

Max Otte: Germany's Decline & the Civilizational Crisis of the West

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 Februar 2022. Otte discusses the political crisis of Germany, Europe and the US. 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> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. Today we're joined by an excellent guest, Max Otte, an economist, former professor, bestselling author, investment manager, and politician who also came in second in the 2022 German presidential election. So thank you. We haven't spoken for a few months. It's good to see you again.

#Max Otte

Yeah, good to see you again, Professor Diesen. I want to correct one thing. I'm not a politician. I'm a political activist at best. So I ran for president, I got the second most votes, but that was my share. I'm not an active politician, and I will not be.

#Glenn

Fair enough. No, I can understand the sentiment. I also at one point attempted to flirt a bit with politics, but for many reasons, yeah, that's not happening again. So the reason I really wanted to speak with you today is, well, many things. I actually want to discuss Spengler a bit with you as well. But first, I wanted to discuss what is going on in Germany, because we see that the Alternative für Deutschland, AfD, a political party only established in 2013, so very young, is now the most popular political party in the polls. And Merz seemingly has become the most unpopular leader in Europe. So why is that actually happening in Germany? How can we understand this development?

#Max Otte

Actually, Merz seems to be the most unpopular leader in the world, in the whole world. That's how I read some of the surveys. Basically, Germany is continuing on its downward, self-destructive path as it has been since 2015, or 2011 really, when we started to go green full scale and dismantle our own

energy. So the cabinets—Merkel, then Scholz, and now Merz—are basically doing all the same. And you can see, and you're an IR theorist, that the international system really determines a lot of the outcomes of policy in Germany because the international factors are so strong. There are very strong forces that have German industry dismantled or diminished, relocating them to the US and so on and so forth. What happened with Merz is that the CDU got a solid, I think, around 28–30 percent in the last election because people were still having hope that Merz, who coined himself Mr. Small Business or Mr. Mittelstand for most of his career, would actually turn things around.

I never had any such hope. I had very low expectations, which he managed to beat downward by a large amount. So my very low expectations were severely underbitten. But quite a few people thought, well, if we get a conservative chancellor, then things will turn around. But of course, they didn't. He didn't do a thing about changing energy policy. He didn't do a thing about changing migration policy. And he didn't change foreign policy. We can cover that a little more deeply in a second. The only thing he is trying to change is to put more burdens on pensioners and the working population.

The pension level is being lowered to 48% of the last average wage. So that's what he's—I mean, you see who he is. He's been a servant and a lobbyist all his life. I mean, he made very good money representing big companies. Of course, for a lengthy period, he was also the chairman of BlackRock for Germany, which was basically a representative and sales position. I mean, he can go in and say, "I'm the chairman of BlackRock," and help in the sale of German industry. He's not making any decisions there. And if you follow his career, he's been a lobbyist, and his grandfather was involved with the Nazis in his hometown.

We come from the same region, by the way, so I've followed him for a long time. And for a while, he was my chairman in the Atlantik-Brücke, a German-U.S. friendship organization. So he's basically continuing everything that Red-Green and the red-black and black-green coalitions before did. So you can see that there's no change, that there's only one alternative in Germany. That's the Alternative for Germany, after the Sahra Wagenknecht alliance dismantled through a lot of tactical and strategic mistakes. There's only the Alternative and all other parties, and that's why the Alternative is gaining.

#Glenn

And we saw in the foreign policy realm a huge development now. That is, we already know that, well, if you go back to 2016, Obama said that the U.S. would pivot to Asia. That means if you pivot to somewhere, you have to pivot away from somewhere. And everyone kind of understood this would be Europe. Well, we're a decade into this, and now we see the U.S. has changed its national security strategy, clearly deprioritizing Europe down to a distant third. And now we have the partial troop withdrawal from Germany. I think Germany has about 35,000 American troops, and 5,000 of those are being pulled out. What does this mean, you think, for Germany and its position in this transatlantic partnership?

#Max Otte

Unfortunately, nothing much in the underlying structure. I mean, we did have about 200,000 troops during the Cold War, 200,000 U.S. troops. Now it's 40, then 35, maybe 30. But the main operational logistical hubs like the Ramstein Air Base, without which the war in Iraq would not really be possible, maybe some Italian bases. So those bases, of course, will continue, and the U.S. presence will continue. So if the U.S. says we de-emphasize Europe, it's basically putting the burden of the empire on the allies.

This is what I predicted to some extent in my 2019 book, **Welt Systemkreis**, where I predicted a new Cold War, with two blocs basically — the Chinese bloc and an American bloc — and some semi-sovereign centers like Turkey or Iran. Russia is sovereign but not a world power, by some measures but by no means by all measures. So basically, we see the total integration of Europe into the U.S. sphere. We see a shifting of burdens onto Europe to continue a war that will harm Europe and is harming Europe in immeasurable ways. So basically, it's a smart move if you are a mandarin of the empire, because Europe — if you think about Macron, Starmer, and Merz — they are bent on continuing this war with Russia.

And so Europe is moving closer to the target zone and to strikes within Europe from Russia, by Russia, because we're now striking deep inside Russia. So pivoting away from Europe means Europe is still being exploited economically immensely — be it the tech companies, be it weapons that are being produced in the U.S. and being bought by Europeans, being in many other spheres. Europe is basically an economic colony, a data colony. And among all things, the three key European leaders try to position Europe as independent by continuing a U.S. war and continuing the division of Europe, which is crazy, but it's a very smart imperial strategy.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, that's another way the U.S. has to adjust to this new distribution of power — that it doesn't occupy this hegemonic position anymore. And one gets the impression it's working hard to outsource its war. So the Ukrainians, and increasingly now the Europeans, will fight and will weaken Russia. In the Middle East, one gets the impression that it's being attempted to be outsourced partially, at least to the Gulf states. And you can see a similar arrangement appearing in East Asia. But with the war on Russia, though, as this is where the Europeans are now playing a frontline position, it seems like we're moving into a very dangerous area. That is, Germany, as well as other European countries — including, well, many of them — are now very openly setting their objective of mass-producing these long-range drones and missiles.

At the same time, as you said, a lot of the war planners are in Ramstein base. The intelligence for what to target, how to circumvent the air defenses in Russia — all of this comes out of the Western countries. So this has become very much our war. I was referring to this as a proxy war in a

discussion with Professor Mearsheimer, and he was correcting me: no, no, we passed that line a long time ago. We are now fighting the Russians directly. But given that we already announced to the Russians how we're going to escalate the war against them, where does this end? Because I can't imagine any other outcome now than the Russians feeling compelled to restore their deterrent in some kind of way.

#Max Otte

Of course, Russia started this war with a few mistakes, mistakenly thinking that Ukraine would be a piece of cake, which it would have been in 2014. But we armed Ukraine since at least 2015, and even the first Trump administration did. So, but then after—and you're much deeper into this than I am—but after changing strategy, Russia went in it for the long run. But I guess what surprised all of us is how long it actually takes and how terrible this grinding ground operation is. I think—and I'm not a military expert, I come from economics—that Russia is fighting this war to preserve manpower. Ukraine is not necessarily, but Ukraine also learned. There are a few counteroffensives.

And so we're in a war of production power, as was the Second World War for Russia from a certain stage on, where military strategy was the smaller part and sheer volume and production power was the other part. I think it was Stalin who said, quantity is a quality by itself. And so we're now in a race of quantity, and I can only hope this war gets resolved before. But I read your posts, I follow you on this channel, and I completely concur that the danger of strikes on German and European territory has increased exponentially. I mean, Ramstein is the logistical base. The planning base is actually Stuttgart. And where I live in the mountains, in the Eifel, I have Nörvenich with nuclear bombers, Stuttgart.

50 kilometers to the north, Büchel with the nuclear bombs, 100 kilometers to the south, and then also Spangdahlem, 50 kilometers to the south. I can hope that weapons are pretty much on target, and I'm elevated, and the winds are favorable, so I can hope to get away, but... it's not a good feeling. It's that feeling I grew up with as a kid during the Cold War, when nuclear war was a reality and when Starfighters were thundering through the skies. And now it's not Starfighters so much, but flight activity over the Eifel, which is one of the westernmost parts of Germany where my country house is. Flight activity has increased very markedly in the past two or three years.

So I can only hope that we find a resolution to this war. It's amazing. Indeed, if you think about it, Ukrainians are very brave and Russians are very brave. These are two armies that fight to the death, which we in the West would probably not do. I mean, I've seen all these terrible movies of forced recruitment of young Ukrainian men to the front. But still, I mean, you have to respect the staying power, even if it is for a corrupt and nationalist and almost fascist regime. I don't dare make any predictions. I'm not a military expert, I'm an economist.

#Glenn

I often lay the blame at NATO, and I know there's more than one party here, of course, in this conflict. But the reason is because I often feel that I can understand the Ukrainian and the Russian position. The Russians had made it very clear they considered NATO's incursion into Ukraine to be an existential threat, so the way they see it, they fight for their survival. The Ukrainians, of course, under very heavy Russian attack, not just losing their manpower, infrastructure, and territory, but indeed, they also face an existential threat. So I can understand where the fighting spirit comes from as well. But for NATO, this was very unnecessary, because this security competition that now exists, it didn't exist before 2014. At that time, nobody wanted NATO in Ukraine; the overwhelming majority was against NATO membership.

And the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians didn't see Russia as a threat. The Russians didn't see Ukraine as a threat. Essentially, the security competition was introduced with this toppling of the government in Kiev for the purpose of pulling them into the orbit. So the way I see it, this is what caused it. This is what's necessary to reverse in order to reduce the security competition. But you mentioned the Cold War. We've gone through something similar before. But how do you explain the Cold War? Because then we had discussions. There were debates. People said, well, we have to deter, but we also shouldn't provoke. There's seemingly nothing of this in Europe today, though. It's quite extraordinary.

#Max Otte

It still baffles me. It still blows my mind that Europeans are so strong. Let's go back for a second. I wrote my dissertation on three case studies of changing German foreign policy in the 90s. One is military missions abroad, one is EU deepening, and the third one is actually NATO enlargement versus the OSCE. And even then, I had the fear—I mean, the first round of NATO enlargement had happened—I had the fear that this might happen. And I analyzed where Germany was positioned, and my conclusion was, in the sense, that Germany did not increase as much in power as some international observers ascribed to it, and the tasks upon Germany increased immensely, so that Germany would still try to mediate.

But in doubt, would lean towards the U.S. position. And we see that extremely now, that we are basically taking over the U.S. position. It's a very smart move on the side of the U.S. because Europe by now is totally dependent on the United States. So in the Gulf region, I see some hopes that Iran has very smart diplomacy, that that coalition of war might break. It might even break between Japan and the U.S. Who knows? There's some fissures there. But in Europe, basically, Europeans have taken on the U.S. role and are loving it. So I guess the brainwashing, the influencing, is on a very granular societal level.

It started with the so-called re-education after 1945, 1948 in Germany. Many of the German press outlets were U.S.-owned or had a U.S.—all of them had to have a U.S. license. You could say they're U.S.-friendly. Springer, which runs Germany's largest tabloid, has in its employment contract the friendship to the U.S. and Israel. So that's one thing. Then a lot of NGOs, and there was re-

education in the schools. I learned about Abraham Lincoln in school and George Washington. I didn't learn much about Frederick the Great or Bismarck. I had to do that myself.

So this is conditioning and shaping, and in one of my books I have an example of the Inca Empire, where it took three generations to basically assimilate another people. You started just with a few bases and put up your own guards and had friendly relations in stage two, and in stage three you integrated the other people completely. So in that sense, we're very, very brainwashed. And in times like this—and this is my psychological explanation—times like this, when things really are chaotic and there's an immense amount of insecurity, the world is changing rapidly. People need simple truths. People need enemies to identify. And so Russia is the enemy. Propaganda, unfortunately, has taken hold.

Also, the propaganda is that the AfD is the enemy. And I'm quite close to the AfD and their leaders. I'm nonpartisan. I used to be a CDU member. The CDU expelled me when I ran for president, an office that is supposed to be above the party. So it's a nonpartisan office, but they expelled me nonetheless. So even in the AfD, the leaders are clear on course: we want a sovereign Germany, we want peace in Europe, we want reconciliation. But quite a few people, even parliamentarians in the party, are openly campaigning for war, for sharp confrontation with Russia. So even this one hope we still have left is so far holding, but it's not assured that we will have even a single voice of sanity in the parliament forever.

#Glenn

Well, the situation in Germany, again, a lot of indicators are kind of grim. Deindustrialization, economic stagnation, the lack of energy security. Well, that's just the economic aspect. But a lot of this isn't uniquely German, though. That is, having leaders almost exclusively focused on foreign policy, warmongering, and essentially plummeting in the polls while trying to criminalize the opposition. How do you see this as a wider or broader European trend?

#Max Otte

It's not only a European trend. Think about the US. MAGA imploded. I mean, the original idea—no more foreign wars, focus on the domestic economy, focus on the American people—has completely imploded. I mean, Trump has gone full out on war and enriching himself and his family and his friends. And so, indeed, I mean, this looks a lot like the polarization of societies, like World War III, which we're in. And I guess you would agree, I mean, it's not an all-out war by law, but it's not the opening moves anymore. It's already at the end of the opening moves of this process. And I don't know how it will be stopped. The hysteria seems to just increase.

Leaders don't know what to do. They cry war. They cry control of the opposition. And unfortunately, this is a cyclical phenomenon. I mean, we in the social sciences, or at least most of our colleagues, don't believe in cyclical views of society because they say the future is free, we can determine it by

ourselves. Yes and no. I mean, there are patterns to human behavior. As Mark Twain said, history doesn't repeat, but it rhymes. There are patterns, and one can recognize those patterns. I remember a very smart but depressing tweet or post by Elon Musk: those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. We know that much.

But then he added, those who do know history are doomed to watch while others repeat it. And that is pretty depressing, but it seems to me like a bit of this is the case. So there's a great book by Strauss and Howe, written in 1996, called **The Fourth Turning**, where they predict history. And they have a generational theory of society and policy, and it's very U.S.-centered. But still, they predict a huge—they have a four-generation cycle of 20 years each—and they predict a total upheaval of the world system or society between 2005 and 2025. Well, it started in 2001, and it probably will be at the end point of that.

#Max Otte

And the new regime, not as a derogatory term but as a political science term, the new regime will be quite authoritarian. I mean, think about the new consensus after 1945 in the U.S., or what Roosevelt built, and we're probably going to see something like that in the West and all over the world.

#Glenn

I like that quote by Musk. I often feel frustrated as well because I can see where this is going. I remember I gave a speech at my university back in 2013 at the end of the year, warning that if we're moving towards trying to topple Yanukovich, it's going to be a disaster. And then... But essentially it was always pushback saying, well, you know, that sounds like something Russia would say. Or the assumption that toppling the government would be beneficial for us, beneficial for the Ukrainians. And, you know, you can just point at the basic security competition that, you know, the other side will respond when their security is undermined.

And, you know, all this—well, essentially for the past decade, well, 13 years now—it just, you know, you see where this is going, you see the escalation, you know that we're going to war if this continues down this path, but there's nothing you can do, seemingly. But about Trump, though, actually, this is one of the reasons I was optimistic about him during his election campaign, because I thought the main problem for the United States was that its empire had been overextended. It had exhausted itself, and many of the other large powers were collectively balancing it. So I thought it would be a good idea for the U.S. to essentially—that is, essentially save the republic by scaling back the empire and let the other Eurasian powers balance each other.

This is what the offshore balancing strategy of the U.S. traditionally was based around. And I thought once the hegemonic moment is over, they have to find a way of making this shift. So I thought that was, you know, good for America, good for the world. Nobody, you know, benefits from going down the path we're on now. But I don't know how it derailed. But, well, my next question

builds on the patterns you mentioned. You can see the patterns in history. And this is why I also wanted to ask you about the thinker Oswald Spengler, because he also identified, much like other scholars, the rise and fall of civilizations. He focused on these common patterns we can see. So while not just applying the German experience to the world, but also as civilizations, what kind of historical patterns are you looking at at the moment?

#Max Otte

Well, Spengler is of limited help here, but I mean, he's the philosopher that really inspired me when I was a teenager, even. He says that civilizations have a lifespan, so he has an organic view, like they have an early stage with knighthood and feudal times, and the cities are rising. And Spengler actually ascribes democracy to the rule of money. So for him, democracy is a phase of about 200 years, and that would have been, well, something from 1815 maybe to 2015, something like this, where the press basically tells voters what to say, and voters then vote accordingly, and it's a battle about public opinion. And that's what he calls democracy, and it's already the very late stage of a civilization. We could see something else in the Roman Republic.

And after that comes a new religiousness, a new Caesarian time where raw power starts to dominate the commercial world, and we do see that. I mean, we do see the return of the U.S. to being a pirate state. There's a fantastic video on YouTube by a U.N.-accredited journalist called *The Rise of the Pirate State*. And if you see Venezuela, Greenland, the attempt, Canada, Cuba, the U.S. is basically using raw power. Trump is doing it unabashedly, is proud of it. I mean, the U.S. has been using raw power for a long time but often concealed it, cloaked it under terms of spreading democracy. This is not so much the case anymore. So we might see the final stage of the West, which can last for a long time if it stabilizes, like Rome lasted for a long time. But we see that democracy is crumbling and...

#Max Otte

One of my Spengler quotes, he said even in Caesar's times, these decent citizens wouldn't go to vote because politics had become a business, had become totally corrupt. You bought your votes, and we can see that in the U.S. congressional races where Thomas Massie, one of the sole dissenting voices in Congress, a true MAGA champion — Make America Great, America First, No Forever Wars — and he's running, I think, for his third or fourth term, and he had always been voted in with a large majority. And now the lobby, mostly the Israel lobby but also others, are spending 30 million so far, even more, on this one single race, which is the highest sum ever spent, because even one dissenter in Congress within the Republican Party is too much for them. So we'll see. But I see democracy indeed highly undermined.

We saw it in COVID. We see it in the Ukraine war. We see it in Ukraine itself, of course, which is right now a military dictatorship. And I think we in the West try to emulate that military dictatorship so we don't have those, let's say, inconvenient elections anymore for the next years because, of

course, the West is over-indebted, and huge sacrifices, huge changes, huge canceling of debts have to be made. And those won't be made simply and exclusively by market forces; they will be made by government decree to some extent. So I think the model of a military dictatorship or a COVID dictatorship, which was somewhat of a military dictatorship, as COVID was a war — I mean, psychologically, it was a war against the virus with curfews, with everything. So I don't have too many hopes for democracy right now. That's, I guess, my conclusion from my reading of Spengler.

#Glenn

Actually, you have a pessimistic view on this, unfortunately. What I find interesting, though, is often when you look at the scholars throughout the ages studying the rise and fall of civilizations, they tend to make a distinction between culture and civilization. So civilization often being like the plant and the culture being the roots. And I know the word culture is often thrown around a lot, but people like Max Weber, I think, did interesting work on culture because he also predicted cultural decline and the consequences, because the way he sees it, culture would be the glue that essentially binds us all together, what we all have in common.

And not just what ties us to each other, but ties to the generation that came before us and the one that will come after. And so essentially what we create is what's worth passing on to the next generation. I guess from Weber's perspective, he argued that the excessiveness of reasoning and individualism often demystified culture, which would corrupt it. But, you know, from a more Spengler perspective, how do you see this? Because what is the main relationship then between culture and civilization, if you would assess the future of our civilization?

#Max Otte

Okay, you make the distinction. I think Spengler actually was the first one to make it. I'm not sure, but he certainly was very big on distinguishing culture and civilization. Many people wouldn't do that. I mean, they would use the terms synonymously, but for Spengler, culture was something organic that grew and evolved from early feudal times, from very early times through the rise of the first cities, through later times in about four seasons. I mean, those were all, of course, metaphors or pictures he painted. And civilization is basically the final stage, which can last forever or for a long time. You just don't see any internal development.

So civilization is basically fully outward-oriented. There's no more internal development; the internal battles and thoughts have been fought. There is maybe a second religiousness which people adopt, and there is, let's say, a mechanization and standardization of life, as you could see in Roman civilization. He said the Greeks had a culture; Rome, let's say starting around 200 BC, started to develop into a civilization. I mean, we're surely in a civilization in the West, where culture or art is dominated by fashions and fads and by commerce. It's not a coherent, consistent thing. It's, as you said, a lot of individualism. And one very important thing is the will to live dies. We don't have children anymore. We don't reproduce. Population collapses. And we saw that in late Rome.

We see it throughout the West, throughout the world actually now, which is a unique situation. I mean, every continent is collapsing basically, with the exception of black Africa. Even South America, even most of the Asian countries, even India—I mean, they're all going through rapid population declines. Persia, of course, a lot so. So that is new. This is a global phenomenon. So Western culture, civilization, might have been so overbearing that it penetrates and pervades other cultures. Of course, Russian thinkers, and Spengler said that himself, there might be a Eurasian Russian culture blooming which is about a thousand years behind us, but that culture, of course, has been overlaid by Western patterns to such an extent that it is probably very much covered.

So we see what happens there. But then again, Russia is not that big—what, 120, 130 million people? So we're in a late stage: decadence, no more children, big cities. That is where the West is currently at. And actually, we're going to award the next Spengler Prize to David Goldman. He is in the U.S. State Department. He is, of course, an ardent supporter of Israel. But I happen to disagree there, but that shouldn't distract from scholarly recognition, because he wrote a lot about civilizations and cultures, and I think we need that perspective, that broader perspective also when looking at the West. That's why he's going to get that prize.

#Glenn

This idea of cultural revival, it's quite important to sustain civilizations then, because if there's no revival or continuation of the culture, well, essentially every new generation becomes, you know, just a cheaper copy of the one before. And people often, I remember especially in the 2000s, there was so much focus on the soft power of the U.S. that had a lot of popular culture then. But for a lot of American conservatives, they were kind of drawing a distinction between what popular culture is and traditional culture, because popular culture is here and now. But if it becomes overwhelming, too successful, it kind of drowns out the traditional culture, where you actually have handing down from generation to generation as something that can actually tie society and all civilization together as well.

But, you know, you can only make so many remakes of Spider-Man before you have to ask whether or not there's an actual, you know, cultural sustainability here. But on that topic, do you see civilizations having an ability to reverse this decline? Because this is kind of where a lot of civilizational scholars disagree. Some argue they can go into the excessive materialist phase. Some believe you can come back again, while others see it as essentially being a set cycle. That is, you will have the spring, you'll have summer, and then you'll have autumn and winter, in which it dies. And then, of course, it can be reborn. But do you see a possibility for a civilizational revival?

#Max Otte

Well, human history is open, that's for sure, but I haven't seen it yet, so I'm tending towards the pattern view that civilizations run their course. We've seen, of course, that China has had a strong

comeback, but China is not sure that a lot of the civilization has come back. But China has kept its language and its writing system, which is a very important part of the identity, so that's one thing that binds it together. But there are not many, let's say, organizations on the level of civil society in China. It's the state, and it's the family, the individual, because there's also a huge surveillance apparatus now. So China has lasted for 3,000, 4,000 years and is doing remarkably well.

So not sure it's a cultural revival, but the old civilization has picked up Western techniques and is doing pretty well. So we will see. What Spengler would predict is a second religiousness. So let's see. In the West, we have two contending religious themes here. We have the evangelical Christians who believe in the Third Temple and who are always pro-Israel. Most of them are. I'm not. I would call myself also an evangelical Christian, but more of a Mennonite, which is different, which is the origin, actually, of evangelical Christians. But most of my brethren in faith would go all-out in support for Israel, and those families are still functioning, and they have children, and that's one thing.

And the other one is, I think, a welcome resurgence in Catholicism, with Pope Leo being the positive surprise of the past few years, openly criticizing war and openly spreading the gospel. I think people get tired of thinking and thinking about problems. It's also a very Spenglerian saying, a very Spenglerian thought I'm uttering right now. People get tired of all this intellectual debate and want back to their roots and want back their faith. So that could be the next phase of Western civilization. In that sense, Spengler said Islam is a thousand years ahead of us because they've gone all through this intellectual phase and they're back to blind faith or stage. But these are very deep things. Of course, I didn't expect us to discuss them, but I think they bear some additional perspective on all of this.

#Glenn

Well, there are a lot of civilizational scholars who could discuss this, of course. I like Toynbee as well, but the general theme seems to be that if civilization outgrows its own roots, then it begins to die, just like a plant can't survive without its roots. But this seems to be a key challenge in these periods of globalization as well. One often gets this civilizational exhaustion. But my last question is, how do you see the populist movements going across Europe and the United States? When we use the word populist, it's often demeaned to a large extent, but populism simply means that you have a political elite which has distanced itself from the public, and the populist kind of builds on this rhetoric.

I remember even Obama and Bernie Sanders referred to themselves as populists in their days. But anyway, now it has a very negative connotation. But I guess my point, back to my question, do you see the populist movements in Europe and the US—do they have a possibility, or do they reflect a democratic revival? Because I guess I tended to see it that way. And then, of course, we had people like Trump and Meloni, and I'm starting to become a bit more pessimistic. Or, you know, is it just a symptom of civilizational fatigue?

#Max Otte

Well, I would go as far as saying that the AfD right now is the only party enriching the democratic debate. They are democratically organized. The other parties are mostly machines with long-term career politicians starting at young ages and very low levels, having served their way up. The AfD had a lot of people coming in from—well, all of the people coming in from normal jobs, basically. Now they, of course, already have their first wave of career politicians. So, I think the system is leaning towards autocracy, towards some kind of authoritarianism, whatever you might call it. The international system is pointing towards war.

We saw that with Trump. But one shouldn't give up hope. I mean, Meloni in Italy and Merz in Germany still voted to ship more weapons to Israel and so on. And while Meloni sometimes positioned herself differently to public opinion, what she did was another thing again. So there is widespread dissatisfaction. In the U.S., in Germany, we have to look at these cases bit by bit. In Spain, we have Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who is very outspokenly critical of the actions in Gaza and Lebanon. In the U.S., we have a highly unstable domestic situation because most of the Democrats are against the Iran war, most of the Republicans are not.

There's still the rally-around-the-flag effect, but only within the Republican camp, which is new in the U.S. Before, people rallied around the president whenever there was war, from whichever side. This is not happening. The U.S. might have huge domestic ruptures ahead. And in Germany, we only have this one party, AfD. There was the BSW, an alliance, Sahra Wagenknecht. I know her fairly well and have done quite a few things with her, who was on the left and also was arguing for peace with Russia. Unfortunately, they did pretty much every strategic, tactical, and organizational mistake you could do. Otherwise, they would be in parliament, but they're not. So there's only the AfD, and they gain a solid foundation.

They have 28% of the vote. Now, by far, the biggest party, the CDU, has 22%. And most of the German population doesn't want this war — like 60%, 70%, 80%. I don't have the latest figures. But so — and the leaders, the two co-leaders, positioned themselves for diplomacy and so on and so forth. But you could also see a few politicians, parliamentarians, activists campaigning very actively for war. So it's an ongoing battle. I'm as pessimistic as you regarding the global picture and the picture in Europe, but there are always developments that might change it. So it's not all lost, but we can keep some faint hope or some small hope that some of those developments will turn out to be positive surprises.

#Glenn

Yeah, I haven't given up quite yet, but there is some good news coming out every now and then, so there is still hope. But it is concerning that it doesn't seem to matter who sits on the throne if the policies simply remain the same. And I couldn't help but notice the same pushback against Massey — the idea that you're the one peacemaker, which would then be too much for him to handle. It's

very depressing. But, well, I know you're a busy man, so I want to thank you very much for taking the time to come on.

#Max Otte

Thank you very much, Professor Diesen.