

# Opportunity in Crisis

Europeans must seize the moment to shape  
the post-COVID-19 world

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In truth, an outbreak such as COVID-19 was all but improbable: the world was put on pandemic alert several times over the last twenty years, including for diseases originating from animal viruses. Nonetheless, like a black swan event, the pandemic is likely to have a major impact, both on our societies and on international relations.

Pandemics tend to rebalance power, thereby stoking patterns of rivalry. The current competition between narratives – and, by extension, models – demonstrates how such a redistribution may play

out, even absent major conflict. Simultaneously, the mitigation measures of the past few weeks have inflicted severe economic damage, and may well reinforce existing inequalities. It is hard therefore to envision the world emerging from the pandemic with an increased capacity to address the challenges it is facing, from geopolitical tensions to climate change, biodiversity, tech regulation, international trade, or disarmament.


Despite these risks, the pandemic also represents an opportunity to shape the post-COVID-19 world. To this end, Germany and France are united in their

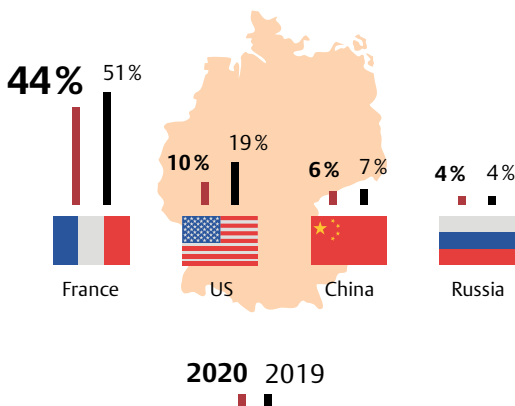
determination to promote and strengthen international cooperation and multilateralism. Bilaterally, Berlin has hosted French patients when Paris' health system was on the brink. We cooperated closely in repatriating from all over the world not only our respective citizens, but also those of our EU partners. At the European level, both Germany and France played a key role in unlocking a stalemate within the Euro group and forging a compromise on the EU's response to the economic fallout of the crisis. On a global level, Minister Maas and Minister Le Drian have convened [a new meeting of the Alliance for Multilateralism](#) to foster more effective cooperation and stronger solidarity in the global fight against COVID-19 and are working hand in hand to strengthen the UN's role in the current crisis.

During the second half of the year, Germany will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union, with France following suit during the first half of 2022. This puts both countries in a good position to work on strengthening European


sovereignty and solidarity. The challenge for the EU lies not only in dealing with the crisis from a public health perspective, nor in merely alleviating the potential shock to our economies and the harm to our social fabric. Instead, Europe will need to show that it is able to protect its people, that it can organize and foster solidarity, and that it will not simply return to business as usual. Europe will need to strengthen its resilience, reorganize its supply chains, and propose an economic, social, environmental, and political model that draws the right lessons from the crisis.

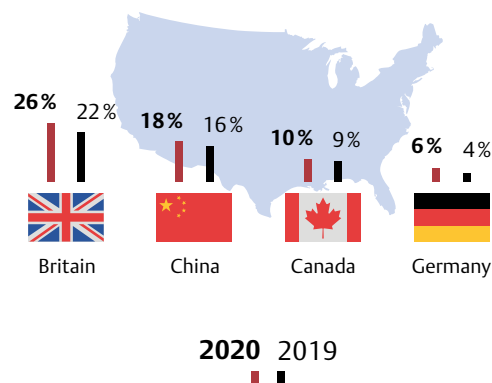
Europe should also focus its efforts abroad. As both Chancellor Merkel and President Macron have [pointed out](#), "No region can win the battle against COVID-19 alone. If it is not beaten in Africa, it will return to haunt us all". Europeans therefore face a two-fold challenge: First, to push for greater solidarity and cooperation, e.g. by allocating the financial resources to address the pandemic and by organizing fair and speedy access to treatments (and vaccines, once they become available);

 German respondents:  
Which country currently is the most important partner for German foreign policy?



2020: a different country 7%, don't know 24%, no answer 5%  
2019: a different country 4%, don't know 13%, no answer 2%

 US respondents:  
Which country currently is the most important partner for US foreign policy?



2020: a different country 20%, don't know/no answer 20%  
2019: a different country 28%, don't know/no answer 22%


second, to navigate an era in which geopolitical considerations will impede international cooperation, and in which Europe will need to earn credibility and impose respect.


In order to meet these challenges, Europeans must achieve a greater level of sovereignty, defined as the capacity to act independently and more decisively. Doing so by working on our capabilities and decision-making mechanisms will help us defend our principles and interests more efficiently, in the crisis and beyond. It will strengthen our position in the post-coronavirus world. It will allow us to have more influence in the international arena. Finally, it will provide us with the power to act on the global stage, to hold others accountable regarding their commitments, and to make our own.

On the multilateral front, Europeans should prioritize supporting the WHO in the fight against

COVID-19. Coordination, monitoring and information sharing are key to fighting the pandemic. We will also need others to step up, including the Global Fund, Unitaid, and Gavi, all of which have been bringing together states, international organizations, NGOs and corporations.

The crisis triggered by COVID-19 underlines the urgency of addressing a nearly endless list of global challenges including the environment, biodiversity, digital governance and data protection, human rights, and reducing inequalities. Viewed through a different lens, however, COVID-19 can broaden our understanding of what scenarios are possible for our future. There may be no magic bullet, but our destiny is not written in stone. If we don't shape our future, others will. And it is unlikely to be the future we want. ✗

 **German respondents:**  
**What would you expect once the corona crisis is over?**

 **US respondents:**  
**What would you expect once the corona crisis is over?**

