Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary visit to Germany

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On Friday 4 November, the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, visited Berlin for discussions with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Frank Steinmeier. Their discussion focused on the bilateral relationship, Syria, Russia, Ukraine and the Western Balkans.

In a press conference afterwards, the Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

Dankeschön, Frank-Walter. Guten Tag [meine] Damen und Herren. Ich freue mich sehr, heute hier in Deutschland zu sein! Ich bin nicht ein Berliner, aber meine Frau ist eine Berlinerin, weil sie in Berlin geboren wurde!

Let me translate that for you. I'm not a Berliner, I'm not from Berlin, but my wife's a Berliner, she was born in Berlin.

Frank, it's great to be here in Germany. Great to be here in Berlin.

Thank you very much for your very generous invitation and for the lunch and the discussion we just had, which were extremely useful and substantive. I think they helped to reinforce the important point that you made in your remarks, which is that the UK may be leaving the European Union, but we are emphatically not leaving Europe and we will remain committed to partnership with Germany for a very, very long time and indeed forever.

I'm sure that you reflect a wide spectrum of German opinion in what you say about the UK decision, Frank, but be in no doubt that there is a huge opportunity here, and with the right spirit I believe we can turn these negotiations into a win-win discussion that produces a strong EU and a strong UK, linked by a new European partnership between the UK and the EU. And that is what we want to achieve.

We had some very good discussions about a wide range of issues. We talked about Syria, about the crisis in Aleppo, the starvation and the suffering and the people of Aleppo, expected to intensify this winter, the probability of a renewed aerial bombardment at the hands of the Russians and the Assad regime.

We talked about the need to keep up the pressure on both the Russians and the regime. We talked about anxieties we had in the Western Balkans and the need for us to work together as we have in the past to ensure that the gains of peace and stability in Europe are continued.

We talked about the work that you've done so much of, Frank, in Ukraine, and the Minsk process and your hopes for further progress there. It is glacially slow, but we are working together and we are very supportive of what you are achieving. We covered a wide range of topics, virtually the entire geopolitical spectrum. We covered huge amounts.

But, above all, we talked about the importance of the bilateral relationship between Britain and Germany, which is of absolutely fundamental importance for us in our country, and the strength of that relationship.

I think there's a paradox here. Which is that, in spite of disentangling ourselves from the treaties of the European Union, it is now possible for us to intensify this bilateral relationship, for indeed to become in some ways more European. Many people in Germany may not realise that over the last couple of decades the study of German language and German history and German culture in my country has sadly fallen away. We want to see that increase and intensify again. We talked about ways in which we could work together to achieve that. I believe this relationship between Britain and Germany is absolutely critical for the peace, the stability and the economic prosperity of the entire European region, and I also believe that it has a great future ahead.

Thank you very much.

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