

## 'Heute in Deutschland'

'Heute in Deutschland' Michael pressed the letters on his tablet, and the words appeared in black and white generic font on the backlit screen in front of him. He was looking for a story, but everywhere was quiet. No news is good news, they said, but not in his profession.

'Heute in Deutschland...'

He sighed. He should have been a journalist ten years ago; could have made a name for himself then as one of 'Die Jungen', got in on the artistic scene, the casual drugs, the pretty girls...but no. That was all before his time.

He had been only fifteen; just a kid, when the heads of state of every country in the European Union had come together and signed the Treaty of Frankfurt. The 'European Treaty' they had called it; the treaty that the optimists said would truly unify Europe, and that the dissenters said would tear it apart once and for all. He remembered the atmosphere at school; what it had been like, those few months leading up to the summit, like a current of electricity running through the air. They didn't exactly understand what was going on but the palpability of change, of something new for better or for worse, with a great role for Germany, was intense. Germany was going to become the economic hub of the new European Union, with the political centre in Brussels and the financial wing of every EU state coming under the careful regulation of the European Central Bank.

Still, some people said a fully integrated European continent was madness. Michael remembered how the entire country was coloured with strife back in those days, some mentioned the Great Recession with invective; the people still remembered those bailouts and what they felt they had done to Germany. Michael never understood it much back then, but he thought the German people still hadn't come to terms with what their Government had had to do almost forty years previous.

Then there was Germany's personal role-could anyone imagine the part Germany would play in a holistic European Union? Could anyone imagine the Reichstag as a museum piece, just a congress for internal affairs with all of the big-dog diplomats and politicians jetting off to Brussels to take their rightful place at the heart of the New World Order? One thousand years of history just to end up a cog in a larger machine.

He remembered how things all went a bit mad, how 'culture' spilled out onto the streets; protests every week, new ways of painting, of writing, of filmmaking, of thinking. Rallies and excess were constant and, of course, maverick journalists with plenty to write about, and plenty of money just waiting for the person who could get the best story.

But Michael had missed all that, and the collapse people sought never came, on the contrary, Germany was booming; the success story of the Union. The world looked on the country with envious eyes nowadays. There seemed little to write about, and for a freelance journalist who was already behind on his rent that meant getting chucked out of his home-even if it was a bedsit in one of Berlin's dodgier neighbourhoods.

He was speaking to the Turkish guy upstairs the other day, apparently Germany was the best country in the world; the best in Europe, certainly, and after the Middle East talks had collapsed everybody wanted in. Michael thought that Germans were content, but they were certainly edgy, more so than he'd ever known them. Immigration had become a bigger concern than ever, crime was up, which many blamed on the swathes of immigrants rushing in from poorer countries. The anti-Unionist parties had started growing in strength, and had made big inroads at the last European elections. When the many right-wing parties left over

from before the Union had tried to merge with their counterparts in the other EU states it was quickly made difficult to merge parties by law by the ruling European People's Party, as opposed to the easier routes of creating a new party or joining an existing one. But people on the street were talking; some were even championing these parties.

'Europe, it just means more jobs for them and less jobs for us!' he'd heard one angry market trader say to a customer as he walked through town one Saturday afternoon.

German pride, some said, had been wounded. People who were proud of their country were being swallowed up by Europe, caving in to internal pressures social and economic, laden down with bureaucracy, trying to play Mutti to everyone. *Der Spiegel* had run a story a few months ago: 'Ein Neues Deutschland: Stark oder Schwach?'

Germany was in an interesting period: quiet, but bubbling under the surface, idealistic yet radical, hopeful yet beleaguered by doubt. A country that once felt its Government was German was worried that even it was German no longer.

People sometimes asked Michael why he wasn't worried. He said it was because of his sunny disposition. He then said that there was this quote from Helmut Kohl that he remembered from a long time ago; it was one of his favourites: 'We were united not only by political respect for each other, but also by deep mutual sympathy as people.' There were still people alive who had been there when the wall fell, during Die Wende, und Die Wiedervereinigung. It succeeded through the strength of the German people; were they not who they believed they were then history would have gone a different way.

'Heute in Deutschland' Michael stared at the screen; the only light in the room. Three words, over one thousand years of history. No, he thought, there was no story just now, but there would inevitably be one, if not sooner, then later.