



GERMANY

EU MEMBER SINCE	1952 (founding member)
OTHER MEMBERSHIPS	NATO, Schengen Area, Eurozone, Bologna Process, OECD
CURRENCY	€ (EURO)
CAPITAL	Berlin
AREA	357,022 sq km
POPULATION	81,147,265 (July 2013 est.)
LANGUAGE	German
RELIGION	Protestant 34%, Roman Catholic 34%, Muslim 3.7%, unaffiliated or other 28.3%
GDP	\$ 44,021 (2011)
GNI	\$ 40,190 (2011)
SGI	7.77 out of 10 (2011)
CPI	79 out of 100 (2012)
ARCHITECTURE	Romanism. Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassicism, Art Nouveau, Bauhaus, Internationalism. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Gottfried Semper, Hans Scharoun, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Günther Behnisch
LITERATURE	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin, Thomas Mann, Günter Grass
MUSIC	Minnelieder, various genres of the Baroque, Classical and Romantic styles, Bavarian Alpine New Wave, Volksmusik (folk music), Ostrock, Medieval metal, Trance music; Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, Robert Schuman, Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Carl Orff, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Helmut Lachenmann, Heino, Die Toten Hosen, Scorpions
PAINTING	Albrecht Dürer, Matthias Grünewald, Hans Holbein, Max Beckmann, Gerhard Richter
PHILOSOPHY	Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger
CUISINE	Apfelstrudel, Prezel, Wurst, Spätzle, Kartoffelpuffer, Bratkartoffeln, Hasenpfeffer, Sauerbraten, Sauerkraut, Knödel, numerous varieties of bread. Delicacies: Marzipan from Lübeck
DRINKS	Beer, Riesling, Obstler, Schnaps
CONSUMPTION	12.81 equivalent liters of pure ethyl alcohol per capita per year (WHO, 2005)
SPORTS	Soccer

Wolf Schäfer *On Germany*

10 May 2013

Touristic images and descriptions, like ads in the personals, present the rosier views; national prejudices capture the impressions of a country from an outside perspective. Both takes may be wrong, yet both are telling. And so are the comparative glances of expatriates, immigrants, and cosmopolitans.



Neuschwanstein Castle © Ximonic, Wikimedia Commons

My comparative take on Germany includes the United States. I would, for example, ask for significant *Vereine* or clubs in the U.S. and the Bundesrepublik and point to the *Allgemeine Deutsche Automobilklub* (ADAC) and the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the unwarranted licenses they propagate. The NRA bills itself as “America’s longest-standing civil rights organization” and defines personal freedom as the right of an American citizen to own as many powerful weapons as he wishes; the ADAC makes sure that Germans have the right to drive as fast as they can on the *Autobahn*. In case you travel to Germany, here are a few more things I can tell you.

Kultur and Fußball – or soccer first and culture second?

Never mind that for some the priority is one way around, for others, the other way. Growing up in Germany, I played *Fußball* with other boys on the street, but never cared much about any particular *Fußballclub* (soccer club); yet I watch the World Cup tournaments wherever I am. Still, my interest in soccer does not compare with that of my Argentinian wife, who is a serious Boca Juniors fan.

It is true that German towns are havens for the embodiments of *Hochkultur* (high culture), such as museums, theatres, and opera houses, classical and modern music halls. Yet basement jazz clubs and *Kabarett*s with biting humor are also popular. Ubiquitous signboards of professional psychologists and ground floor *Kitas* (*Kindertagesstätten*, day care centers) attest to the social-democratic milieu that cuts across society and all political parties of present-day Germany.

Beer and Wine, what else?

Hearty breads and delicious cakes of course. *Brot* (bread), *Brötchen* (bread rolls), *Brezeln* (pretzel), *Kaffeegebäck* (cookies), and *Kuchen* (cake) come in hundreds of varieties, all rather tempting, I may say. For Germans living abroad, finding good enough bread is an everyday problem. Westphalian pumpernickel from the German “lifestyle bakery” *Mestemacher International* is no substitute for the fresh offers of a local *Bäckerladen* (bakery shop). Check it out.

German beer needs no explanation or promotion. Have one under a tree in a *Biergarten* with a fresh *Brezel* or six *Nürnberger Rostbratwürstchen mit Sauerkraut* (small pork bratwursts from a wood-fired grill, crunchy, and brown on all sides, with sauerkraut).

When it comes to wine, the German answer is *Riesling*, the world’s finest white wine variety. If *terroir* means something to you, this grape is pure eloquence. It evokes the regions of the Rhine and the Palatinate (*Pfalz*); the Moselle and Main Rivers; geology, geography, and microclimates; slate and sandy soils, as well as other unique places and Riesling features, not to mention the frightening nomenclature of the German wine classification. Names like *Trockenbeereauslese* (dry berry selection) can break your tongue (and wallet), but the amber liquid will prove divine. Varietally pure, not oaked, sweetness counterbalanced by acidity, comparatively low alcohol content, and amazing longevity (100 years and more) will make an unforgettable wine. If you are young, keep a case of the very best from your birth year; and if you are older, do the same.

Speaking about today’s Germany is easy – the country’s problems lie in the past and the future. First, a personal riff on the past regarding Germany and Europe.

Around 1950: ruins, literally and metaphorically

Born during World War II, I grew up in the rubble of Frankfurt am Main after “the hour zero” (*die Stunde Null*, an allusion to the defeat of Hitler’s Third Reich May 8, 1945). Being a young German at that time meant learning that the ultimate responsibility for the ruins all around was overwhelmingly German. This created an uneasy political identity.



Playground, Hamburg, Winter 1946/47 © alliance/dpa

Initially, Europe was but a continental place name for my generation. We could not see it until much later as an integrated entity. The old multicultural “European Civilization,” if it ever existed, was gone. What we did see was a patchwork of conflicting states, cultures, histories, traditions, prejudices, policies, economies, and ideologies. Moreover, those in West Germany who talked about Europe in civilizational terms in the 1950s and 60s – politicians of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) – had distinctly medieval preferences. For many of them, the Third Reich’s twelve years were simply an aberration or an accident in the millennial context of the Christian *Abendland* (Occident). However, and not coincidentally, Christian conservatives pulled postwar Europe out of the wreckage and lifted it up. Robert Schuman, Charles de Gaulle, Konrad Adenauer, and Helmut Kohl – Catholic leaders with the “back to the future” advantage of a genuinely premodern perspective – successfully bridged the continent’s numerous divides and started building the European Union (EU).

Adenauer, who had been mayor of Cologne since 1917, was dismissed by the Nazis in 1933, survived the regime, and became the first chancellor of West Germany in 1949 at age 73. The physicist Werner Heisenberg, who was Lutheran and had clashed with Adenauer in 1958 over atomic weapons for the Federal Republic, noted: Adenauer’s “compass was not set by the Prussian model” but rather by “the Roman-Christian tradition as it had survived in the Catholic Church, together with certain nineteenth-century social doctrines whose Christian roots he seemed to recognize.” Indeed, Adenauer studied the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* during his enforced retirement and remarked to Heisenberg about his time off: “When you are locked up in a small cell for days, weeks, months, and are never disturbed by telephone calls and visitors, you can think back at leisure on the past and reflect quietly on what may still be in store for you, and that is really quite a nice thing to be able to do.”

Now turn to 2013 and Germany’s future role in the EU, and the political forecasts call for stormy weather.

Looking to Germany for leadership

The German word for leadership is *Führerschaft*. My German driver’s license from 1961 is not called *Fahrerschein* but *Führerschein* – you see where this leads to. The country that once hailed a *Führer* has to overcome a linguistic obstacle.

The solidly democratic republic of Adenauer, Willy Brandt, and Angela Merkel is now confronted with what Timothy Garton Ash (*The New York Review of Books*) recently termed “[The New German Question](#)”: Can Germany move the European project forward, decisively and yet softly, not as a bully, but in a helpful neighborly spirit? To fulfill the vacant *Führungsrolle* in the EU without becoming the despised *Schulmeister* (or schoolmistress) of the EU, is the problem.

According to Fritz Stern, Germany has been given a “second chance” almost a century after 1914 and nearly seventy years after the conclusion in 1945 of the wretched phase of German history. How the historian qualified his assessment is important. Stern wants Germany to direct “its efforts for peace and reason in such a way that it does not merely rhetorically pledge its support for Europe, but is also practically helping to realize it.”

Ash is skeptical that Germany can achieve this feat. He faults the German political class of having become “even more provincial than it was before.” Accordingly, he bemoans “a crying need for poetry,” political EU poetry that is. Ash is right about that but requesting such poetry from local political elites is not realistic. Ask German public intellectuals for soaring political poetry.

Jürgen Habermas, perhaps the most influential of them, just published a warning cry in *Der Spiegel* about the “state of emergency” Europe is in. Habermas sees Germany “dozing on a volcano.” He accuses Merkel’s government of “forcing Southern Europe to undertake profound reforms while at the same time denying its own responsibility for the consequences of its crisis policies.” He scolds the German political elite and deplores the democratic deficit of the EU, whose “increasingly restless citizenry ... has never been confronted with substantial European issues” (crucial EU

issues are handled behind closed doors in Brussels). Requesting German leadership towards a more perfect political union of the EU, Habermas condemns Merkel's "opportunism of staying in power."

	Unemployment rate	Unemployment ratio
European Union (27 countries)	22.8	9.7
Euro area (17 countries)	23.0	9.6
Belgium	19.8	6.2
Bulgaria	28.1	8.5
Czech Republic	19.5	6.1
Denmark	14.1	9.1
Germany	8.1	4.1
Estonia	20.9	8.7
Ireland	30.4	12.3
Greece	55.3	16.1
Spain	53.2	20.6
France	24.3	9.0
Italy	35.3	10.1
Cyprus	27.8	10.8
Latvia	28.4	11.4
Lithuania	26.4	7.7
Luxembourg	18.1	5.0
Hungary	28.1	7.3
Malta	14.2	7.2
Netherlands	9.5	6.6
Austria	8.7	5.2
Poland	26.5	8.9
Portugal	37.7	14.3
Romania	22.7	7.0
Slovenia	20.6	7.1
Slovakia	34.0	10.4
Finland	19.0	9.8
Sweden	23.7	12.4
United Kingdom	21.0	12.4
Norway	8.6	4.8
Croatia	43.0	12.8
Turkey	15.7	5.9

EU Youth Unemployment 2012 © Eurostat

I am less frightened and more hopeful and would say first things first. Merkel has to win re-election before tackling the thorny problem of assuming responsibility for the whole EU. Taking issue with a politician's careful oratory and smart maneuvering at the [eve of an election](#) is not hard. I believe German leadership for the benefit of the EU is, however, possible. Without a challenger of Brandt's caliber in sight, Merkel's small steps and steadfast humility are encouraging and may actually be well suited for the looming task.

Looking ahead, I would say Germany's piecemeal statecraft is exportable. The country's practice of an "understated" and "collaborative" form of governance is paradigmatic and could be applied to the EU. The political management of a cumbersome conglomerate of sixteen *Länder* (federated states), numerous dialects, cities, and city-states including Hamburg and Berlin, ranging from Bavaria in the south to Schleswig-Holstein in the north, all bound together by the venerated principle of federalism, has provided Germany with a model. Putting it to work across the Eurozone can lead to a Federated European Commonwealth.

The grandchildren of my generation, who are now coming of age all across Europe, must be enabled to embrace the EU as their best political hope. There is much that needs to be done on that front, especially in Berlin, Paris, and Brussels.

[\[PDF\]](#)

