EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

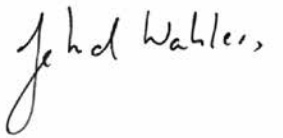
"Germans on a different continent", this was part of a statement issued by the U.S. Pew Institute in connection with a survey published in May: 60 per cent of German respondents conveyed a basically positive attitude toward the European Union, while the European average was only 43 per cent. The study showed particularly clearly that the attitude of the French is increasingly diverging from that of the Germans and becoming more strongly aligned with the opinions from other countries in the south of the European Union. The worry that Germany and France might drift apart and that the political leaderships of the two countries might no longer be able to agree on joint positions is deepening in view of such surveys and not least in view of a noticeably tense political atmosphere.

Several decades of European integration have illustrated that without the Germans and the French taking joint steps the historic integration project stops in its tracks. When the European Community did take steps towards integration, it was usually because influential countries merged their ideas and added their political weight behind the implementation of those ideas – and these tended to be Germany and France. In the current debt crisis, there is yet again a need for this joint leadership from Berlin and Paris. Structural weaknesses of the economic and currency union have caused the eurozone to falter. This situation calls for effective sanctioning mechanisms and improved coordination in the area of economic policy. Efforts must be made to establish a culture of stability with binding rules. The governments in Germany and France are currently not yet agreed on how this can be achieved. But agreement is necessary in order to allow the weaknesses in the European system to be rectified.

There has already been some progress made at a national level in a number of countries. In the affected countries of

the eurozone, efforts to reduce debts and to implement initial, partly even far-reaching, structural reforms have begun to take effect. This is pointed out by the authors in this issue of the *International Reports*, who are reporting from France, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Between 2009 and 2012, the Greek governments have reduced primary government spending by over 22 per cent, writes Susanna Vogt in her report from Athens. The budget deficit has been reduced considerably, and spending ceilings were set for all departments. Pensions, wages and salaries have been cut. In Greece, all these measures had to be implemented against the will of large parts of the population. In response to the question what the best way to solve the economic problems of the country would be, a majority of 56 per cent of Greeks surveyed by the Pew Institute responded that the state should invest more to stimulate the economy. Only 37 per cent thought it was more important for the state to reduce its spending – the lowest figure amongst all surveyed nations, which must give cause for concern.

The French responded in an entirely different way: 82 per cent thought debt reduction was the most important task. This proportion was even higher than that of the surveyed Germans (69 per cent), and it shows that the French are definitely ready for the urgent reforms that France would need to undertake to reenergise its economy and that President Hollande has been reluctant to initiate to date, as Norbert Wagner reports in his article. It seems the Germans and the French are living on the same continent after all. If a substantive solution to the debt crisis does come about, which will no doubt have to involve an increasing level of integration in economic policy, this will once again have happened as a result of cooperation between the Germans and the French.



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