

1 WHO has not met a self-hating German? Choose a German tourist at random and ask his country of origin, and nine out of 10 times he will sheepishly avert your gaze and mutter words such as: "I'm a European" or "I come from Lower Saxony".

2 Most Germans feel uncomfortable with their national identity. Many try hard, sometimes too hard, to adopt a *Heimat* (a homeland) they do not have to feel ashamed of. At the Royal Norwegian Rowing Club in Berlin, for example, a battle is brewing between true Vikings and wannabes. The latter have learnt the language and brook no criticism of their new country of allegiance, especially from jaundiced natives. They are more Norwegian than Norwegians.

3 Most Germans cannot sing their anthem, or at least not the third verse, and do not like waving the flag. That kind of thing is for morons, or worse still, neo-Nazis. Even Germany's head of state, paid handsomely to fly the flag abroad and drum up a little patriotism at home, admitted last week that he lacked national pride.

4 Imagine the outcry in Britain if the Queen had uttered such words. True, President Johannes Rau's confession did stir a mini-debate, with politicians of every

hue hurriedly professing their own ethnic pride, but no one is seriously suggesting that he should step down.

5 But the politician who is in trouble is the man President Rau had tried to defend: the Green Environment Minister, Jürgen Trittin. For Mr Trittin had done something far worse than denigrating his country. He has tarred another politician with the Nazi brush, accusing Laurenz Meyer, the general secretary of the opposition CDU, of having the "mentality of a skinhead". Mr Meyer's offence was to publicise his patriotic leanings. For the "skinhead" insult, Mr Trittin may have to pay with his job.

6 THE hapless, soon-to-be ex-minister is not the only German confused by the double stand-

ards of the new "Berlin Republic". There is evidence the public is struggling to identify what it is supposed to be proud of in the first place.

7 *Bild Zeitung*, the country's top tabloid newspaper, has tried to whip up a patriotic campaign, but its telephone poll came up with some perplexing answers. As one would expect of a conservative newspaper, most of its readers were proud, though perhaps not of the things the rest of humanity would identify as quintessentially German. The North Sea and the Alps topped the poll, followed by the constitution which had been dictated by the postwar occupying powers. Those awe-inspiring German cars got a measly 507 of the nearly 15,000 votes cast. Forget efficiency, diligence and other German virtues. They did not make it to the hit parade.

# Flying the flag for Germany's wary patriots

Debate on patriotism: Only immigrants seem to love Germany, writes Independent correspondent Imre Karacs in Berlin

8 So German national pride seems to be developing into a concept mastered by a select band of politicians and foreigners. Gerhard Schröder, the Chancellor, went on record this week, choosing his words with care: "I am proud of the achievements of the people and the democratic culture," he said in a newspaper interview. But notice the caveat: "In this sense, I am a German patriot who is proud of his country." A malicious soul may describe this as "don't mention ze war" patriotism.

9 But immigrants love Germany, at least those pictured last year in a government drive for racial tolerance. They wore a T-shirt with the Gothic logo: "I am proud to be German". Those images were meant to shock, and they did. Such a flagrant display of patriotic fervour had not been witnessed in Germany for, well, 55 years.