

# European union assignment

[History](#)



Germany Must Take The Wheel In The European Union TIMOTHY GARTON  
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EDT Last updated Friday, Aug. 24 2012, 3: 54 PM EDT Like an overladen lorry  
labouring up a steep hill, the European project is close to stalling. If it stalls,  
even the emergency brake may not stop it running back down the hill, out of  
control, until it Jackknives. Two of the lads are wrestling over the steering  
wheel; others lie comatose in the sleeping area at the back of the cabin. We  
need a woman to come and sort them out. Her name is Angela.

The most urgent part of this crisis is Greece and the Eurozone. Between the  
fury on the streets of Athens and the continued disunity of decision-makers  
in Brussels, Berlin, Frankfurt and Luxembourg (where the Euro Group  
huddles again Sunday and Monday), the lorry could stall any day. But it's not  
Just Greece. In Ireland, Portugal and Spain, too, anger is boiling over, as  
people feel that the young, the poor and the unemployed are being forced to  
pay for the selfish improvidence of their politicians and of French and  
German bankers, who lent profusely where they should not have lent at all.

And it's not Just the Eurozone. Every single major project of the European  
Union is faltering. France and Italy are suggesting that the achievement of  
the Schengen Zone, with no border controls, should be chipped away Just  
because a few thousand people from convulsed North Africa have taken  
refuge on the Italian island of Lampedusa. Many European countries are  
already in a panic about the integration of immigrants and people of migrant  
origin, especially Muslims.

Solidarity and social justice, central values of the post 1945 European project, are in retreat almost everywhere, as a result of growing inequality and spending cuts to tackle public debt. In the Arab spring, Europe faces the most hopeful set of events in the 21st century so far, comparable in scale and potential to 1989, but its collective and institutional response to this historic opening has been feeble beyond belief. Yet, this was meant to be the year the EU got its act together in foreign policy.

Even in the most hopeful cases, Tunisia and Egypt, we may have only a few months in which to prevent the Arab spring becoming an Arab fall. The disappointed hopes of that half of the population which is under 30 would then produce further, larger immigrant surges to Europe. The European-led military intervention in Libya was always likely to be a slow grind, but it has painfully exposed Europe's chronic failure to concentrate its military capabilities. Already, some of the powers involved are running short of munitions. Even enlargement, Europe's most successful project, is close to stalling.

The magnetic attraction of EU membership continues to have a significant positive effect in a country like Serbia, but ever less so in Turkey. In his victory speech after the recent Turkish elections, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan did not even mention the EU. Retired prime ministers and foreign ministers never tire of attributing this faltering of the European project to the lack of "leadership." (Subtext: It was all so much better when we were in charge.) It is true, but less than half the story. For while the quality of European leadership is somewhat poorer than it was a quarter-century ago, the need for it is greater.

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Why? Because all the great underlying motivators of the European project back in the days of Helmut Kohl, Franpis Mitterrand and Jacques Delors have faded or disappeared. Those powerful driving forces included searing personal experiences of war, occupation, Holocaust, fascist and Communist dictatorships; the Soviet threat, catalyzing west European solidarity; generous, energetic U. S. support for European unification; and a West Germany that was the mighty engine of European integration, with France on top as the driver. The West

Germans wanted to rehabilitate themselves as good Europeans, but also needed the support of their European neighbours to achieve their goal of unification. All these are now gone, or very much diminished. While there are intellectually convincing new rationales for the project, including the rise of non-western giants such as China, rationales are no match for emotional motivators. Heart trumps head, every day. The key to so much of this, especially on the economic side, is Germany. For much of its history, what has become the EIJ pursued political ends by economic means.

For Mr. Kohl and Mr. Mitterrand, the euro was mainly a political project, not an economic one. Now the boot is on the other foot. To save a poorly designed and overextended monetary union, the political must ride to the rescue of the economic. This is where Angela Merkel comes in. There is no particular reason to expect Germany to take the lead in creating a European foreign and security policy. For a response to the Arab spring, we should look first to Spain, France and Italy. If the issue is the integration of migrants, every country must do its homework.

But if we are talking about the European economy and currency, Germany is the indispensable power. Only the combination of Germany and the European Central Bank, working in unison, has a chance of calming the mighty markets. For more than a year now, Ms. Merkel has attempted to find the narrow - perhaps non-existent line where the minimum that can be done to save the embattled Eurozone periphery meets the maximum she thinks German public opinion will bear. She has then tried to win her Eurozone partners to that course. So far, it has not worked.

Now she needs to start from the other end: Work out, with the ECB and other Eurozone governments, what is the most credible deal available, then put all her authority on the line to persuade a reluctant German public that this will be in their long-term, enlightened, national self-interest. Which it will be. For no one has more to lose from the disintegration of the Eurozone than the continent's central economic power. It may soon be too late. [Http:// www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/germany-must-take-the-wheel-in-the-european-union/article583479/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/germany-must-take-the-wheel-in-the-european-union/article583479/)