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**A positive impulse must finally emerge in Germany**

*There are so many men sitting in executive chairs, there is so much complaining about women-how about a scrapping premium for old-Machos? An open letter to Chancellor Merkel.*

*By Angela Hornberg*

Dear Mrs. Chancellor Merkel,

you can most likely remember August 27<sup>th</sup> 2005. You were sitting in that legendary heavyweight circle of power of newly voted-in Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. You sat across from him as he clearly stated that “no one other than myself will be able to form a stable government”. In spite of all opposing facts he described you, the future most powerful woman in German politics as a “loser” and refused to even meet with you should you request a leadership role in his cabinet. Driven by testosterone, he spouted loudly that one should not get too carried away and insisted upon a view of reality which, other than himself, no one else shared.

Today thousands of women managers are experiencing a similar scenario within German business. There are statistics and facts which prove that women are not only equally qualified but often times provide better results than their male colleagues, that they are more successful in school and at university, that they possess higher skills in social competence and leadership, can assess risks more cleverly and can safely navigate enterprises into the future. And still, they are denied nearly on a daily basis any dialogue when it comes to requesting a position of leadership and are instead openly maligned with disparaging words and actions and stamped as losers.

Mrs. Merkel, you will receive for the second time one hundred women from German industry at your office this Wednesday. They all hold leadership positions. Surely there will be impressive photos taken with so many top female managers. Great, but when we do our math, we realize how pathetically few top managers this is. There are 173 men listed on the board level of the thirty DAX- companies alone, much more than the amount of guests you will receive on Wednesday. There are only eleven women among this circle of dinosaurs who have surprisingly managed to get there and more admirably, have been able to remain there. Six of these women work in human resources and only five were allowed to aspire to other responsibilities.

These are actually “ejection seats” which the women are allowed to sit upon and most fly out at the beginning of their careers. Dear Chancellor, during your last Women’s Summit in May of 2013, you demanded that “the present snail tempo had to speed up”. There has indeed been a speeding up, but instead it went in reverse. Of the eighteen female DAX board members back then, seven have already prematurely left their company positions, all claiming “personal reasons”, and sank back into the level of business operations. No shouts of protest were heard in

Germany as no one got too carried away and the men were quietly heard saying their evening prayers..." no one other than me can form a stable government".

This dogma sits so deeply in the minds of some men that they actually sue their companies when opposing their dismissals. A former board member for human resources of the Commerzbank sued them for his dismissal and won! Not one of these women went to court. They did not even publically complain. Let us imagine a scenario where within twelve months not half of all women but half of all men from the level of the board would be dismissed; 85 DAX- Top- Managers would have lost their positions and forfeited their power due to "personal reasons" just to disappear back into their private lives. This would not only evoke cover stories about "the rising anger of men" but war would be declared! Don't worry, those 173 men remain comparatively firm in their board position saddles. When they ever do leave their companies it is usually to enter into their "deserved pension" or they move to more attractive positions.

Even openly hated managers quickly find new jobs. It is interesting to note that nearly all board level men are "happily married with X amount of children". These facts are proudly listed even upon the shortest of resumes. So just a quick question, Mrs. Merkel: Did one of these men ever attend the group of fathers you recently invited to your office? Have you ever had a conversation with a chairman of the board regarding the challenges of combining work with family? Or do you ever get a bad conscience during one of your diplomatic travels if were unable to pick your daughter up from primary school or missed the ballet performance of your son?

Probably not because we all hear during those celebratory thank you speeches that the real happiness of married men lies in that their wives keep their silver-backs free. The hypocrisy could not be greater. The boss of Germany's largest business consultancy company vociferously demanded that more women be placed in leadership positions but when asked how it is in his own company, had to sheepishly admit that they were a rare commodity among the top levels. The reason given was that all the mandatory trips would not be compatible with the duties regarding the family. Now, how could that be? Are there only childless men travelling about from Germany's top levels?

Let's get to the point: A gender-equitable casting of leadership positions sounds perhaps like a revolution but is actually a long overdue political reform. Regarding technological innovations we are worldwide pioneers but we are not very good regarding innovations of a social nature. Mrs. Merkel, your predecessor was able to put through the Agenda 2010; a drastic social and economic reform which lead Germany back into international competitiveness. And yet the theme "women" seems to be unsolvable. Why does this seem to be a German problem?

During the last twelve months three of the four board and supervisory board positions in Germany went to men. In contrast, the EU-average saw a third of these seats being filled by women and in France it was every second and in Belgium even two of three seats. The German economy takes the last place. Is Germany a united front of male chauvinism? And what does the



Chancellor say to all of this? Dear Mrs. Chancellor, your many economic advisors would affirm that innovations and changes are only possible when they are treated as top priorities. For this reason may I suggest a scrapping premium for old-machos?

Then former Chancellor Schroeder can be excused not only for his “suboptimal” performance at that heavyweight circle but also for his use of the word “fuss”. And a manager like Gerhard Cromme would finally be made fun of when he gives his argument for openly denying women entry into the industrial centers of power by stating that supervisory boards are “no tea-party”. A positive impulse must finally emerge in Germany! We need an “Agenda 50:50”!