Speech by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle at the opening of the 12th Ambassadors Conference: “Europe in the world”

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-- Translation of advance text --

Ladies and gentlemen,

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Minister Westerwelle at the Ambassadors Conference

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I am really very pleased to have Jens Weidmann here with us today. First at the Chancellery and now at the head of the Bundesbank and on the Governing Council of the European Central Bank, he has proven one of our foremost proponents of the three pronged strategy that can and will make Europe stronger than it was before the crisis – namely consolidation, solidarity and structural reform for new and sustainable growth. A very warm welcome to you, Mr Weidmann!

Much remains to be done before Europe in its entirety is back on the road to success – but we need to remind ourselves once again that there is also good news. The ambitious reforms undertaken in many of our partner countries deserve our respect.

They also deserve our support. Stick to the agreed reforms, and you can count on Germany’s continuing solidarity.

Last quarter, the euro area recorded growth again for the first time in one and a half years. This is not down to Germany and France alone; countries such as Portugal also played their part.

The triad of solidarity, consolidation and growth through reform is not a dogma, nor is it a German obsession. It is no more or less than the reasoned response to past mistakes which we are rectifying and future challenges which we will have to master. Europe hasn't been a closed system for a long time now. We are part of a globalised world, where we have to be able to hold our own and be competitive. If we look beyond the shores of our own continent, we see a world undergoing sweeping change. The balance of power is shifting at a breathtaking pace. If we chose to distance ourselves from globalisation, we would soon become impoverished and no more than a pawn in the hands of others. We should instead tap the creativity of our people, their talents, their hard work and their energy to safeguard our place in the competition over not only the best ideas but also values and interests.

We have a lot to bring to that competition. Europe has always been more than a single market and a free trade area. And it remains far more than a single currency. More than anything else, Europe is a community based on a shared culture and common values. Our shared values are the foundation on which this Europe stands. They are the legacy of the Enlightenment and of the revolutions for liberty in 1789 and 1989. The ideals that drove those revolutions are still the norms at the heart of our societies today. What we have built on those foundations here in Europe has massive international appeal. We need to protect and propagate that precious achievement. That is why I have come together with a number of

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colleagues to start a legislative initiative to ensure better protection of European fundamental values and principles of the rule of law. They are our strongest card in this globalised world. If we uphold our own principles, we have every reason to enter this competition over values and social systems with our heads held high.

That view of Europe also needs us to look beyond the crisis. An informal meeting in Mallorca in July brought us together with many other Foreign Ministers, MPs and Commission members to discuss the essential steps of developing an effective and active European Union above and beyond the current improvements to economic and fiscal coordination. Efficient institutions, effective decision making procedures and democratic legitimacy are the major priorities for the coming years.

Looking beyond the crisis in our thinking about Europe also means ensuring that Europe's voice is heard and listened to on the world stage. We saw in the Western Balkans this spring just how much we can achieve if we work together and stand united. The agreement achieved between Serbia and Kosovo can be chalked up as a success for European diplomacy, with Baroness Ashton and the European External Action Service at its helm. We need to build on successes like that.

The 21

EU

countries which are also members of

NATO

spent around 268 billion dollars on defence in 2010. That's more than the defence expenditure of China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Australia put together. However, a good part of those vast resources is lost by dint of their being split between 21 sovereign, independent defence budgets. That is why we want to develop and strengthen the

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Common Security and Defence Policy. That's our goal for the December European Council. Germany and France have put forward a range of proposals in pursuit of that goal.

The biggest challenge for Europe at the moment is the change that has been sweeping the Arab world. When the people there demanded to have more of a stake in their countries' political and economic life, we knew that the road would not be smooth; we knew it would be anything but easy.

The situation in Syria is the most dramatic example. The people living in the towns and villages of Syria have been through immeasurable suffering. What started as a peaceful protest against dictatorship has been subsumed into a terrible civil war.

The mounting evidence that chemical weapons, which are banned under international law, have been used is very disturbing.

It is high time that the

UN

inspectors were granted access. However, the regime has taken a long time to do anything about this. The reports and images coming out of Syria already speak a clear language.

The use of chemical weapons would be a crime against civilisation. The international community must act should the use of such weapons be confirmed. In this case, Germany will be among those who consider that some consequences will have to be drawn. We are working closely with the United Nations and our allies on this.

The international community is endeavouring to ease the suffering of the millions in Syria as well as possible, and simultaneously to avoid the conflict spilling over into the region as a whole. Germany is playing its part in those efforts. The ongoing deadlock in the

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Security Council is profoundly frustrating. Nonetheless, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the goal of having the international community agree on a shared stance and finding a political route towards ending the violence.

In Egypt, the escalation of violence was avoidable. In close liaison with Baroness Ashton, we joined the US and others in calling with all possible urgency for the polarisation and confrontation in society to be peacefully resolved. The stakeholders on the ground decided against that policy, and the costs of that decision have been high. We cannot now go on as if nothing has happened; that would serve our own interests just as little as it would anyone else's. Lasting stability can only by achieved if there is stability at grassroots level. And that requires balance, tolerance and unfettered civil society. In the long term, stability grounded in repression will only engender fresh extremism and will not serve Europe's interest. That was the clear message that came out of last Wednesday's Foreign Affairs Council.

Egypt remains a key country in the Arab world, and it is always wise to keep diplomatic channels of communication open. We all need to be aware, however, that the events of recent weeks are not the end of the historic process that began two and a half years ago – a process which no power except the people within the countries themselves can direct or even decisively influence.

I hear many voices these days bemoaning what they call the impotence of diplomacy. Some people conclude that these conflicts are like Gordian knots and we should simply take a sword to them. It is possible that those who call diplomacy impotence have an unrealistic concept of the omnipotence available. Conducting responsible foreign policy today means taking a sober look at our options as well as our interests.

Preaching interventionism and ignoring the uncertainties and dangers involved is not a credible response to the limited nature of those options. Democracy cannot be imposed from the outside; it has to grow from within.

Having said that, we shouldn't underestimate the many tools we do have at our disposal. We should not think less of what Germany and Europe contribute towards peace and development in the world just because the world doesn't do whatever we say.

The change sweeping the Middle East will continue to confront us with extraordinary challenges in the years to come. The desire for a fair society and internal cohesion, protection of minorities – these things are as much a part of democracy and the rule of law as freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and the right to equal opportunities irrespective of gender, origin, religion or sexual orientation. The many attacks on Christian churches and the displacement of people because of their faith are utterly unacceptable.

The countries of Europe have pledged their dedication to this canon of shared values in the

OSCE

and the Council of Europe. We will not remain silent in cases where those values are under pressure or systematically undermined. That applies in our relations with Russia just as it does elsewhere. A strategic relationship that has a long history behind it, as well as shared interests and the millions of individual ties between the people of our two countries, can and must be able to withstand open discussion of such matters. In terms of geography, history and culture, we are close to Russia. There can only be security in Europe if Russia is made a part of it, not an opponent. For prosperity and security in Europe, we also need closer ties between the

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and the countries in the Eastern Partnership, however. The Vilnius Summit in November can serve as a means of achieving that. Our strategy remains geared towards creating an area of security, stability and prosperity that extends from the Atlantic to Vladivostok.

Next to the acute crises, there is one topic that has been particularly close to my heart in recent years: developing our network of ties with the world's new centres of power. Almost a hundred years ago, the first globalisation ended in the inferno of the First World War. Today, we are living through an incomparably more intensive period of globalisation driven by high speed technological innovation. Our greatest interest, and a Herculean task for foreign policy, lies in ensuring globalisation is a peaceful process subject to reliable rules. No country can manage that on its own. We need strong partners. Above all, we need a united Europe if our values and interests are to have a voice in tomorrow's world.

Globalisation brings us great opportunities. Having a complex of economic ties with the rapidly growing markets in Asia, Latin America and Africa will secure our prosperity for the future. Expanding our networks in science and academia will secure our capacity for innovation. Expanding our political dialogue will create the conditions for agreeing on global solutions to the major challenges of our time, from climate protection to cyber security to combating poverty and disease. In publishing our strategy papers on Africa and Latin America early on in this legislative term, we breathed new life into relations with those regions and turned a spotlight on the benefits of exchange. In Asia, we have responded to the challenge of needing a greater presence outside capital cities, as the provinces boom, by opening new Consulates General in Shenyang and Bangalore. Through our strategy paper on the new global players, we have also reorganised the way we cooperate within the Government itself. Regular intergovernmental consultations with many of these countries help us develop our relations more systematically and strategically, with the Foreign Office functioning as a hub and a platform for effective coordination.

Our good place in all these networks depends to a crucial extent on our openness to the countries and peoples involved, to their students, business people and skilled workers. The key to that lies in visa policy. This is one of my own main concerns. We have come a long way, simplifying and speeding up a lot of procedures. But we mustn't rest on our laurels. Germany needs more openness. The Federal Foreign Office sees itself as an advocate of openness. Interest in Germany has grown enormously in recent years. This represents a fantastic opportunity not only in terms of Germany's image abroad but also for our country's chances in the competition for the finest minds. We should be glad, not frightened, to see intelligent young people taking a growing interest in Germany. This also means that Germany needs to retain its openness towards people who face political persecution and fear for their lives. We not only have an obligation to do so in view of our own history; this attitude is also an expression of the values which determine our foreign policy.

It is a few days shy of 40 years since the Federal Republic of Germany – and the GDR – became members of the United Nations. In this globalised world, the United Nations is more indispensable than ever. However, it is only as strong as its members make it. Germany does everything in its power to bolster the United Nations' universality and help make globally valid rules a reality. Reforming the United Nations remains a central aim of our foreign policy. In New York this June, we became one of the first countries to sign the new global Arms Trade Treaty. Disarmament and arms control take a long time and are not easy, but they cannot be consigned to the past – these are challenges of our time. Iran's nuclear programme, for example, has not only regional implications but a global dimension too. Following the election of the new President, I hope that we will finally be able to make some real progress in the nuclear talks with Tehran.

In Afghanistan too, Germany is shouldering its responsibility for peace and security. At the start of our term, we significantly raised our diplomatic and military presence as well as our development assistance and, together with our partners, set the mission a realistic goal. Many members of the Foreign Service, not to mention the Bundeswehr, the police and many development organisations have demonstrated great dedication under very difficult conditions to help the country on its road to a brighter, more peaceful future. This is yet another area where we too seldom acknowledge the progress that has been achieved. We are always looking instead at the undeniable setbacks, obstacles and hurdles to be overcome. But we have come a long way on the road towards handing over responsibility to Afghan hands. The ISAF mission will finish at the end of 2014. After that, we will be starting a new chapter.

We have learned a lot in Afghanistan. We have developed new forms of civil military cooperation. We have meshed the goals and tools of foreign and security policy with those of development policy. The reason this is so important is that we are going to have to respond actively when states become dangerously weakened in future too. The German Government's guidelines for coherent policy towards fragile states represents a real advance

on the road towards coherent foreign and security policy. One good example is Mali, where our stabilisation mission is making a significant contribution to enable the people there to take the future into their own hands; another is the Horn of Africa, where we have managed to greatly reduce the wave of piracy.

Allow me to close with an issue which I have supported particularly strongly and in which I see massive potential. Relations with the US, so instrumental in Germany’s unification and liberty, will continue to play an especially pivotal role among our strategic alliances. That is true with regard to our security alliance in

NATO

, which remains the most important anchor of our security policy. It is also true, more so than ever before, with regard to our economic relations. The partnership for trade and investment which we are currently negotiating has huge strategic potential. I am talking about new jobs and fresh growth, but also about the way rules and yardsticks are set in this globalised world. Together we have a chance of influencing the way globalisation turns out.

The motto of this Ambassadors Conference is “Europe in the World”. Let us not overestimate our continent’s capacity to mark its mark in view of the emergence of new global players – but let’s not underestimate it either. Our influence depends on the strength of the example we ourselves set, economically, politically and culturally. Our open societies speak for themselves. In this digital age, our strongest and most persuasive move is to set a globally accessible example. Credibility and confidence are the most important currency of international politics. We should always be conscious of that fact.

Thank you for your attention.

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