

# Hot off the Press 49!

*Members recommend.....*

## TV Series

TV series "Rhineland Gardens" (BBC2 8pm Fridays) in which Monty Don visited gardens situated along the Rhine. The first one covered the Lake Constance region.

## ***Willkommen to DW's Berlin Briefing***

Germany's Vice Chancellor and Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil has been making a show of defiance in the face of US President Donald Trump's latest threat of tariffs. "We will not allow ourselves to be blackmailed," [he said on Sunday.](#)

On Thursday, an EU meeting is scheduled to debate the response to the threat of 10% tariffs against eight European nations, six of them members of the EU, who are opposing Trump's plan to seize Greenland. Another 25% tariffs may take effect by the summer if no deal is reached.

The EU leaders may invoke the Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI), the EU's "trade bazooka," which allows the European Commission to impose measures such as restrictions on imports and exports, retaliatory tariffs, as well as restrictions on intellectual property and investments, and block US companies' access to public procurement contracts in Europe.

International leaders, including around 60 heads of state and government and 850 top managers, are gathering in the Swiss ski resort of Davos for the [World Economic Forum \(WEF\) this week.](#) Donald Trump is expected to bring the largest group of US top managers and political elites ever to attend the meeting, which has the motto: "Spirit of Dialogue."

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is hoping for an opportunity to talk to Trump face-to-face.

The second term of US President Donald Trump has brought unprecedented strain on once-solid German-American relations.

In Davos, Merz and Klingbeil are also seeking to promote Germany as a safe location for

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investment, conveying the message that their government is currently working on reducing bureaucracy, reducing the *Lohnnebenkosten* (non-wage labor costs) and energy costs.



## [German firms hunker down in the face of US pressure](#)

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[German companies in the US are weighing compliance against resistance as uncertainty grows.](#)

Germany relies on the US not only as its main trading partner, but also for defense. The US maintains a major military presence in Germany — a vital part of its post-World War II national defense strategy.

Over the decades, American military communities have formed around a handful of German towns.

The total number of US military personnel had risen significantly, to over 50,000 by 2024.

## **STRUGGLING CHURCHES**

This week, Limburg Bishop Georg Bätzing announced he will step down as chairman of the Catholic German Bishops' Conference (DBK) in February after only one six-year term. The German Bishops' Conference is an association of Catholic bishops comprising 59 members.

Bätzing had sided with reformers in the church who call for allowing women to become deacons and giving lay people a greater say in decision-making. He had sharply distanced the Catholic Church from the far-right populist [Alternative for](#)

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## Germany party (AfD).

Bätzing was also critical of the way the Church handled abuse allegations. "The Church has made big mistakes in the past and lost credibility. The abuse and the way it was handled, the cover-up, has robbed many people of their trust that the Church can be a home for them," Bätzing told the tabloid BILD in 2024.

In that year alone, the two major churches lost over a million members in Germany. Currently, more than 45% of Germans still belong to either the Protestant Church or the Catholic Church, down from 69% thirty years ago.



## Germany's empty churches repurposed as congregations shrink

In Germany, an increasing number of Catholic and Protestant churches are closing due to falling membership numbers. What happens to these former places of worship once the final service ends?