

# Merkel is a 'half-dead wreck'

The CDU's Brinkhaus rebellion heralds Ms. Merkel's end, while we are watching Germany's belated reckonings for sex abuse. Here's our Daily Briefing on September 26, 2018.



Source: DPA / Kay Nietfield

Konrad Adenauer (chancellor for 14 years) overstayed his welcome. So did Helmut Kohl (chancellor for 16). Angela Merkel (in her 13th) was always determined to be wiser than these two other Christian Democrats. She wanted to exit office gracefully, not as "a half-dead wreck", as she once put it. But power has its way of roping people in. And so Ms. Merkel also overstayed her welcome. In effect, she already is a half-dead wreck. That became clear yesterday afternoon.

The signal was delivered by Bundestag members of her own Christian Democratic Union and its "sister party" from Bavaria, the Christian Social Union. (The two parties form one caucus in parliament.) They were electing their parliamentary leader, or chief whip. For 13 years, i.e. during the entire reign of Angela Merkel, that job has belonged to Volker Kauder, one of her most dependable (and otherwise uninspiring) worker bees. But for the first time, another Christian Democrat ran for the job against Mr. Kauder. And ... won.

The new face belongs to Ralph Brinkhaus, a budget expert. He claims not to be interested in leading a rebellion against the chancellor. But that is not how Berlin's cognoscenti see it. Ms. Merkel had lobbied for Kauder. Kauder, with his back-room deals and knack for de-escalating controversies at the cost of stifling important debates, represented the whole Merkel style and system. In effect, the caucus poll turned into a mini-referendum about Merkel. And Merkel ... lost.

She acknowledged as much. "This is a moment of democracy," Ms. Merkel said. "Those also include defeats, and there's no sugar-coating that." This woman is so gifted as a politician that she can probably cling to power for a while longer. But she is also perceptive enough to know that her exit is nigh. My hunch is that she will now try to prepare an orderly departure sometime in 2019.

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A year after the patriarchal dam burst on Harvey Weinstein, the #metoo revolution continues to roil America. Bill Cosby, once TV's paragon of fatherly male virtue, is heading off to prison for at least three years. Les Moonves is out at CBS. Brent Kavanaugh, until a few weeks ago a picture-perfect candidate for Supreme Court, could be damaged goods.

Following all this from Germany, I'm tempted to repeat the observation I made last year, when the #metoo wave washed up on European shores: "All major American social phenomena, positive and negative, also spread to Germany, albeit in delayed or attenuated form." In Germany, too, more women are speaking out, and more men are getting their reckoning. Most recently, Hubertus Knabe, the head of a Berlin museum about East Germany's dreaded Stasi, had to go, after women who had worked for him accused him of transgressions. What I find most interesting, though, is not the similarities but the differences. For some reason, in Germany #metoo does not feel revolutionary, but (at most) evolutionary.

The culture of sexual abuse and perversion in the Catholic Church is also being aired with something of a delay in Germany. A big study was unveiled yesterday in Fulda. It had investigated allegations against 1,670 clerics who had tormented 3,677 children. Half of the victims were younger than 13 at the time. Cardinal Reinhard Marx, the leader of Germany's Catholics, professed shock and shame. But how honestly will the church now gaze at itself? How relentlessly dare we interrogate the depths of human nature?



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became editor-in-chief of Handelsblatt Global in March 2017, after writing for The Economist for twenty years. During that time he was most recently Berlin Bureau Chief and Germany Correspondent. Before that, he covered the western United States from Los Angeles, technology and media from Silicon Valley, Asian business from Hong Kong, and finance from London. He got his B.A. from Williams College, Massachusetts, and his M.Sc. from the London School of Economics. Andreas is the author of "Hannibal and Me: What History's Greatest Military Strategist Can Teach Us About Success and Failure."

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