40-year trend of falling interest rates. This cannot go on. I mean, we had the lowest rates, of course, ten years ago, eight years ago, with zero interest. So that is already far away. But even 5% or 6% on government bonds is not, historically speaking, really high.

So, I mean, if we say 4% is a good rate for a solid government, 5% or 6% is not really high. So that is certainly going to continue. And so one breaking point is French public finances. The other one is the German real economy. I mean, we are transforming parts of it into a war economy, but our bread and butter—the automotive industry, machine tools, SMEs, the Mittelstand—those are suffering. I mean, we have record numbers of bankruptcies and failures. So the German real economy, which is still a backbone of the EU, is in danger. And then, of course, we have the shrinking middle class. We have written about this for more than 20 years.

We have irresponsible elites. We have a huge gap between rich and poor. And we have a redistribution—not from the poor to the rich, as it's commonly described, but from the middle to the rich and to the poor. So the elites buy themselves, so to speak, constituencies and electorates that are totally dependent on them. And the middle class is disappearing more and more. And so that's also why we see this unrest. So unrest can be a breaking point. Poland can be a breaking point, if the Polish people stand tall and firm, which I very much hope they do. I did a number of X posts on that that were quite widely received.

And I must say, I respect the country. I was amazed at what Nawrocki did. But that situation is also still up in the air. Let's say Poland stands firm. Then that is a huge problem for the EU. And it's like

trying to repair a dam that has been breached or that is leaking at various points. So we see ever more desperate attempts by the European elites and by the EU elites to repair that dam, but then it's leaking at another point. So I can only hope that the thing collapses and, simultaneously, we keep the peace. I mean, there will be economic hardship. There will be tough choices. But that's the only way I see for Europe.

#Glenn

Europe needs a collapse in order to reform, essentially, right?

#Max Otte

It needs a serious economic crisis, yes. I mean, in the end, if you think about it, the same thing happened after the Roaring Twenties in the US. We had Roosevelt with his reforms. We had, of course, failed reform in Germany, which ended in a dictatorship. But I guess there are times like this when you really have to have that kind of breakdown to build something new.

#Glenn

But I remember when I was teaching students about the European Union a while ago, Germany was the economic locomotive pulling the continent forward. One looked at those dilemmas—deeper or wider integration—but overall, things seemed somewhat stable. But Germany is at the heart of Europe, and it is the country that tends to move the rest of the continent. And for good reason, people are looking at it more carefully than at other countries. And there's a sentiment now, especially with Merz, that Germany's entire political establishment is losing some of its authority. This can, yes, be a consequence of economic, political, and social factors, but it also impacts everything. I was wondering, how do you see this crisis of authority or legitimacy? How would you define it?

#Max Otte

Absolutely. I mean, Germans have not had many revolutions, although that is to their credit. I mean, there was the peaceful revolution of 1989, which is being downplayed, which was a wonderful thing. There was, of course, 1832 and 1848–49. But there was always the complaint that Germans don't take to the streets.

#Max Otte

Which historically is, in a way, true because, a bit like in the Nordic countries, there was a compact between rulers and the governed. I mean, the elites and the common people were never as far apart as in England especially, or in France, or in the U.S. to some extent. So it was a much tighter social compact, I would say. And, of course, with the dwindling middle class and with obvious

incompetence at the highest levels—and this doesn't only start with Merz. I mean, Merkel wasn't incompetent. She just played by different rules and for different masters. But, of course, after her, Scholz also was not quite incompetent, but he didn't do much.

But certainly his foreign minister and his economics minister were quite incompetent. I won't say their names because I could face a penalty in Germany. I mean, we are pretty good at arresting people for hate crimes because it's a replay of the scenario we see at the European level. I mean, there's ever more propaganda, ever more repression of dissenting opinions, and that's one reason why AfD has become the biggest party, with almost 30% of the vote. Now, you've had Sahra Wagenknecht on your channel, I know, and she's a smart woman. So BSW is now starting to cooperate with AfD at a limited level in one state. But other than that, all the other parties are trying to keep AfD out.

And it's really also very much to Tino Chrupalla's credit that he stood for a peace line in the party, for peace with Russia, for negotiations. He stood for energy sovereignty—not autarky, but sovereignty—for German interests. And, of course, he's getting a lot of pressure on this, even from some within his own party. So we have a replay in Germany of the general scenario: trying ever more desperately to fix the dam, but the dam is leaking, and we'll see where it breaks next.

#Glenn

What is fascinating is that the period of economic prosperity also brought political and social stability. But now that the economies of Europe are in decline, at least relative decline, the rules no longer sustain themselves. We see the political elites getting desperate and resorting to various means. For example, you mentioned hate speech, which has become a very strange concept. Anything that goes against what they're saying is now hate speech or disinformation or propaganda. And the ability now to just crush all dissent is kind of terrifying. You see it now across most of Europe. But it seems like economic recovery would be the way to go in order to restore this stability. That's essentially what Chancellor Friedrich Merz was tasked with, though. How do you explain his failure to do so? Because he was supposed to reverse Germany's decline. In your opinion, what is it that went wrong with his initiatives?

#Max Otte

Well, I've known him for a long time. We're from the same region in Germany. And he's in way over his head. Basically, he broke every promise, and he's just not made for such a job. I mean, he was a lawyer serving corporate interests. He had some, let's say, advisory roles in SMEs and other companies. But basically, he was an adviser. He was a lawyer. He was good at making speeches, even 20 years ago or so, when he was a young and rising star. And he really wanted this to get even with Merkel. And now that he's there, he just holds on to power. And you can see it. He has no line, no strategy, except the war line with Russia. The German people don't matter to him.

It's a total disaster. I mean, it couldn't be worse. And the approval ratings, of course, reflect this. And he's just not cut out for the role in any way. Even Scholz was better, although Scholz didn't do much. But at least he understood. I just had a long conversation on my own channel with Klaus von Dohnanyi, a nephew of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a minister in the '70s and the ruling mayor of Hamburg. He's now 98 and very sharp, and he has just written more books. And he told me, well, at least Scholz knew and tried within a very limited range, but Merz does not know anything. And that is pretty much my opinion, too.

#Glenn

And competence. Well, what I find fascinating, though, is that it looks like many, if not all, European leaders essentially have a choice: do you pursue some basic national interests and stabilize your economy and society, or do you fight Russia? I mean, you can't have it both ways. And sometimes these leaders speak very openly: well, our priority is—well, they call it helping Ukraine, but as we know, the Ukrainians—not Zelensky necessarily, but the vast majority of Ukrainians, as polls show—want immediate negotiations. They want a negotiated end to the war. And still, it appears our leaders can't even, you know, talk to the Russians. It is quite remarkable to see. But to what extent is he facing opposition now within Germany? Because if he's down to, you know, 10 or 15 percent in his approval ratings, with this comes a legitimacy crisis. It certainly opens up a vacuum to be filled by other forces.

#Max Otte

Well, again, the pro-peace forces are few. I mean, the population wants this, but their representation in parliament is not so strong. So far, Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel are holding the line, but they have opposition inside the AfD because, of course, some parliamentarians are open to, let's say, lobbying or NATO influence or whatever, and they get a pat on the back and they get to sit in conferences and so on. So there's a constant pull back into whatever you call it—the deep state, mainstream interest groups. So far, the AfD is holding firm.

The BSW is putting out these points in general. In tactical matters, they have often wavered, which is unfortunate. But you can see that if people are in politics for too long, they get isolated, and they are in a bubble. And that's, to some extent, I'm afraid, what happened to BSW and, of course, what's happening to a much greater extent in all the mainstream parties. And in the CDU, for example, anybody saying anything else would, of course, be cast out or punished severely. So, so far, the repression is holding, although the population wants something different.

#Glenn

I'm a bit perplexed by the policies towards the United States. I mean, I often make the point that I would like to see Europe have a close relationship with the US, but it seems like the European leaders are attempting to essentially mimic the model we had in the '90s. But it seems like now, for

the United States, their interests are effectively elsewhere. Their priorities are different. They want to look at the Western Hemisphere. They want to look at East Asia. I'm just wondering, how do you see the US-Europe relationship being organized moving forward? Because so far, it looks like the Europeans are willing to be quite submissive in the hope of being rewarded by the Americans. But instead, by making an enemy out of Russia, they're weaker.

By bowing to all of America's pressure in terms of horrible trade agreements or handing over partial sovereignty of Greenland—or at least the right to trade with whomever they want—I mean, all of these things, you know, to make ourselves look like loyal friends of the U.S., I just feel like we're making Europe even weaker and more vulnerable to exploitation. How do you see this now? Because I thought the ideal position for Europe was to be a center of power in a multipolar world. But it seems like this commitment only to the United States makes us a vassal in an almost bipolar world between the U.S. and China.

#Max Otte

Well, the control the U.S. has over individual policymakers, over public opinion, over the media in Europe—I mean, it was always high, but it's much higher now than in the '70s, '80s, '90s, or even in 2010. So a European leader at this point is...

#Max Otte

Almost powerless. I mean, the U.S. is very powerful. We've seen an ambassador—I think it was a Greek ambassador—who engineered, let's say, a major political change in Bulgaria just recently. So there are these engineered changes, and we can go back to Ukraine, which is, of course, not in the EU. But U.S. influence—societal influence, media influence, political influence, economic influence—is very tight and very controlled and very skillfully engineered. So to get rid of that, let's say, corset—it's a corset our policymakers are in—would be very difficult. And, well, some completely believe in it, like Merz.

That's why I say an economic collapse is probably necessary to do something, and it's probably coming anyway. So it's pretty depressing. And for Germany, for example, it would mean going its own way a bit more. I mean, over the past decades, ever since the Federal Republic was founded, the approach was to do everything in lockstep with the U.S. and also with its European partners—primarily, of course, France at first. But even there, I mean, Germany needs to make tough choices, even vis-à-vis France, even sometimes vis-à-vis Poland. I mean, the wounds vis-à-vis Poland have healed pretty well in Germany. My father's family is from Silesia, which is now Poland, which was totally German. So in Germany, you find almost no revanchists.

I mean, I would say this is below 1%, if that. Unfortunately, those old wounds in Poland are still a bit more open, although both countries have suffered terribly. So it's time to put this behind us. And if Germany starts going its own way, this will certainly create further unrest, but I would say that is

the only way to move forward. I mean, in, I think, 1994, there was the Schäuble–Lamers paper, and Ulrike Guérot, who was also on your channel, I think—my good friend Ulrike—was an official or a staff member then, and she was involved in that paper. And the Schäuble–Lamers paper said we need to have a Europe of various speeds. So fewer actors should be able to go and do things on individual issues and then invite the others to join in.

I still think that is the right approach. We cannot move in lockstep with 20-plus members. This is impossible. I mean, there are approaches, but of course, the hardest thing is the euro. And there's a debate within the AfD about whether to leave it or reform it. But in the end, it doesn't matter. If you really reform it, it's going to be as tough as leaving it. So, I mean, if you make painful reforms, you might as well leave. This is only a matter of degree. And that, of course, will create an outcry in France. But it may come to a point where it will happen anyway because the financial reserves are exhausted.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I always think about what you said about all these countries walking in lockstep. You can't really have it both ways—that is, all these democracies pursuing prosperity and their own economic interests, while also expecting everyone to have the exact same policy. And I think this is part of the problem, this demand for policy conformity. And I think it also impacts everything, even down to political discourse, because if you want everyone to walk in lockstep, to agree on everything, you kind of have to manipulate every issue into black and white—that is, good and evil.

Otherwise, how will you get 27 countries to agree on the same security policy, economic policy? And I think that's part of the reason why EU enlargement, for example, was framed as, "Oh, this is only about democracy. That's it." So if you don't support enlargement of the EU, then you don't support the spread of freedom. This is a way of coercing consensus, almost. And I think it's problematic because you fail to address the challenges, for example, of enlargement. If you recognize that it does come with a lot of problems, and that for some countries it creates more problems than for others, at least you could mitigate those problems, address them.

But in order to get that consensus, you have to frame it in an artificial way. And I feel that's part of the problem we have now with our war with Russia. That is, how do you get 27 countries in Europe to agree to fight the world's largest nuclear power? Well, you kind of have to sell it as, you know, the return of Hitler or the restoration of the Soviet Union. Everything is unprovoked. Otherwise, you know, once nuance is allowed, they're not going to walk in lockstep anymore. And so I think this is the problem. But I did want to ask you: you said Germany should go its own way. How would you, I guess, operationalize this? What would this entail?

#Max Otte

Well, I did not say it should go its own way, but sometimes it has to take steps independently without coordinating everything. That was my somewhat more differentiated statement. So, indeed, the euro is one thing: very serious reform initiatives or Dexit. The other thing is, of course, to reopen Nord Stream. And there are loud voices in Poland who don't want this. They see it almost as an unfriendly act or as the act of an enemy. But, I mean, this is infrastructure. This is national sovereignty. I mean, it is Germany's prerogative to have a safe and secure energy source, or one of a few.

So those are things that can be done effectively. There can be better representation in the EU. I mean, the intergovernmental construction of the EU always favored the French because they had, of course, a functioning top bureaucracy, and they sent their top people to Brussels and to Strasbourg. Germans sent their, let's say, retirees or the people who did not get ahead in the German political system. That is a big mistake. I wrote about it in 1991, and nothing is better nowadays. So these are a few things that could and should be done. One area where the EU has to act in lockstep is trade policy.

Otherwise, we cannot prevail against China or the US. The US is much more problematic for Europe than China is right now in terms of value transferred to the US from the European economy. So competition policy is also very important. I mean, competition policy in Germany is being used to destroy the Mittelstand. The beer-brewing companies had a big case a few years ago. Potato growers had a big case. Competition policy is not used against Google, Microsoft, Alphabet, and so on and so forth. This is the real problem, and this is an issue Europe has to address as a whole. So, indeed, Glenn, you're a man of reason and nuance, and this is not a time of reason and nuance.

That's why politicians go for black and white. But moving Europe ahead is a mix of things where we have to act in common and things where some of the big powers, maybe even Germany alone, have to advance on their own. I mean, one of the failed deals in Europe—and German diplomacy and Kohl were naive about this—was the euro. I mean, if the euro, which was termed Germany's nuclear weapon by François Mitterrand, is socialized, then we should have a true common defense identity—not an aggression identity, a defense identity for the defense of the homeland—which, of course, failed in the French National Assembly, I think, in 1952. And then we had NATO accession pretty shortly after that.

So we have to go way back, and we could even argue about the origins of the EU, which were, in a way, a bureaucratic attempt and also, of course, an act to harness German industrial potential and to socialize the German steel industry. So, I mean, there are two interests. We have to lay these interests open. Of course, there's not much left of the German steel industry, and there won't be much left of the automotive industry very soon. So it's not five to twelve; it's after twelve. That's why I'm saying we'll have a time of economic hardship, come what may, but we'd better go into it prepared.

#Glenn

What you said about Nord Stream made me think about the demand for everyone to walk in lockstep, because I think it's evident when we start to take these ridiculous positions—that is, having all the European leaders stand together and celebrate that we've cut ourselves off completely from Russian energy. Now we have energy security. I mean, for, like, forever, energy security was always defined by diversification, diversification, and diversification. That is, get as many suppliers as possible. That way, you make sure that it's not a supplier's market and you get the best possible deal. So essentially, energy security was defined as the reliable supply of affordable energy.

Now it means cutting ourselves off from Russia. And it doesn't make any sense. And so we have to make up these narratives, which is why you also see European leaders standing up there—and I see the German leaders as well—saying, "Oh, well, the Russians cut us off from gas." It's like, "No, they didn't. We did this to ourselves." It's just quite shocking to see this. And even with Nord Stream, no one seems to want to ask twice, because I always make the point that, you know, they now recognize that at least the Americans knew about the attack on Nord Stream before it happened, even though they claim it was only the Ukrainians who did it and that they tried to stop it.

We've more or less already admitted that, when we pretended it was the Russians who attacked Nord Stream to escalate the war in Ukraine and militarize the Baltic Sea, we knew that wasn't the case. And we said it nonetheless. I mean, this is quite extraordinary. We admitted that we lied about it in order to escalate the war and militarize the Baltic Sea. We lied to our own public. And there's no interest from the public. And also, sorry to go on, but even now, the Americans might bring back Nord Stream, but under their control and administration. This is what we want.

#Max Otte

We're even more dependent. By the way, the Americans certainly knew about Nord Stream. There's a famous statement by Biden, with Scholz standing next to him, on 7 February 2022. But I'll give you an eyewitness account from a person I know who was vacationing on Bornholm. He said that in the days before the attack, there were a lot of Polish cars with Polish license plates there. So that's all I can say. I mean, this is just another, let's say, fact for the big picture. It doesn't prove anything, but it's just another fact that should be out there.

#Glenn

How do you see the euro, by the way? Will the euro survive?

#Max Otte

It's in a way synonymous with the EU, and I hope not. I mean, my job talk at Boston University in April 1998 was “The Euro and the Future of the European Union,” and I predicted the euro would

not survive and would have great problems in 10 years, which would have been 2008, which is pretty close to the mark. That's because Europe is not an ideal economic union. But we, of course, have Americanized the European financial system and the European economic system to quite a large extent. I mean, it's as if you have forced a soccer player to play American football, and that's what's been happening to the large corporations in Germany and parts of the rest of Europe, and to our Mittelstand companies to some extent.

So, I mean, a total reform of the euro, or a collapse of the euro followed by a painful reform that gives much more leeway to individual countries and imposes huge penalties on overdrafts and so on and so forth, is the only way to go. The question is how long this repressive regime can last. I mean "regime" in the political science sense, but you could also take it literally. So, how long will that regime last? We've seen an escalation of repression.

We've seen growing discontent. We've seen, so far, the narratives—the black-and-white enemy narratives. I mean, there are domestic enemies. Those are the populists. And there are external enemies: the Russians and, increasingly, the Palestinians. I mean, debate over Gaza is very polarized in Germany. So all these are means to polarize and to split the population and to divert people from nuances and from their own interests. So the matrix is still holding. There are blips in the matrix. I would certainly hope, as tough as it is, that the euro does collapse.

And I know I will get quite a few objections to that, but I think it's an important, let's say, point and an important issue that would then lead to real negotiations and to reopening some of the deals about common defense and trade policy. It's the only lever Germany has left to move the debate forward. And I think Germany and France are still very important, crucial to the debate. Poland is being built up, so Poland will play a role, and we'll see how all of this goes. I mean, I'm beyond predictions. I did predict the world system crash in 2019, the chaos we're in. I wrote a big book. So now we're in the chaos, and when you're in the chaos, it's very hard to make predictions.

#Glenn

I had another thought about Nord Stream. Did you know that Nord Stream 1 and 2 were blown up on the 26th of September? And the day after, Poland, Norway, and Denmark officially inaugurated the Baltic pipeline, which replaced that gas with Norwegian gas supplied to Poland. I mean, I know some things can be called a coincidence, but it feels like it's a bit on the nose.

#Max Otte

I have a day job. I have a financial company, and I run mutual funds for private investors. So that's why we've been invested in Equinor and in Aker BP for a long time. Yeah, I know. So, of course, these are indigenous sources of European oil and gas, and they're very important. But, of course, we should also go back to receiving gas from Russia. Yeah.

#Glenn

Well, can Germany shift course toward these goals—that is, diversify and improve ties with the Russians—as long as it's tied into the EU and NATO? Because, again, the EU and NATO were supposed to be the key pillars on which Germany would grow over the past 80 years. Within this framework, what would be good for Germany was seen as good for Europe, and Germany would dress itself in the clothes of the EU and NATO. But now it's become so tied to them. Is it possible to do something within this straitjacket?

#Max Otte

Well, I would phrase it the other way around. Germans thought whatever was good for NATO and the EU would be good for Germany. So I'm not sure. I mean, it could happen again if we have a severe economic crisis. But let's suppose AfD gets into power and pursues the current party line. I mean, I am afraid for the lives and health of its leaders because the pressure and threats facing AfD heads of state and heads of government, let's say, would be immense. And I mean, the intelligence services are involved in many things. This is one thing I've learned in the past, let's say, 10 or 12 years.

I'm a realist by training in political science. I think power and states matter, but I've learned a lot more about how deep the meddling and interference of the intelligence services go and how brutal they can be. I mean, they can carry out precision strikes, and that is a reality any European leader has to live with these days. So there has to be widespread popular support, and we'll see. I mean, maybe the U.S. is becoming preoccupied with itself. We're in a totally fluid situation, but the chances are, of course, not very big. I mean, there's a chance, but I would say it's below 50%.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, this is, I guess, the terrifying part: within Germany, they actually labeled the AfD, which is now the most popular party in Germany, as an extremist organization, allowing the intelligence services to actually go after its members. It's quite radical, really. I mean, of course, we've seen similar trends across the continent, but I guess my last question is mostly about what you think would happen if the AfD takes power under Alice Weidel. Do you think the AfD would, to some extent, take Germany out of either the EU or NATO?

#Max Otte

Well, it's, of course, under Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla. I mean, they're co-leaders of the party. Alice is the candidate for chancellor, but I'm sure Tino would play an important role. I would think they would start with slightly less drastic measures. I mean, they would start by negotiating with Russia. Hopefully, they would start taking some steps on their own. They would start by renegotiating deals with the French government.

But there's, of course, the old reflex: whenever Germany did anything independently—as was the case, for example, in 1992 with the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia before the other states, which Genscher did at the time—there was a huge outcry: "This is a German Sonderweg." So, I mean, there was a reflex to label anything that Germany did independently as a German Sonderweg. So they have to get the others used to Germany sometimes doing its own thing. There will be enough uproar and heated debate that I don't think they would start by taking Germany out of the EU and NATO right away. I mean, this is and should be the last resort, but it should be a last resort.

#Glenn

Actually, let me put in the last question there. How would you ideally define the relations between the two big powers of Europe, that is, Germany and Russia? Because I always find it interesting that Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was, you know, the former national security adviser in the U.S. and who famously wrote The Grand Chessboard in the '90s, once even stated that deepening economic cooperation between Germany and Russia threatens European integration. I find this an interesting view: you have the two largest countries in Europe, and their economic integration threatens European integration.

But that kind of shows what kind of vision they have for Europe. It is interesting because, for the Russians, their main concern over the past 35 years—and also the reason for their new anger towards Germany, why they feel betrayed—is this broken security architecture in Europe. That is, instead of honoring the agreements to have indivisible security, they have instead expanded NATO, trying to turn Russia's neighboring states into frontline states. I mean, there's a lot that has to be fixed now between the Germans and the Russians.

#Max Otte

Yes, there's a lot that has to be fixed. Let me go back to Brzezinski briefly, to The Grand Chessboard. That book was translated into German by a publisher friend of mine. It sold very well. The second edition sold very well. And then the American publisher said, "We won't renew the license." So it was taken off the German market. The same thing happened to the same publisher with Weapons of Mass Migration by Kelly Greenhill. It sold very well in Germany—the first edition, the second edition—and then it was taken off the market. So the U.S. publishers chose to forgo the revenue. They preferred not to have the books published.

So, I mean, these are all the secret mechanisms by which our opinion is shaped, even before the mass media get involved. That's just an interesting fact. But to me, of course, Russia is an integral part of Europe, so European integration means including Russia. I mean, the U.S. had a big part in building up the EU, also as an economic sphere against Russia. The American picture of European

integration was also as a bulwark against communism. There was a decade when things opened up, in the '90s. We could have had true European integration, which, of course, includes Russia because its main centers are west of the Ural Mountains, and that is Europe. That is Europe.

Russia is Europe, and there are long-standing ties between Germany and Russia. So this, of course, requires a lot of skillful diplomacy between France, Germany, and Russia, but also Poland. I mean, those are the main actors. There should be a group of those four powers, really. I mean, we're far away from that. But I do think, although we've betrayed Russia many, many times, and there's widespread disappointment within the elites, of course, the Russians still view themselves as the winners of World War II. And I think with a sensible policy, those...

#Max Otte

Those divisions could be bridged. This is easier in some ways than repairing the EU.

#Glenn

Yeah, I always suspected that one of the reasons why the Russians now seem most angry with the Germans is that they had warmer relations before. I mean, they wouldn't feel betrayed by the British because they already knew the British hated them. So there was no love lost. But I think that kind of resentment sometimes goes beyond the rational, in terms of being fueled by something other than strategic calculations. It reflects some of the hopes they had because, when they wanted to integrate with Europe, I think they always saw Germany as essentially the heart of Europe, the main one. So anyway, do you have any final thoughts?

#Max Otte

Yeah, there's an interesting fact I want to add, because just last week a friend of mine, who would also be an interesting guest for your channel, Alexander von Bismarck, received the Pushkin Medal from Vladimir Putin. He's a great-great-nephew of Otto von Bismarck—not a direct descendant—and he has done a lot for German-Russian friendship in these times. You can see this online. Of course, it was completely left out of the mainstream media. So there are attempts, and there's hope. I'm more optimistic about reconciliation with Russia, if we don't manage to get ourselves into a hot war, than I am about reform of the EU.

#Glenn

We'll have to speak with him.

#Max Otte

Anyway, thank you so much for your time. My pleasure.