



INFINITE OPPORTUNITIES | GERMANY + INDIA
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Teilnehmername	Medium	Titel d. Artikels	Erscheinungsdatum
Srinand JHA	Hindustan Times	'Entry of Walmart can help India tackle agri, job issues'	20.12.2012
Srinand JHA	Hindustan Times	Germany pitches for metro rail contracts	23.12.2012
Mukesh RANJAN	Asian Age	Germany sets 2030 target for total energy shift	26.12.2012
Abraham Johnson THAZHATHEL	Indian Express	German thinking in an Indian heart, and car that drives itself	5.1.2012
Vineeta PANDEY	Daily News and Analysis (DNA)	Wuppertal: Like a tram in the sky	8.1.2012
Sachin PARASHAR	Times of India	Indis's push for UN veto rights to stall: Berlin	16.1.2012
GANDHI, Jatin	OPEN – Weekly Magazin	How Germany sees the Eurozone crisis	23.1.2012
Sachin PARASHAR	Times of India	'Germany must understand India is a very important country'	2.4.2012
Meera SRINIVASAN	The Hindu	When politics colour curriculum	30.3.2012

The Hindustan Times
20.12.2011

'Entry of Walmart can help India tackle agri, job issues'

Srinand Jha

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HAMBURG (GERMANY): Walmart has virtually been edged out of business by powerful domestic chains in the German market, but India's engagement with the US multi-brand retailer can be mutually beneficial.

Gero Winkler of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce elaborates on his assumption, "Approximately 40% of agricultural produce in India is lost post-harvest. Retail brands such as Walmart can help address such issues by setting up infrastructure including the setting up of cold storage chains."

After two decades of slugging it out in the competitive German retail market, the Walmart has lost the race to powerful domestic brands such as the Aldie and Lidl.

"Majority of Walmart outlets have shut and those that remain are on the verge of closure,"

BACKING FDI IN RETAIL, GERO WINKLER OF THE HAMBURG CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, SAID MOVE WILL BE GOOD FOR INDIA

Winkler said in an interview.

Responding to anti-Walmart protests in India, Winkler recalled similar developments two decades ago when Walmart entered German market. "But no great harm came to Germany. Instead, more jobs were created; farmers got better remuneration for products while consumers started to be offered cheaper prices," he said.

The Indian government can go step-by-step (permitting FDI in multi-brand retail) and can work on effective regulations to prevent cartelisation of food retail chains, said Winkler, who heads the India desk at the chamber.

Walmart developments are being keenly watched for the huge potential perceived for the German retail industry in India — a country that has largely withstood the storm of the Eurozone.

Already India's biggest trading partner within the European Union with the goal of increasing bilateral trade volumes to 20 billion Euros by 2015 having already been achieved, Germany now wants the entry of middle-size family businesses in the pharmaceutical, cosmetics and food industries.

Middle-sized German pharmaceutical firms that want to enter Indian market include Hamburg-based firms Fristam and Ervotec.

Approximately 1,500 German companies have already set up offices in India including Bosch Seimens, Mercedes, Volkswagen and Airbus Industries. Indian investments in Germany have also grown.

Germany pitches for metro rail contracts

Srinand Jha

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STUTTGART: The Germany-based transportation division of Bombardier and Siemens are among the global conglomerates pitching in for contracts to build networks to run metro train services in Indian cities including Chennai, Pune and Lucknow.

The German rail industry is also keen to partner the Indian Railways in the futuristic project of creating networks to run new generation trains (NGTs) or high-speed trains on 800 kilometre long routes in India.

Thirty five routes across India, with an annual passenger traffic of 1,03,90561 have been identified by the Stuttgart-based German Aerospace Center (DLR) — which is developing the trains of the future.

"The Indian locomotive industry has a huge potential and German firms are bidding

for contracts in areas including consultancy services and logistics cooperation," said Joachim Winter, project director, DLR.

"The Indian rail industry also has the potential to provide a huge competition to the shipping industry in the field of freight transportation between Europe and Asia," said Wolfgang Kupper, head of the rail policy unit at the German federal ministry of transport. "The German industry can provide technical consultancy to the Indian Railways to build trans-national rail lines."

A German delegation visited Bangalore early this month for discussions with the officials of the DV Sadananda Gowda government on a possible partnership for the future development of the Bangalore metro project.

(The writer's trip was sponsored by the German government).

The Asian Eye
26.12.2011

SPOTLIGHT

Germany sets 2030 target for total energy shift

MUKESH RANJAN
COLOGNE/ESSEN (GERMANY),
DEC. 25

Keeping in view the fast depleting hydrocarbon energy sources in the world, Germany has set a target to entirely shift to renewable energy sources by 2030 and in the process the country has not only been phasing out its 17 nuclear power plants, but also many of

its coal mines and thermal power plants have been converted into heritage sites with Unesco certifications. Set to achieve total migration to renewable energy sources for the country's requirement, the energy department has fixed 2030 as its deadline and has accordingly been providing substantive incentive to end users and producers. "Solar and wind power are

being promoted in a big way. Power generated through the two energy sources are being integrated with the national grid. So every household, which has bought solar panels, has become a power generating plant, as the surplus power is fed into national grid and each generating unit gets an assured return of 28 euros per kilowatt," said a senior energy department official. He added

that with this policy, every household achieves break-even in almost one year against their capital investment for the equipment and solar panel. Conventional energy sources like coal are getting fossilised in the country, as its one of the oldest and largest coal mine — Zollverein — in the north of Essen city with 12 shafts has been converted into a world heritage

site with a Unesco certification. Speaking to this newspaper, Mr Rolf Kuhlmann, head of communication and marketing, said, "The site was inscribed on the Unesco world heritage list. Preservation through conversion is the motto. History, culture, creativity, events, gastronomy, leisure, all these what Zollverein offers to about two million visitors every year."



World's only hanging train in Wuppertal, a shrinking city.

German thinking in an Indian heart, and car that drives itself

JOHNSON TA

ONE WEEK is hardly enough time to understand a foreign country and its way of life. Still, a week-long visit to Germany provided a wide spectrum of some interesting encounters. Here are a few snapshots:

MADE IN INDIA



THE EARLY MTV generation in India will remember the chart-topping number *I am an Indian* with a reggae rhythm from 1996. Part of the album *Made in India*, the song was by the Noble Savages band featuring brother and

sister Cyrus and Shirin Valentine.

Shirin is today among the best known Indian-origin Germans. A music producer, promoter, performer and TV presenter, she says her heart is Indian but her thinking is German. Her father, a Punjabi Christian, and mother, a Parsi from Mumbai, met in Munich during the 1976 Olympics when they were new immigrants, speaking hardly any German. Her father first worked as a janitor at the Olympic Stadium. The couple later moved on to work at the Indian embassy.

"The first time I was in India was when I was 11. I was thrown back by the smells, noise and crowds in Mumbai. I wanted to go back," Shirin says. "I later grew to understand India and my Indian identity better."

Her musical avatar is today in a band called *She's All That* with "a rock on electronic sound", as she describes it. A journalist by training, she runs a music production agency, *Das Musiknetzwerk*, and organises an annual contest for bands, *Toys2Masters*.

GEEKS TO POLITICIANS

LAST YEAR, Germany witnessed its own version of the Internet revolution. The Pi-

rate Party, comprising largely computer geeks and born on the Internet in protest against violation of online privacy and data protection norms, hit the jackpot in the elections to the Berlin city council. All 15 candidates nominated by the Pirate Party found seats after the party got more than five per cent of the votes. The party, some of whose members have overlapping affiliations with hackers' collectives, surprised many people in Germany by translating their fight for greater Internet freedom into a political victory. It is the first protest party to emerge in Germany since the Green Party in the 1980s. It is also standing for direct democracy and legalisation of soft drugs.



AUTONOMOUS AUTOMOBILE

A SMALL artificial intelligence and robotics laboratory at Berlin's Freie University, which started with creating soccer robots, is chasing Google in the race to develop the first commercially usable autonomous or self-driving cars. After extensive trials at the out-of-use Tempelhof airport, the driverless car (disingenuously called *Made in Germany*) from AutoNOMOS Labs has over the last few months been plying on the streets following clearance from Berlin's local authorities. The 20-man group at Freie University, headed by Prof Raul Rojas, has a 20-year time-frame for commercialisation of the car against Google's more ambitious one of eight years, says AutoNOMOS commercial project co-ordinator Patrick Vogel.

The car deploys multiple radars, sensors and cameras to capture and process the real-time environment and mashes it up

with digital mapping and GPS technology to navigate the prototype Volkswagen car around pre-programmed routes. The car, for which the government provided 2.1 million euros as funding in 2009, is meant to be "better than a human being when it comes to following the rules completely" and "does not look like a robot", says Vogel.

AutoNOMOS is also working on spin-off versions that can be driven by the thoughts of a person. Some of the technology for the brain-driven car is being tested on a special wheelchair where a person seated decides where the chair will go on the basis of programmed thoughts.

SHRINKING CITIES

A STORY you hear often these days is about Germany's shrinking small cities in the wake of migration to bigger ones. Wuppertal, close to Cologne and the only city in the world with a hanging train (over 100 years old), is a prime example. The erosion of small and medium industries by the growth of bigger German industry and Chinese imports has reduced its population, once nearly 400,000, to 340,000 in 15 years. In small districts of Wuppertal like Olberg, where tools used to be handmade and textiles handwoven, large blocks of homes now lie vacant.

Residents have now launched initiatives with the funding of state authorities and the European Union to try and put empty homes to community use. The *Zwischen Nutzungs Agentur Wuppertal* initiative has received 60,000 euros for five years for a pilot project to use empty properties for uses such as children's craft workshops and artists' studios. In another initiative, local residents have started a company to buy over empty properties and put them to profitable use.

"Those staying back in the smaller cities are the ones who are immobile like single mothers, the elderly, migrants and children," says Rolf Martin from the *Zwischen Nutzungs Agentur Wuppertal*. "Cities won't invest money in their futures. People have to organise themselves. Keeping a district alive is a social sign that an area is alive, at least as a model for future cities."

Rudiger Bleck, a town planner in the city council, feels things are changing with funds from the EU and the local state government.

GOODBYE REACTORS

FOLLOWING FUKUSHIMA, Germany has settled on 2022 as the year when the last of its 17 nuclear reactors will shut down, ending a nearly five-decade tryst with nuclear energy. Yet, groups like *Anti Atom Bonn* still organise weekly protests for fear that there could be a rethink.

Germany is expected to continue to have nuclear supplies from countries like France. The hole left by the shutdown is not likely to be filled by renewable energy sources by 2022. Nuclear energy contributes 23 per cent of the total electricity produced in Germany and renewable energy 20 per cent.

Germany is also grappling with the issue of a site for disposal of its nuclear waste. "It is about a safety culture, it's about having a lot of qualified people who act responsibly," says Sven Dokter, a media representative for *Global Safety Research*, an independent adviser to the government.

(The correspondent was in Germany on a journalism exchange programme, Shifting Perspectives, organised by the Federal Government of Germany, as part of the Infinite Opportunities agreement between the Indian and German governments)

Like a tram in the sky

DNA / Vineeta Pandey / Sunday, January 8, 2012

After jostling for space in a typical Indian city, a walk through the sparsely populated town of Wuppertal in the erstwhile Federal Republic of Germany is refreshing. The city's claim to fame is that it is the birthplace of the tablet Asprin. In 1897, the German pharmaceutical company Bayer produced its brand of acetylsalicylic acid, drawn from the bark of the local willow plant, and sold it across the world with its trademark. It lost the trademark in the next century — one of those casualties of the Great War — but by then, Wuppertal had established itself firmly on the industrial map.

Perhaps the city's once flourishing industry helped shape revolutionary thoughts in one of its most famous sons, Friedrich Engels, who supported and co-authored The Communist Manifesto with fellow German Karl Marx. Engels' ideas were unpalatable to his parents, leading to a rift that probably led him to settle down in Britain in the years to come.

A trip in the tram

It was raining on the day we decided to take the city's famous floating tram and get a bird's eye view of the magnificent city. The Wuppertal Schwebebahn (Floating Tram) began its life in the skies in 1901. Back then, its designer Eugen Langen had dreamt of it floating above the streets of Berlin, but had to finally settle for Wuppertal. While most modern western cities opted to burrow into the underground for its mass transportation systems, Wuppertal aimed for the sky. Hanging from intricate metal beams, the tram is suspended mid-air as it snakes its way through the city, offering a majestic view of the mountains that surround the city.

Sometime in the 1900s, German emperor William II had participated in the tram's trial run before it was thrown open to the general public. The only time the tram got closed down was during the Second World War, when allied bombers inflicted extensive damage on its steel beams. But by 1946, German engineers swung into action to restore its floating tram as the country began to emerge from its post-War years.

The tram travels 39ft above river Wupper, traversing a distance of nearly 13kms. Here, an accident can mean a dip in the bone-chilling water in the river below the tram. To those of us who were used to travelling closer to terra-firma, the idea seemed exciting as well as daunting. It helped that there is a metal net below so that an unfortunate slip doesn't take you straight to the river.

Holding our breath, we climbed into the tram. Large windows opened up a majestic view of the city, which was dotted with trees. The cold waters of the Wupper river was flowing gently below. It took us a bit of time and assurance from co-passengers that there has been only one accident in its 110-year existence, to settle down. The Germans clearly take their engineering feats quite seriously.

The city swished past in a delightful blur, as its buildings and trees merged or separated nearly 35 feet below us.

A ghost town called Olberg

The Olberg district has a population of just about 17,000: Nearly 60,000 of its residents left for larger cities like Cologne and Bonn. The district's magnificent mansions, called Wilhelminian houses, now lie vacant. Rents have plummeted (from 12 euros to 3 euros per sq mt). A mansion can be bought for as cheap as 1,00,000 euros. Groups here actually work towards bringing back the district's population to save the crumbling houses that have been un-cared for. In the last couple of years, Wuppertal has begun to attract artists who use corner shops as a studio or gallery.

The Times of India

16.01.2012

India's push for UN veto rights to stall reforms: Berlin

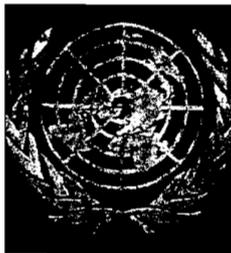
Sachin Parashar | TNN

New Delhi: As the issue of expansion of UNSC permanent membership gathers momentum, Germany for the first time has openly warned India that its insistence on veto rights for new permanent members will not just delay the reform process but also not help in turning the UNSC into a more decisive body.

This assertion, made in an exclusive interaction with TOI by Ruprecht Polenz, the chief of foreign relations committee of Bundestag, the lower house of Germany's parliament, and a key member of chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union party, has further laid bare fissures within the G-4 — India, Germany, Japan and Brazil — which is together seeking permanent membership in an expanded UNSC.

"I think the veto question should be reconsidered because too many blocking powers will not lead to a decisive body," Polenz told TOI. "I can understand it coming from India, a nation of 1.2 billion people, but if you want a body which can take decisions, you should not aim for more blocking competencies," he added.

Unlike Germany, which is open to inclusion of more members even without veto power, India wants



TOUGH TALK

the veto issue to be settled before any expansion. However, realizing its stand could be used by others to block any expansion, India announced in 2010 it was ready for delayed veto rights to new members.

India's envoy to the UN Hardeep Puri said in 2010 the new permanent members "shall not exercise the right of veto until the question of the extension of the right of veto to new permanent members has been decided upon in the framework of the review mandated 15 years after the entry into force of the Council reform". According to Puri, this was to ensure the "veto does not veto council reforms".

This is being seen as a compromise solution to the issue but Polenz said the only reform Germany saw happening in the future was in the form of intermediary steps with new members joining for 5 or 10-year terms without any veto rights.

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STATE OF THE UNION

Too Smart for Europe

How Germany sees the
Eurozone crisis. And
why others demur

JATIN GANDHI
HAMBURG AND BERLIN



PHOTOS JATIN GANDHI

1/4

ROSTOCK IS A small town in Northern Germany, off the Baltic Sea Coast, with a population of nearly 200,000, down from 260,000 in 1989 after the Berlin Wall fell. From the balcony of every room in the multi-storey Hotel Neptun, where the German government arranged to put me up for a night, you can see the white sand beach of Warnemunde. Around Christmas isn't the time you would see much activity on a beach off the icy Baltic Sea, apart from

some well-clad joggers. The breeze is chilly. The average morning temperature in December hovers around 3°C. It hasn't snowed yet, but it is almost freezing.

The advantage of watching a deserted coastline is that you begin to imagine things. Like a photo frame, you begin to fill the space that your eyes stare at with people and happenings. On the train from Hamburg to Rostock, business writer Dirk Böcher—my 'tandem partner' for the journalist exchange programme that I was part of—had spoken of the way people were killed trying to escape East Germany. Standing in the balcony, I imagine people trying to escape the coast, 30 years or so ago, on boats and rafts they had secretly built, and being shot at by Red soldiers in long overcoats.

Later in the day, before we leave Rostock for Berlin and walk through the city centre, those images acquire faces. At least some of them do. One such face is that of Walter Gerber of Lubek. Walter, a

to escape the clutches of the Communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Wall fell and East and West Germany were reunited.

The hidden prison used by the secret services to hold their suspects without trial for months together is now part of the University of Rostock. It has been converted into a small museum where postgraduate students also attend lectures and study history and philosophy. From the outside, the prison looks like any ordinary red-brick building. Residents in the area never knew it existed till the GDR collapsed. At one point, in 1988, more than 7,000 secret service operatives kept watch on nearly 20,000 citizens suspected to be against the regime. "It was an environment of deep mistrust. Almost everyone looked at everyone else with suspicion," Böcher says.

IN ANOTHER PART of town, inside a similar looking building that houses Biocon Valley, Dr Heinrich Cuypers is at work on scientific projects involving research on longevity and distance health care. Assenior project manager in the life science department of the lab, his work is at the core of what Biocon Valley set out to do in the mid 1990s: with government funding, reduce the economic gap between East and West Germany. Biocon Valley uses biotechnology to that end.

Rostock had a bustling local economy of shipbuilding and agriculture before the Berlin Wall fell. Since reunification, Berlin's biggest challenge has been to address economic disparities, which means uplifting the East. "Since shipbuilding has been going down, tens of thousands of jobs have been lost," Cuypers explains. So the government invested millions of euros to set up research centres here and create jobs in this East German town. "At the time of reunification, big companies from the West were happy to get a new market," he adds, "We were able to convince the government that this field produces jobs which are permanent and not like call centre jobs." With about 100 companies at work in the sector now, nearly 100,000 people have found jobs.

With public funding, there is a history of employees at Biocon mastering a research-to-application process for a particular product or technology and then venturing out on their own. "Then we have

Bridging the economic gap between the two former halves of Germany is proving tough enough, let alone resolving disparities across the EU

bearded man in his late 40s or early 50s, and his wife Ingrid are smiling in a picture that is part of a large poster. The entire room, which was once a cell in the secret prison here, is dedicated to Gerber's effort to escape East Germany—in the 1980s—and get beyond the Iron Curtain by taking a route below the surface of the icy sea. The walls of the cell are adorned with pictures and diagrams of Projekt Delphin—Gerber's ambitious attempt at using a 7-by-5 ft homemade submarine to escape to Gedser in Denmark, a two-hour ferry ride from Warnemunde port.

He was caught and kept here, a suffocating 8-by-0 ft cell with a wooden door bearing three locks and a little slit for food and other deliveries. Before he could be killed like hundreds of those who tried

SHADOW OF THE WALL Berlin's Line of Trees Street: Germany's quest for a unified Europe is under threat





ICY ATTEMPT Walter Gerber's homemade submarine in which he tried to flee East Germany

to start all over again, on another technology," Cuypers smiles. But that is really the whole idea and he can afford to smile because Biocon Valley doesn't envisage breaking away from government funding. It is one of the many ways in which the country is trying to elevate the East for a measure of parity with the West.

"Even after 21 years of spending, the East still lags behind," says Dr Indo Malcher, chief editor at the German business monthly, *Brandeins*. He sees no easy way out of the Eurozone crisis either, the issue that dominates public debate not just in Germany but across the EU, of which the country is seen as the anchor. If addressing disparities within Germany is proving so difficult, he reasons, dealing with those in the wider Eurozone—with its constituents far less homogenous and cohesive—would be quite a long haul. "Greece is only 2 per cent of the European GDP and European leaders could have easily handled [its public debt crisis]," says Malcher.

There is an explanation for what happened, which inevitably includes stereotypes. One stereotype that Germans, especially, love goes: tax evasion is Greece's national sport. According to another, the Greeks and Italians are on holiday without end, too lazy to work and always ready to live off the State (and overseas credit). Fiscally austere Germany, on the other hand, has been thrifty and hardworking, and wants to model the rest of the Eurozone in its own image. In 1998, it even deflated its economy, cut social benefits and went on a productivity drive (a

decade-long wage freeze). Spain, Portugal and Italy, meanwhile, were raising wages without boosting output much.

The net result, in this narrative, was a 'multi-speed Europe': an extra-competitive Germany, an export hothouse, and several outlying EU states that could not keep up—but had access to cheap euro credit all the same. Add to this a bout of state overspending in these weaker economies, and the lack of a devaluation option (given the common currency) to reflect national weaknesses and help

Fiscally austere Germany sees itself as thrifty and hardworking, and wants to model the rest of the Eurozone in its own image for the sake of the euro

regain export competitiveness, and it was enough to overload them with debt and eventually strain the entire euro project. To fix things, German Chancellor Angela Merkel wants other Europeans to tighten belts and work harder.

Malcher, who blames "a lack of policy design in the EU" for the Eurozone's gaps, prefers to point to Germany's own role in the crisis. Its post-1991 export strategy was so aggressive that it paid little attention to anything else. "Greece and Italy were buying inflation from Germany," he says, unhappy with the way Merkel wants to impose fiscal tabs on truant

economies, "Greece and Portugal couldn't compete, so our banks lent them money to keep buying our products."

Ordinary Germans, though, are miffed about having to bear the burden of other Europeans, as they see it. And they insist on thrift. Greek or Italian attitudes towards spending and savings, to their mind, are unacceptable. In Germany, says Malcher, quoting his father's example, you do not take a large loan and buy a house. You build a small house and expand it as your means grow.

The euro uncertainty has led people in Germany to start investing in property. Real estate saw 6 per cent growth in 2010-11 in Hamburg, as opposed to an average of 1 per cent for as long as he can remember. And Germans are set to work not just harder but longer. "The German government recently increased the retirement age to 67," says Malcher. "If an average German is working 10 years more than the average Greek, there is no way Greece can catch up."

OVERLOOKING THE POSSIBILITY of a multi-speed Europe is something the EU treaty is widely blamed for. "And now we have 20 economies which are totally different," says Malcher. What this has meant is an atmosphere of mutual suspicion within Europe—not unlike what life in Rostock was like in the 1980s. These suspicions are compounded by the domestic concerns of various leaders involved in negotiating a solution. Each has an electorate to deal with; precisely why a one-size-fits-all solution is fraught with risk, no matter how avidly Merkel hard-sells the prospect of a strong euro, backed by fiscal firmness, emerging from the crisis.

Politically speaking, Merkel's own concerns are somewhat different from French President Nicholas Sarkozy's. Sharp differences arose in mid 2011, when it came to a rescue package for Greece, which was about to default on its public debt. French private banks were big holders of Greek bonds, and the haircut imposed on them by the EU—on Merkel's insistence—was accepted only reluctantly by Sarkozy. In exchange, Merkel had to withdraw her resistance to giving new powers to a Eurozone bailout fund to directly buy bonds of weaker countries and thus keep the rates at



IT'S ALL GREEK TO EUROCRATS A public protest in Athens against the country's new austerity measures 'imposed' by the EU as a condition for bailing Greece out

AFP

which they borrow money from the market from soaring too high. The Dutch, on their part, wanted a bigger bailout for Greece if private bondholders were to bear such a big burden, while the Finns had their own proposals.

And that was just the start. The EU's Brussels summit in early December witnessed even more dramatic moments. While almost all EU members agreed to Merkel's plan of reducing debt and fiscal deficit levels to pre-set limits (with fines for non-compliance), Britain stood aloof. In fact, British Prime Minister David Cameron vetoed all attempts to change any EU agreement, leaving the rest to sign inter-country deals to achieve their aim. Back home, defending his decision, Cameron told British Parliament: "The EU treaty is the treaty of those outside the euro as much those inside the euro. Creating a new Eurozone treaty within the existing treaty without proper safeguards would have changed the EU for us too." Germany is angry with the UK's stance. The country, it grumbles, wants to "sit on the fence" and yet interfere with EU efforts to resolve the crisis.

The annoyance clearly shows when I meet Rupert Polenz, member of the Bundestag (Germany's lower house) and

Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Polenz is late for the appointment by over 15 minutes. Over the past few days dotted with appointments, I have learnt that is unacceptable even for top leaders. So Polenz starts the meeting with a series of apologies, explaining how he was held back in the Bundestag next door because the house is in session. But his politeness vanishes when he speaks of Cameron's or even US President Barack Obama's allegation that EU leaders are not doing enough. "London knows we have to do it together, but they want to have their cake and eat it too," he says. He suggests that Anglo-American resistance will only make the EU stronger. "The last summit has a clear message: that even if we haven't yet found everything we need to solve the crisis, we are committed first to solve it, and second, we are staying together to solve it."

Polenz adds, "The basic data is simple, the US economy is one-fourth the world's economy, the EU is another quarter, and the other half is the rest of the world. The euro is thus backed by the economy of a quarter of the world... linkages between the economies of Europe, US, India and China are so dense that if one part were to die, it'll have a huge effect on others.

Common sense lies in cooperation."

But for politicians, common sense also includes retaining power. Experts suggest that a European monetary fund buying debt and funding infrastructure and education in Southern Europe would have worked better than tighter fiscal control that Merkel has insisted on. "While there is need for acute firefighting... [the EU] is not yet an economic and currency union. It is not anywhere close to a fiscal union. The system is under stress; there needs to be an immediate response in the short term, and while the troubleshooting is on, it needs to be reformed," says Almut Möller, a euro expert and head of programme at the Berlin-based thinktank DGAP that advises the government on foreign policy.

The EU, she says, will inevitably have to work towards greater integration out of "sheer necessity" and while there is no choice, heads of different states "might not be able to do it, locally".

There are several old walls that EU members must tear down before they can reach the next stage of integration, or perhaps even the next level of reforms. Without that, the euro experiment could end up as a museum story, like Gerber's Delphin submarine. ■

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When politics colour curriculum

Meera Srinivasan

Political considerations should not dictate government decisions related to education

I'm glad that I am not in school anymore — that is the feeling I am left with as the current academic year comes to a close. No school student should ever be subjected to the kind of uncertainty and turbulence that this batch saw.

One of the earliest decisions taken soon after the AIADMK assumed power in the State was to defer the implementation of Samacheer Kalvi — uniform syllabus for all streams — from classes I to X that the DMK-government had introduced. The new government felt the DMK's initiative brought down the standard of the syllabus and took objection to some references made in the textbooks to leaders and achievements of the party. So it took an extreme position and said it will not be implemented, ignoring the fact that students in classes I and VI were already following it.

The move, besides evoking criticism, sparked a series of legal proceedings. The issue even went to the Supreme Court and in August 2011, it directed the State government to implement the syllabus. All this meant that in addition to a delayed start, this batch of students did not know what exactly they were going to learn during the first three months of the academic year. And the textbooks, when they finally arrived, seemed like a warzone to me — pages, pictures and passages had been crudely tampered with to black out all references to DMK leader Karunanidhi. Despite all this, a class VI boy I met at a Chennai Corporation-run school told me: “*Akka*, our new textbooks have more pictures. They are very colourful.” The government may be intending to provide equal access to education, but policymakers cannot afford to let curricular decisions be coloured by politics.

On a recent trip to Germany, I had an opportunity to get an idea of a very similar move in that country, where education is a state subject. In the state of Baden-Württemberg, where the conservative Christian Democratic Union which was in power for decades until 2011, was following a system of segregating students after primary education based on their performance. The “good students” make it to a Grammar School, “average performers” go to a middle school and the rest typically go to a basic school which focuses on vocational education. The coalition of the Greens and Social Democrats that came to power in the state last year, is trying to change this practice through a community school system. This, I thought, was an interesting parallel to Samacheer Kalvi, which also seeks to merge different streams holding different tags of quality.

Michael C. Hermann, Head of Political Decisions, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, in Stuttgart, told me that in the proposed community schools there will be no separation of pupils, they would be in schools together “There will be children who are very clever in some subjects and some who have problems. This forces a new kind of pedagogy where the teacher helps pupils to find individual ways of development,” he said. The government there plans to start 30 to 35 community schools by September 2012. “We want to start slowly. We want to do a good job, giving them all the information and support that is needed to be successful,” Dr. Hermann said.

I thought there was an important message in “starting slowly and doing a good job”. What children should learn and how they should be taught are not matters that the Cabinet of ministers alone is necessarily equipped to decide. The present government made a costly error on that front when it came to power last year. It should, at least now, make amends by pursuing an earnest exercise of reviewing the new syllabus.

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