

Common Challenges, Joint Solutions?

Tokyo and Berlin are natural partners

Having lived in Germany for nine years, first as a diplomat's child in the 1970s and then as a diplomat myself in the early 1990s, I consider Germany my second homeland. In the 1970s, Germany was still split between West and East.

I remember a family trip in 1973, during which my father took us from West to East Berlin. I was astonished by the yawning gap between the two Germanies in both material goods and in spirit. East German cars were utterly different from those of the West. Gun-toting soldiers and police officers were everywhere on the streets, watching the people. I was relatively sensitive and precocious, and I was shocked by the worry, distress, and discontent I saw behind the frowns of the people of East Berlin.

In 1989, I joined the Foreign Ministry, dreaming of becoming, perhaps in thirty years or so, the first Japanese ambassador to a united Germany. But history moved far more quickly than I imagined. The Berlin Wall fell in November '89 while I was still in Tokyo. I was sent to Augsburg the following spring to university, and on October 2nd I travelled to Berlin, and tasted the euphoria of unification day for myself.

Today, Japan and Germany are vital partners, sharing the universal values of liberty, democracy, fundamental human rights, and the rule of law.

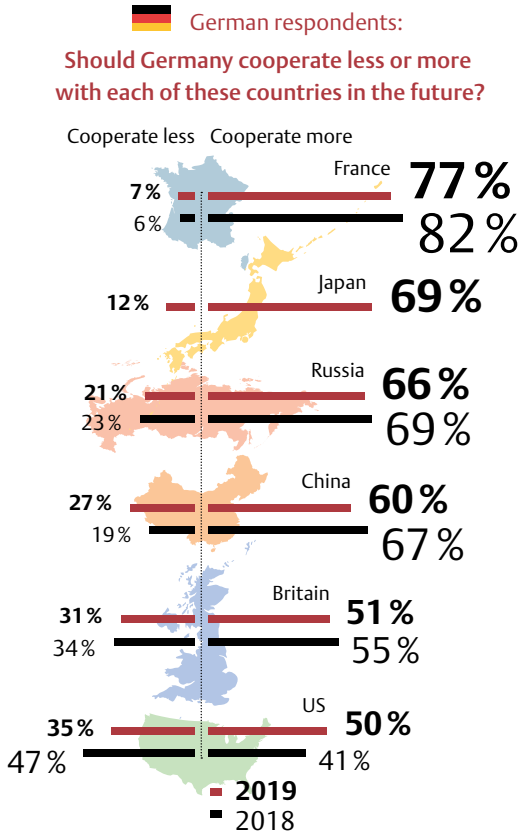


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More than any other country, Germany's interests converge with those of Japan in fields such as the promotion of free trade, global problems including the environment and poverty, and active contributions to peace as non-nuclear states. The politicians and people of both nations have finally begun to notice this.

Until recently, when Germans thought of Asia, they thought of China – thanks in no small part



to the car industry. For Japan on the other hand, post-War Europe first and foremost spelled the UK and France, followed by Germany. Following unification, Germany's increased economic and political influence, and the democratization and accession to the EU of Eastern Europe, fundamentally changed Tokyo's perceptions. Now, as the UK tries to leave the EU and France is beset by domestic issues, surely it is unnecessary to spell out how important Germany is in Europe for Japan.

The more the US, allied to both Japan and Germany, turns towards protectionism and away from climate action, the more Tokyo and Berlin must work together to persuade it to change course. To this end, they should continue to promote multilateral efforts such as the Paris Agreement and the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement.

Further, China is pursuing an expansionist foreign policy, drawing neighbouring countries into its economic hegemony under its "Belt and Road Initiative". It is important for Japan and Germany not to pretend that they do not see the mass human rights violations committed against the Uighurs and Tibetans, the persecution of Falun Gong, or the suppression of democratic protests in Hong Kong. We must actively intervene, with countries, such as the US, that share our values. This is equally true in our relations with Russia.

We hope that Germany will become more active in the Asia-Pacific, in free trade, security, and the construction of high-quality infrastructure. Similarly, Japan is a world leader in the development of fuel cells and the hydrogen society, but through collaborative research and development with Germany, we can make a real contribution to global decarbonisation and fighting climate change. Let us continue to move forward together in these and other fields.

During this time and in the future, I will continue to serve as a bridge between Japan and my second homeland, Germany.

