

Interview with Jürgen Heraeus, B20 Chair



Jürgen Heraeus elucidates the motivations of the B20.

The German G20 Presidency features three core themes: building resilience, improving sustainability, and assuming responsibility. Its agenda seems extensive and ambitious. How does the B20 incorporate these subjects?

The priorities of the German G20 Presidency reflect the challenges of our time. Even though ten years have passed since the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, global growth is still lagging behind expectations. Trade and investment as driver of growth and development are increasingly questioned around the world. The German G20 Presidency has therefore placed trade high on its agenda. It wants to advance the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to establish a G20 Resource Partnership to promote resource-efficient economic practices in the G20. And it proposes a new partnership with African countries, the Compact with Africa.

The B20 supports these ambitions. We call upon the G20 to support an open and rules-based trading system and the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement. Over the last ten months, a total of 700 members from all G20 states and beyond worked together on actionable recommendations to the G20. Around the globe, businesses are major innovators, tax contributors, employers, and educators. From technological developments to reduce air pollution, to programs for life-long learning, and closing the infrastructure gap – businesses are fundamental enablers of sustainability. We therefore have the expertise and experience to assist the G20 in finding good solutions for today's problems.

Next to the Business 20, there are seven other Engagement Groups: civil society (Civil 20), labour (Labour 20), the scientific community (Science 20), think tanks (Think 20), women (Women 20), and youth (Youth 20). What role does the G20 play for business, and how is the B20 process related to the other Engagement Groups?

The B20 is part of the larger civil society. This is why we have continuously sought an active dialogue with the other Engagement Groups ever since the handover of the B20-presidency from China last September. Representatives from the other groups have participated in our first B20 Conference in December last year. The close cooperation with representatives of the think tank community came naturally, given the strong focus on digitalization and trade. All representatives from civil society share the concern over increasingly isolationist tendencies around the word. In consequence, we jointly issued a call for open and inclusive societies in February 2017. Both the B20 and the G20 process benefit from a continuous and lively exchange within the civil society, and the B20 will extend and intensify its efforts beyond the B20 summit, as well.

Today, many voices in the world are calling for more isolation than openness: economically, politically, and socially. What role does the G20 play in this regard, and what impact can it hope to achieve?

Germany has the presidency of the G20 at a time of increasing global uncertainty. Recent events, like the decision of the UK to leave the European Union, the change of leadership in the United States, or upcoming national elections in Europe, all signal that globalization itself is increasingly in

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IFG Industrie-Förderung
Gesellschaft mbH
Rechnungswesen
Gertraudenstrasse 20
10178 Berlin

b20germany@b20germany.org
T: +493020281711
F: +493020282711

question. Challenges such as climate change and migration require more, not less, international cooperation. National efforts to go-it-alone will not achieve much.

Recent events have also taught us, however, that growth alone is not enough: we have to work more on inclusiveness. This means to engage with critics and take responsibility, instead of dismissing them out of hand. In this regard, the private sector again maintains an important role. Together with our respective governments, we have to make our workforce fit for the structural changes, digitalization will entail. We have to invest more in education and life-long learning.

As business, we support the endeavors of the G20: We want to assume responsibility and contribute to finding the best solutions for today's challenges and opportunities such as climate change, digitalization, or sustainable growth. We aim to be responsive to the varying needs and concerns in all sectors and countries of the G20. And we want to build resilient, future-oriented economies. As a family entrepreneur, I work under the premise: "The economy serves the people – not the other way around." I am convinced this is also true for the bigger picture of the G20 business community.