

‘Transatlantic relations are irreplaceable’

Why Europe has to do its part

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: A prominent issue on the transatlantic agenda is the question of NATO burden sharing. In contrast to Lithuania, Germany still spends considerably less than two percent on defence. Is it in the end Berlin’s own fault that transatlantic relations are increasingly under strain?

LINKEVIČIUS: That is not to blame on anyone here. Let us look strategically on the issue. I am convinced that transatlantic relations are irreplaceable. There were brighter and darker moments. For example, when France left the chain of military command. It is crucial that we pay attention to the two percent defence-spending goal we have agreed upon many years ago. I believe President Trump was right to put a more substantial emphasis on this topic by telling us to share responsibility. It is definitively not good that the two percent goal is not really fulfilled in NATO. Therefore, it is needless to say that we have to do our part and that the split in transatlantic relations could be detrimental to all of us. Not only from a security policy perspective, but also due to other possible common policies. I believe that we will come back to issues, such as trade, which we now push aside. Let us be honest, it is not the best time to discuss trade. Although I believe that it is unavoidable, and a topic we can only discuss together. The same is true for climate change. Both is unimaginable without the United States. We



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trust Germany and it is a decisive force in Europe. No matter in which policy area, the direction the continent will choose depends on Germany. Especially now, while we are facing difficult times, it is very important that Germany takes the lead and plays an active role. Otherwise, we face the undesirable situation of a vacuum.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Would a US troop withdrawal strengthen the security of eastern NATO members at the expense of Germany?

LINKEVIČIUS: We always said that we would be happy to host US troops, but not at the expense of Germany. From our perspective, the withdrawal of US troops from Europe would definitely be detrimental for the whole continent.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Do you consider US sanctions against German companies or the threat of it a legitimate instrument to stop the construction of Nord Stream 2?

LINKEVIČIUS: US policy has its own leverages. I believe sanctions are not the best instrument to be used in international politics. Nord Stream 2 is probably the only issue we publicly disagree on with Germany. It simply contradicts the policies and the principles the EU has agreed upon.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Would you have wished for a more prominent German role during the crisis in Belarus, given that Germany was very active in the Ukraine conflict since 2014?

LINKEVIČIUS: The answer is yes. Germany is the most powerful country in Europe. However, as neighbours, we all have to play a more prominent role and should share this task.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: During its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Germany has tried to establish a more coherent European stance towards China. Do you think that these efforts will lead to success in the future?

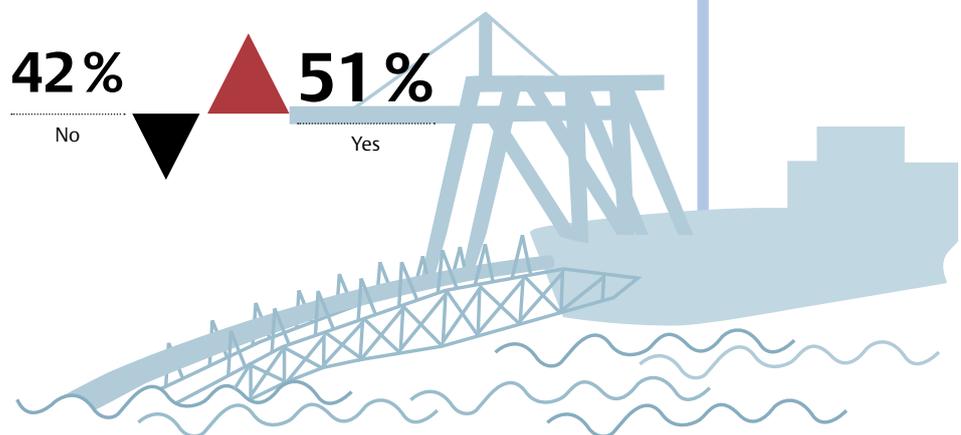
LINKEVIČIUS: They should lead to success. A few years ago, we did not discuss China at all. This was a mistake. We are now starting with a strategic discussion on all fronts and recognize that we still

need to do more collectively. What we have to do is setting rules and sticking to them, independent of the subject: be it trade, 5G or investment in strategic sectors. Concerning the latter, we have already identified the gaps in our industrial potential. In order to be competitive, we now have to invest more. The same holds true for pandemics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we discovered that the only market to buy protection gear and ventilators was China. We need to develop and create some incentives and support for the industry, for example by engaging more in research and development. This is a task for all Europeans.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Do you think that European countries should stop buying critical infrastructure from authoritarian states?

LINKEVIČIUS: If we are still able to meet our needs, we should stop, yes. When you are trying to save lives, as during the pandemic, you might make a compromise and order what you need, regardless of the regime you are backing. However, the goal needs to be to fill those gaps that became visible during the pandemic. ✕

Should Germany deny non-democratic states to provide critical infrastructure, like telecommunication technology or energy supply, on its territory?



don't know 5%, no answer 2%