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*Germany/Europe and the USA: Reconfiguring Relations*

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Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you today.

The US had a special role and deserves our eternal gratitude as one of the leading nations in the fight against Nazism and as a champion of Western Europe's freedom and democracy. Due to the fact that, on the one hand, the US was the dominant political power in the international arena and, on the other, Europe was basically the theatre of the Cold War global conflict, one can say that the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was clearly defined as a quintessentially European-American or transatlantic century. The Atlantic Ocean served as the connecting point of reference between the US and Europe. Divided Germany – located in the eye of the storm of the Cold War – and the Berlin Wall – the brutal and bitter incarnation of division – both helped to crystallize the idea of freedom. As a symbol of freedom, Berlin glued the West together and prompted not only leaders but also ordinary people to stand up for freedom.

In the 1930s and 40s when Nazi Germany tried to gain world dominance, German and European politicians, philosophers, writers, and scientists found refuge, among other places, in the United States. Some of them went back to Europe during World War II to fight Nazism. After the war, some of them helped to prevent the US administration from adopting the Morgenthau Plan which aimed at reducing Germany to a country of cattle growers and peasants. Some of the former refugees helped to establish a free press and other prerequisites for democratic renewal in Germany. Some of them like philosopher Theodor W. Adorno even went back to reintroduce the old cultural and philosophical traditions to post-war Europe. Some went back to Europe of their own free will, for instance Nobel Prize winning novelist Thomas Mann, and retained fond memories of their time in the US. Others, such as Bertold Brecht, felt pushed out of the US by growing resentment against socialist and communist political ideas and thus looked back to their American years in anger.

This shows how close German-American ties were even during and especially after World War II. At any rate, it is fair to say that in many ways America served as Europe's cultural repository: some of the best and brightest were able to survive in the US and bring their talents and inspiration back to Europe.

Germany and the German heritage in America have always been a special and important point of reference for Americans. This is true for the past through Bach and Beethoven or the builders of steel empires like Carnegie or steel bridges like Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius who contributed to the skyline of modern US cities. Even today, Germany is a reference point in the US as some types of modern music like hip hop have been influenced by German youngsters and fashion victims flock to Berlin to attend the very avant-garde "Bread and Butter" fashion week.

In recent times, I have often been asked to what extent our relations have changed. Let me share some ideas on that with you.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the peaceful reunification of Germany were not only the culminating point of a longer development in which the decline of the Warsaw Pact became apparent. 1989 and 1990 were also the beginning of an era of change that ultimately led to a revision of the American-European epoch.

A new generation of politicians has taken the helm in Berlin, a generation that has been shaped by vastly different forces from those that molded the post-war generation. The new generation started their political career shortly before or after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Some 15 years have passed, that is to say half a generation, since the night the first East Germans poured into West Berlin. Or to put it more clearly: the kids that were born that night will soon be learning to drive and in a short while they will be the ones in the political driver's seat who decide the future of our two nations and of transatlantic relations in general. We need to pass on the transatlantic legacy and make sure that they are aware of our historic ties. I see it as my role to discuss not only the positive but also the critical aspects of our relationship, more precisely what binds us together and what could cause us to drift apart. Although common values is a favorite topic in talk shows, we must not forget that from the beginning of its immigration history the US has defined itself as a counterweight to Europe. The balance between mutual admiration and concurrent aversion on some points, that is to say the desire for closeness while, at the same time, maintaining a measure of intellectual detachment, best captures the contradiction of the close, unique yet ambivalent nature of transatlantic relations.

The reason why we Europeans regard the Americans as not only similar but also different is largely due to the fact that the US has developed its own school of thought and intellectual tradition. Of course, this is inconsistent with the cheap but, unfortunately, widespread belief that the US is a country without any culture. American pluralism and diversity, dynamism and creativity have always been admired in Europe, as have the scope of personal freedom and fundamental rights.

If there is one lesson we learned following September 11, 2001, then it is that we cannot simply take good and stable transatlantic relations for granted. This has to do with changes in the geopolitical situation, as well as cultural differences which are not immediately apparent but which do indeed have an impact on relations at a subconscious level.

On September 11, 2001 the entire Western world felt closer to the US than ever before. The attacks in New York and Washington were regarded as attacks against Western civilization as a whole. People on this side of the Atlantic identified both emotionally and politically with

the Americans, particularly in the light of the knowledge that bloody new attacks could be carried out in their own countries at any time.

There are many reasons why Europe showed solidarity with the US. First of all, we have long-standing ties. We Europeans have no closer links than those with North America. We have common basic values and similar ideas on representative democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the market economy. We can look back on a long common cultural and intellectual history. We have common interests. We owe much to the US. Germany's experience with the US is, on the whole, very positive.

The transatlantic relationship is changing. I would ask everyone not to regard changes as negative from the outset, or as a sign of crisis. For example, the shift in Germany's geostrategic location after 1989 has given rise to unavoidable changes. If – despite these geostrategic changes – we were to hold on to the modes of conduct and ideas which reflected Germany's geostrategic location during the Cold War, we would undermine rather than strengthen the partnership between our two nations. We should first of all rationally identify common ground and differences, for not only clarity about our own interests as well as detailed knowledge of the other side are essential if we are to strengthen and renew transatlantic relations.

Back to the changing transatlantic relations: what has changed strategically? Let me mention just a few points and then draw conclusions. Firstly, before 1989 Germany had been at the heart of a global conflict for fifty years. It was therefore only logical for J.F. Kennedy, as the representative of a global power which was also a local protecting power in Berlin, to say that he was proud to be a citizen of Berlin. Now that the Cold War is over, Germany is fortunately no longer at the center of a global conflict. The legendary German angst, a term which has also entered American English, of waking up one day and hearing on the radio that Russian tanks had crossed the border is a thing of the past. The expression "the Fulda gap", a term which you are probably not familiar with, which described the geographical gap in the east in the plains around Fulda and supposed point of attack for Warsaw Pact troops, was part of the standard vocabulary of the strategic training of American recruits.

The centuries-old German question has been resolved by united Germany's membership of the EU and NATO in a stable European peaceful order. Both sides of the Atlantic can and should

rejoice that Germany is no longer a source and cause of crisis but a contributor to international peace and stability.

The key locations for conflicts have shifted in the US consciousness to other problems and, in geographical terms, to the Middle East and to certain parts of Asia. For many Americans, the Pacific is as important now as the Atlantic. Germany no longer has a strategic importance for the US because it is no longer located at the heart of a conflict. Germany's main relevance today is due to its willingness and ability to help resolve problems in future crisis regions. German politicians must now examine whether they want to reorientate either in order to be relevant to the US or because they, just like the US, believe that their security and interests are at risk. Mind you, this is about the strategic orientation of the US away from a global conflict with Europe at its epicenter – which we all perceived as a European or local German crisis – towards other regions and towards other issues (for example, the fight against international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). At the same time, we must seek a new consensus in security policy on whether, where and under what conditions, we are prepared to use military means to protect our security, interests and values.

For other Europeans like the British and French, America's strategic reorientation does not require the same fundamental change in thinking and actions as it does for us. Until 1989, German soldiers were not deployed in military missions outside German territory. I believe that Germany should think increasingly in global terms when it comes to foreign and security policy and that it should also act globally on a selective basis in the field of security. However, we must decide when we want to act and when not. In view of our limited resources, we will have to consider this very carefully and we will only be able to take military action very selectively. Unfortunately, we will also often have to weigh up interests against morality whenever our limited resources and influence prevent us from combining them in an ideal fashion.

The change in Germany's strategic situation and the reorientation of the US has presented German policymakers, as well as the political thinking of most Germans, with new challenges. These new challenges and Germany's new situation will influence and change our foreign and security policy culture, as well as the decisions our country makes. Through its

actions, the US can have either a positive or a negative influence on this process of creating a new security culture in Germany.

However, it also has to be said that Germany was completely dependent on the US during the Cold War. Berlin could not be protected by Germany at all but, rather, only by the Allies and in particular by the US. We are still dependent on the US when it comes to combating the dangers of international terrorism or the many other dangers in this world. But in contrast to earlier times, Germany is no longer more dependent than other European countries. To that extent, Germany's special dependence during the Cold War disappeared after 1989. German governments will continue to strive to achieve the greatest possible degree of common ground with the US. But in future they will also express any disagreement with a measure of self-confidence. This is the self-confidence of a stable democracy which can be convinced by arguments but whose tendency to be influenced by a show of power has decreased. I am therefore pleased that the dialogue based on arguments across the Atlantic has intensified once more, especially during the last few months. President Bush's visit to North-Eastern Germany in mid-July clearly demonstrated this. Our next step should be to help dispel the German public's negative view of the US which has emerged during the debate on the Iraq war.

There is another factor. In contrast to the situation during the Cold War in Europe, the US itself is no longer dependent on Germany in order to prevail in purely military terms in regional conflicts such as the one in Iraq. In the final analysis, the American military victory in Iraq was not dependent on the support of other European partners. This decrease in military dependency in wars has not only military but also political consequences. A country which believes it is no longer dependent on military support but seeks support for political reasons will begin to weigh up the benefits and disadvantages of partnerships. That will influence the extent to which a country is prepared to show consideration for potential partners. During the Cold War, certain political and military decisions in the US would not have been made against the express wishes of key European partners in NATO. Although we Germans were completely dependent on the US for our security at that time, we nonetheless had much influence on it. Prior to the Iraq war, there was a debate in Washington on whether, on political grounds, the US should still show consideration to those who doubted not only the tactics but also the goals and strategy of US policy. Or whether for the sake of protecting the autonomy of US military action and the clarity of its own objective, it would not be better, if

need be, to pursue the US course alone and accept that it would have to do without critical and excessively self-confident partners. After all, there were other partners who although they did not support every tactical detail of Washington's decisions did support the strategic orientation. One result of the difficult situation in post-war Iraq is that those in the US who favor partners and alliances have again gained ground.

The US rightly regards itself as an "indispensable nation" but Europe should, with the same right, see itself as an "indispensable partner". None of the major problems facing the world could be easier resolved if Europe and the US were to oppose each other. Incidentally, that goes not only for military and economic issues but, ultimately, also for those related to our democratic culture and even environmental protection. If Europe and the US were to oppose each other, this would jeopardize the chance of achieving security and democracy in many parts of the world.

I foresee neither an end to the West nor an end to the transatlantic alliance. Those who, in agreement with Oswald Spengler, predict the "decline and fall of the West", will be proved wrong. However, we find ourselves in the midst of a phase of adjustment and reorientation. Whenever facts and thinking changed in the past, the West was forced to redefine itself time and again, too.

Even more than during the Cold War, we – the West – represent a challenge to other parts of the world. Indeed the West prompts them to question how they think and act. The impact of Western ideas and our way of life has never been limited in geographical terms but, rather, has always been global in scale. Democracy, human rights and the Enlightenment are ideas with a global impact and immense appeal.

I support these ideas and their influence. I am thus opposed to cultural and value relativism. And dictators, those who commit genocide, as well as religious and political fundamentalists, rightly feel that our Western ideas and policies cast doubt on the legitimacy of their actions.

In view of the development which Europe has undergone in the last few years and decades, it is understandable if there is growing concern, particularly in the US, that this stronger Europe is transforming itself into a second rival pole within the West. In the final analysis, I do not believe there is any real danger that Europe will endeavor to define itself in opposition to the US. Nor is there a majority in favor of this following the enlargement of the European Union.

Defining Europe in opposition to the US would not be in Germany's interests. However, I would also like to contradict those in the US who believe that Europe's increased strength in the sphere of foreign and security policy is a negative development. The opposite is true! A Europe incapable of taking effective action would have little global influence and would be of little interest to the US as a partner. The US would lose interest in a weak Europe. A weak Europe would also weaken transatlantic ties. A Europe which, as a result of its weakness, sees no hope of exerting influence on the US would, out of a sense of frustration, turn either away from or even against the US.

In keeping with the sentiment expressed by Joe Nye of Harvard University, I would like to add: the US is the only true global power in the military sphere. In the economic field, it is one power among many. In economic terms, the European Union is almost equal in weight, while in terms of population and its share in world trade it is more important. At the level of societal and non-state players, the US used to be more attractive than any other country in the world. Not military power but rather its attractiveness was its strongest advantage. After all, "soft power" is also a form of power. In the light of current developments in the US, including Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Haditha, Joe Nye has warned America that it must not lose its social and political appeal by flexing its military muscle too much, thus objectively also losing power, which is more than just military might. I share this concern.

In common with American realists and in contrast to many Europeans, I am convinced that the deployment of military power is sometimes unavoidable. However, unlike these American realists, I am also convinced that, with the prospect of a new reality in line with post-war developments in Europe, we can change our world. Indeed, we should not abandon hope of being able to change the world. Otherwise, politics would be reduced to action without the goal of creating a better world. It will take generations until fundamental changes can be brought about in other parts of the world. However, acceptance of the reality of power and the pursuit of the rule of law, realism and teleological action do not exclude one another.

Beyond today, therefore, serious questions have arisen in the transatlantic debate. We must try and answer them: many together with the Americans, almost all together with our European neighbors and some of them on our own. Ultimately, this is about what Germany should be in the European and global context, what risks we are prepared to take, what influence and what

power we are striving to gain, what financial means and what instruments we are prepared to employ for our priorities. The conclusions drawn from this German debate will be influenced not only by the discussion among Germans but to a large extent by the arguments put forward by our European and transatlantic partners. What is clear already is that we Germans are more and more ready to engage ourselves in international conflict resolution. We are doing so for example in Afghanistan, in Congo, and now in the Middle East where the international community successfully agreed on a UN mandate to monitor the Lebanese border.

The US is a mixed society par excellence and at the core of a new global community which is increasingly leaving its European traditions behind and expanding culturally and politically along the Pacific Rim.

What keeps the West together? How can "the West" be reconstructed?

What constitutes modern society and modern individuals in a globalized world? We have to ask these questions from a European-American perspective to intellectuals, international educators, think tank experts and political decisionmakers. They will probably not be able to answer the question yet of what constitutes human knowledge in this new era of mobility due to communication, travel and increased international experience of more and more young people. However, these challenges need to be identified and will be addressed. They should join hands with German intellectuals, diplomats and representatives of German companies to represent the modern Germany and the new generation that is about to emerge.

I would be proud to see that there is a group of people from very different parts of our world who feel they should be part of this immense task: to educate and create a new global generation ready to take on the challenges of our era.

Thank you.