

Americans Fall Back in Love with Germany

By Gregor Peter Schmitz in Washington, D.C.

Bratwurst and lederhosen are yesterday's news, as are clashes over Iraq. According to a new poll, the image of "modern Germany" is positive again in the United States. Diplomatic clashes over the Washington-led invasion of Iraq are a thing of the past, but Afghanistan could create new problems.



AFP

US President George W. Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel: a flattering view of Germany

The dispute between Germans and Americans over Iraq and George W. Bush appears to be a thing of the past. Nearly one in two Americans has a very positive image of the European country. And more than one-third categorize German-American relations as excellent or very good, with only four percent perceiving them as bad. Indeed, Americans view Germany as their country's fourth most important ally -- trailing only Britain, Canada and Japan.

The image Americans now have of Germans has also become more modern. Stereotypes of blond-haired, blue-eyed, dirndl- and lederhosen-wearing Bavarians who tell the time of day by a cuckoo clock has given way to a view of a Germany that is a top exporter of high-tech products, a center for research and development as well as home to a lively musical and cultural scene.

A full 49 percent of Americans say they are very interested in modern life in Germany, according to a new poll conducted by the German Information Center at the German Embassy in Washington. The center surveyed about 1,000 US citizens about their views of Germany in

September.

"The trend is positive. We are back to where we were before the war in Iraq. This is very encouraging," German Ambassador to Washington Klaus Scharioth said at the presentation of the poll on Thursday. The Iraq debate, in particular, led to a temporary cooling of relations between the two countries. At the peak of diplomatic tensions, only 17 percent of Americans polled expressed a positive image of Germany.

Nevertheless, the Americans' assessment of ties with Germany hasn't returned to previous levels.

- In September 2001, 65 percent of Americans said they had a positive view of US-Germany relations.
- From the Americans' point of view, Iraq has become less of a sticking point between the two countries. Questioned about where they saw strains in relations, Americans listed economic and trade disputes first. Iraq came in fourth, with 6 percent of respondents citing the war there as a contentious issue, down from 7 percent in a similar poll taken in February 2007.

Nevertheless, tensions related to the ISAF peacekeeping deployment in Afghanistan could create new burdens for the relationship.

- In the latest poll, 26 percent of Americans said Germany is not doing enough in the fight against terrorists.
- In Germany, the deployment of German Bundeswehr troops in Afghanistan remains highly controversial. The country's parliament, the Bundestag, is currently debating an extension of the armed forces' mandate there. Even some conservative politicians, like Peter Ramsauer of Bavaria's

Christian Social Union (CSU), are calling for a debate over possible scenarios for withdrawing German troops. Polls show that as many as 86 percent of Germans are opposed to combat missions in Afghanistan.

Indeed, the Afghanistan deployment may test the strength of the trans-Atlantic relationship yet again. Both Republican presidential candidate John McCain and Barack Obama of the Democrats have called for increased European military engagement in Afghanistan.

Are Americans the Better Environmentalists?

The German-American relationship is largely defined by economic interests. Last year alone, the flow of trade between the two countries surpassed \$140 billion.

- Thirty-six percent of Americans view economic partnership as the most important bond, with only 9 percent saying the same of political ties.
- Climate protection could also provide fertile ground for future political cooperation. Fifty-six percent of Americans said they felt Germany and the US should seek to tackle the challenge together.

However, US readiness to follow international guidelines has ebbed slightly in comparison to polls taken in previous years. It's a development that reflects the findings of other trans-Atlantic public opinion polls: Americans are showing more of a willingness to address climate change and environmental protection, but they are often skeptical about the approach to these issues taken by other countries.

Every Second Person Feels Poorly Informed

The results of the poll come at a time when Germans are following the US presidential election with great interest. The German media is providing more comprehensive coverage of the election than ever before.

But that media attention is not reciprocated. The US media crisis has created a situation where American newspapers, magazines and radio and TV stations are shuttering their foreign bureaus. This hasn't escaped the attention of Americans, either.

The German Information Center poll found that 51 percent of Americans said the media did a poor job of informing them about Germany -- an increase of 17 percent since 2004.

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