**Interview with James Kirchick**

**„The End of Europe “**

**30 March 2017**

On 30 March, Atlantik-Brücke and Microsoft Berlin hosted American journalist, author, and Atlantik-Brücke Young Leader Alum James Kirchick, for a panel discussion on Europe, Trump, Russia, and the way forward. Kirchick’s new book “The End of Europe” was published this month, and is a look at the current state of a continent in crisis.

The event was part of the Transatlantic Dialogue series, co-hosted by Atlantik-Brücke and Microsoft Berlin. What follows is an interview with the author, conducted by Ana Ramic, Robert Bosch Stiftung Fellow.

**Q: What, in your opinion, is at the root of what happened in America regarding Trump?**

A: There’s no one root cause; there’s several. It’s a combination of people in economic uncertainty falling for the promises of someone who said he would make their lives easier with very simple solutions. But it’s more than that because many people who voted for Donald Trump were economically secure. I think racial resentment played a huge role. Let’s not forget Donald Trump started his political career in 2011 by being the leading ‘birther’, alleging that Barack Obama was not a natural born US citizen, which is a very racially-charged accusation. The third element would be celebrity culture. This is the culmination of decades of blurring of the lines between politics and celebrity. And Donald Trump is masterful at melding these two worlds together. And, let’s not forget, the failure of the Democrats to put up a candidate who would have been able to beat him. I think a lot of this is contingent, and if the Democrats had nominated someone else—Joe Biden for example—we would not be having this conversation.

**Q: Are we entering a post-American world, and if so, is Germany ready to take the role of leading the West? What about the German public?**

A: I think it’s premature to say that. Just because Donald Trump is the president, I don’t think that means we are in a post-American world. You know, he lost the popular vote, and he won by a thread in just a couple of states. So, if Hilary Clinton had been president, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. He could lose in four years, so I think it’s too premature to say that we entered a post-American world.

And as to the second question, no I don’t think Germans are comfortable with this notion of *Führung*, you could say. It’s a very difficult concept for people here to wrap their heads around, and I think there is a natural inhibition when it comes to leadership on any issue. And as much as I would like personally to see Germany play a more assertive leadership role in Europe and the world, I don’t think that the German people are anywhere near the point where they would be as assertive on the stage as the French are, or the British even.

**Q: What can Europeans do to prevent the end of Europe?**

I think they need to stand up for the values upon which the transatlantic community is based. That’s individual rights, freedom, democracy. And they need to *defend* those rights. They need to defend them from the enemies within: the nativists and the populists, whether that’s Le Pen or the AfD. And they also need to defend it from the enemies without, of which I think the main one is Russia. That means building up a greater resilience to Russian attempts to intervene in our politics. And, it needs to be defended with force of arms as well.

**Q: You mentioned cultural resentment and nationalism. Why wasn’t the EU been more successful in creating a more supra-national identity in the last 60 years?**

1. I’m not sure that should be the project of the European Union; I don’t see the need for that. Its compatible to be a German *and* a European, or a Spaniard *and* a European. These are perfectly compatible identities. We shouldn’t try too hard in that direction, or else there will be a backlash.

I think one thing we’ve underestimated is the attraction that national identity has for many people. And it can be very corrosive and harmful in many ways, obviously as we’ve learned in the past. But we should distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. Not all forms of national identity are necessarily evil or wrong.

**Q: Do you see a difference between populism and nationalism? John Judis makes the distinction between populism being an American “invention” originating in the 1970s and now coming to Europe, and nationalism being distinctly European. Or are they two names for the same thing?**

A: Nationalism is populism taken to an international level. Nationalism is the foreign policy of populism. Populism is basically saying, I as a political leader am the only legitimate representative of the people, and those who are against me are enemies of the people. And nationalism is saying, our nation is better than the nation next door, and we are going to get into fights predicated upon our different national identities. If you translate populism into foreign policy, you get nationalism. And Trump is the expression of this. He is a populist when it comes to the domestic political scene in America. And the people who oppose him—as he called the media—are enemies of the people. And he is a nationalist when it comes to the foreign policy of the United States.