

Speech at the German Historical Institute on the Day of German Unity

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**Germany has Come of Age –
Lessons from the Past and Worldwide Responsibilities**

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Sehr geehrter Herr Berghoff, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation. It is a great honor for me to be here today.

I guess I have been asked to speak as an eyewitness of the collapse in East Germany and the watershed events of that time. Since I am known as a “civil-rights activist,” I would like to offer more than just stories about the peaceful revolution. In light of this revolution and other experiences I have had while serving in different capacities, I would also like to add a few of my personal views to the discussion, not just those of an official government representative.

My perspective comes from being a former co-founder of a group of “opposition-activists” associated with the Protestant Church in the German Democratic Republic, in short GDR, the former communist, eastern, part of Germany. Over the last twenty-one years, I have been strongly involved in political and economic reunification policies in Germany. In the last five years, as Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and as the Personal Representative of the German Chancellor for Africa, I have also been engaged in international politics (as you heard in the kind introduction).

My thesis is that: Germany, like a twenty one year old, has come of age and is eligible to vote worldwide. It is, in other words, of sound mind and, like an adult, free to make its own decisions and to be held responsible for their outcome.

This has to be understood. It has consequences.

Today we are celebrating the Day of German Unity. On October 3, 1990 the former West Germany, known as the Federal Republic of Germany, and East Germany were officially unified as one nation. Exactly 21 years have passed since that event occurred. As I proposed the title for my lecture, someone here at the Washington institute suggested that it would be better to say the “Berlin Republic” has come of age. But that is exactly what I do not mean.

In my speech I will explain my thesis from three perspectives and try to make it slightly more palatable. I will begin with a few detailed examples from history, then proceed

with a short description of the current situation as I see it. And finally, I will suggest what this could mean for German politics.

First: During the period of German division, from the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR after the World War Two in 1949, until the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification in 1989/90, Germany -- including the old Bonn Republic -- was a country with limited liability.

The West German economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s was known throughout the world. At the time, Germany was described as an economic giant and a political dwarf. Both German states were able to become members of the United Nations, but only after a controversial Basic Treaty was signed with the GDR in 1972.

In the European Union, an economic community that began as a European Coal and Steel Community, the Federal Republic did not *want* to play a leading political role. It was better to pay with the West German Mark than to get involved in conflicts that required getting one's hands dirty.

Hans Dietrich Genscher, German foreign minister for 18 years, was able to sum up German foreign policy in a single sentence and managed to keep almost everyone on his side: War must never again start from German soil, he said. And Erich Honecker, who followed Walter Ulbricht as party leader and Head of State from 1971 until the end of the GDR in 1989, said the same thing, although he did not always mean it.

It was the time of the cold war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, between the capitalist and socialist world systems, as I was taught in Marxism/Leninism class. The mutual strategy of deterrence threatened - and naturally had to threaten - to actually use its capability of multiple nuclear extermination.

Fifty years ago, on August 13, 1961, when Ulbricht had a wall erected right through the middle of Berlin, the tenseness of the situation was similar to that of the Cuban Crisis that would follow a year later. The Western Allies, including the U.S., accepted that the GDR, with the approval of the Soviets, would officially annul the Four-Power-Status of Berlin and make the German division permanent. No doubt the Berliners would have appreciated a visit from President Kennedy at the time. But were the western powers capable or willing to risk a third world war -- perhaps even a nuclear war -- in the middle of Berlin? Germany was the pawn and battlefield of the two super powers, both of which defined themselves solely through their military strength.

That was a different time.

As division came to an end in 1989 the Italian president said openly that he preferred two Germanys to one. The British prime minister showed this more or less openly until the end of the 2+4 negotiations. And in December 1989 the president of France visited the SED leadership of the East German Communist Party that had already stepped down and proceeded to sign trade agreements with the GDR for another five years.

How could western state leaders err so badly? Were they only concerned with their own interests in Europe that they *correctly* saw hindered? Or did they also harbor a distorted, perhaps even a false impression of stability?

Heads of state and politicians often think that stability has to be *organized* from above. Permanent stability, however, must always be *borne* from below!

Here is an example from July 1989. At a panel discussion in a church in Leipzig, Erhard Eppler, a well-known West German intellectual and former federal minister of the Social Democrats, pronounced right at the start: "The Wall is part of the structural fabric of the European House". The European House was a catchphrase coined by Gorbachev and went down well with most people. Eppler unfortunately continued to argue his point the whole evening, invoking the threat to world peace so familiar from socialist propaganda. At the end of the discussion a young man with long hair sitting in the front pew asked, "But what would you do, if the citizens of the GDR decide in a truly democratic vote that they don't want the Wall?"

And that is indeed what happened. Much faster than we could ever have imagined in July 1989.

What happened in 1989 and what led, logically, to Germany's rapid reunification had many causes:

- - The catastrophic economic situation in the Eastern Bloc that became even more evident after the NATO double-track decision and the star wars resolution under Reagan.
- - The anti-communist Polish pope Johannes Paul II openly supporting the Solidarnosc trade union movement which had clearly won the first semi-free elections held in Poland on June 4, 1989.
- - Gorbachev, who revoked the Brezhnev Doctrine before the United Nations and who spoke of New Thinking, Glasnost and Perestroika.
- - The Hungarian Communists, who had no money or interest in replacing the dilapidated border fortifications on the Austrian border and who already began dismantling the border obstacles to Austria in May 1989, triggering a mass exodus of GDR citizens.
- - This was only possible because in a lawsuit filed by the state of Bavaria against the Basic Treaty that I mentioned earlier, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that GDR citizens, according to the Basic Law, were German.

But all of this would never have led to the collapse of the GDR and the entire Eastern Bloc had there not been one more decisive factor: The irresistible attractiveness of freedom.

For us in the GDR, October 9, 1989 was the turning point: The day the peaceful Monday demonstration followed prayers for peace in the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig. After that the fear vanished. And a dictatorship cannot function without fear. Dictatorships cannot endure when people express their opinions freely.

The Peaceful Revolution of Autumn 1989 in East Germany was the only successful freedom revolution in German history. It was a revolution because power structures changed fundamentally. And it was, very much in Leninist terms, a revolutionary situation. The Arab Spring has shown that Lenin's definition still fits well today: A revolutionary situation exists when the people below no longer want what they should want, and when the people above can no longer do what they want to do. Whether the power structures in Egypt, where the military is still playing a decisive role, will also be fundamentally changed, remains to be seen.

Americans and their presidents have always recognized the importance of worldwide intervention on behalf of freedom and democracy. The Germans in the West and in particular the people in the East, can not thank them enough for this. I am convinced that in the future, freedom, be it freedom of speech, freedom of assembly or the freedom to travel, will not lose any of its appeal. But in the future, as the world becomes increasingly complex and confusing, it will require more courage to consistently hold this view.

Let us return to the image of the European House. There was a *crucial* difference for us Germans in the West and East. In the democratic state, people were able to decide for themselves in which room of the European House they wanted to live. In the other state they were kept behind locked doors and had no first-hand knowledge of the other rooms.

The post-1968 discussions about the horrific crimes committed by the Germans during the Third Reich and the industrial mass murder of six million European Jews led many to believe that Germany's division was the punishment for the war it had lost and above all, for Auschwitz.

But the East Germans had not voted or cheered for Hitler any more or less than the West Germans had done. So why did some Germans enjoy freedom and prosperity, while others were walled in and denied freedom? That was something we refused to accept, it was also something that could not be right – even in the face of these atrocities against mankind in history.

For many opposition activists, including my wife and myself, another consideration was of paramount importance, one that had to do both with the Nazi dictatorship from 1933-1945 as well as the post-1945 reluctance to confront this past fully in the way it deserved: One of the factors that fuelled the 1968 movement was the desire of the young to know what role their parents had played during the Third Reich. Many of the older generation who had lived through those years were reluctant to give an honest answer. Even people such as the West German Nobel Literature laureate Günter Grass, a prominent intellectual esteemed as the moral conscience of the nation, remained silent about their past. The Protestant Church issued public statements after the war admitting it too, had been guilty of supporting the inhuman Nazi regime.

That was why, in the years preceding 1989, my wife and I asked ourselves: What would we tell our children should they one day ask us what role we played during the years of communist dictatorship? For those who did not want to leave the country, or

who were able and willing to recognize the human rights violations that were also occurring in the GDR, there was only one honest answer: We must do something *against* this SED regime. That is the reason why I am considered a human rights activist today. Evidence of this is provided by the conflict we had with the state, but also with the Church because we published an unauthorized magazine, a so-called "Samisdatt-Blatt," in my hometown in the Lausitz on the Polish border.

As an East German I am quite aware of the ideological distortions of Nazi history that existed in the GDR and the non-recognition of the state of Israel. I also know a bit about the efforts made in the West to research the Nazi past and the gestures of reconciliation made toward Israel under Adenauer.

This is why it pains me all the more today when hostile arguments are openly expressed against Jews and Israel, not only by right-wing parties, but also specifically, in recent months by the parliamentary party and Bundestag faction "Die Linke" (The Left).

What most people do not know is that there is a left-wing tradition of antisemitism in Germany. This communist (and former SED state) party that now exists under a new name explicitly invokes its connection to the German Communists since 1919 and speaks quite openly of "Jewish capital" and "finance Jews." A terror attack on a Jewish community center was intentionally carried out on November 9, 1969, the anniversary of the so-called "Reichskristallnacht." The assassination of Jewish athletes during the Olympic Games in Munich in 1972 was expressly welcomed by Ulrike Meinhof. In 1976 German leftist terrorists "selected" Jewish passengers on the hijacked Air France plane in Entebbe, Uganda. Most recently, in May of this year, a public Palestine conference took place to which several Hamas representatives were invited: A member of the Bundestag from the Left Party (Inge Höger) spoke wearing a scarf around her neck that bore the outline of a map of the Middle East -- with the state of Israel missing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I do not know if you can imagine what kind of discussion would be sparked, if one of my fellow party members of the Christian Democrats expressed this kind of position. Or if the CDU formed a coalition government with a party that held these kinds of views. The Left Party was until recently coalition partner with the SPD in Berlin and still is in Brandenburg.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The experience resulting from the German reunification has led people to not only want to live in freedom and dignity, but also to live in prosperity and safety.

After the victorious western powers imposed democracy, it took almost twenty years for it to find acceptance among the majority of *West* Germans, despite the fact that the country underwent an immense economic boom from which almost everyone benefited.

There was no economic miracle in East Germany after 1990, but almost everyone's living standard, measured in absolute terms, improved there, too. The new freedom soon became a matter of course, but, joined by the global economy of the 1990s, it brought with it unemployment and financial fears that many had not known under the "mandated dictatorial conditions" in the GDR. Nevertheless, even after 1990, most East Germans continued to call for democracy. Democracy as a form of society, however, becomes less appealing when it is accompanied by complexities, or perhaps even chaos, as it occurred in Russia of that decade.

The final point from the list of historical lessons that I wish to offer has to do with the feeling of togetherness that the Germans share. The Peaceful Revolution of 1989 was not only liberal and democratic, it was also national. That is true, by the way, not only in Germany, but everywhere in eastern and central eastern Europe.

Societies function less as constitutional states than as cultural environments. The desire and ability of people to live together voluntarily has much to do with their shared history, traditions, customs and morals, with a common language, ethnic affiliation and religion as influential cultural factors.

The East Germans struggled not only for democracy by chanting: *We are the people!* They also struggled for the unification with the West by saying: *We are one people!*

But as early as the 1990s, it was already being discussed how, despite our common language and centuries of shared history, during the 40 years in which we had lived in two divided states, we had become strangers. Paradoxically, it was not until after unification that most East Germans felt something like a GDR identity.

Before, in the GDR, there was little to be proud of. Doped female swimmers were not appealing. Better was East Germany's "prettiest face of socialism," the figure skater Katherina Witt. But the GDR was really only able to gain recognition through sports in the developing countries. At home in the GDR, with soccer, people paid more attention to Beckenbauer and the others from the West German Bundesliga than to the East German soccer player Sparwasser.

The real life of people in the GDR was strongly influenced by what they saw and heard every evening on the West German TV channels, which nearly everyone could receive and of course understand. At no time was the GDR attractive to the majority of its citizens, or a state with which one wanted to identify.

This was something the strategists in the East German communist party – were well aware of. Unlike many democrats in the West, dictators have always clearly understood how important it is to give people a sense of belonging. Culture and tradition play a crucial role.

In 1983 the Martin Luther Year was widely commemorated with international participation. Luther, the great church reformer, was born in Eisleben, after all, and nailed his 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg, a city in East Germany. This was

an opportunity not to be missed – even if religion was rejected as something basically unscientific.

Prussia and the Potsdam heritage were tarnished due to their connection with militarism. Despite ideological correctness, however, the equestrian statue of Frederick the Great, was once again erected on Unter den Linden. In the late 1980s the GDR authorities even sought to integrate Otto von Bismarck, the architect and first Chancellor of the German Empire founded in 1871, into their socialist history of Germany.

There is a positive side to such activities, but it is important to remember that their intention was ideological and the Party did whatever served its own purposes.

When the East German astronaut Sigmund Jähn flew into outer space on a Soviet spacecraft in 1978, the party newspaper “Neues Deutschland” ran the headline – in huge bold type never seen before or since – “First *German* in outer space!” – and not “First *GDR citizen* in outer space”. Contrary to their own propaganda, the communists knew how important it was to appeal to national pride when one of their citizens really was the first German in space.

By contrast, the West German news reported that the first three medals went to GDR sportswomen, the best German took fifth place. Although not formally the case, in the minds of many West Germans, the citizens of the GDR had been expatriated long before 1989.

As society became increasingly individualistic in outlook, West Germans preferred to see themselves more as Europeans than as Germans. Ever since the 1968 movement, the West Germans more or less associated Germany with the evils of the Third Reich and the Nazi rule of terror. That was a past that could only be rejected; one on which no one would want to build.

Which is why there was little understanding or sympathy for the East Germans in their cars adorned with black-red-gold stickers who were suddenly celebrating their return to Germany. In the eyes of Westerners, it no longer existed. This changed however during the World Cup in Germany 2006 when black-red-gold flags were seen everywhere: A major step towards national identity.

The feeling of a shared German identity was much more widespread among East Germans than West Germans -- despite, or perhaps *because* of the very different constitutional situations and the propaganda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This brings me to the end of the first section. In the second part I would like to address more strongly the current situation.

When one's childhood comes to an end, things start to get easier for the people around us, but harder for oneself.

Today, Germany finds itself in a world that is no longer about black-red-gold flags and the mental state of East and West Germans!

Today, Germany is still a strong industrial and export nation. We came out of the most recent crisis of 2008 better and stronger than others. But in the current situation in which the world is constantly changing, many, especially Europeans, Americans and Russians, are asking us what *political* role and responsibility Germany is willing to take on.

Our first task in Germany is to realize this, to recognize this and *to take on* the challenge.

As mentioned, the discussions in Germany are in many ways influenced by the crimes against humanity that were committed during the Nazi rule of terror. The positive image of Germany *abroad* is diametrically opposed to this negative image at home *in* Germany.

In March of this year, Germany, for the fourth year in a row, was ranked most popular country by a survey of the BBC(!).¹ Every other country in the world would have rejoiced at this and felt proud given the tremendous friendliness that others felt towards it. But in Germany, the survey caused many intellectuals, scholars and journalists to feel perturbed. It was hardly reported or discussed. Like in 1990, when we won not only unity but also the World Cup, the same rule applied: Be sure to avoid celebrations of national pride.

Germans, particularly in publicly voiced opinions, are more reluctant to say something positive about themselves than others are.

But here also things are changing. On the one hand Germany, especially the younger generation, has become more self-confident. On the other hand, however, every form of participation or non-participation in an international conflict means that enemies are made – which was not the case in the past when we meant everything but nothing with the word peace.

Perhaps that is why a certain uneasiness resonates regarding the greater responsibility ascribed to Germany. Each year the BBC researchers pose the same

¹ http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_3A79D14FEB70FC92D689E00AE5D90093/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2011/110310_BBC_Country_Rating_Poll.html?nn=567734, Pressemitteilung des AA vom 10.03.2011: Die "BBC Country Rating Poll" wird seit 2005 jährlich von der BBC durchgeführt. Seit 2008 ist Deutschland in die Umfrage einbezogen worden. Auf die Frage: "Hat das folgende Land einen insgesamt positiven oder negativen Einfluss in der Welt?" antworteten 2011 62% der Befragten in 27 Ländern in Bezug auf Deutschland positiv, 15% erklärten sich negativ. Die höchsten Werte wurden in Italien (89%), Frankreich (84%) und Südkorea (82%) gemessen. Am unteren Ende steht die Zustimmung in Pakistan (32%) und Indien (37%), wenngleich sich auch in diesen Staaten die Zustimmungsraten im Vergleich zum Vorjahr deutlich erhöht hat. Insgesamt äußerten sich in allen befragten Staaten jeweils mehr Befragte positiv als negativ über den Einfluss Deutschlands in der Welt.

question: "In general, is the following country's influence in the world positive or negative?"

I do not wish to spend time here discussing whether the results of the survey are justified or not. It is not about *real* influence, it is about *assumptions*, specifically about Germany's international image. But in a world driven by PR, "image" is not unimportant. Add to that: Germany is a wealthy country, economically strong, not too small and not too big, and it has produced a number of geniuses in its history, a subject about which a Brit, not a German, dared to write last year: Peter Watson, *The German Genius*.²

Before I assumed my position as Human Rights Commissioner, I was always aware that Germany was regarded differently abroad. But *in* that position, I did experience it personally. The official German foreign policy strategy, to dampen and relativize expectations for Germany as a consequence of our history, is only effective to a certain degree. It is hard for many people to believe that we do not want to have any influence or that we are no longer able to act as an important country. Those outside of Germany also do not understand when we carry out internal and in part petty debates about these issues.

And it is true: It is not possible to draw simple linear extrapolations from history to determine for a country what it is allowed to do, what it must do or what it must not do in the future. Even the terrible crimes of the Germans, for which we, as Germans, will always bear responsibility, do not negate our freedom to make decisions. They no longer provide us with a justification for refraining from getting involved. Freedom and responsibility belong together. Without the freedom to decide, it is not possible to confidently take on responsibility. This is particularly true at the moment when one comes of age!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us re-assert: Germany is allowed to say yes or no, or perhaps even to abstain.

But we have to explain why we conduct ourselves in the way we do.

The decision-making patterns of the former Federal Republic are *not* superfluous – this means coming to terms with the past and Germany's division, the Transatlantic Alliance, NATO, integration into Europe, Israel's right to exist, and finally, standing up for universal human rights –.

I am certain, ten years after 9/11 and such extreme acts of terror, that the German chancellor would again offer her "unqualified solidarity" to the United States.

² Peter Watson: *Der deutsche Genius, Eine Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte von Bach bis Benedikt XVI*, Gütersloh 2010.

In my view, the old decision-making patterns continue to be influential. It is *essential* that they be kept in mind, but that alone is *not enough*. In mathematical term: It is necessary not sufficient.

Those who participate bear responsibility for their participation. Those who partake in decision-making also bear the full responsibility for the content and for the consequences for everything that goes well or could end disastrously.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The issues that we are currently dealing with are well known:

- What will Europe become and how can the Euro be saved given the immense national debt in the Euro Zone?
- Where and how will Germany participate in military operations? As part of a NATO mission and only with a UN mandate (for example in Afghanistan) or also without a mandate (for example in Serbia)? Do good intentions count or only a victory, even when it is achieved by acting beyond the mandate (for example in Libya)?
- Should Germany, given its special history, play a role in the Middle East conflict, and if so, which one?
- What will become of Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran?
- How much money must Germany pay, despite its own budget cuts, for disasters such as the drought in the Horn of Africa, when only part of the aid gets there and much could have been prevented from the start.
- How much should Germany get involved in the international struggle against pirates, drugs and human trafficking?
- How many and which weapons should Germany be allowed to provide to which countries, to enable them to take on responsibility for themselves (for example in Angola)?

It is my impression that Germany cannot get around facing these debates and the issues they encompass. Germany, with our partners, and even our historical institutes abroad, must more carefully weigh the pros and cons of the arguments. And not only in consideration of German history, but on the basis of its own value system and its own interests.

We avoided doing this in Germany in the past. We have only just begun to learn how. Pointing out taboos - as a consequence of history or those based on the German lack of sovereignty during the period of division or those based on German problems that emerged as the East and West grew together after reunification - are simply not effective anymore.

Technically we have grown up and we should start behaving like adults. Others should understand that.

The most difficult task in my view, however, is explaining this to the Germans themselves and getting the German population to come along. Even when politics has grown up, that does not mean that it communicates or wants to communicate honestly

and openly with the people. That is no different in Germany than it is in the U.S., especially before elections.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although current reporting on Germany leaves a different impression, we have made quite a bit of progress on the path to adulthood. Still, many have yet to recognize a clear goal. But I do not think that is so difficult.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With this I arrive at the third part of my lecture. I would like to sketch out the direction that Germany should move in order to confront the major challenges it faces in an adequate, historically-aware and openly pragmatic manner. It is an attempt to do justice to worldwide responsibility, fully aware of the excessive demands that this entails and how rarely this is achieved in a satisfactory manner.

The lessons we have learned from our history provide a good compass for these challenges and go beyond simple alliances of solidarity and peace obligations.

I will summarize some of them here:

1. Tyranny, dictatorship and terrible crimes against humanity, -- they can be overcome with help from the outside and by completely facing up to the responsibility oneself. Hard work and the determination to rebuild a country were not any less important.
2. Permanent stability can only grow from below. People have to back their government rather than being stabbed in the back by the government. Changes often take a painfully long time – and then they happen suddenly and unexpectedly.
3. There is no real justification, in the sense of a higher purpose, for the violation of basic human rights. Not only right-wing racist ideology, but also left-wing class ideology has cost many lives.
4. People have an interest in freedom and especially in attaining a good and safe life. When democracy endangers domestic security, instead of guaranteeing it, other ways of living together become attractive.
5. There are groups of people that feel they belong together and others where this is less the case, even in Europe.
6. Culture, formed by a shared history, morals and customs, religion, ethnic affiliation and language always play a crucial role.
7. Norms and constitutions are “derived quantities” and often have little to do with the everyday lives of people. But they are essential for organizing the transition to democracy; they often open up or block important options.

These statements give rise to very practical considerations.

Here are three examples:

War is always the negation of universal human rights. Therefore it is always worth thinking it over yet once again, whether Germany becomes involved. A French president may thrive as commander-in-chief, an American government is allowed to change its mind overnight. But a grown-up Germany has to find its own justification for participating or not. Universal human rights and the refusal to tolerate civilian war victims, or even the flawed and inadequate Libya Resolution No. 1973 in the UN Security Council provide these kinds of legitimate justifications. Domestic policy considerations before a federal state election do not.

In the concrete case of Libya, the majority of the German press did not challenge the question of military intervention. It was regarded as necessary to prevent an even greater ill. And that was an equally serious consideration. We are relieved that it seems to have turned out well.

I share the Chancellor's view: Germany would have had to participate in the mission if we had voted for it. In that case the German press would have reported very differently. Exceeding the mandate would have already been discussed and probably rejected. The resolution did not cover attempted assassination of a tyrant to protect the civilian population.

These kinds of resolutions will also not be passed in the future with Russia and China. Does this mean we are stuck with majorities and vetoes in the Security Council? Does the right to override a UN mandate exist when done for a good cause or to achieve "victory"? We still do not know how many victims there were in Libya after the UN Resolution in March.

The Europeans speak out for the elimination of the death penalty throughout the world, not only in China, but also in the U.S. How can we credibly explain to civilian victims of European military operations why they are less important to us than convicted criminals and murderers according to the law?

Arguing about that would have been worthwhile. We have to learn how to conduct debates on such issues: properly, differentiated and without taboos. Instead almost the entire media criticized Germany for going it alone.

If others do not cooperate, it will be harder to grow up. Especially when the communication between politics and the population is further disturbed by too much ideology and ignorance, also among ordinary journalists and the usual talk-show guests.

Or we can take the example of the Arab Spring. Of course a country like Germany has to meet and negotiate with dictators, too. But it would be better if we make clear to these dictators that if the people demonstrate peacefully for freedom and democracy and demand the end of a dictatorial regime, then we are behind the people and not them.

In the short-term, that may be directed *against* our security and economic interests, but in the mid and long-term, German interests and values converge. Yes, German

special interest policy wants the island of freedom and prosperity to get bigger, because it would provide the German economy with new and legally secure export markets. Instead of having tanks exported to Saudi Arabia, the Arab Spring should sicker through to that country, too.

Angela Merkel, a major supporter of Israel who has often been criticized for this in Europe, refused Netanyahu, the Israeli head of state, when he -- concerned about the security of the state of Israel -- asked Germany to support, not overturn, the government of the Egyptian president Mubarek. With her own GDR experience in mind, she felt herself *more* obligated to a value-based foreign policy than to the avoidance of what may become a greater security problem for Israel.

She also knows that it is easier to give her support to peaceful demonstrators on Tahrir Square in Cairo than to Libya's *armed* rebels, a few of whom only recently supported the Gaddafi regime in high-level positions. Unlike on the Champs-Élysées, Gaddafi could not put up a tent in Berlin.

A third example in Europe: Naturally the Euro had birth defects. After reunification in 1990, the Germans did not want a European political union. But the single currency was a political project. Some were thinking of the export economy, others were thinking of integrating Germany as the largest and strongest country in the EU.

What can a German federal government do today? To give up on Europe and the single currency would be a major step backwards, and not without its price for Germany. The German population's rejection of a "transfer union" is understandable since it suggests that German will pay for others. The fact is that in the last fifteen years, the real income in Ireland and Greece has risen enormously, whereas in Germany it has barely increased at all. But the German government needs the support of a democratic majority to be permanently stable.

A more honest argument might help to make clear what advantages Germany would have *if* it paid. For those who pay can have a say.

In the last few months I have often heard my American colleagues say that Germany should take on a leadership role in Europe. But at the same time the East Coast newspapers warn of a "German Europe," fuelling new resentments against Germany. Perhaps you recall: Thomas Mann called for a "European Germany" and was against a "German Europe". The contradiction can not be easily resolved, or yes, it can be?

In general it is good when others, especially our friends, who *want* to know and understand us, observe and criticize us when we are mistaken.

I think it is highly unlikely that Germany would ever again endorse a war of conquest and racism. But as the example of the Left Party shows, when hostility to Israel and antisemitism are involved, we must not look only to the right. And moreover, we have to conduct these kinds of debates and not cut them off.

However I find the suggestion from America, that Germany should export less and from France, that we should work more slowly, do not lead us to our objectives. Did not an American president once say something like: You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong?

Germany would be better off maintaining its economic strength as one of the few industrial nations in Europe and using this strength positively so that no one in the European Union has reason to fear it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To explain further I like to use an image from the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.³ In it the United Nations and world peace rest on three pillars: security, development and human rights. What I find important in this image is that each of the three legs is necessary for the table to stand. And it is also important conceptually and with regard to content that these three thematic areas be treated separately. In place of development, one could also say economy or economic cooperation, but developmental aid is not meant.

In light of “western” history, one could put it this way: Human development (free of affliction and poverty) and human security (free of fear and violence) are only possible when human rights are implemented worldwide.

Formally, this view of the importance of human rights is shared by all members of the United Nations. But in content and in practice, this is unfortunately not the case.

I am truly convinced: Standing up for the protection of universal human rights is worthwhile. But we are referring here to *basic* human rights. In my opinion, given the vast diversity of cultures, *a human right*, in its truest sense, can only be what applies to all people everywhere in the world. Otherwise the inalienable right granted to everyone at birth would not exist. Human rights are either universal or they are not at all. (Udo Di Fabio)

This very reduced, but all the more earnest understanding of human rights is what makes the third pillar in Kofi Annan’s metaphor so strong. If it was about the good life, and not about dignity, it would belong more appropriately to the economic pillar. If you want to live well, you have to work hard, instead of pointing out legal clauses. Unfortunately, western politics, especially European politics, has gone completely in the wrong direction here. In typical UN jargon, regarding development work, we commonly speak of the “human rights based approach,” suggesting that we, the western donor countries, are responsible for realizing the much too long catalog of supposed human rights in the UN Conventions, which include paid vacation and trade-union lunch breaks.

³ Kofi Annan: “Accordingly, we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.” Report: In larger Freedom, Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All, 2005, Para 17.

A look at the world, how it is and how it will likely develop in the next twenty years, leads us to expect more complexity -- some people speak of a new Middle Ages. It is not only states and their governments that are emerging as political actors, but also global enterprises and banks, NGOs, individuals, and even rebel groups and terrorist leaders. Nevertheless, I still find the image of the three pillars useful. The pillar of security, which requires a strong military, will continue to be led by the United States. The pillar of economic development will increasingly be dominated by China, which is the largest export nation today and soon to be the largest national economy.

I do not wish to go further into detail here about the implications of that. Is it necessary, in regard to security, to adhere at all times to every period and comma of international law? (Look, for example, at the action taken by the United States against Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan.) Or can we rest assured that China will always act according to the rules of the WTO (consider intellectual property)?

In my opinion it always has to do with politics. And whoever has the power, can act against the legal clauses to hopefully achieve something good. But that must never be the rule. On the one hand, the rule of law is essential in international relations, too. On the other hand, legalism can become an ideology. In the Europe debate in Germany, we currently witness how the opposition in the German Bundestag and many in the EU continually demand that Germany *not* adhere to the Lisbon Treaty.

The image of the three pillars leaves one question open: Who is looking after the stability of the human rights pillar?

Ladies and gentlemen,

If you look around the world, I believe you will find no other answer than Old Europe. European special interest policy should foremost and substantially always be human rights policy. One's own history plays as much a role in this as the interest in being an honest and reliable partner, mediator or advocate. Whoever is serious about achieving a peaceful world, in which people can live together in dignity, should know that Europe is with them.

How would it be if Germany adopted this vision of Europe as its own?

It is not necessary to convince all the other 26 EU states, the majority would now probably see it exactly like this, too. But someone has to stand at the top and really *want* to implement it! Someone able to take the criticism, who has the courage to criticize others and demand an honest debate in Europe. And someone willing to pay for it, so that everyone sees how serious one is about it.

Why should Germany not take on this role in Europe? Would a Europe under this kind of German leadership truly be something to fear?

Of course this is a vision. But sometimes this is exactly what we are doing.

Perhaps this vision would be more controversial within Germany than abroad if we would discuss it *explicitly*. Remember that BBC survey. But Europe, all the member-states of the EU, including the Federal Republic of Germany, could build up their influence in a less threatening way and gain new partners in the area of security, in export markets and in securing raw materials.

Of course, everyone should be aware of just how idealistic and at the same time thankless this role can be. And the Germans and the Europeans must not look with contempt on the U.S. when they take care of things that the Europeans could not agree on, or China when they battle against poverty and rescue people from famine, in a manner that we do not approve of.

Kofi Annan's image with the pillars implies that no one bears the weight of all three pillars alone. It also means no one bears responsibility for human rights alone either.

I am convinced that, in the future, complementary forms will develop in regard to security, economy and human rights. These complementary forms will consist of more than merely "as-well-as" or "either-or" solutions. But what they will be depend essentially on who the actors are. As Shakespeare wrote: "All the world is a stage but we are but its players." There is no end to the story.

Thank you for your attention.