

Germany looks eastward as it welcomes Modi

Angela Merkel believes the U.S. and the U.K are no longer dependable and her nation hence has to shift its gaze and find new friends

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A day after warning that Europe can no longer “depend” on its Western partners, the U.S. and the U.K., German Chancellor Angela Merkel met Prime Minister Narendra Modi shortly after he landed in Berlin on Monday.

Ms. Merkel’s comments are likely to set the atmosphere for her meetings this week with Mr. Modi, followed by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, who will visit Germany on May 31, as she discusses closer cooperation with leaders from the “East” after her stated disappointment with those from the “West”.

Mr. Modi and Ms. Merkel, who met informally for dinner at the Schloss Meseberg castle outside Berlin, will address a press conference on Tuesday after the announcement of expected agreements on investment, technology, counter-terror, clean energy and water partner-

ships as well a joint statement likely to focus on co-operation on global issues such as climate change and UN Security Council reform.

G-20 agenda

Germany will host the next G-20 summit in Hamburg in July, and Mr. Modi is expected to discuss Chancellor Merkel’s agenda at the multi-lateral forum.

Germany is expected to raise issues over trade with India after their bilateral treaty lapsed this year and push for the resumption of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement talks. Mr. Modi is likely to pitch his government’s recent reforms on foreign investment and the rollout of the GST to attract more German investment in India, and take trade beyond its current levels of €17.42 billion.

“Both (the German and Indian) governments are firmly committed to strengthening economic relations,” Mr. Modi was



Taking ties forward: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel take a stroll through the garden of Meseberg Palace near Berlin on Monday. ■ AP

quoted as saying in an interview with the *Handelsblatt* newspaper of Germany. “I am very optimistic about our future partnership.”

After his meeting with Ms. Merkel, Mr. Modi will meet many top CEOs and business

leaders to strengthen the push for bettering economic ties.

While the economy was always expected to top the agenda for the Prime Minister’s Germany visit, it is now likely to be overshadowed by

Ms. Merkel’s comments after the just-concluded G-7 summit in Italy as well as the NATO-U.S. summit. The Chancellor told a party convention in Munich on Sunday that the “days when Europe could completely

count on others are over to a certain extent”.

Ms. Merkel was responding to U.S. President Donald Trump’s refusal to commit to the U.N. climate change accord this far, his insistence on more contributions from other NATO partners, as well as Britain’s exit from the European Union.

Concern over OBOR

In what is being described as her version of the U.S.’s “Pivot to Asia”, Ms. Merkel is expected to discuss closer cooperation with both India and China as part of Europe’s quest for alternative coalitions, raising speculation that the moves could make Germany an unusual new venue for India-China rivalry.

“It would be wrong to see Germany-India and Germany-China as a zero sum game,” said the spokesperson of the Federal Foreign Office, when asked at a press briefing on Monday in Berlin, ahead of the high level

visits. “Improving our relations with any country in the world will not come at the cost of any other.”

Mr. Modi would also like to discuss shared concerns over China’s Belt and Road initiative that India has refused to join on sovereignty issues. Germany is part of the B&R connectivity initiative, but refused to sign a statement on trade – along with other EU countries – that they said would contravene World Trade Organisation (WTO) commitments.

“We maintain concerns over China’s ambiguity on free trade commitments and human rights,” conceded a foreign ministry official who didn’t wish to be named. “But the fact is there is no way around China if you want to achieve anything on the global stage in today’s world,” he added, in a possible reference to a bilateral trade partnership of €169.9 billion which saw China surpass both U.S. and France in 2016.