

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/trump-pulls-out-of-climate-deal-western-rift-deepens-a-1150486.html>

Paris Disagreement

Donald Trump's Triumph of Stupidity

6/2/2017

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other G-7 leaders did all they could to convince Trump to remain part of the Paris Agreement. But he didn't listen. Instead, he evoked deep-seated nationalism and plunged the West into a conflict deeper than any since World War II. By SPIEGEL Staff

Until the very end, they tried behind closed doors to get him to change his mind. For the umpteenth time, they presented all the arguments -- the humanitarian ones, the geopolitical ones and, of course, the economic ones. They listed the advantages for the economy and for American companies. They explained how limited the hardships would be.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was the last one to speak, according to the secret minutes taken last Friday afternoon in the luxurious conference hotel in the Sicilian town of Taormina -- meeting notes that DER SPIEGEL has been given access to. Leaders of the world's seven most powerful economies were gathered around the table and the issues under discussion were the global economy and sustainable development.

The newly elected French president, Emmanuel Macron, went first. It makes sense that the Frenchman would defend the international treaty that bears the name of France's capital: The Paris Agreement. "Climate change is real and it affects the poorest countries," Macron said.

Then, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau reminded the U.S. president how successful the fight against the ozone hole had been and how it had been possible to convince industry leaders to reduce emissions of the harmful gas.

Finally, it was Merkel's turn. Renewable energies, said the chancellor, present significant economic opportunities. "If the world's largest economic power were to pull out, the field would be left to the Chinese," she warned. Xi Jinping is clever, she added, and would take advantage of the vacuum it created. Even the Saudis were preparing for the post-oil era, she continued, and saving energy is also a worthwhile goal for the economy for many other reasons, not just because of climate change.

But Donald Trump remained unconvinced. No matter how trenchant the argument presented by the increasingly frustrated group of world leaders, none of them had an effect. "For me," the U.S. president said, "it's easier to stay in than step out." But environmental constraints were costing the American economy jobs, he said. And that was the only thing that mattered. Jobs, jobs, jobs.

At that point, it was clear to the rest of those seated around the table that they had lost him. Resigned, Macron admitted defeat. "Now China leads," he said.

Still, it is likely that none of the G-7 heads of state and government expected the primitive brutality Trump would stoop to when announcing his withdrawal from the international community. Surrounded by sycophants in the Rose Garden at the White House, he didn't just proclaim his withdrawal from the climate agreement, he sowed the seeds of international conflict. His speech was a break from centuries of Enlightenment and rationality. The president presented his political statement as a nationalist manifesto of the most imbecilic variety. It couldn't have been any worse.

A Catastrophe for the Climate

His speech was packed with make-believe numbers from controversial or disproven studies. It was hypocritical and dishonest. In Trump's mind, the climate agreement is an instrument allowing other countries to enrich themselves at the expense of the United States. "I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris," he said. Trump left no doubt that the well-being of the American economy is the only value he understands. It's no wonder that the other countries applauded when Washington signed the Paris Agreement, he said. "We don't want other leaders and other countries laughing at us anymore. And they won't be. They won't be."

Trump's withdrawal is a catastrophe for the climate. The U.S. is the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases -- behind China -- and is now no longer part of global efforts to put a stop to climate change. It's America against the rest of the world, along with Syria and Nicaragua, the only other countries that haven't signed the Paris deal.

But the effects on the geopolitical climate are likely to be just as catastrophic. Trump's speech provided only the most recent proof that discord between the U.S. and Europe is deeper now than at any time since the end of World War II.

Now, the Western community of values is standing in opposition to Donald Trump. The G-7 has become the G-6. The West is divided.

For three-quarters of a century, the U.S. led and protected Europe. Despite all the mistakes and shortcomings exhibited by U.S. foreign policy, from Vietnam to Iraq, America's claim to leadership of the free world was never seriously questioned.

That is now no longer the case. The U.S. is led by a president who feels more comfortable taking part in a Saudi Arabian sword dance than he does among his NATO allies. And the estrangement has accelerated in recent days. First came his blustering at the NATO summit in Brussels, then the disagreement over the climate deal in Sicily followed by Merkel's speech in Bavaria, in which she called into question America's reliability as a partner for Europe. A short time later, Trump took to Twitter to declare a trade war -- and now, he has withdrawn the United States from international efforts to combat climate change.

A Downward Pointing Learning Curve

Many had thought that Trump could be controlled once he entered the White House, that the office of the presidency would bring him to reason. Berlin had placed its hopes in the moderating influence of his advisers and that there would be a sharp learning curve. Now that Trump has actually lived up to his threat to leave the climate deal, it is clear that if such a learning curve exists, it points downward.

The chancellor was long reluctant to make the rift visible. For Merkel, who grew up in communist East Germany, the alliance with the U.S. was always more than political calculation, it reflected her deepest political convictions. Now, she has -- to a certain extent, at least -- terminated the trans-Atlantic friendship with Trump's America.

In doing so, the German chancellor has become Trump's adversary on the international stage. And Merkel has accepted the challenge when it comes to trade policy and the quarrel over NATO finances. Now, she has done so as well on an issue that is near and dear to her heart: combating climate change.

Merkel's aim is that of creating an alliance against Trump. If she can't convince the U.S. president, her approach will be that of trying to isolate him. In Taormina, it was six countries against one. Should Trump not reverse course, she is hoping that the G-20 in Hamburg in July will end 19:1. Whether she will be successful is unclear.

Trump has identified Germany as his primary adversary. Since his inauguration in January, he has criticized no country -- with the exception of North Korea and Iran -- as vehemently as he has Germany. The country is "bad, very bad," he said in Brussels last week. Behind closed doors

at the NATO summit, Trump went after Germany, saying there were large and prosperous countries that were not living up to their alliance obligations.

And he wants to break Germany's economic power. The trade deficit with Germany, he recently tweeted, is "very bad for U.S. This will change."

An Extreme Test

Merkel's verdict following Trump's visit to Europe could hardly be worse. There has never been an open break with America since the end of World War II; the alienation between Germany and the U.S. has never been so large as it is today. When Merkel's predecessor, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, refused to provide German backing for George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, his rebuff was limited to just one single issue. It was an extreme test of the trans-Atlantic relationship, to be sure, but in contrast to today, it was not a quarrel that called into question commonly held values like free trade, minority rights, press freedoms, the rule of law -- and climate policies.

To truly understand the consequences of Trump's decision, it is important to remember what climate change means for humanity -- what is hidden behind the temperature curves and emission-reduction targets.

Climate change means that millions are threatened with starvation because rain has stopped falling in some regions of the planet. It means that sea levels are rising and islands and coastal zones are flooding. It means the melting of the ice caps, more powerful storms, heatwaves, water shortages and deadly epidemics. All of that leads to conflicts over increasingly limited resources, to flight and to migration.

In the U.S., too, there were plenty of voices warning the president of the consequences of his decision, Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner among them. Others included cabinet members like Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Energy Rick Perry, along with pretty much the country's entire business elite.

Companies from Exxon and Shell to Google, Apple and Amazon to Wal-Mart and PepsiCo all appealed to Trump to not isolate the U.S. on climate policy. They are worried about international competitive disadvantages in a world heading toward green energy, whether the U.S. is along for the ride or not. Google, Microsoft and Apple have long since begun drawing their energy from renewable sources, with the ultimate goal of complete freedom from fossil fuels. Wind and solar farms are booming in the U.S. -- and hardly an investor can be found anymore for coal mining.

A long list of U.S. states, led by California, have charted courses that are in direct opposition to Trump's climate policy. According to a survey conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, almost three-quarters of Americans are opposed to withdrawing from the Paris Agreement.

The Absurdity of Trump's Histrionics

On the other side are right-wing nationalists such as Trump's chief strategist Stephen Bannon, who deny climate change primarily because fighting it requires international cooperation. Powerful Republicans have criticized the climate deal with the most specious of all arguments. The U.S., they say, would be faced with legal consequences were it to miss or lower its climate targets.

Yet international agreement on the Paris accord was only possible because it contains no punitive tools at all. The only thing signatories must do is report every five years how much progress they have made toward achieving their self-identified climate protection measures.

Therein lies the absurdity of Trump's histrionics. Nothing would have been easier for the U.S. than to take part pro forma in United Nations climate-related negotiations while completely ignoring climate protection measures at home -- which Trump has been doing anyway since his election.

In late March, for example, he signed an executive order to unwind part of Barack Obama's legacy, the Clean Power Plan. Among other measures, the plan called for the closure of aging coal-fired power plants, the reduction of methane emissions produced by oil and natural gas drilling, and stricter rules governing fuel efficiency in new vehicles. Without these measures, Obama's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by up to 28 percent by 2025, in comparison to 2005, will hardly be achievable. But Trump is also planning to head in the opposite direction. To make the U.S. less dependent on energy imports, he wants to return to coal, one of the dirtiest energy sources in existence -- even though energy independence was largely achieved years ago thanks to cheap, less environmentally damaging natural gas.

German and European efforts will now focus on keeping the other agreement signatories on board, which Berlin has already been working on for several weeks now. Because of the now-visible effects of climate change and the falling prices for renewable energies, German officials believe that the path laid forward by Paris is irreversible.

Berlin officials say that EU member states are eager to move away from fossil fuels, as are China and India. Even emissaries from Russia and Saudi Arabia, countries whose governments aren't generally considered to be enthusiastic promoters of renewable energy sources, have indicated to the Germans that "Paris will be complied with." On Thursday in Berlin, Merkel and Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang demonstratively reaffirmed their support for the Paris Agreement. Keqiang even spoke of "green growth."

China and India are likely to not just meet, but exceed their climate targets. China has been reducing its coal consumption for the last three years and plans for over 100 new coal-fired power plants have been scrapped. India, too, is abstaining from the construction of new coal-fired plants and will likely meet its goal of generating 40 percent of its electricity from non-fossil fuels by 2022, eight years earlier than planned. Both countries invest in solar and wind energy and in both, electricity from renewable sources is often cheaper than coal power.

Isolating the American President

The problem is that all of that still won't be enough to limit global warming to significantly below 2 degrees Celsius, as called for in the Paris deal. Much more commitment, much more decisiveness is necessary, particularly in countries that can afford it. Germany, for example, is almost certain to fall short of its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 percent by 2020 relative to 1990.

In Taormina, Chancellor Merkel did all she could to isolate the American president. In the summit's closing declaration, she wanted to specifically mention the conflict between the U.S. and its allies over the climate pact. Normally, such documents tend to remain silent on such differences.

At the G-20 meeting in Hamburg, Merkel plans to stay the course. She hopes that all other countries at the meeting will stand up to the United States. Even if Saudi Arabia ends up supporting its ally Trump, the end result would still be 18:2, which doesn't look much better from the perspective of Washington.

Merkel, in any case, is doing all she can to ramp up the pressure on Trump. "The times in which we could completely rely on others are over to a certain extent," she said in her beer tent speech last Sunday.

It shouldn't be underestimated just how bitter it must have been for her to utter this sentence, and how deep her disappointment. Merkel, who grew up in the Soviet sphere of influence, never had much understanding for the anti-Americanism often found in western Germany. U.S. dependability is partly to thank for Eastern Europe's post-1989 freedom.

Merkel has shown a surprising amount of passion for the trans-Atlantic relationship over the years. She came perilously close to openly supporting the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and enjoyed a personal friendship with George W. Bush, despite the fact that most Germans had little sympathy for the U.S. president. Later, Merkel's response to the NSA's surveillance of her mobile phone was largely stoic and she also didn't react when Trump called her refugee policies "insane."

As such, Merkel's comments last Sunday about her loss of trust in America were eye-opening. It was a completely new tone and Merkel knew that it would generate attention. Indeed, that's what she wanted.

A Clear Message to the U.S.

Her sentence immediately circled the globe and was seen among Trump opponents as proof that the most powerful woman in Europe had lost hope that Trump could be brought to reason.

Prior to speeches to her party, such as the one held last Sunday, she always gets a manuscript from Christian Democratic Union (CDU) headquarters in Berlin, but she herself writes the most decisive passages. The comment about Europe's allies was a clear message to the U.S., but it was also meant for a domestic audience. Her speech marked the launch of her re-election campaign.

Merkel knows that her campaign adversaries from the center-left Social Democrats (SPD) intend to make foreign policy an issue in the election. After all, it has a long history of doing so. Willy Brandt did so well in 1969 and 1972 in part because he called into question the Cold War course that had been charted to that point. Gerhard Schröder managed to win in 2002 in part because of his vociferous rejection of German involvement in the coming Iraq War.

Last Monday, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, a senior SPD member, took advantage of a roundtable discussion on migration in the Foreign Ministry to lay into Trump. The largest challenges we currently face, such as climate change, he said, have been made "even larger by the new U.S. isolationism." Those who don't resist such a political course, Gabriel continued, "make themselves complicit." It was a clear shot at the chancellor.

But her speech last Sunday shielded Merkel from possible accusations of abetting Trump, though she nevertheless wants to keep the dialogue going with Washington. Speaking to conservative lawmakers in Berlin on Tuesday, she said that the trans-Atlantic relationship continues to be of "exceptional importance." Nevertheless, she added, differences should not be swept under the rug.

Merkel realized early on just how difficult it would be to work with the new U.S. president, partly because she watched videos of some of his pre-inauguration appearances. Speaking to CDU leaders in December, she said that Trump was extremely serious about his slogan "America First."

The chancellor's image of Trump has shifted since then, but not for the better. The first contacts with the new government in Washington were sobering. When Christoph Heusgen, her foreign policy adviser, met for the first time with Michael Flynn, who was soon to become Trump's short-lived national security adviser, he was shocked by his American counterpart's lack of knowledge.

Shattered Hopes

But there were still grounds for optimism. Early on, Merkel thought that the new U.S. government's naivete might mean that Trump could be influenced. She was hoping to play the role of educator, an approach that initially looked like it might be successful. In a telephone conversation in January, Merkel explained to Trump the situation in Ukraine. She had the impression that he had never before seriously considered the issue and she was able to convince him not to lift the sanctions that had been placed on Russia.

The new president has likewise thus far refrained from moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He has also left the Iran deal alone and revised initial statements in which he had said that NATO was "obsolete." In the Chancellery, there was hope that Trump could in fact become something like a second-coming of Ronald Reagan.

Those hopes have now been shattered. Because Trump has had difficulty fulfilling many of his campaign promises, he has become even more intransigent. Merkel watched in annoyance as Trump did all he could in Saudi Arabia to avoid upsetting his hosts only to come to the NATO

summit and cast public aspersions at his allies. The bad thing about Trump is not that he criticizes partners, says a confidante of Angela Merkel's, but that in contrast to his predecessors, he calls the entire international order into question.

At one point, Merkel took Trump aside in Sicily to speak with him privately about climate protection and the president told her that he would prefer to delay his decision on the Paris Agreement until after the G-20 in July. You can postpone everything, Merkel replied, but it's not helpful. She urged that he make a decision prior to the Hamburg summit.

He has now done so.

To the degree that one can make such a claim, Trump has a rather functional view of Merkel. He wants her to increase defense spending and to reduce Germany's trade surplus with the U.S., even if it is a political impossibility. And he wants Merkel to force other European leaders to do the same, even though Merkel doesn't possess the power to do so.

In Trump's world, there are no allies and no mature relationships, just self-interested countries with short-term interests. History means nothing to Trump; as a hard-nosed real-estate magnate, he is only interested in immediate gains. He cares little for long-term relationships.

Two close advisers to the president contributed a piece to the *Wall Street Journal* this week that can be seen as something like a "Trump Doctrine." "The world is not a 'global community,'" wrote Gary Cohn and Herbert Raymond McMaster, Trump's economic and security advisers. The subtext is clear: The global order, which the United States helped build, belongs to the past. There are no alliances anymore, just individual interests -- no allies, just competitors. It was a clear signal to America's erstwhile Western allies that they can no longer rely on the United States as a partner.

Putin's Dream Come True

It's not surprising that Moscow is gleefully scoffing at the losers in Europe. Mariya Sakharova, the Foreign Ministry's brash spokeswoman, gloated openly Tuesday on Vladimir Solovyov's popular Russian talk show.

If Europe is going to have to take its fate into its own hands, as Merkel says, that just shows how different things used to be when the Continent simply followed the marching orders given by Washington, she said. "We always thought that the Europeans had united in the European Union -- but they were really just standing at attention," she sneered to the approving giggles of her host.

The open government gloating is indicative of the mood currently prevailing in the Russian capital. For Vladimir Putin, a dream appears to have come true in recent days; Trump could prove to be a godsend. For some time, Moscow has been trying to drive a wedge between the trans-Atlantic alliance. But now it looks as though the American president is doing that job for him.

In the past, the Americans guaranteed Europe's security with their nuclear and conventional capabilities. Russia would stand to profit the most from a loosening or possible breakup of the trans-Atlantic relationship. If that were to happen, Putin will have been successful in his strategy of undermining the cohesion of liberal Western democracies.

The fact that the process of disintegration would go so fast has surprised even the Russians. "The trans-Atlantic frictions had been obvious for months. But I didn't expect Merkel to say that Europe needs to free itself from its dependency on the United States," says Konstantin Kosachev, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Federal Council, the upper chamber of Russia's parliament.

In Brussels, Berlin and many other European capitals, pro-European forces are hoping that Moscow is premature with its celebratory mood. They believe the Trump factor could have the reverse effect and actually serve as a magnet to pull the quarreling Europeans back together.

"We've had enough," says Manfred Weber, the influential German politician who leads the conservative party caucus in the European Parliament. "Despite goodwill, we are at a turning point. We have to seize our own opportunity and show that we are just as prepared to act with our trade policies as we are with defense."

Indeed, the Trump factor appears to be having an aphrodisiac effect on European defense cooperation efforts. What had seemed nearly impossible only a short time ago has now become plausible. France and Germany have long been pushing for closer military cooperation in Europe. The French are interested in doing so to assert their own claim to leadership on the Continent, alongside the Americans. And the Germans are interested in diverting attention from the fact that they have spent years spending too little on their armed forces.

In the past, it had always been the British and the Eastern Europeans who stood in the way of the joint efforts promoted by Germany and France -- for the most part out of fear that an internal European competitor to NATO could result. But Britain's decision to leave the EU also means that it will no longer be able to block such efforts. The Eastern Europeans, meanwhile, who see themselves as being on the front against Russia, have lost faith in Trump's pledges to the alliance.

The government in Berlin isn't the only one taking note of the Estonians' eagerness for progress on defense cooperation once it assumes the rotating six-month presidency of the European Council in July. The country had previously been largely opposed to deeper European defense cooperation.

No one believes that Europe can ensure its future security on its own. Washington's military role is too dominant for that. The U.S. spends two and a half times more on defense each year than all the European NATO member states combined. That's why the unthinkable has always been ignored: That Trump could actually withdraw from NATO. But the climate issue has demonstrated that the unthinkable is not something that Trump shies away from.

Europe's Military Push

The more unpredictable this major ally becomes, the more the Europeans will have to rely on their own military capabilities. A few weeks ago, they agreed in Brussels to create a joint command center that would be responsible in the future for European training missions in Africa and the naval operation Sophia against human-traffickers in the Mediterranean Sea. After lengthy hesitation, even Britain relented and agreed in the end.

Further projects may follow, including a European medical command, joint officer training and a European logistics hub. The French and the Germans also want to create a joint air transport unit. The Dutch have offered to take leadership of a multinational alliance providing air-to-air refueling and transport aircraft.

On Wednesday, the European Commission plans to present a paper playing out a number of scenarios of what stronger military cooperation in the European Union might look like in 2025, if the EU member states move to more closely coordinate their military activities. Under the scenarios, EU member states would more closely coordinate their military planning and they would also conduct joint exercises on a regular basis.

Even though there is an urgent need for it, the most difficult area of cooperation seems to be that of joint arms procurement. "There are 178 different weapon systems in the EU, compared to 30 in the U.S.," says European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. The result is that Europeans achieve only 15 percent of the efficiency enjoyed by the Americans with their defense spending.

The Germans and the French, especially, would like to cooperate more closely in this area and develop drones, tanks and combat helicopters together. But previous experience has been sobering. The negotiations are taking an eternity and no agreement is in sight.

The EU is not setting out to challenge the U.S. on security policy -- it merely wants to become less dependent on the Americans, which is something Washington might support as well.

Trade, on the other hand, could be the subject of major conflicts. German Economics Minister Brigitte Zypries and her senior deputy Matthias Machnig experienced firsthand during a trip to the American capital last week, just how big the chasm is on trade issues. Both politicians, members of the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), were shocked after their talks with Republican members of Congress and the president's trade advisers.

"Some of the Americans we met with have a serious misjudgment about the economy," Machnig reports. "They believe that the high trade deficit the U.S. has with other countries is largely the product of bad trade deals." They claim that they are constantly getting defeated in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) courts. "But the Americans use the WTO system just like every other country to address trade disputes. And they are often successful." With Trump, he says, the U.S. is already well on its way to self-isolation.

An Opportunity for Europe?

What Trump might call a disaster, could actually present a major opportunity for Europe. The EU could offer an alternative to trading partners feeling snubbed by the Americans. That's one reason that negotiations have been accelerated for free trade agreements between the EU and Japan and the Mercosur countries of South America. EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström herself even personally attacked Trump during her recent visit to Mexico. "Now is the time to build bridges, not walls," she said.

In addition to trade, the EU also wants to fill the vacuum being left behind by the United States on climate protection. "It is Europe's duty to say: That's not how it works," EU Commission President Juncker said on Wednesday in Berlin. "The Americans can't just leave the climate protection agreement. Mr. Trump believes that because he doesn't get close enough to the dossiers to fully understand them."

Juncker says it will take three to four years for the United States to withdraw from the agreement. "We tried to explain that to Mr. Trump in Taormina in clear German sentences. It seems our attempt failed, but the law is the law and it must be obeyed." He also said that "not everything which is law and not everything in international agreements is fake news."

In addition to defense, trade and climate protection, there's a fourth area where the Trump factor could generate some movement. Emancipation from America can only succeed if a way can be found to prevent the common currency from once again becoming the plaything of international financial investors. The introduction of the euro was intended as the crown achievement of the European peace project, but it instead led to massive discord on the Continent during the crisis.

In response, there are numerous proposals on the table for eliminating the design flaws in the currency union. At the core is the question of balancing out the interests of the Northern and Southern European countries. Members in Northern Europe are pushing for fiscal discipline and business innovation, whereas Southern Europe wants to be able to use government borrowing to spur growth if need be.

On Wednesday, the European Commission presented a reflection paper on the future of the euro. Suddenly, many proposals no longer sounded as unrealistic as they did only a few months ago: that of the creation of a post for an EU finance minister and Eurogroup head and a eurozone treasury.

Macron's Momentum

Much of the recent momentum is attributable to one man: new French President Macron. If he makes good on his pledges and forges ahead with economic reforms in his country, it would make it increasingly difficult for Germany to balk at France's ideas for the eurozone. Merkel has long hinted as much by saying she would be prepared to make the necessary changes to the European treaties. "We can give the whole situation a new dynamic," Merkel said during Macron's recent visit to Berlin.

Whether Europe can succeed in breaking free from the United States will ultimately hinge on Merkel and Macron working together. If Merkel wins the election in September, she will have,

together with the new French president, the unique opportunity to give Europe the international credibility that it now lacks, says American historian Anne Applebaum. She says Europe should now develop its own foreign policy, its own security and possibly even its own army. "Shouldn't a European navy blockade the Libyan coast? Shouldn't Europeans be thinking about ending the war in Syria? Shouldn't Europe have a joint strategy to push back against Russian disinformation? All of these things are possible, but only if Europe's political leaders start working on them now."

The idea that the Europeans could no longer primarily rely "on others," that they have to become more active on their own, was Macron's position even before his election. He wants to create greater capacity for the EU to act, and he wants to adapt its institutions to the new challenges. That's one reason he appointed Sylvie Goulard, a longtime member of the European Parliament who speaks perfect German, as his defense minister.

"Whether we loudly proclaim our concerns as Europeans or not, the main thing is making it more capable of acting," says one French diplomat. The French share Merkel's view that Trump's Washington is no longer a reliable partner. Macron's statement before the G-7 that he sees Trump as a "partner" was nothing more than lip service. And French diplomats were appalled by how poorly prepared the Americans were in both Brussels and at the G-7 summit in Taormina.

Still, it's unlikely that Macron, who has so far proven himself to be quite skillful with mind games, will seek an open conflict with Trump. A trans-Atlantic clash isn't in his interests. Macron firmly believes in his own persuasiveness, his charm and his seductiveness. At first, he will try to do everything he can to steer Trump where he wants him to go.

And Angela Merkel may find all the things in Macron that she likely sought in vain in his predecessor. Macron could become a reliable and strong partner for Germany. Indeed, there has never before been a French government with as many members possessing deep knowledge of Germany as this one.

Can Merkel Forge Alliance Against Trump?

Will the German chancellor succeed in forging alliances against Donald Trump on the important disputes? It won't be easy. In terms of climate protection, there is a chance. But it's much less likely on trade and defense. When it comes to burden sharing within NATO, Trump isn't alone in his views. And in terms of Germany's trade surplus, it isn't clear who will face isolation.

Merkel is now convinced that Europe must take its fate into its own hands. At the same time, Germany also can't be totally certain who its allies are. When Trump began attacking the Germans behind closed doors in Brussels, it was Macron and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, above all, who sprung to the chancellor's defense. Participants say it was alarming how many NATO members kissed the ground before Trump -- and not just the usual suspects from Eastern Europe.

Merkel has many fans. She is the star among liberals around the world. The leftist American press had already begun declaring her the new leader of the free world even before Trump's

election. In an opinion piece this week, Britain's Guardian heaped praise on Merkel, noting that "her statesmanship, her ease, her ability to broker deals and relationships is ever more impressive." But her glorification in the press will do little to help in her test of strength with the world's most powerful man.

And what about China? The major Asian power is standing in the wings, ready to take over the role of the world's leading nation, which America appears to be abandoning. At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, President Xi Jinping sought to present himself as the most powerful advocate of global free trade. Now China also wants to become the leading nation when it comes to climate protection. But officials in Merkel's Chancellery aren't harboring many illusions when it comes to the new partner.

At moments when nothing else helps, Merkel these days, it is said, takes a look at her appointment calendar -- more specifically at June 17. That Saturday, Merkel plans to fly to Rome, where the pope is hosting a private reception for Protestants. The chancellor wants to present Pope Francis with the goals of her G-20 summit in Hamburg in July, on issues like migration and women's rights, for example. It doesn't require much imagination to believe that the two are on the same page when it comes to Trump.

The differences of opinion between the U.S. president and the head of the Catholic Church are no secret. In contrast to Trump, Pope Francis has called for the protection of God's creation and for the world to battle climate change. "It is inconceivable that the pope did not discuss climate change in his conversation with Trump," says one person close to the Vatican who has intimate knowledge of Francis' thinking. But it doesn't appear to have done anything to help.