

Good old friendship to the rescue

Transatlantic relations have reached a previously unknown point of uncertainty, and the global order is following suit. Uncertainty drives all kinds of negative outcomes, so we have to find a positive, personal way to address it.

BY CHRIS BOOS

The negative and positive impacts of the current transatlantic situation have figured prominently in so many articles and papers. If you follow politics, you will see negativity prevailing; and if you follow Wall Street, things seem to be just fine. Still, a general feeling of dread and fear of the future prevails as we've never seen before.

Uncertainty is driving this feeling. People and businesses as well as global and local relationships cannot easily live with uncertainty. It embodies the opposite of stability, and stability is what personal, business and global relations are built on. Even if you know you'll have a poor relationship with someone or, in the case of nations, a hostile attitude toward each other, you know what you're dealing with; even the Cold War "felt" better to people than the uncertainty we're currently experiencing. That's what drives people into the arms of populists who talk about "the good old days" — typically forgetting all about history — or into the traps of egotists who reject our completely connected world and believe one person, one community or one nation can go off and fend for itself alone.



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No short-term resolution to this growing wave of uncertainty in politics, international relations and the global markets is in sight. Everybody can feel that things are changing. Technological transformations are unfolding at a rapid pace, and the impact on industry and trade as well as on personal relations and communities has been monumental. Despite making everybody's life just a bit more comfortable, these changes in technology also serve as proof of that lingering feeling about things changing without really knowing where it's all leading.

Certainly, the road to nationalism, closed markets, "us versus them" thinking, and the like is undesirable. Caught in the heat of the moment, this may look different; but historical evidence — indeed, the history of humankind itself — clearly shows

Anyone who has a long-standing international business or political relationship has built friendships; most of us have good friends, especially on both sides of the Atlantic. I remember a time when the Cold War was at its peak, and people were opposed to nuclear-weapons deployment despite the fact that this policy guaranteed peace. This was the time when I remember people creating German-American friendship clubs and initiatives and fostering human-to-human relationships. These led to a better understanding of one another, and, even more importantly, to personal relationships outside the official political and economic realms. These personal relationships spread. Everybody knew someone who was involved in some sort of transatlantic friendship organization, and there was much positive communication in them — even

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that only increasingly networked communities with more people involved will guarantee prosperity and peace over extended periods. For the longest time, transatlantic political relations served as the foundation for our shared stability. Now this foundation is being replaced with uncertainty fueled by more uncertainty.

If we cannot rely on transatlantic political relations for this foundation, we must ask this simple question: What else is there? Some may answer with economic relationships, pointing out that international companies have not changed and suggesting these companies could form this new foundation. But people are skeptical about how much power corporations have, even more so than the power governments enjoy. No, the answer is simple and powerful at the same time: Friendship — good, old personal friendship — is what creates a foundation for stability and a very personal approach to dealing with uncertainty.

among the folks who had massive political disagreements — because this brought in a human element, an element that shows each of us that trust among people can exist and that everybody is human.

So if we need to find a new anchor for stability, let us foster personal relationships. Let us not only speak about our good friends across the Atlantic, but let us use these relationships to communicate our common ground, our trust in each other, our will to submit to common goals — even if political leaders cannot do this. In the end, it's us — along with our families, our companies and our businesses — that constitute a transatlantic relationship, and it's this relationship that's guaranteed peace and prosperity for a very long time now. There's no need to give it up or be skeptical about it continuing to exist; that is, not if we — the people who create this relationship — want to keep it.