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Transatlantic Cooperation after the US Election

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Dear guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be with you in today.

I was asked to speak to you about German and European relations to the United States of America, especially in view of the upcoming US presidential and congressional elections on November 4.

1. US elections and European public opinion

The electoral process in the United States has generated an **enormous interest in Europe**, and I might say: particularly in Germany. News about the candidates, their profiles and ideas are top news on German TV, in the papers and the online Media every single day. Sometimes you might think that Germans will be asked to vote for the American president! If that were the case, a large **majority of Germans** – just like most of their European peers – **would opt for Barack Obama**. In opinion polls, about 80 percent of Germans say they would prefer him to be the next American president. This may be due to the unpopularity of the current Bush-Administration and the aftermath of the Iraq war, but also to the intellectual, fresh and multicultural image of the candidate himself.

On July 24th, **Obama held a public speech in Berlin**, which drew a crowd of about 200.000 mostly younger spectators and raised eyebrows in the Republican campaign. The Senator from Illinois seems to be a person that Europeans can relate to. He transports a positive image

of the United States and inspires hopes for a reinvigorated transatlantic relationship. Many of these hopes seem exaggerated to me. Just like John McCain, Barack **Obama would first and foremost defend American interests** and might have to take tough choices that Europeans would not necessarily like. **John McCain** has a long record of interest in European affairs and has been a guest to the annual Munich Conference on Security Policy for a number of years. He is well known by European governments and in the foreign policy and defense community. The European public, however, regards him critically, not least because of his rhetoric on issues like the Iraq war, the Iranian nuclear program and relations with Russia.

The **German government takes a neutral position** and could work together well with either John McCain or Barack Obama as president. This is strongly in our interest because the United States remains our **most important partner outside the European Union**. We know that Europe barely plays a role in this year's elections. The debate seems to be mostly about economic issues. Even on the foreign policy agenda, Europe is not very high up because luckily we are not anymore the center of global conflicts. Yet, both presidential candidates have vowed to engage their European partners more extensively and to take multilateral institutions more seriously than the Bush-Administration did in the past. As a result, many Europeans are hopeful that the coming elections will result in a fundamental reorientation of American foreign policy. I believe that we should scale down our expectations. Later, I will come back to this point.

Before we explore what Europeans and Americans can expect from each other after the new US-Administration takes power, let me first recount how the **transatlantic relations have changed over the last decades**.

2. Germany in the eye of the storm: Transatlantic relations in the 20th century

During the 20th century, **German-American relations were part of a larger geopolitical process**, in which Germany **first triggered two global conflicts** with Germany and the United States on opposite sides. In the second half of the 20th century, Germany was part of the power equation of the **Cold War**, with a Western part staunchly allied to the United States and an Eastern part under the control of the Soviet Union. The US guaranteed the freedom and security of West Germany and West Berlin. Therefore, the second half of the 20th century was clearly defined as a quintessentially European-American or **transatlantic century**. Just last year and this year we celebrated the remembrance of two important historical events of

this transatlantic era: the fifty years' anniversaries of the **Marshall Plan and of the Berlin Air Lift**. Both were crucial in forging the transatlantic alliance and in laying the foundation for a free and prosperous Western Europe, while Central Europeans had to wait another 40 years, before they could join the transatlantic community.

After the **Fall of the Berlin Wall** in 1989, the United States under President George H. W. Bush strongly supported the **unification of Germany**, even more so than some of our European allies did at the time. We owe the United States our gratitude for this support as well as for the fight against Nazism and the protection against the Soviet threat during the previous decades.

The watershed of 1989 once again fundamentally changed the political parameters in Europe and in our transatlantic partnership. The **centuries-old German question** has been resolved by united Germany's integration into a stable and peaceful European order, particularly its membership in the EU and in NATO. It is an order in which Germany's borders are recognized by all its neighbors and Germany likewise also recognizes the borders of all its neighbors. Germany enjoys very good relations with its European partners and with the US and – what many Americans are not aware of – with Israel. While complicated, also our relations with Russia are largely constructive, even after the recent crisis in Georgia. Germany is now surrounded exclusively by friends and allies, the most comfortable geostrategic situation the country has had in centuries.

3. Germany as a provider of security

Neither Americans nor our European neighbors see Germany any longer as a source and cause of crisis but as a **contributor to international peace and stability**. Now, this is important: Germany, which was first a source of global conflicts, then in the eye of the storm of a global conflict for fifty years, is now asked to help stabilize conflict situations far beyond its borders: in the Balkans, before the shores of Lebanon, in Afghanistan, Georgia and Sudan, to name only the most important ones.

After **September 11, 2001**, people on the European side of the Atlantic identified both emotionally and politically with the Americans and overwhelmingly showed their support and solidarity. Europeans understood that the Western “system” as such was the target of the attack and that new bloody attacks could be carried out in their own countries at any time.

Therefore, European nations have participated for years in **OEF and ISAF missions** to fight international terrorism and bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. On the other hand, European-American disagreements over the **Iraq war** reminded us, that sometimes opinions differ even between the closest allies and that strong and **stable transatlantic relations cannot be taken for granted any more.**

This is also due to the fact that **attention in America has shifted away from the Euro-Atlantic space** to the new key areas for international conflicts in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. For many Americans, particularly along the West Coast, the Pacific Rim area seems more important now than Europe. In parallel, the face of America is changing. Immigration patterns have led to growing Latin American and Asian constituencies in the United States. For Americans of Asian, Latin American, Caribbean and African decent, European matters are simply not as close and vital anymore as they used to be for the descendents of German, Irish, Polish, Italian, Russian and other European immigrants of the past.

This means for Germany that its **main relevance for America** today depends on its willingness and ability to help **resolve problems in crisis regions** on the fringes of Europe or far beyond. Other problems like climate change, international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are **global** in scale. They, too, can neither be solved by America nor by Europe alone. Close transatlantic cooperation on this issues is a necessary precondition for viable solutions. **Rising powers** such as China, India, Brazil and Russia need to be closely engaged on these topics. The initiative for creative solutions, however, will for quite some time mainly have to be taken by the transatlantic partners. Europe and America therefore need to reestablish their partnership on new foundations.

The **new role of Germany** in international politics has a deep impact on German policymakers as well as on the political thinking of the German population. The **political culture** of a country does not change over night. Citizens ask their members of parliament why we send troops abroad while we have enough problems to deal with in our own country. Since nobody wanted German troops abroad after the Nazi catastrophe and World War II, over time Germans have become **averse to the use of military force**. For years, the German parliament has supported **foreign missions of our troops** across party lines (with the exception of the populist Left Party). But this was always against the will of the majority of the people. Therefore, parliamentarians run a risk voting in favor of such missions. For

Germans, other than Americans, the British or the French, the new international security challenges demand a fundamental change in political thinking and acting.

Yet, I am convinced that Germans will increasingly learn to think in larger perspectives and to realize that **global threats also necessitate global responses**. The former German Defense Minister Struck coined the phrase that “the security of Germany is also defended in the Hindukush mountains”. But we also must be aware that we **can only act selectively**, where our security is really at stake. Since we have limited capacities, we must analyze where we are capable and willing to act and where we are not. When possible, we prefer to use **civilian means** to stabilize crisis areas. Cases in point are the European mission to safeguard the rule of law in Kosovo, the monitoring mission to Georgia, and the police training and development aid in Afghanistan. If necessary, we will continue to use also military means. Often, both are necessary, as it is the case in **Afghanistan**, where there will be **no state building and development without security**. Robert Kagan once quipped that Americans live on Mars and Europeans live on Venus. I would rather say, the future of international politics is not about soft power and hard power. It is about **smart power**. We must decide carefully and responsibly, which means to employ where to safeguard our interests and effect the most peaceful and prosperous outcome possible.

4. Europe – the indispensable partner of the United States

My feeling is that in the wake of the Iraq war, Germany and other European countries will defend their foreign policy positions with more **self-confidence** than in the past. European governments and parliaments will continue to strive to achieve the greatest possible degree of common ground with the US. But they will also develop their own ideas and not simply follow suit to decisions taken in Washington. This does not mean that Europe is developing into a **rival pole**. This would not be in the European and even less so in the German interest. Yet, just as the United States remains “the indispensable nation” in the words of Madeleine Albright, Europe wants to shape itself into an **indispensable partner** – a partner that has a say in how things should be done.

For instance, we can observe this trend in the reaction to the recent **conflict between Russia and Georgia**. While the EU joined the US in condemning the Russian incursion into Georgian territory, it has resisted calls for sanctions against Russia and refrained from bellicose language. Instead, the French EU presidency brokered a **six-point agreement**

between the conflict partners and is now putting together a mission, which will help stabilize the situation by monitoring Russian troop withdrawal from Georgia proper and the return of refugees. The mission includes monitors from 24 European countries, including up to 40 Germans. This **initiative is a genuinely European** one, and it also enjoys the support of the US government. I hope will we see more of this new-found European self-confidence and responsible crisis management in the future, particularly when we deal with conflicts inside and on the fringes of Europe. That would be in the interest of both: Europe and the United States.

Having these developments of the transatlantic relations over the last decades in mind, **what can Europeans and Americans expect from each other after the new US administration takes office in 2009?**

5. **Foreign policy after Bush – continuities and discontinuities**

In terms of their foreign policy objectives, the **differences between the candidates** to the US presidency are **not as pronounced as many Europeans assume**. Despite public commitments to multilateral cooperation, no US Administration will place the same value on **multilateralism** as does a country like Germany. The German Basic Law in its Article 25 stipulates that **international law** is part of the German legal system and supersedes national laws. US Congress, in particular, will never recognize international law as an authority which in any way supersedes national law. That would contradict not only US constitutional tradition, but also the United States' political culture and status as world power. Neither McCain nor Obama will rule out the **use of military power**, unilaterally if deemed necessary, when it comes to defending important American security interests. Even with regard to the **Iraq war**, the candidates have now moved closer together. McCain, who was a strong supporter of the war and the troop surge from the beginning, now expects that US troops can be withdrawn from Iraq until 2013. Obama, who opposed the war from the start and advocated a quick removal of American troops now wants to withdraw only combat troops within 16 months and leave smaller units behind to protect service personnel and train the Iraqi Army. **Europeans may therefore become disappointed** once they understand these facts and realize that whoever becomes US president does not represent European, but American interests.

Russia is another potential source of controversy between the United States and Europe. Even before the recent conflict between Russia and Georgia, there has been widespread disillusion in Congress and in the Administration concerning domestic developments in Russia and the country's new flexing of muscle on the foreign stage. In an article published in the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, John McCain wrote: "We need a unified Western approach to a revanchist Russia whose leaders seem more determined to chart an old course of conflict." In addition, he said that the G8 should "become again a club of leading market democracies". He calls for the acceptance of India and Brazil into the group, while at the same time calling for Russia to be excluded from the organization and for China to be kept out. He also argues in favor of the creation of a new international organization called *Alliance of Democracies*, which would bind together the world's democratically governed countries, so they can more effectively cooperate in resolving international security problems, especially when the United Nations is prevented from acting by its difficult decision-making processes. This concept, which is also endorsed by some informal advisors to the Obama campaign, once again, would expressly **leave out Russia and China**.

If the concept of an Alliance of Democracies become government under the new Administration, it would seriously **challenge two major global powers** and would be a departure from Washington's previous policy of integrating Beijing and Moscow into the international order as much as possible. In light of the economic ties and political cooperation between Europe and Russia and the rising importance of China, such a policy of exclusion would be frankly unacceptable from a German standpoint. The EU and Russia are direct neighbors and rely on each other on many levels – not only in the gas trade, as it is often portrayed in simplified form. If anything, Russia depends as much on Europe as a market and a source of technology as Europe on Russian gas. Russia, like China, is also a key player in important areas such as disarmament, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the stabilization of conflict zones. Therefore, it remains German policy across party lines to strive for rational and cooperative relations with Russia as well as with China, as difficult as this may sometimes appear given the authoritarian nature of their governments and their behavior in international affairs.

Relations with **Iran** will also continue to be an important topic on the transatlantic agenda. In Congress, both Republicans and Democrats are rightly very critical of Iran, its nuclear program and its unacceptable stance on Israel. Representatives of both parties therefore call for the Administration to put more pressure on Iran, for example by tightening the "Iran Sanctions Act", by imposing **sanctions against foreign firms doing business with Iran**, by

way of other sanctions against Iran and a variety of other measures. Despite the fact that Germany has significantly scaled back its formerly close economic ties with Iran, Europeans should not be surprised if the new Administration in the White House, with the support of Congress, will quickly call for us to exert further economic and political pressure on Iran. Even the **military option** remains on the table for both presidential candidates, although Obama has repeatedly stated that he would in principle be willing to engage the Iranian leadership in talks about their nuclear program and other issues.

Numerous other pressing **international problems and regional crises** will remain on the transatlantic agenda under a new Administration: from the joint fight against terrorism to the quest for peace in the Middle East, from geopolitical and economic challenges tied to emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil to the continuing conflicts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Africa and Asia. Both the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates have declared their willingness to involve their allies more extensively in the resolution of such conflicts.

At the same time, they will insist on a more **even-handed sharing of the associated burdens**, and will undoubtedly confront Germany and other European states with new demands to take on additional military and civilian responsibilities in conflict regions. Regarding Afghanistan in particular, there is sure to be increased American pressure on Germany and the EU to contribute more to joint security operations. We can also expect the new US Administration to solicit additional contributions from its allies for the civilian stabilization of Iraq. In light of the considerable skepticism among the German public toward Bundeswehr missions abroad, this will pose a great challenge to the Federal Government and the Bundestag, particularly as we approach **federal elections in Germany** in the fall of 2009.

6. Areas for enhanced transatlantic partnership

Nevertheless, Europe and the United States can achieve closer cooperation in many other, less controversial areas. For instance, the transatlantic **economic partnership**, which provides millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic, represents a great opportunity, especially in times of global economic downturn and turbulence on the financial markets. It will be vital for the transatlantic partners to work together to contain the truly global repercussions of the **banking, credit and real estate crisis**, which threatens economies around the world. Also, the EU and the US should further strengthen their cooperation within the **Transatlantic**

Economic Council. For the sake of the larger benefit, they should resolve their differences concerning details – for example the EU's import ban on chlorine-treated poultry or the US project for “100 % container scanning” – as quickly as possible.

I hope that we can also strengthen our cooperation in a number of **traditionally domestic policy areas**. I am thinking of topics like affordable education and health care for families; dealing with economic structural change; the loss of industrial jobs; the depletion of the purchasing power of the middle class; dumping wages and poverty in the middle of our affluent societies. Americans and Europeans are more or less in the same boat here and should learn from each other how best to cope with these problems. Particularly, they should refrain from protectionism and the mutual closing off of their markets. Otherwise they would only hurt each other and miss important opportunities for growth.

Another topic of great significance to the future of our societies is the issue of **climate protection**, which is closely related to **energy security**. While the EU has set ambitious goals for the reduction of greenhouse gasses, the Bush-Administration was reluctant to make a commitment, particularly in the beginning. It rejected imposing binding limits on CO₂ emissions as long as emerging economies like China and India, which are responsible for an increasing share of emissions, are not also required to comply. In the meantime, however, there is movement in the debate, even in the United States. A number of states, including California and Florida, have passed their own laws limiting greenhouse gasses and promoting renewable energy. Recently, both East Coast and West Coast States launched regional plans for emissions reduction. McCain and Obama have both spoken out in favor of climate protection measures and an international emissions cap-and-trade system. On this topic there seems to me a very **fertile ground for cooperation between the US and Europe following the elections** in November. German Foreign Minister Steinmeier is very engaged in this endeavor and has repeatedly consulted with Congress leaders and State governors to start a new transatlantic initiative on climate protection and energy security.

7. To sum it up:

In all these areas, the necessary **precondition for solving existing problems remains the transatlantic partnership**. While an increasingly globalized and interconnected world requires the integration of many other partners, without close cooperation between America and Europe there will be no progress in tackling the pressing problems of our time. For Euro-

peans, the US remains the most important partner, and American politicians also realize that in no region in the world are there more common interests and values with the United States than in Europe. The upcoming presidential and congressional elections represent a prime opportunity to lend this partnership new momentum. Differences in opinion and foreign policy approaches between Europe and the US will certainly remain. Americans and Europeans, however, should learn to take these differences in their stride and translate apparent contradictions into common, constructive solutions.

Thank you.