Arthur F. Burns Fellowship Report
Josh O'Kane
Technology Reporter, The Globe and Mail / Handelsblatt
October 2019

Having long been fascinated with how Germany, and particularly Berlin, interacts with technology companies big and small, the Burns fellowship was a thrill. I wrote a wider variety of stories than originally anticipated – chasing controversial politicians across the countryside, covering tense regional elections, hunting for waterlogged e-scooters and doorknocking in a town with a curious Canadian tech connection. I sometimes joked about being a "fake foreign correspondent" and spending time at "midcareer journalism summer camp," but the reality was that I got an incredible reporting experience with serious freedom to pursue stories both within and outside of my beat.

Orientation

The first week in D.C. and Airlie already seems like a million years ago. The structure of the week was a little imbalanced, beginning with several days of intense sessions on German-North American relations and broader international affairs. They were very helpful, but occasionally dense or unrelated to the subjects we planned to cover, such as the session on Middle-Eastern geopolitics. I also probably personally contributed to the denseness of the sessions during a panel with Canadian journalists when I made them explain the admittedly tedious-and-procedural SNC-Lavalin scandal to a roomful of half-interested Americans and Germans. (My bad.)

The most valuable moment of the orientation for my reporting actually took place between sessions, when in casual conversation, my fellow fellow Marina Kormbaki explained how the rise of the Alternative für Deutschland party in former East German states could have significant sway in national politics. This connected dots I hadn't connected before, and helped inform my coverage during the first few weeks in Germany. While I wouldn't trade the casual few days in Airlie for anything – Fritz and Manisha, we will race golf carts somewhere, someday – I think more unstructured time with our fellows right at the start of orientation would have helped broker these kinds of conversations earlier on. That could be something as simple as a happy-hour mixer or as structured as us sitting around a table and discussing the biggest issues in our countries. (In the former had happened, if I had brought up the SNC-Lavalin affair, people could have just walked away.)

Language class

I have always had trouble comprehending new languages orally, so I preemptively audited an introductory German course at a Toronto college before arriving (though news deadlines made me miss a few classes). This gave me a leg up when language classes began at GLS language school in Berlin, because I could focus on words, phrases and interactions that I was observing in real time, rather than basic grammar and conjugation. One of our two teachers, Tom, was extremely receptive to our style of learning, interest in news, and, early on, jet lag.

While I understand that there has been some consideration among Burns organizers to reduce the language class component from two weeks to one, I think having two full weeks both made me much more confident in speaking and also helped me orient myself to the language and culture before shifting to full-tine reporting. In hindsight, however, I wish I had asked our teachers to spend more time having casual conversations with us in German so that I could better listen for key phrases as they come naturally in dialogue. I admit this is in large part because, as I said, oral comprehension is where I naturally struggle. But I also believe that in reading and writing, translation services such as DeepL can be a significant help in approximating understandable German, whereas real-time interactions require more on-your-toes finesse that classes can help improve.

Reporting in Germany

I selected Handelsblatt's Berlin bureau as my first placement choice after reading reports from two past fellows that covered startups from there. I, too, found it a great base for me to do that kind of reporting, though the capital bureau of the Dusseldorf-based paper was admittedly smaller and (perhaps consequently) much more preoccupied with covering politics than I had anticipated. Editors and colleagues there were very kind in suggesting story ideas for me right away – including spending time in an East German state to write about on my pre-election impressions – though I found this somewhat intimidating at first, as I planned to largely focus on one long feature and had already lined up interviews.

Once I explained my Globe priorities, however, Handelsblatt colleagues instead helped me figure out how to best cover the state elections, giving me contacts for press accreditations, context for different parties' standings, and relevant stories and press releases I didn't have access to. As a result, I was able to write a longer feature for The Globe's Foreign desk on the ties between the rise of the AfD in the eastern states of Brandenburg and Saxony and both the region's and country's economic frustrations. I also spent election night in Brandenburg's capital of Potsdam, watching gasps fly through a crowd of SPD supporters as they learned about the AfD's strong standing before finding out their own party had won the most votes. I had also been asked to write an analysis of the AfD's rise in the elections for Handelsblatt from a Canadian perspective the next day, with an offer for someone at the paper to translate it to German. Once I wrote and filed it, however, there wasn't anyone available to translate it, so it was never published – another consequence of a small bureau taking on so much work. So it goes.

I spent much of the first week gradually sending out interview requests as I prepared to cover the state elections, and discovered that people take a little longer to respond in Germany, if they bother responding to an unfamiliar reporter at all. Many of the tech contacts I reached out to when I landed at Handelsblatt in August were on holiday or straight-up did not respond. Having been a beat reporter for a while, I'm very much used to getting a hold of people I need to quickly, so this forced me to adapt. After talking to other reporters, I eventually learned that there is less of a culture in Germany than in North America of responding to emails immediately – though I'm also sure a left-field request from a temporary Canadian correspondent is not high on many tech execs' priority lists. While I first used email to reach out for my timeless feature reporting, I found that cold-calling soon after was a little more productive. This is a pretty normal way of contacting people for stories, but in Berlin, it took a few minutes each time to

work up the courage to launch into a cold-call conversation in a new, somewhat daunting language. Generally, however, this approach worked, and people quickly switched to English. In one case, a politician enthusiastically agreed to a same-day interview, despite having totally disregarded e-mail requests for the same story.

My ambitions for the fellowship were, well, a little too high. I had hoped to write a single long feature on Germany's relationship with technology companies and data collection, both from the perspective of big tech and from Berlin's rapidly growing startup scene. One previous fellow who covered startups had told me that he'd put in a lot of work trying to report a similar story, but that the angles didn't work out, forcing him to get creative. I should have expected to have a similar experience. In the end, I did end up filing my long story – though only half as long as initially expected, in part because the editor I had promised the story to left for a new job while I was in Berlin, throwing a wrench into the editing process.

In the end, the (forthcoming!) story I filed wound up matching the ambition of my initial plan but with greater concision. And this gave me the freedom to pursue other interesting stories, including a detailed feature on the calamity of e-scooters in Berlin, a news story on charges against Volkswagen AG executives and a piece for our foreign desk on how a Canadian researcher's use of home-movies tried to bring more nuance to portrayals of life in the former German Democratic Republic. This is on top of the extensive coverage I wound up giving the Brandenburg and Saxony elections in the early part of the fellowship. I also have filed an analysis for Handelsblatt based on the reporting for my long feature, as well as a co-bylined story with a Düsseldorf reporter on the German hometown of the CEO of Canadian tech company Shopify. In the end, I wound up filing far more words than the original feature I set out to write, even if it took a roundabout way to get there.

Thanks very much to the team at Handelsblatt in Berlin and Düsseldorf, in particular my mentor Moritz Koch, whose kind offer for translation got me my first German co-byline, and who was very helpful in understanding Germany's political scene. Thanks as well to the teams at IJP and ICFP, in particular Frank, Amal and Emily, for giving me this wonderful opportunity to get out of my comfort zone and report from one of the most interesting cities in the world. I'm now much more comfortable reporting from the ground in a new country, and have a better understanding of how the industry I report on works outside of markets traditionally covered in North America. Finally, thanks to my fellow fellows for our friendships, and two wild months I couldn't have ever imagined experiencing. I promise we will race golf carts someday.

Clippings

In Handelsblatt (two stories forthcoming):

Co-byline with Moritz Koch, Aug. 14: Heiko Maas' „Allianz der Multilateralisten" stößt nur in wenigen Ländern auf Begeisterung
https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/internationaler-pakt-heiko-maas-allianz-der-multilateralisten-stoesst-nur-in-wenigen-laendern-auf-begeisterung/24900820.html?ticket=ST-36975682-uzvhKNa2afLAblE5WJsp-ap4

In The Globe and Mail (one feature forthcoming):

Weekend feature reporting on the rise of the AfD from a rally in Brandenburg an der Havel, Aug. 30: State elections in Germany bring anti-immigrant fury to the fore.
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-state-elections-in-germany-bring-anti-immigrant-fury-to-the-fore/

Feature analysis on the Brandenburg election results from the SPD party in Potsdam, Sept. 1: Far-right party deepens its hold in eastern Germany.
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-far-right-party-deepens-its-hold-in-eastern-germany/

Short feature on a project by a Canadian researcher and Swedish-Argentinian filmmaker that compiled hundreds of hours of home-video footage from the GDR, Sept. 22: Canadian professor looks to challenge clichés about East German life with home-video clips.
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-canadian-professor-looks-to-challenge-cliches-about-east-german-life/

News story on Volkswagen AG executive charges, Sept. 24: German prosecutors charge Volkswagen executives in connection with diesel-emissions scandal.
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-german-prosecutors-charge-volkswagen-executives-in-connection-with/

Feature on the calamitous rollout of thousands of e-scooters in Berlin, Oct. 1: The wheel deal: What Canadian cities can expect after Berlin's rocky e-scooter rollout.
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-the-wheel-deal-berlin-grapples-with-the-realities-of-e-scooters/

State elections in Germany bring anti-immigrant fury to the fore

As the far-right AfD gains in the polls ahead of Sept. 1 votes, Germans worry about political polarization, resurgent racism and Merkel's future

JOSH O'KANE
BRANDENBURG AN DER HAVEL, GERMANY
PUBLISHED AUGUST 30, 2019

As a massive rainstorm approached the state of Brandenburg's namesake city, Andreas Kalbitz unleashed his own rhetorical storm on the 300 or so people gathered in a public market.

Over the course of almost 30 minutes, the state leader of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party framed shifting social norms as attacks on traditional German life. He railed against removing the word Christmas from holiday traditions. The teaching of Turkish and Arabic in school, he said, took integration too far. He even characterized large Muslim prayer gatherings not as a religious ritual but as a demonstration of political power. He was met with nods, claps, even laughs.

At the rally, Mr. Kalbitz laid bare his feelings about Germany's shifting demographics: "The only kind of airport noise I like is the one planes make when they fly so-called 'refugees' back home." (Noise levels at airports are a topic of regular debate in Germany.)

Riding a wave of dissatisfaction after Chancellor Angela Merkel's 2015 decision to accept a million refugees into Germany – largely from the Middle East and Africa, many of them Muslim – the AfD is now a serious political force and a leading contender in advance polls ahead of several state elections on Sept. 1.

The elections come at a precarious moment for Germany – even more so for former East German states such as Brandenburg and Saxony, which have struggled to catch up with the economic and population growth of western states in the three decades since the Berlin Wall fell.

Sunday's elections will have far-reaching implications, threatening to widen the regional disparities and damage Europe's largest economy, shaking the foundations of Germany's political future.

After a 2017 federal election that saw the centre-right Christian Democrats and centre-left Social Democrats draw historically low vote shares, Ms. Merkel is ending her decade and a half as Chancellor with diminished authority. The results on Sept. 1 in

Brandenburg and Saxony could send one or both national parties into a crisis, potentially triggering an early federal election.

And just days before Mr. Kalbitz's rally, Germany revealed GDP numbers showing a country on the brink of recession, prompting Dieter Kempf, the president of the Federation of German Industries, to warn that the AfD's rise could deal a further blow to the economy.

"Achievements of the AfD harm the image of our country," Mr. Kempf told the Funke Media Group.

"The attractiveness of a location suffers from extremist parties. There is a threat of downturn and structural weakness. … The emphasis on nationalism would cause enormous economic and political damage."

In an interview with The Globe and Mail as rain poured down after his speech, Mr. Kalbitz tempered his comments on immigration, trying to avoid connecting his party's immigration stance with any particular race or place of origin. "We need immigration from specialists, but not this kind of mass immigration that we have at the moment of people who don't come here to work," he said.

Despite the subject matter, the AfD rally was framed as a family-friendly fair, complete with a bouncy castle. Across the street and separated by dozens of police officers, several hundred protesters gathered with a bouncy castle of their own, surrounded by signs that read, "Anti-Fascist Area" and, in German, "Honk Against Nazis."

Among the protesters was 21-year-old Hannah Bühl, who was frustrated that the AfD's legitimization in politics had given rise to more open hate speech.

"People say, 'Oh yeah, it's a democratic party and we should hear their voices,'" she said. "But it's not okay what they say. … It's discriminating, it's oppressing people."

The AfD has transformed in just six years from a loose band of conservative euroskeptics to a populist anti-refugee party with elected officials in both the German and European Union parliaments, with Mr. Kalbitz considered a stalwart of its furthest-right wing. Recent reports in German media, such as Die Welt, have established historical connections to far-right extremist groups and statements.

Asked about these reports, Mr. Kalbitz told The Globe, "There's no extreme-right biography," but "there may be" some previous contact with extremists. He insisted there was a media campaign against him and that he'd moved past that part of his life: "I'm of strong belief in the circumstance that I've also made personal developments."

A poll this month by Forsa for Brandenburg newspaper Märkische Allgemeine found the AfD leading in the state with 21 per cent of vote intention, followed by Ms. Merkel's Christian Democrats at 18 per cent. The ruling Social Democrats, meanwhile, sit at at 17

per cent – threatening the legacy of the party that has governed the state since reunification.

Next door in Saxony, meanwhile, a Civey poll for Spiegel Online found the AfD at almost 25 per cent, just behind the governing Christian Democrats at 28 per cent. (While the leftist Green Party has risen to similar prominence nationally, an August report by the German Institute for Economic Research found their support was lowest in the east.

The AfD's strength in advance polls would not be enough to govern Brandenburg and Saxony alone. But its newfound popularity, along with that of the Greens on the left, has fractured traditional voting lines and is expected to force unusual and potentially weak coalition governments among other parties in those states.

"I very strongly doubt the AfD will ever form a government," said political economist Marcel Fratzscher, president of the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin. "All parties have basically declared they'll never form a coalition with the AfD." But, he continued, "polarization could continue if the economic, structural and demographic differences persist."

As much as the past three decades have improved life for Germans in the east, the ghost of the former German Democratic Republic still haunts the region.

Mr. Kalbitz chalks up his party's rising popularity in the formerly socialist sector of Germany to the region being left behind after reunification in 1990. "Nothing's happened," he said. Citizens "are motivated for change."

Since Germany began stitching itself back together, eastern states have struggled to keep up with the country as a whole as young people and skilled workers leave for regions that have more people, jobs and tolerance. Brandenburg's population has fallen almost 3 per cent since 1990, to 2.5 million, and Saxony, with a current population of 4.1 million, has lost 14 per cent of its people, according to the national statistics agency.

A 2015 report from Bertelsmann Stiftung found that between that year and 2030, Brandenburg's median age will rise by almost four years, to 53, while Saxony's will rise two, to 50.

And while productivity has increased across the east, its gross domestic product per capita hasn't come close to matching the west's since reunification – according to a federal report, it was still just 73 per cent of the west's in 2017.

These struggles and the AfD's nationalist policies are intertwined. Four decades in the Eastern Bloc left that part of Germany deeply homogeneous, Dr. Fratzscher said, fuelling xenophobia even after the Wall fell. Then open-minded young people flocked to more diverse cities and regions, shrinking the talent pool and making the region less attractive for business investment.

All this has left behind an aging, frustrated population with “a burden for economic development,” said Joachim Ragnitz, who studies eastern German regional development with the Dresden branch of the Ifo Institute for Economic Research.

Dr. Fratzscher notes that the AfD has hardly any economic strategy at all. But despite having a very slim chance of forming a coalition, Mr. Kalbitz said his party would use tax incentives to lure companies to Brandenburg to invest in its deteriorating infrastructure and poor internet access.

But businesses in the region are already struggling with the rise of nationalism, including in Saxony, where violence broke out last year between neo-Nazis and protesters. Jens Drews, the regional spokesperson for computer-chip maker Globalfoundries Inc., which has operations in the state capital, Dresden, says it can be hard to attract skilled engineers.

“People can make it work here, but it takes a little more effort to convince people to come,” Mr. Drews says.

Dr. Ragnitz doesn’t expect much significant policy change to happen soon on a state level, given that familiar parties would likely band against the AfD. And even if the AfD’s growth further damages the local economy, he points out that Brandenburg’s and Saxony’s populations account for less than a tenth of Germany’s 83 million people.

Others see the consequences as much more far-reaching.

When Germany’s federal statistics office said in August that GDP growth had declined 0.1 per cent in the most recent quarter, it raised concerns that the world’s fourth-largest economy was entering a technical recession.

Though industry leaders have largely been reluctant to comment on the AfD’s rise, Mr. Kempf was not the first to send such a warning. In 2018, Siemens AG CEO Joe Kaeser tweeted that the AfD’s brand of nationalism “damages the reputation of our country in the world. Where the main source of German prosperity lies.”

Dr. Ragnitz, however, believes Germany’s current slowdown is cyclical, simply following an almost decade-long boom. And Dr. Fratzscher noted that numerous economic signals, such as extremely low national unemployment – a record 4.9 per cent in March – are strong.

While Dr. Fratzscher says the economies of eastern states would suffer if the AfD makes great strides there, he sees the political consequences of Sunday’s elections on a national scale. Huge losses for Ms. Merkel’s Christian Democrats could lead to an internal revolt, he said. Should that lead to her being pushed out and stepping down, it could trigger a much earlier election than the one planned for late 2021.

The Social Democrats, meanwhile, are already in the middle of a search for a new federal leader. Should the elections aggravate that existential angst, the party could pull

out of its formal “grand coalition” with the Christian Democrats, forcing the latter into an even weaker minority government. This, Dr. Ragnitz said, also has the power to create “a governmental crisis on the federal level and, presumably, to elections in 2020 for the Bundestag.”

In either case, both parties would enter an election weaker than before, potentially ceding ground to further left-wing parties such as Die Linke and the Greens, or to the right, with the AfD at its furthest edge. As such, Dr. Fratzscher said, “it’s in both interests to make the grand coalition work, do good work for the next two years, to be in a stronger position for the next federal election.”

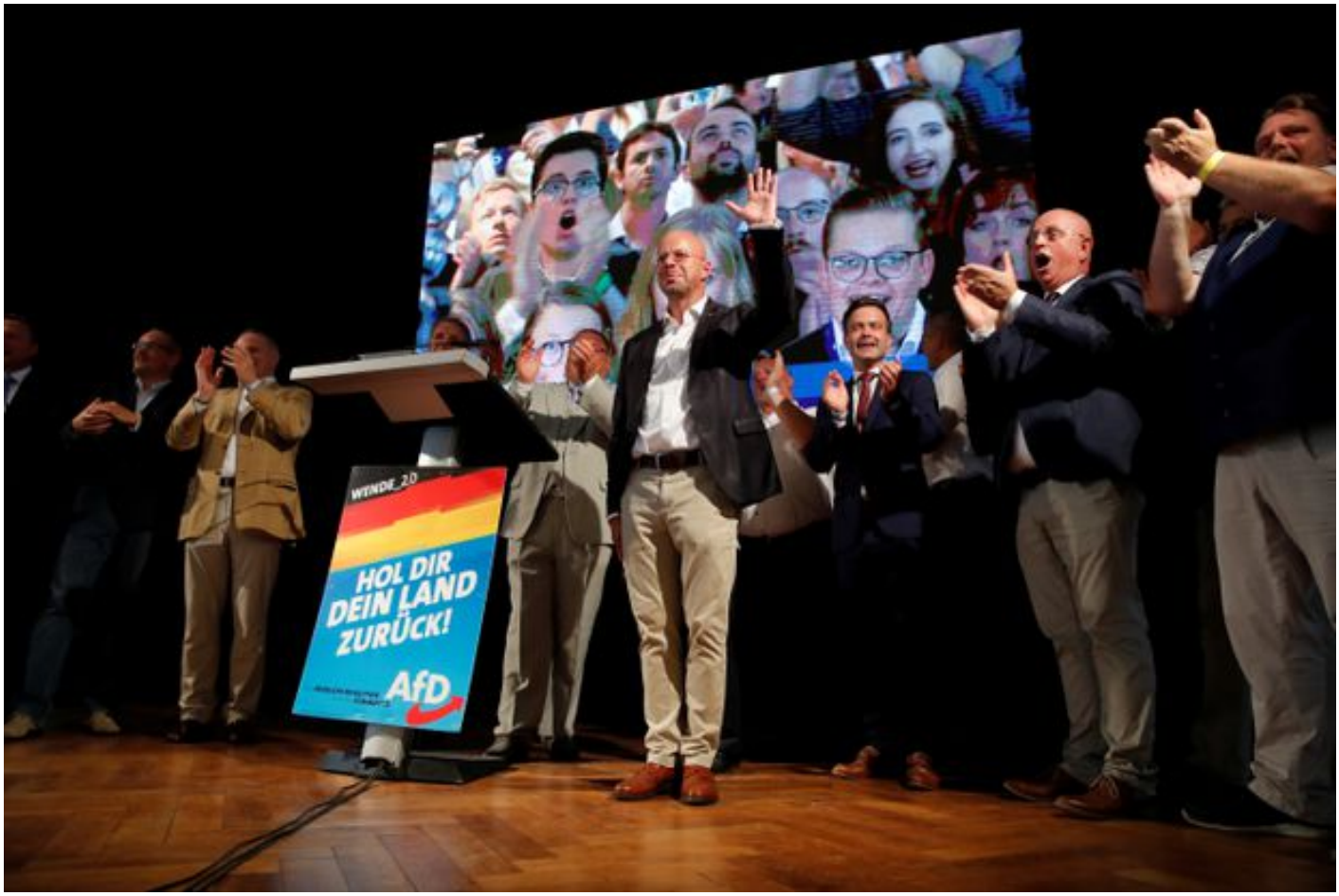
Instead, he believes Germany’s established political parties should seize this moment and address the structural weaknesses that affect the eastern states and other have-not regions. It’s an opportunity for the more centrist parties, he said, to invest in wide-ranging infrastructure, including expanding internet access, and to attract companies to these regions.

“My hope,” said Dr. Fratzscher, “is that divergences won’t increase, but that the elections could be a wake-up call, and they will take peoples’ concerns more seriously.”

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Far-right party deepens its hold in eastern Germany

JOSH O'KANE › TECHNOLOGY REPORTER
POTSDAM, GERMANY
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 1, 2019



Alternative for Germany (AfD) top candidate for the Brandenburg election Andreas Kalbitz reacts for the first exit polls for the Brandenburg state election in Werder, Germany, Sept. 1, 2019.

AXEL SCHMIDT/REUTERS

The far-right Alternative for Germany party surged in that country's eastern state elections on Sunday, falling short of first-place finishes in Brandenburg and Saxony but deepening the

struggles of the country's historical political establishment.

The party, known as AfD, earned 23.5 per cent of first-choice votes in Brandenburg, according to exit polls by broadcaster ZDF, although the incumbent centre-left Social Democratic Party came out ahead with 26.2 per cent of first-choice votes. In neighbouring Saxony, the centre-right Christian Democrats – the party of Chancellor Angela Merkel – came in first place with most polls reporting. The party earned 32.1 per cent of votes, shedding 4.9 percentage points from 2014, ahead of the AfD's 27.5 per cent.

Gasps wafted through the Social Democrats' election party in Potsdam Sunday evening as a television showed the AfD's strength in early results; after governing Brandenburg since reunification, the Social Democrats were one or more percentage points behind the AfD, according to many pre-election polls. The mood soon shifted to relief as the centre-left party seized first place.

State Leader Dietmar Woidke soon took the stage and threw a barb at the AfD's xenophobic positions: "I'm glad that the face of Brandenburg remains a friendly face," he said. In Dresden, incumbent Christian Democrat Leader Michael Kretschmer made a similar remark: "The friendly Saxony has won." Despite warding off their biggest political threats, challenges remain ahead for the governing parties: Both will need to form coalitions with others to govern, although they have promised not to partner with the AfD.

While Germany's moderate established parties were able to escape their worst-case scenarios, the weak results – and overall loss of vote share – in these formerly socialist eastern states have the potential reshape the politics of Germany, the world's fourth-largest economy and a force of stability in a European Union rattled by Brexit's threat.

The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats govern Germany as a coalition, with each in the midst of a leadership transition. Diminished mandates in Brandenburg and Saxony could throw the parties into disarray and trigger an early general election – one in which both the far-right AfD and fast-growing leftist Greens could become significant power brokers. Domestic instability, meanwhile, could also sideline Ms. Merkel's foreign-policy efforts in the era of Brexit, Iran nuclear negotiations and global trade tensions.

What began as a Euroskeptic party in 2013 has become a far-right political force. The AfD transformed anger over Ms. Merkel's 2015 promise to let a million refugees into Germany into a third-place finish in 2017's general election. Rising to second-place finishes in Brandenburg and Saxony will give the party greater influence in the national conversation ahead of the next

federal election, which is scheduled for 2021 – but could come sooner if the historic federal Christian Democrat-Social Democrat coalition unravels.

While the Social Democrats celebrated here in historic Potsdam – which is both Brandenburg's capital and a bedroom community for the well-moneyed of neighbouring Berlin – the AfD's rise took place in less economically well-off, more rural areas. Dwindling populations there have struggled to keep up with the prosperity of western and urban communities since reunification. The party shores up votes in large part by positioning itself as the antithesis of the establishment that allowed the east to struggle.

The AfD's rise in the eastern elections is yet another sign of "the ongoing fragmentation of the German party system," with the decline of the country's historically dominant parties, said Kai Arzheimer, a professor of political science at the University of Mainz.

In particular, that means the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats. The two parties make up Germany's governing "grand coalition," but each is grappling with leadership struggles, especially after the AfD and Greens ate into their traditional support base in May's European Parliament election.

Ms. Merkel, a Christian Democrat, resigned last year as party leader, but intends to remain as Chancellor until the next general election.

Then-Social Democrat leader Andrea Nahles, meanwhile, resigned after the EU elections, prompting an existential crisis that will culminate in a leadership vote by the end of the year.

While the Christian Democrats' lowered turnout in Saxony would likely make the party's national wing "close ranks and soldier on," Prof. Arzheimer said, the parties also plan to review their national coalition by the end of 2019. Frustrated Social Democrats could vote to leave, thrusting the the Christian Democrats into a minority as that party transitions its own leadership, and potentially triggering an early election.

Describing the Social Democrats as in a period of "national decline," Prof. Arzheimer said that "many of the rank-and-file and lots of left-leaning mid-level functionaries will see major losses as the final straw, and will argue for ending the so-called grand coalition in Berlin."

But it also could encourage the party to avoid an early election in order to shore up its base. Christian Martin, the Max Weber Visiting Chair for German and European Studies at New York University, said that as it stands, the Greens have risen enough in national politics to rise to a

second-place election finish, putting them in a king-making position in a coalition, likely with the Christian Democrats – "which was unthinkable only a few years ago."

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Canadian professor looks to challenge clichés about East German life with home-video clips

JOSH O'KANE › TECHNOLOGY REPORTER
BERLIN
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 22, 2019
UPDATED SEPTEMBER 23, 2019

The assembled videos come together as a first-of-its-kind opportunity to humanize generations of East Germans whose society is often reduced to totalitarian clichés.

OPEN MEMORY BOX

The home-video clips that Laurence McFalls and Alberto Herskovits have stitched together seem, at first glance, like a patchwork of ordinary mid-20th-century moments. There are snippets of sleeping babies; moments stolen away for a sip of coffee; beachwear fashion shows; beer-fuelled singalongs.

Taken as a whole, though, the more-than-400-hours of film their team has digitized and meticulously categorized is intended to tell a story largely forgotten following the collapse of the Berlin Wall – until Mr. McFalls, Mr. Herskovits and their team persuaded residents of the former communist German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, to part with their homemade films.

The assembled videos, says Mr. McFalls, a University of Montreal political-science professor, come together as a first-of-its-kind opportunity to humanize generations of East Germans whose society is often reduced to totalitarian clichés that are increasingly being questioned 30 years after the fall.

“We can’t just dismiss people’s pasts on the grounds that they lived in a failed, or a repressive, states,” he said in an interview last week. "We’re not denying the elements of the surveillance or police state. But reducing it to that alone is what we’re combatting.”

The result is the largest-ever digital, accessible collection of home movies from the secretive former state. The online project, called Open Memory Box, will be made public on Monday at the Canadian embassy in Berlin, just weeks before the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall that led to German reunification. A team of more than 30 contributors has digitized 2,283 rolls of film, sent in from 149 families that lived in the former GDR from 1947 to 1990.

Clips are searchable by themed keywords – such as “beer,” “Alexanderplatz” and “winter holidays” – but the website also has clips of East German life in randomized two-second fragments. In this way, the researchers say, more people can connect with the story they’re watching without having the context and history.

“We think that these fragments give people an incredible opportunity to grasp the zeitgeist of the East in a way that a traditional archive could never achieve,” said Mr. Herskovits, an Argentine-born filmmaker who lives in Sweden.

Mr. Herskovits and Mr. McFalls met by coincidence watching their daughters play soccer on an East Berlin field in 2011, after lives spent undertaking similar pursuits. Around the time the Wall fell, the former was working on a documentary about daily East German life; the latter had spent part of his youth visiting relatives in the GDR and was doing field research 50 kilometres away.

After discussing their mutual frustration that clichés of GDR repression and surveillance can minimize the experiences of its citizens, the researchers sought a way to portray those lives plainly. Eventually, they realized, home movies – slices of private life never meant for consumption by the state – were the key.

In 2014, they held a press conference inviting former GDR residents to send in their private movies. The response was enormous – not least because Mr. McFalls went on German radio and offered to digitize the first 100 submissions and return them on DVD.

A team has collected more than 400 hours of East German home movies to illustrate that life in the Soviet satellite state was more than totalitarian clichés. Video supplied by open-memory-box.de.

Germany still tends to struggle with how to portray the former communist east, said Mary Fulbrook, dean of University College London's history faculty and an author of several books on East Germany, including *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*.

Ms. Fulbrook said she's received blowback for her research "because there are certain historians and politicians and people who have particular political interests who want to keep banging on about the dreadful totalitarian regime." There is a tendency among some German historians, she said, to avoid shining any positive light on the GDR.

While Ms. Fulbrook doesn't describe life in the GDR as normal – "peoples' ideas of 'normal' are extremely culturally varying" – she said it was important to show what its residents felt was ordinary, even in the shadow of the Stasi, the secretive domestic surveillance agency.

Of the Open Memory Box, she continued, "it's actually fabulous that we've got an archive like this – that we've now got this kind of data to look at."

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

German prosecutors charge Volkswagen executives in connection with diesel-emissions scandal

JOSH O'KANE › TECHNOLOGY REPORTER
BERLIN
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 24, 2019
FOR SUBSCRIBERS

German prosecutors charged Volkswagen AG's chair, chief executive officer and former CEO with allegedly withholding details from investors in connection with the automotive giant's long-running diesel-emissions scandal.

Public prosecutors from Braunschweig, near Volkswagen's headquarters in Wolfsburg, said in a 636-page indictment that they accused CEO Herbert Diess, chairman Hans Dieter Potsch and former CEO Martin Winterkorn of market manipulation in relation to the diesel-emissions controversy. The current and former executives, chief prosecutor Klaus Ziehe wrote, were "intentionally too late" earlier this decade in revealing to investors that they had discovered certain diesel vehicles were designed to circumvent U.S. emissions tests.

The scandal, which has been unfolding in public since details were revealed in September, 2015, by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has cost Volkswagen at least €28-billion ($40.9-billion) in fines, vehicle buybacks and other penalties as the automaker has tried to rebuild its image with drivers and shareholders. But Tuesday's news did not come as a huge shock to shareholders, who have gradually pushed Volkswagen stock back to its prescandal heights and only sent its common shares down 3.02 per cent to €154.30 apiece on Tuesday on the Frankfurt exchange.

In an e-mailed statement, Volkswagen called the allegations "groundless," and that it had fulfilled all reporting obligations. "The company has meticulously investigated this matter

with the help of internal and external legal experts for almost four years," wrote Hiltrud Dorothea Werner, who oversees integrity and legal affairs for Volkswagen's management board. "… If there is a trial, we are confident that the allegations will prove to be unfounded. Furthermore, the presumption of innocence applies until proven otherwise."

The company said that Mr. Diess would remain CEO, and that its supervisory board would gather on Wednesday for an "extraordinary meeting."

Ferdinand Dudenhoffer, a professor of automotive economics at the University of Duisburg-Essen who has long been following the scandal, said that such an indictment was inevitable, as shareholders sought someone to take responsibility for not properly informing them that the company had cheated on emissions tests. "My point of view is that this will not deteriorate the image of VW, because everyone expected that it would happen," he said in an interview.

But, he said, he expected former CEO Mr. Winterkorn and Volkswagen chairman Mr. Potsch – who was chief financial officer for the company when the emissions scandal quietly unfolded – to face significant scrutiny in court. Prof. Dudenhoffer said current CEO Mr. Diess was less likely to be held centrally responsible; he only joined the company in July, 2015, to lead its passenger-vehicle brand, less than three months before the scandal unfolded in public view.

On Sept. 18 of that year, the U.S. EPA contacted Volkswagen and its subsidiary Audi alleging that, from 2009 through 2015, they had installed devices in some diesel vehicles that could bypass control systems that comply with emissions standards. About 590,000 vehicles, the EPA wrote, violated the Clean Air Act. Mr. Winterkorn resigned as CEO days later.

In a statement to media on Tuesday, German prosecutor Mr. Ziehe said that the U.S. authorities' multiyear investigation would have led to "increasing awareness" internally about the technology.

"It became increasingly clear that disclosing the [system bypass device] would entail significant financial risks," Mr. Ziehe wrote. "… The accused was aware of the considerable financial consequences resulting from the explosive nature of the issue that it would have had to inform the capital market."

The EPA later contacted Volkswagen about other violations, eventually prompting a U.S. Department of Justice complaint, and, within a year, a multibillion-dollar settlement. In January, 2017, Volkswagen agreed to plead guilty to three counts of criminal felony, with multiple 10-figure financial penalties.

Mr. Winterkorn was also handed fraud charges in Braunschweig this past April, alongside four other managers, who were not named. He has also faced similar charges in the United States.

Bloomberg auto-sector analysts Michael Dean and Gillian Davis wrote in a research note that Tuesday's charges would have a "temporary negative impact but may be difficult to prove for prosecutors," and that they were "unlikely to derail an ambitious electrification strategy and recent earnings outperformance vs. peers."

Also on Tuesday, fellow German automaker Daimler AG was fined €870-million by public prosecutors in Stuttgart in relation to the company's own diesel-emissions investigation.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The wheel deal: What Canadian cities can expect after Berlin's rocky e-scooter rollout

JOSH O'KANE › TECHNOLOGY REPORTER
BERLIN
PUBLISHED OCTOBER 1, 2019

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Berliner riders weave from bike lanes to sidewalks, sometimes doubled up and sometimes drunk.

ANNEGRET HILSE/REUTERS

On the streets of Berlin, the latest trend in Big Tech is hard to miss. Rentable e-scooters have only been here for three months, but they're everywhere – and not always where they're supposed to be.

Parked scooters clog bike lanes and block sidewalks. Speeding riders create havoc for pedestrians who are forced to jump out of their path. They're increasingly the topic of hot-tempered political arguments and popular podcasts.

And once every week or so, one of Voi Technology AB's German staff has to drag one out of a body of water.

As Claus Unterkircher walks through the company's Berlin repair shop, the regional manager of the Stockholm-based scooter company finds one that's been waterlogged, likely retrieved from the city's Spree River or Landwehr Canal. He tries to brush the situation off: "Probably more people drive their car into a river every day than scooters."

His optimism is rooted in a deep belief in the company's cause – that rentable motorized scooters can make the world a better place by lessening urbanites' dependence on gas-guzzling cars. Investors ranging from Uber Technologies Inc. to Bain Capital LP have equally bought into this vision, plowing hundreds of millions of dollars into U.S. companies Bird Rides Inc. and Lime owner Neutron Holdings Inc., giving them global leadership positions in just a few years. Tens of millions of euros, meanwhile, have flooded into fast-growing European startups, including Voi, aiming to gain a global edge from the continent's dense, less car-friendly cities.

But such optimism doesn't overshadow e-scooters' side effects. While American Big Tech trends usually creep into daily life incrementally, e-scooters can change the fabric of cities almost instantly. They have in Berlin, where more than 6,000 have hit the road in just three months; they can be found littering the streetscapes of Paris and Los Angeles; in Washington, it's possible to be cut off at the National Mall by a parade of scooting, besuited twentysomethings in Make America Great Again hats.

These battery-powered e-scooters are usually unlocked with an app for a small fee, are controlled with hand-throttles and brakes along bike lanes or sidewalks, and charge riders by the minute. Companies tend to allow drop-offs anywhere within a preapproved zone – and thus scooters can be left behind in the middle of sidewalks.

Parent companies send employees or contractors, colloquially called "juicers," around cities to replace dead scooters with fully charged ones. In Canada, Bird and Lime have placed hundreds

of scooters in Edmonton and Calgary; Lime has rolled out as many as 500 scooters in Montreal; and Bird recently launched a pilot in Toronto's Distillery District, though the city just moved to ban the vehicles on municipal property.

Few cities have had as swift and calamitous a rollout as Berlin. Since Germany legalized e-scooters in June, central Berlin's streets and sidewalks have become clogged with the tangerine, teal, salmon and lime-green machines. They've cluttered historic sites, forcing the city to ban their parking at the Holocaust Memorial and Brandenburg Gate. Riders weave from bike lanes to sidewalks, sometimes doubled up and sometimes drunk, ignoring that they're operating a motor vehicle. It's common to watch riders dump their scooters in the middle of walkways or bike paths when they're done. Dozens of accidents have been reported, some serious. Vandalism is rampant, ranging from mild knock-overs to ripping out sensor boxes to mysterious fires.

Then there's the river dumping – German comedian Jan Bohmermann has made it his latest crusade, hinting on a podcast that while he doesn't want to advocate for crimes, the scooters appear to be very easy to drop into the Spree.

"You can't just put anything on the streets to make money with it," adds Falko Liecke, deputy mayor for the Berlin district of Neukolln. He's frustrated that the federal directive to legalize e-scooters has left cities to deal with the consequences – including when the machines are left haphazardly in walking or biking paths, which is annoying at best and dangerous at worst, including for the visually impaired.

In July, he once found a Lime scooter sitting on the platform of the U-Bahn transit stop by his office; elsewhere in his district, he says they've been thrown into bushes and even high into trees.

Both governments and scooter companies need to take a greater role in controlling the less-than-polite human behaviour that the new transportation methods can bring, Mr. Liecke says. Some Berlin districts plan to turn some car-parking spaces into dedicated scooter parking areas next year, but he wants to see more stringent rules around sidewalk parking and fines for companies that allow haphazard parking.

A spokesperson for the Berlin Senate's transportation department said in an e-mail that the city saw e-scooters' rollout as a success, given their popularity, but admitted there have been "problems from the very beginning," including with poor parking. But, Jan Thomsen continued, "If something is new like the scooters, you see them just everywhere and it is

always the scooters you find annoying – not the broken bikes on the ground, the wrongly parked cars, the bikers on the sidewalks."

And even though more 65 accidents caused by scooters and at least one potential arson have been reported to police, with 87 scooter-related criminal investigations opened, appetite for the scooters in Berlin is rising. While Voi launched in Berlin, for instance, it brought in 200; it now has 2,000 on the streets. "It's fun, and I get everywhere faster," said Karoline Ramalho as she parked a Lime scooter outside the Goethe Institute language school in mid-September. "It's more fun to ride than a bike."

Berlin may present an outsized nuisance to scooter companies because of its sheer size – 3.6 million people – and core old-build density. Stewart Lyons, chief executive officer of Bird Canada, says that since the company rolled out scooters in Calgary and Edmonton this summer, "a bunch" have wound up in Calgary's Bow River and other waterways. "With any new popular thing you bring to the city, you' get a bit of confusion," he says, but he's told by global colleagues that the cities' launches were "pretty good and orderly" compared with other markets.

As the summer comes to a close, the question of e-scooters' novelty lingers – will riders keep hopping on board in the cold? Mr. Unterkircher says that Voi, which launched last year in Scandinavia, saw "not quite a large dip" in winter ridership. He expects to see the same here: "People in Berlin bike when it's cold."

Seasonal sustainability might matter less to investors than financial sustainability, though – and profitability doesn't yet seem easy. Bird, for example, lost US$100-million in the first quarter, according to The Information. These kinds of losses haven't stopped investors from buying into European startups; Berlin's own Tier Mobility GmbH raised €25-million ($36.8-million) last October, including from Point Nine Capital.

"It's one of these megatrends – it's about reconfiguring transportation in cities to electric," says Pawel Chudzinski, a partner at Point Nine. "I think Europe is the best market for this in the world, and I think by extension, there will European companies that become significant."

Tier launched in Berlin with 500 scooters, but now has 1,500 of its teal-coloured machines on the streets. "We see this as just the start," says co-founder Julian Blessin. "It's one of the, if not the most, dynamic markets since delivery. … My personal opinion is that we are at the beginning of an urban mobility revolution."

INTERNATIONALER PAKT

Heiko Maas' „Allianz der Multilateralisten“ stößt nur in wenigen Ländern auf Begeisterung

Bundesaußenminister Heiko Maas will einen Club der internationalen Teamplayer gründen. Doch außerhalb Berlins hält sich der Enthusiasmus dafür in Grenzen.

Moritz Koch, Josh O'Kane

14.08.2019 - 06:27 Uhr • 1 Kommentar • 1 x geteilt

Heiko Maas

Die Initiative des Außenministers soll sich gegen den wachsenden Unilateralismus stellen.
(Foto: AFP)

Berlin. Sie zählt zu den wichtigsten Initiativen, die Bundesaußenminister Heiko Maas in seiner inzwischen eineinhalbjährigen Amtszeit angestoßen hat: die „Allianz der Multilateralisten“. Sie soll sich dem neuen Nationalismus und der Destabilisierung der Weltordnung entgegenstellen.

„Im Zeitalter von 'America First' stehen Werte wie Kooperation, Achtung des Völkerrechts und Freihandel weltweit unter Druck“, argumentiert das Auswärtige Amt. „Deshalb will Außenminister Maas ein neues Netzwerk von Ländern aufbauen, die sich für eine faire Zusammenarbeit einsetzen.“

Jetzt könnte alles ganz schnell geben: Schon im September soll die Allianz bei Generalversammlung der Vereinten Nationen in New York offiziell ins Leben gerufen werden. Die letzten Vorbereitungen laufen.

Maas ist daher nach Kanada gereist. Das Land ist außerhalb Europas sein wichtigster Ansprechpartner. Mit der kanadischen Außenministerin Chrystia Freeland verbindet ihn eine politische Freundschaft.

THEMEN DES ARTIKELS

Heiko Maas Kanada

Schon im März war Kanada dem Projekt zur Allianz für den Multilateralismus beigetreten, die neben Deutschland vor allem Frankreich vorantreibt. „Viele der größten Herausforderungen der heutigen Zeit sind global und können nur gemeinsam gelöst werden. Deshalb ist Kanada mit seinen deutschen, französischen und japanischen Freunden vereint“, sagte Freeland damals.

Interessanterweise vermied es Freeland allerdings, den Namen Donald Trump in den Mund zu nehmen – obwohl die „America-First-Politik“ des US-Präsidenten bei den Europäern als wichtigste Begründung der neuen Bündnisdiplomatie herhält.

Kanada agiert vorsichtig: Premierminister Justin Trudeau und Freeland sind zwar überzeugte Multilateralisten, doch ihr Land ist stark von den Vereinigten Staaten abhängig, seinem südlichen Nachbarn und größten Handelspartner.

Diskutable Kompromissbereitschaft

Nach den Vorstellungen des Auswärtigen Amts soll sich die Allianz Themen wie der Abrüstung, dem Umgang mit neuen Technologien, dem Schutz humanitärer Helfer und dem Zusammenhang von Klimawandel und Sicherheit widmen. Aus Berliner Sicht zeigt Deutschland immer wieder, dass es bereit ist, Kompromisse einzugehen, um internationale Verhandlungen voranzubringen. Kritiker hingegen werfen der Bundesregierung vor, es mit den eigenen multilateralen Idealen oft nicht so genau zu nehmen. Als Beispiel gilt vor allem die Gaspipeline Nord Stream 2, die mehr russisches Gas nach Deutschland leiten soll und die von Deutschland gegen den erheblichen Widerstand anderer EU-Staaten vorangetrieben wird.

In der kanadischen Diskussion spielt der Club der internationalen Teamplayer trotz allem bisher keine große Rolle. Kanada hat ein ganz konkretes Problem: Die Unilateralisten in Washington und Peking setzen das Land unter Druck.

Die vergangenen zwei Jahre war Freeland vor allem damit beschäftigt, das Abkommen für die nordamerikanische Freihandelszone neu auszuhandeln, das für die kanadische Wirtschaft von entscheidender Bedeutung ist. Jetzt muss Freeland die Spannungen mit China unter Kontrolle bringen.

Kanada spürt den Druck der chinesischen Regierung, weil es auf Bitte der USA Meng Wanzhou festgesetzt hat: Spitzenmanagerin des chinesischen IT-Konzerns Huawei und zugleich Tochter des

Unternehmensgründers. Sie soll Banken im Hinblick auf Huawei-Geschäfte im Iran in die Irre geführt haben. China hat daraufhin zwei Kanadier inhaftiert. Offenkundig eine Vergeltungsmaßnahme.

Große Begeisterung für die Multilateralisten-Allianz ist auch in Japan nicht zu spüren. Die japanische Regierung ist dem Pakt zwar beigetreten, derzeit aber trägt sie auf sehr unilaterale Weise einen Handelskonflikt mit Südkorea aus.

Mehr: Trump verschiebt China-Zölle. Ein Ende des Handelsstreits ist trotzdem nicht in Sicht.

Auch interessant:AUCH INTERESSANT