SPRINT OR MARATHON?
Thoughts about quality of life and growth

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Today, when we speak about growth we are no longer talking about the 1950s concept of growth that existed during the “economic miracle” period, a time when growth seemed to have no limits. Such a phenomenon could, plainly and simply, no longer occur today: these days we are all much more aware that growth should never be at the expense of future generations and the environment. And this is why, in our “Focal Point” article, we have asked the question of what type of growth is in keeping with the present times.

I believe that a responsible economy promotes people’s welfare and resource protection in equal measure. But it is also committed to ensuring that this conviction becomes widespread on a national and international level. With the awareness that people are the be-all and end-all of all economic activity – and with the wish to contribute to people making careful decisions and thinking about future generations.

Dr Wolfgang Schäuble argues a similar case: In a fascinating presentation at the 20th Berlin Wednesday Social of Trade, where trade issues are discussed, he spoke about his understanding of acting responsibly during times of crisis: patience is required – and it is also important to have a clear goal in mind. Read more about this in our review of the event (page 6). The deputy parliamentary leaders in the German Bundestag also explained their understanding of responsible actions to us. One thing is clear: the importance of dialogue where the creation of responsible practices is concerned. Being open to other people, entering into a dialogue with one another – it is precisely under this premise that the Wednesday Social was established five years ago.

I am delighted that Thomas Schröder, president of the German Animal Welfare Association, found the time and opportunity to discuss current animal protection matters – as well as the recently launched Initiative Tierwohl (Animal Welfare Initiative) – in great detail with Patrick Müller-Sarmiento, member of the management board of the German hypermarket chain Real, for our “Interview” section. You can read the interview from page 8.

In our “Insights” section we are examining the question of what the responsible representation of interests in the age of digitalisation could look like. The METRO GROUP is seeking new approaches to openness and dialogue with non-governmental organisations and politics. One thing is certain: this can only happen if transparency is guaranteed – and if discussion on equal terms is possible. With the “digital representative office” on politik.metrogroup.de we are taking the next step (page 11).

I hope that reading this edition of our Trade Letter is a rewarding experience for you!

OLAF KOCH
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
METRO AG
What kind of growth do we want?

These days growth can no longer just be considered from a quantitative point of view – the economy, politics and society are now focusing more on the quality of growth. And there are good reasons for this.

Hardly any other topic is as controversially discussed in public debate as the topic of growth. While the growth critics are citing that growth causes environmental damage and social injustice, proponents are retorting that growth boosts overall prosperity and thereby opens up margins of distribution that didn’t exist in this way during times of stagnation – which, they say, applies in particular to environmental and social standards. As so often, the truth lies somewhere in between; what is decisive is whether the terms growth and quality of life can be reconciled with one another in a global context – this concerns trading companies just as much as politics.

The country needs new indicators

Over many decades it was primarily the gross domestic product (GDP) that was regarded as the indicator of a country’s wealth. GDP indicates the total value of all goods and services produced or carried out within the country’s geographical borders in a one-year period. The fall or rise of the gross domestic product serves as a benchmark for the economic growth of a national economy.

But anyone who believes that an increasing GDP automatically translates into an improvement in the quality of life in a country is mistaken. After all, the GDP ignores important factors like the way the population deals with its resources or the environment, but also social developments. A rise in criminality or environmental pollution can even increase the GDP due to the associated repair or prevention costs. Recently, in 2012, the clean-up of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico caused the GDP of the USA to grow by 4.57 per cent compared to the previous year. And in March 2014, under the headline “Kiffen für die Konjunktur” (Smoking Marijuana for the Economy), the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung reported that since the beginning of the year, as a result of a new EU legislation for environmental protection, the economic output of drug dealers and cigarette smugglers is being – or has to be – included in the GDP for the first time.

Angela Merkel wants to know what is important to the German population. What qualitative demands do people have on a good life? On the basis of conversations with citizens the federal government of Germany is planning the development of an indicator and reporting system for quality of life in Germany. At regular intervals it should provide comprehensive information about the status and progress in the improvement of quality of life in Germany.

With data from the Federal Statistical Office and the help of economists from the German Council of Economic Experts, the study commission called on the German government to take a closer look at these ten indicators when developing their policies. And this also resulted in the German federal government approving the project “The Good Life – Quality of Life in Germany” at their closed-session meeting in 2014. Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel took this opportunity to emphasise the necessity of new indicators for measuring quality of life. The first phase of this project is set to begin this year, during which the federal government also wishes to engage in dialogue with the German people. The main questions are: what constitutes quality of life in Germany? What does living well mean for you personally? The answers will probably include “Eating Good Food”.

www.dialog-uber-deutschland.de
Healthy food and a good diet constitute a good quality of life for many people.

Stakeholder or shareholder?

The economy is also increasingly dealing with the question of what healthy growth is. An in-depth survey, carried out on behalf of the New Quality of Work Initiative (INQA) amongst 400 managers in Germany unearthed some remarkable results: more than half of the people surveyed assume that traditional competitive strategies have reached the limits of their capacity and the principle of cooperation is continuing to gain in significance. Less than 30 per cent prefer a style of management aimed at maximising profits as their personal ideal management model. Instead, the focus of attention is turning more towards social topics and stakeholder perspectives: more than 15 per cent of the managers stated that they are increasingly dealing with matters of social solidarity and corporate social responsibility.

In 2010, at an international law conference organised by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Professor Matthias Herdegen from the Bonn University stated:

"The relative strengths of non-governmental organisations lie in their professional expertise, the persistence with which they pursue their goals, their independence from governmental bodies and in their function as examples of a pluralistic system."

Critics say that NGOs don’t have a mandate for society as a whole – an NGO with no democratic legitimacy doesn’t have the right to criticise a democratically elected government.

In the last 30 years not only the number of NGOs has increased, but also their significance, diversity, commitment – and with this the pressure which they can exert on companies. While up into the nineties they mostly dealt with ecological topics, now social aspects are increasingly shifting into focus. Not to mention the fact that NGOs are gaining increasing acceptance within the population.

Changing demands on companies

Social networks and the Internet have created a whole new level of transparency: nowadays, it is possible for citizens to obtain precise information about environmentally harmful production processes and social injustice, to ally themselves with other people and to create pressure by means of protests, down to the widely dreaded online outrage sparked on social media.

Companies are also sensing this change in values in their HR departments: well-qualified professional and managerial staff are increasingly interested in a work-life balance and sustainability. It is no longer possible to retain highly qualified employees with a good salary alone.

As a consequence, companies, more than ever before, are under obligation to not only satisfy the interests of their shareholders or investors, but also those of the relevant stakeholders. Anyone who doesn’t do their “homework” in the social and societal sector may also come under pressure economically, because customers and partners are paying increasingly attention to the overall image of a company. A good example is the online retailer Amazon in Germany. While ten years ago the company was still a high-flyer in terms of growth...
and a favourite of both shareholders and customers alike, it is meanwhile confronted with real-life, unpleasant problems like strikes and a deteriorating image.

Activities of METRO GROUP

As part of a series of workshops, the METRO GROUP regularly invites managers from the planning and strategy departments of the political parties and parliamentary groups as well as representatives from business and academia to a small group debate. The topic of the most recent workshop in November 2014 was: “What does social progress mean today? A conversation about quality of life, growth and prosperity”. Eva Christiansen, head of the “Political Planning, Fundamental Issues, Special Projects” staff department in the Federal Chancellery, said: “We are only just at the beginning of an in-depth dialogue with the public, which we hope will show us what requirements constitute a good life for our citizens.” Oliver Schmolke, head of the department for Policy Planning at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), pointed out: “The focus here isn’t on yoga and spa treatments, but on what is important to us as citizens: security, peace and sustainable prosperity.”

Growing together with the customers

A central topic for the METRO GROUP is providing support to company founders and the partnership-based cooperation with its commercial customers. Here, the goal is not only to be a retailer to the customers, but to get to know them better and to establish and promote functioning business models together with them. In order to achieve this goal, in regular start-up studies the METRO GROUP asks its commercial customers and start-up companies about their experiences, successes and challenges, in order to respond better to their needs. In several Eastern European countries METRO Cash & Carry also supports founders with special franchise programmes – including employee training sessions, product offer consultancy and the printing of advertising leaflets. And in Germany a new accelerator programme will be established this spring, which brings together start-ups and supports them with infrastructure resources and consulting services. Olaf Koch, Chairman of the Executive Board of METRO AG: “We see ourselves as an enabler of our customers. Only if they are satisfied are we able to grow too.”

The METRO GROUP attitude

The METRO GROUP sees itself as part of society and contributes to its value creation. With a view to global challenges it is the company’s responsibility to reconcile economic goals beyond mere statutory regulations with the requirements of its customers, employees, investors and partners. In this context it is necessary to be aware of the limitations set by the environment. This means that the METRO GROUP of today is also acting for the world of tomorrow.

The METRO GROUP’s sustainability vision “We offer quality of life” for the business operations means creating more quality of life in the sense of added social value and reducing detrimental effects on the surrounding environment, both ecologically and socially.

The compatibility of sustainable actions and economic success is possible, according to Tino Zeiske, Group Director for Sustainability at METRO GROUP: “I believe that sustainability can no longer be viewed as being disparate from normal good business practice. We see that as one of many opportunities to invest – and combine a positive footprint of the company with an equally positive business case.”

METRO start-up study: the concerns of entrepreneurs in the gastronomy sector

To mark the 50-year anniversary of the wholesaler METRO Cash & Carry, the METRO GROUP, together with the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung GfK (Association for Consumer Research), carried out a survey among its customers in the hotel, restaurant and catering sectors and asked them about their wishes, experiences and goals. The basic tenor was that people working in the gastronomy sector in Germany are satisfied with their careers.

- 87% want to turn their own ideas into reality
- 65% would start up a business again
- 89% confirmed they have a strong dedication to the business
- 79% see the biggest problem in a lack of skilled professionals
- 77% are (very) satisfied in their professional lives
- 70% believe creating jobs is important

Source: www.metro-startupstudy.com
If you want to act responsibly you should never lose sight of your goal: at the 20th Berlin Wednesday Social of Trade Dr Wolfgang Schäuble expressed his understanding of successful politics.

“The acting responsibly in times of crisis” – Federal Minister of Finance, Dr Wolfgang Schäuble, spoke about this topic at the 20th Berlin Wednesday Social of Trade on 17 December 2014 in the atrium of the Berlin editorial office of the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. He began his speech by emphasising that people in Germany are fundamentally satisfied with their lives, as shown by the “Politikbarometer” survey in October 2014. Almost two-thirds of all people stated that they expect their personal situation to stabilise or even improve in the year 2015. So in this respect we cannot currently speak of a crisis in Germany. He went on to say that the situation on the perimeters of Europe is a different one, as well as in the Near and Middle East – which is having noticeable repercussions on Germany.

Schäuble went on to clarify: “Necessary changes are always associated with political costs. That is rather difficult in prospering situations, when vested interests need to be safeguarded. In a crisis it is always easier to make unwelcome changes.” As an example, Schäuble went on to talk about the situation in Greece, saying that although the country hasn’t yet fully overcome its economic crisis, it has made remarkable progress.

But to emerge from a crisis stronger than before, Schäuble said that two forms of behaviour in particular are advisable: long-term thinking and calm, balanced actions. The Ukrainian conflict, for example, cannot be solved, according to Schäuble, by military action, but only by offering actions based on partnership – and, where applicable, also by working with sanctions. This requires perseverance and a steady approach – but is ultimately the most effective route out of the crisis. At the end of the day, German reunification, said Schäuble, was also a result of the “long-term” principle.

The anniversary event was opened by the Chairman of the Board of METRO AG, Olaf Koch. In his opening statement he explained the significance of trust as a central pillar of acting responsibly in crises and emphasised: “Trust can only be built up when you’re engaged in dialogue.” It is also with this fundamental idea that the Berlin Wednesday Social of Trade was established in 2010 – as a format that promotes dialogue between trade, politicians and society as a whole.

Videos of the Wednesday Socials can be found at www.youtube.com/user/videos4metro
“Acknowledging crises, not ignoring them”

At the Wednesday Social, Federal Minister of Finance Dr Wolfgang Schäuble explained what acting responsibly during times of crisis means for him – we also asked three deputy parliamentary leaders responsible for economic affairs the same question.

Dr Michael Fuchs

“The benefits of responsible actions are particularly manifested in times of crisis. Safeguarding international law and human rights must take precedence over economic interests. Our German economy has agreed on this, which is something we can all be very proud of. Even if the trade constraints as a result of sanctions negatively impact profits, we have to remain steadfast, in order to ensure human rights and international law with "smart sanctions". Above all, these "smart sanctions" should concern the elites of the states that, in our eyes, are committing injustice and contravening international law. We will and must never allow such violations to happen in Europe again without us acting.”

Dr Michael Fuchs is the Vice-Chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag

Hubertus Heil

“Acting responsibly is all about investing today and thereby laying the foundations for future economic growth. In many sectors of our infrastructure we are living off our reserves. That is why we need additional money and new ideas in order to make Germany’s transport routes and its energy and broadband networks viable for the future. It is also necessary to boost intangible investments for fields such as education and for a skilled workforce. In all of these areas we need to be making responsible investments to safeguard future prosperity.”

Hubertus Heil is the Vice-Chairman of the SPD parliamentary group in the Bundestag

Kerstin Andreae

“Acknowledging a crisis and not ignoring it is the most important thing! Taking early action can limit costs. A notable example is the report by German magazine Stern about the consequences of climate change: today climate protection costs 1 to 2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), but if the climate crisis continues, in the longer term it will cost approx. 20 per cent of the GDP. For me, acting responsibly also means seeing the path out of a crisis as an opportunity, e.g. supporting businesses with higher tax write-offs for investing in green technology.”

Kerstin Andreae is the Vice-Chairwoman of the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group in the Bundestag
“Animal protection needs responsible consumers, competent policies and retailers with accountability.”

We spoke to Thomas Schröder (German Animal Welfare Association) and Patrick Müller-Sarmiento (Real). Our question to them: how can retail, NGOs and politics join forces to improve animal welfare?

**Mr Schröder, is it actually possible to eat meat without having a guilty conscience?**

That’s not an easy first question (laughing). I wouldn’t dream of pointing the finger and telling people what they should be eating. But a guilty conscience certainly plays a role if meat is consumed without a thought, and by that I mean without asking yourself the question of how the animal was reared. Anyone who still eats meat should do everything in their power to choose meat where they can be sure that the animal was treated reasonably well – or should I say: as well as possible. And that means: conventional meat without labelling telling us exactly where it comes from doesn’t belong on our plates.

**Mr Müller-Sarmiento, what do you pay attention to when buying meat at the butcher’s or the supermarket?**

I actually do a lot of shopping at Real, because there I can find out where the animals come from and how they were reared. As far as information is concerned, I have to tell you: as a consumer, even I am confused by the wealth of available information and labelling from time to time. The customer, for example, often doesn’t know, what “organic” actually means – and is meat that is classed as “organic” really better? Therefore measures that contribute to the compliance of the rules regarding the labelling make much more sense than new forms of labelling. This is exactly where the “Initiative Tierwohl” (Animal Welfare Initiative) comes in.

Who bears the main burden of responsibility for the species-appropriate husbandry of animals? Farmers, retailers, consumers or politicians?

Everyone in the chain shoulders some part of the responsibility. I’m not someone who just protects the consumer and criticises everyone else, but I find it hard to comprehend when I hear how it’s no problem for a family to buy the second flat screen TV for their child’s bedroom and their household’s third iPhone – but they aren’t willing to pay more than 49 cents for 100 grams of turkey escalope. So to that extent I am also reproaching the consumer. But the question is also: who has access to the most direct tools for change? The advertisements, the assortment policy, the grip height of certain products – all of that is directed by retailers. That means that retailers have a huge responsibility, because they are the last link in the chain of communication to the customer. They have the opportunity to educate the customer, and also to encourage change with their suppliers. But I have to stress: as far as the pricing policy is concerned we are simply lacking the statutory framework to prevent the market being flooded with cheap goods. In that respect I have to pass the baton to the policy makers because there is obviously a need for regulation in the industry, which has not yet been sufficiently addressed.

We all try to shoulder our responsibility. As retailers, of course, we have a high level of responsibility, because Thomas Schröder has been president of the German Animal Welfare Association since 2011. After training to become a communications specialist, he was office manager at the German Federal Parliament for many years. Before he was elected as the association’s president he initially held the post of press spokesperson and, since 2004, he has held the post of general secretary of the German Animal Welfare Association.

Patrick Müller-Sarmiento has been a member of the Real executive board for food & non-food since October 2012. He is also responsible for goods quality management and the field of corporate social responsibility and sustainability. Before that he worked at Roland Berger Strategy Consultants for ten years, most recently as global head of consumer goods & retail.
we are the distributors of the goods. I don’t agree with patronising the cus-
tomer by pointing the finger at them and telling them what they should eat. But we can achieve a lot through edu-
cation and transparency and positively influencing the decision-making pro-
cess to encourage customers to choose high-quality products. The debate about animal welfare and animal protection is meanwhile also a lot more broadly based than it was a few years ago. In the same way that vegan and vege-
tarian diets have become significantly more widespread, consumer interest in the origin of meat products has also increased. On the one hand it comes down to aspects like locally-sourced meat and, on the other, the basic con-
ditions of the rearing and slaughtering of the animals. The commitment of the retail trade, together with the German Farmers’ Association amongst other organisations, which led to the creation of the Animal Welfare Initiative in 2013, underlines the fact that retailers and farmers have recognised and promoted the issue early on – even considerably ahead of the Animal Welfare Initiative established by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. But the most important thing is: at the end of the day it is always the consumer who decides whether they are willing to also pay more for animal welfare and which piece of meat they therefore opt for. Our task as retailers is to make an appropriate offer.

Objection! In principle you are right. But despite this, I do think that a cer-
tain degree of patronage is justifiable. And in that respect I’d like to take this opportunity to praise Real: several years ago you successfully pushed through your new policy on battery-farmed eggs with your customers. You made the clear decision, out of a sense of moral responsibility as a retailer, to no longer support the manner in which battery hens were treated back then. At the time you were jointly responsible for introducing labelling requirements for eggs and promoting them. Thank you very much for the recog-
nition. But even in the case of the bat-
tery-farmed eggs we didn’t dictate to our customers, but educated them early on directly at the egg shelf and provided them with information in the “Kein Ei mit 3” (No egg with 3) campaign. This then led to the fact that we were able to remove the battery-farmed eggs from our range more than six months before the statutory sales ban actually came into force, which, due to our campaign at the time, had been reduced to almost zero in terms of sales by then.

The demand that Federal Minister Schmidt placed on the animal wel-
fare offensive of the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture was: “At the end of this legislative period the welfare of the animals has to be better than it is today”. How optimistic are you that this goal will be achieved by 2017?
I see that as a hopeful deadline and not as a reprieve. But despite the voluntary commitment I believe that we still need higher legal standards and a govern-
ment-led national labelling system. I don’t like the term “animal welfare” either. I’m not in an animal welfare commission, but an animal protection commission. The term animal protec-
tion reflects the fact that I am active-
ly doing something. The term animal welfare, in my eyes, is deceiving, and rather unspecific.

On the one hand, Federal Minister Schmidt is advocating improved ani-
mal protection. On the other hand he is emphasising that agriculture has to be competitive. Is that not a contra-
diction?
Not for me. I think that it was the wrong approach to want to compete with the export market prices during past dec-
ades. We have to concentrate much more on the concept of quality. I’m all for a nationally pioneering role, also in terms of the TTIP. It makes sense to put barriers in place: goods that don’t fulfil certain quality standards should not be coming into this country. And I believe that those are good precon-
ditions for farmers to succeed on the market here. The last thing our asso-
ciation wants is to destroy the farming profession. But that’s what will happen if we continue to focus on increased exports and price competition on the global market.

That’s exactly why retailers pay into a fund, with which farmers who are taking measures to focus their production more strongly on animal welfare can be subsidised. We hope that this pays off for the retailers as well as for the farmers and also that the consumers honour the participating retail com-
panies for their commitment to ani-
mal welfare and buy their meat from them. But the fact is also that around a third of our customers are current-
ly very price sensitive. We are also trying to sensitise them, by providing a diverse offer and by showing them
alternatives, for example also with the “Eating Good Food” initiative. For example, we offer simple salmon from aquaculture by our own brands – but also higher quality, freshly filleted salmon with a clear indication of origin. We are also focusing on long-term effects, by introducing customers to higher quality, sustainably produced products by means of cost-effective introductory offers, in combination with specific themed communication measures.

Real is taking part in the Animal Welfare Initiative. But at first glance it seems to be an expensive route to take. What made you decide to participate?

More animal protection, e.g. by improving the conditions in which animals are kept, certainly also costs more money. That’s why, from our point of view, it is so important for the Animal Welfare Initiative to rest on a broad base, with as many trading companies as possible – ideally all of them – participating. Otherwise the risk of unfair competition is very high. The participants in the initiative will certainly have to pass on a percentage of the costs to their customers, which, in turn, will lead to higher meat prices. While animal protection in Germany is improving overall as a result of this, individual retailers not participating in the initiative would also profit, whilst still offering their customers cheaper meat. Such a development would be fatal from our point of view and brings disadvantages for the participants in the Animal Welfare Initiative. Animal protection, social responsibility and sustainable conduct are, however, a central concern of the highest priority for us. This is why there’s no question that we, as a retail company, are adding more transparency to the origin of our products and are strongly committed to animal protection and animal welfare in particular. We welcome the idea behind the Animal Welfare Initiative, which is aimed at improving the husbandry conditions of farm animals. That is the reason why we accompanied this process from the beginning and actively helped to develop it. We are involved in the work group in which criteria and measures for improvements in animal protection and animal health are defined within the quality assurance system. With the initiative we are fulfilling the wishes of the consumers for improved animal protection, by aspiring to all-round improvements in pig and poultry farming. In this year alone all of that will cost us a high single-digit million amount. I do believe that this is well-invested money, firstly because it will make a really positive change, and secondly, because I am certain our customers will also thank us for it in the mid-term.

I praise the industry solution for the goal of making changes on a wide scale – and also because it financially compensates farmers for making improvements. This is the first time the industry is committing itself on such a large scale and that is remarkable. However, I am very critical towards the methodology behind it. The scientific foundation is lacking: at the moment there is a criteria catalogue, from which the farmer can put together their bonus in what is basically a modular system. But how do I know that these measures really serve the purpose of improving animal welfare – or protection? And also from a consumer perspective I see the solution, in this respect, as a declaration of bankruptcy, because the consumer, due to the principle of mass balancing, doesn’t have any indication of whether they are purchasing conventional or “better” produced meat. What I give Real credit for is the fact that you are involved in both the Initiative Tierwohl (Animal Welfare Initiative), as well as using our animal protection label – and therefore not pitting the two systems against each other. In my view it would have been cleverer to combine both systems right from the beginning.

Despite the criticism from Mr Schröder, why do you believe the industry initiative is beneficial? As I already mentioned: initiatives only make sense if many, or, ideally, everyone gets involved. With the Initiative Tierwohl (Animal Welfare Initiative) at least we have a very big commitment from the retail trade. In its current form I don’t see it as an industry solution that has been thought through carefully to the end. But it is a starting point, from which we can set off together. After all, the topic needs to become a lot more present amongst the population. Why aren’t children being taught more about the production conditions, dealing with food and a healthy diet in schools? But up until now there is no real discussion taking place in society. The broad Animal Welfare Initiative of the retail sector is, however, a clear step in the right direction.

Where do you see the most urgent need for change or action? Especially where we have clear, scientific findings, e.g. in non-curative interventions like beak trimming. Apart from that we are currently heading towards a two-class system in the animal world: in the case of pig farming we have recognised that castration without anaesthesia has to be stopped. But we are still dehorning cattle without anaesthesia. And there are many issues that the retail sector simply couldn’t help us with. If the retailer – like when it comes to battery-farmed eggs – clearly says: “We are not putting up with certain conditions anymore”, then we could send out very clear signals together.

This is why it’s so important that we remain in contact. I would welcome us closely cooperating with one another also in the future regarding animal protection, but also consumer protection, e.g. regarding Barbary ducks or the even beak trimming of poultry.

We should do that in a few months, for example also on the topic of animal protection labels. If you share your sales experiences with us, we could see what we could develop together from there!

Mr Schröder, Mr Müller-Sarmiento, thank you very much for the interview.
The “digital representative office” at politik.metrogroup.de is a first for the trade sector: the new website is providing more information about trade-related issues and lobbying.

The EU Commission has recently started publishing details about all of the contacts of its commissioners, cabinet members and director generals with stakeholders. And it is committing itself to only speak to lobbyists who are listed in the EU transparency register. There are also discussions being held in Germany about a transparency register and other measures that should create more transparency in the representation of interests.

Critics of lobbyism argue that it unduly influences the political consensus-building process and are warning about the danger of power shifts. These rules are a response to such criticism. Supporters, on the other hand, are pointing out that the representation of valid interests can support decision-makers in politics with complex matters – for example in the form of detailed specialist information.

“We think the idea of a transparency register is a good thing,” says Michael Wedell, Group Director Public Policy at the METRO GROUP. Since the opening of the group works council in Berlin they have been committed to “responsible lobbying”, a concept with a sustainability background. The trading company aims at consistency in its messages, transparency in its methodology and strives to remain in constant dialogue with interested parties.

Events like the Wednesday Social in Berlin and Brussels or the Trade Letter are useful for this purpose. And the Twitter account @DasGuteessen has been up and running for almost five years already – unusually long for an account used by a company that wishes to inform its stakeholders from the worlds of politics and non-governmental organisations, as well as interested foodies.

Another new tool is the recently launched “digital representative office”: a website aimed at the political sector in Berlin, featuring information about positions of the trade sector, reports of hearings or conferences and details about the people who lobby for the METRO GROUP. The topics of who has access to the German Bundestag and who is part of which association are also addressed. This creates more transparency on the one hand, but on the other it should also become even easier to enter into direct contact with the company. Non-governmental organisations and research facilities should be able to have their say too.

The blogger and political consultant Martin Fuchs (@wahl_beobachter) is also concerned with the representation of interests in the digital era. With his #lobbytweet initiative he wants to create more transparency. He welcomes the METRO initiative of a digital representative office: “Providing more information is helpful and creates transparency – even if it is of course up to the company to decide what it publishes. I wish more associations, businesses and NGOs would provide such offers of information and dialogue. I will be observing them closely with an interested and critical eye. Other bloggers and politics should do the same.”

“We won’t be able to publish everything on every topic – alone due to limited resources. But we will be able to do more than before, as well as being more open, more visible and even more approachable,” says Wedell. “Digitalisation is not only changing the way we work. It is also an opportunity to gain greater credibility and increased legitimation from various interest groups.”
... in a discussion
A stakeholder discussion about “Eating Good Food”

Dr Franz Josef Jung, MdB, Vice-Chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag: “We have outstanding food and outstanding products in all regions of Germany. This is something we have to support more on a political level. The focus on regional products is a very important aspect.”

Olaf Höhn, owner of Florida-Eis Manufaktur GmbH: “We have to create a new ethical approach so that people are prepared to spend 50 per cent of their money on food.”

Thomas Kammeier, Head Chef of Hugos Restaurant at the InterContinental Berlin: “Everyone talks about how they’re committed to regional products, but it is very difficult for a top restaurant to source sufficient regional products of a high quality.”

Andreas Jung, MdB (CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag), Chairman of the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development: “The retail sector can’t just selectively back sustainability with a focus on a few individual products. That would be political grandstanding. The commitment to sustainability has to cover the entire breadth of its business activity.”

Herbert Beltle, owner of Berlin restaurants Aigner, Altes Zollhaus and Rotisserie Weingrün: “We can’t convince 80 million German people to eat high-quality regional and ecological food.”

Frank Jäniche, Regional Director East at METRO Cash & Carry Germany: “It’s not possible to obtain all our food-products from regional suppliers. Especially when it comes to fish, but also in the case of meat and fruit, this poses a problem. That’s why it’s extremely important to us to explain to our customers where the products they are buying actually come from.”

Ingmar Streese, Division Manager Consumer Policy at the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband e.V.): “Producers and retailers are responsible for ensuring that food products are correctly and clearly labelled – there is still a lot to be done in this respect. And the framework conditions have to be set by politicians.”

Renate Künast, MdB (Alliance 90 / The Greens parliamentary group in the Bundestag), Chairwoman of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Consumer Protection: “We cannot support only high-quality niches. We also have to ensure that business is done differently across the board. Only then can good quality foods become the rule rather than the exception.”

Professor Ines Härtel, posts including Chair for Nutrition Economic Law at the European University Viadrina: “The efforts invested on a daily basis by farmers, producers and the retail sector to supply us with good and varied food products should not be taken for granted.”

Dr Ursula Hudson, Chairwoman of Slow Food Deutschland e.V.: “We have to start in nurseries and schools, we have to cook with children and be role models for healthy eating.”