

World



Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany oversaw Europe's most powerful country during a severe financial crisis, then the European debt crisis and then a surge of immigrants.

Split views on Merkel's legacy

LONDON

Many economists assert austerity policies amplified downturn and euro crisis

BY PETER S. GOODMAN

In the political obituaries chronicling the departure of Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, the world is preparing to lose a rare source of sober-minded leadership at a time rife with dangerous tumult.

For the European Union, the loss appears grave. The bloc is contending with a nasty divorce with Britain, rising authoritarianism in Hungary and Poland and a showdown with a populist government in Italy. Ms. Merkel's pending retirement will remove a stalwart champion for the union's cohesion. So say countless pundits and editorials.

But many economists take a less generous view of the German chancellor's place in modern European history. Far from a hero who anchored the bloc under profound challenges, she played a leading role in amplifying an economic crisis, allowing it to erupt into an existential threat to the European Union and its shared euro currency. The resulting distress has undermined faith in the European bloc while fueling anti-establishment grievances across the Continent.

Like many national leaders, Ms. Merkel, time and again, catered to domestic political interests at the expense of broader European concerns, dismissing calls that Germany's prodigious savings be put on the line to rescue debt-saturated members of the bloc. She impeded measures aimed at coordinating banking rules and public spending across national boundaries.

She adamantly opposed debt forgiveness to Greece, even as it teetered toward insolvency, and even as joblessness exceeded 27 percent — a special source of outrage given that German banks were primary lenders in Greece's catastrophic explosion of borrowing.

"She was at the heart of the design of the flawed Greek program, which not

only imposed austerity, but most importantly resisted restructuring the debt in order to save the German and French banks," said Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate economist at Columbia University in New York. "The rhetoric that she used suggested that the crisis was caused by irresponsible behavior by Greece, rather than irresponsibility on the part of the lender."

In place of public spending to soften the crisis, Ms. Merkel used Germany's power as the largest economy in Europe to force troubled governments to slash support for pensions, health care and education. In the process, the moves helped lengthen and deepen a devastating economic downturn.

"This is what history will remember, a complete mismanagement," said Amandine Crespy, a political scientist at the Institute for European Studies at the Free University of Brussels. "Austerity very clearly has deepened or even created this great gap, political fragmenta-

"The euro crisis started getting better the moment Europe decided to go against what Merkel said."

tion between the north and the south, between the debtors and the creditor countries that is very, very difficult to fix, and has had dramatic political consequences in terms of fueling the populist forces."

Sifting through history is a complex exercise open to divergent interpretations. One can never know how events might have transpired absent some variable. Anyone in Ms. Merkel's position would have found the going difficult. She oversaw Europe's most powerful country during the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, then the European debt crisis, and then the surge of immigrants from some of the poorest, most troubled nations on earth.

Some argue that no German chancellor could have held on to the office while behaving much differently in the realm of economic policy. Given a deep cultural proclivity toward thrift, moral revulsion over debt and a fear of rising prices

dating to the hyperinflation after World War I, Germans were aghast at any arrangement in which their savings were on the hook for the recklessness of Greeks and Italians.

"She had to sell German voters on the idea that Germany would send resources to bail out European countries that were already engaged in irresponsible policies," said Nicola Borri, a finance professor at Luiss, a university in Rome. "That was the problem. Politically, it's really hard to criticize Merkel."

But other economists say Ms. Merkel squandered an opportunity to use the crisis as a teachable moment that could have altered German public opinion. She might have fostered a sense of responsibility in Germany to see the nation as a primary beneficiary of the European Union, with the responsibility to aid those in distress.

Instead, she catered to stereotypes of lazy Greeks, at one point suggesting they take too much vacation. She used their troubles to inaccurately depict the breadth of the crisis. Though Greece's government had been profligate, those in Ireland and Spain had enjoyed budget surpluses before they landed in crisis, falling into perilous debts only after bailing out banks.

Europe's economic troubles have often centered on a dearth of faith in the endurance of the euro, the currency shared by 19 members of the bloc. Since the euro's inception, critics have warned that it is structurally unsound — a currency union lacking a political apparatus to coordinate policy and collective aid when trouble emerges.

Under the guidance of Ms. Merkel and her famously unsentimental finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany effectively used the crisis as an elaborate demonstration of the euro's foundational defects. As they bickered with European counterparts over the principles that should apply to the Greek rescue, they delayed help and exposed global markets to the possibility that none might be forthcoming. A currency championed as a source of European solidarity was exposed as an impetus for discord.

As the crisis mounted in the early part of this decade, reformists called for col-

lective action. Europe needed rules governing all of its banks along with insurance for depositors to lift confidence in the financial system. The worst-hit countries needed relief from European rules limiting deficit spending.

Ms. Merkel and Mr. Schäuble maintained a hard line aimed at protecting German taxpayers from having to pay for the supposed sins of profligate spenders in sunnier climes. In tones of moral admonishment, they prescribed structural adjustment — rules making it easier to fire workers — along with more cuts to public budgets.

"There is no crisis of the euro itself," Ms. Merkel declared in a 2012 speech delivered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "There is a debt crisis. We have to ensure that stability and sound public finances are the order of the day. Indebtedness is the biggest danger and the greatest risk to prosperity on this continent."

Eventually, Europe forged a partial banking union that put in place bloc-wide rules, while allowing crisis-hit countries some flexibility from limits on deficit spending. The European Central Bank resorted to extraordinary measures, and a series of rescues kept Greece solvent, even as many doubt the country will be able to pay back its crushing debts.

"The euro crisis started getting better the moment Europe decided to go against what Merkel said the policies should be," said Christian Odendahl, chief economist at the Center for European Reform, a research institution.

Ultimately, Ms. Merkel fueled the notion that Europe's crisis was a morality play in which prudent nations in the north would school their reckless counterparts in the south on the virtues of living within their means.

Such depictions seem likely to outlast Ms. Merkel herself, making it difficult to imagine Europe's summoning the unity to bolster itself against the next crisis.

"She helped shape the mind-set of the Germans," said Mr. Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate economist. "She shifted it in a very ugly way, and that makes it very difficult to change the framework of the eurozone. She could have reframed it. That would have been leadership."

Hunter displays kill, and Scotland is angry

LONDON

Officials to review laws after photo of goat carcass appears on social media

BY YONETTE JOSEPH

The Scottish government said it was reviewing its animal culling laws after a photograph of an American hunter posing with the carcass of a black-faced goat with magnificent horns during a hunting trip to Scotland set off a furor on social media in the past week.

The hunter, Larysta Switlyk, whose Twitter account says she is from Florida and is the host of a show called "Larysta Unleashed" on the Canadian channel Wild TV, posted the image of the dead goat on her Instagram account.

"Beautiful wild goat here on the Island of Islay in Scotland," wrote Ms. Switlyk, who describes herself on Twitter as "not your typical CPA, professional huntress and angler." "Such a fun hunt!!"

Ms. Switlyk added: "Made a perfect 200 yard shot and dropped him with the gunwerks and nightforce-optics! (Good thing too because he could have ran off the cliff into the water)."

She also posted on Twitter images of other dead animals shot during the hunt, including a ram and a red stag, and appeared to have enjoyed eating the stag, publishing an image of cuts of meat with vegetables with the caption "Nothing Better than enjoying what you hunt!! Fresh Red Stag from our hunt in the highlands of Scotland!!"

Outraged Scots took to social media to slam what they saw as a cruel, boastful display, though some justified the legal hunt as necessary to cull a wild animal classified as a nonnative invasive species in Scotland with no natural predators.

But Sarah Moyes, a spokeswoman for OneKind, an organization dedicated to ending cruelty to Scotland's animals, said in an email: "It's utterly shocking to see these images of Larysta Switlyk and other hunters posing for photos with the wild animals they killed on a recent trip to Scotland. Yet again, instead of celebrating Scotland's magnificent wildlife, we are seeing these beautiful animals exploited in the name of sport."

"This is not the kind of tourism we should be encouraging in Scotland, let alone allowing to happen in the 21st century."

A 2015 report shows that country sports tourism in Scotland brings in 155 million pounds, or almost \$200 million, to the economy every year, according to the Scottish Country Sports Tourism Group.

But hunting, or rather the display of animal trophies, has become a reviled activity in some corners of social media, as well-heeled individuals, including the older sons of President Trump, proudly display their trophies for the world to

see on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

The killing of Cecil the lion by an American dentist, Dr. Walter J. Palmer, in Zimbabwe in 2015 set off an international outcry and drew new scrutiny to the practice of paying to kill big game. Two years later, the lion's son Xanda was killed in a trophy hunt.

Since then, photographs of hunters posing triumphantly with the bodies of animals such as giraffes and a family of baboons have stirred global condemnation. In the latter case, the Idaho fish and game commissioner, who was seen grinning with an array of carcasses from an African hunting trip, resigned.

While many defenders of hunting see it as an honorable, skilled and bonding experience, others denounce it as unnecessary waste in the modern age and detrimental to the environment and to the animals who roam in the wild. But the issue is more complex than a clash of cultures.

Some countries like Zimbabwe encourage big-game hunting as a source of income, and others allow the activity to keep down herd populations through managed hunting trips and as a way to pay for the upkeep of game reserves.

Researchers warned recently in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that 90 percent of nearly 300 protected areas on the African continent faced funding shortfalls and that some could vanish.

Some studies have shown, however, that hunting can be devastating to endangered populations. A study published in 2010 by Craig Packer, director of the Lion Center at the University of Minnesota, found that sport hunting directly contributed to the decline of lions in most of Tanzania's hunting areas.

To many conservationists and animal lovers, there is simply no excuse for hunting.

Michael Russell, a member of the Scottish Parliament, said on Wednesday that he would raise the issue "as a matter of urgency" with the environment secretary, Roseanna Cunningham. "If this is actually happening on #Isle, and laid on by some sort of tour company, I would want to see it stopped immediately," he wrote on Twitter.

In response to the concerns, Ms. Cunningham vowed to look into clarifying or changing the law, writing on Twitter, "We fully understand why so many people find these images of hunted animals being held up as trophies so upsetting."

It's likely that Ms. Switlyk, who wrote that she had been in Scotland more than a month ago, was well aware of the outrage unfolding because of her photographs. In posts on social media, Ms. Switlyk wrote:

"I'm headed out on a bush plane for my next hunting adventure and will be out of service for 2 weeks. Nothing better than disconnecting from this social media driven world and connecting back with nature. Hopefully that will give enough time for all the ignorant people out there sending me death threats to get educated on hunting and conservation."



The island of Islay in Scotland, where the hunter and television show host Larysta Switlyk boasted about killing a "beautiful wild goat."



A primary school in Shanghai. The 15-page résumé of a first-grade applicant has provoked debates about China's test-crazed education system.

A 15-page plea for a place in the first grade

BEIJING

BY JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

The young applicant is described as confident and courageous. His résumé, at 15 pages, is glittering, complete with performance reviews ("full of energy"), a map of his travels (trips to Tokyo and Bali) and a list of books he has read this year (408 in total).

But the applicant is not a seasoned job seeker. He is a 5-year-old boy from southern China applying for a spot in first grade at a Shanghai private school.

"I hope I can outperform my parents," the boy is quoted as saying, between photos showing him playing the piano, swimming and driving a toy car.

The résumé, which was leaked and shared widely online this week, has provoked a mix of fascination, indignation and debate about whether children in China's test-crazed education system are being raised as soulless strivers.

Some called for the parents of the boy

to be arrested. Others wondered whether today's children would know true happiness, given the intense pressure to perform well and land good jobs.

"Only 5 years old?" one user wrote on Weibo, a Twitter-like site. "So scary."

Still, some defended the parents, saying they were trying to promote their child's best interests in a flawed system.

By Thursday evening, tens of thousands of people had weighed in, and a hashtag about the boy had been viewed more than 38 million times.

Yong Zhao, a professor of education at the University of Kansas, said the debate reflected widespread anxiety among Chinese parents about getting their children into top schools. In China's test-dominated system, exam scores determine where students go to college and what careers they can pursue. "No matter how many good schools there are, people are always shooting for the best," he said. "Where their children go to school represents an achievement, an accomplishment for parents. But many don't know what a good edu-

cation is."

It is unclear who prepared the résumé, which was addressed to the Shanghai Starriver Bilingual School but whose claims could not be independently verified. As in urban school districts in the United States and elsewhere, it is common for parents in Chinese cities to hire coaches to help their children gain admission to selective schools.

A staff member at Shanghai Starriver declined to comment, except to say that the school did not accept résumés from parents as part of the admissions process. The boy's father also declined to comment, saying he did not want to draw attention to his son.

The competition for seats at top schools in China is notoriously cutthroat. In some cities, the wealthy and well connected pay large sums of money, sometimes described as "donations," to secure placements in top programs.

The boy's résumé reads like a PowerPoint presentation, complete with

growth charts and stick-figure clip art. It includes discussion of his adversity quotient and his artistic talents. It also provides details of his schedule — time for memory training, English diary class, sports and piano — and samples of his artwork, including drawings of dogs and fish.

"I never cry when I get shots," the résumé says. "Starting when I was a year and a half old, I would get up by myself when I fell down. Everyone praised me as brave."

The résumé closes with a list of English books the boy has read, including "The Hungry Squirrel" and "Bubbles in the Sky." It shows a picture of him with his head resting on his hand, a pensive look on his face.

A caption alongside a photograph of the school's terra-cotta facade reads, "When will Shanghai Starriver open its gates to me?"

Albee Zhang contributed research from Beijing, and Carolyn Zhang from Shanghai.