Speech by Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel at the opening of the German Council on Foreign Relations symposium in memory of Dr Sylke Tempel Thinking ahead – mediating

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Many thanks, Ms Pohl,

Dr Oetker,

Dr von Heydebreck,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It wasn’t so easy for me to accept the invitation to speak here today. What happens to us when we experience something we find frightening in the true sense of the word? Well, we are actually glad to get back into the routine of our daily lives and not to have to think about this terrible event all the time.

The invitation to come here and think about what I would say largely served to remind me of a truly terrifying situation. You spend a few hours with someone and then say goodbye to them; they thank you for the opportunity to be the first fellow in Thomas Mann’s former home in LA – and a few minutes later, you hear that they have been killed.

I didn’t know Sylke Tempel well before that. Naturally, I had read her work and heard her speak, and we had also met briefly. But that day was actually the first time we spoke at length. As you would expect, we naturally talked about the United States.

We had invited various experts from different fields to help make us wiser in politics and the Federal Foreign Office.

The idea was not just to depend in the Federal Foreign Office on what we ourselves know, but to ask for an evaluation, to ask these experts how they see the situation in the States, how it affects us and what we can expect to see in the future. We had a long debate. And indeed, our talks with Sylke Tempel could not have been any more illuminating.

Particularly at the moment, when there has been new unrest in Jerusalem, Sylke Tempel and her clarity and analysis are sadly missed.

In an interview last year on the war in Syria, she said: “When a super-power like the US withdraws from the world, this leaves a vacuum that will be filled by others who are by no means better – on the contrary.”

She said this in February 2016 – in other words, at a time when it seemed like a bizarre fantasy that Donald Trump would become US President. But already by then, there were signs that the US would not exert the same amount of control all over the world that we were used to. This was not something we were used to because we always agreed with the Americans. We were used to it because someone was doing something we were happy not to have to do ourselves. And if it went wrong, at least we always had someone to blame.

We had someone who protected the West – a West that had, at least until then, agreed on a few ground rules. It had not only agreed on freedom, human rights and the rule of law, but also that the world is more orderly and in everyone’s interests if we work on the basis of binding agreements rather than in a sort of arena where it is “every man for himself”.

At the time, far-sighted people already had an idea of what would happen if the US gradually distanced itself from the idea of a liberal order. Sylke Tempel was one of these far-sighted people.

That is why her views on difficult foreign policy developments were always in demand, and not only as regards the US. The last time was on that fatal 5 October, when we discussed the right way to deal with the US under President Trump with other think tank members at Villa Borsig.

Sylke Tempel’s death is the result of a terrible accident, which we all find very difficult to accept. The fact that we are now discussing key German foreign policy issues at a symposium hosted by the German Council on Foreign Relations is perhaps the best way to show the great sense of connection we feel with Sylke Tempel’s views and actions, even if at times we were of a different opinion.

So, please allow me to share some thoughts with you on topics that were particularly important to Sylke Tempel: the transatlantic relationship, relations with Israel and the Middle East, and the public discourse on German foreign policy itself – how we see the world and how the world sees us.

“In Spite of It All, America” is the title of the transatlantic manifesto written by Sylke Tempel and colleagues. This text has now become something like her transatlantic legacy – a legacy that must serve both as a warning and an incentive to us to maintain or redefine this relationship, which has been so important in our post-war history, despite all the irritation and

contradictions. It is becoming increasingly clear to us that we can certainly not take this relationship for granted.

The hope of many German transatlanticists that we will return to our old partnership following an exceptional period under the Trump presidency is not one I share. And it is not one Sylke Tempel shared on 5 October.

Many things will be different after Trump, partly because the United States' withdrawal under this president from its role as a reliable guarantor of western-influenced multilateralism is definitely creating new facts, which can probably not be reversed. The appointment of judges in the US will also change domestic policy over a longer period.

This withdrawal is accelerating the transformation of the global order and that has an immediate impact, including on us in Germany and Europe.

Since George Marshall's famous speech 70 years ago, Europe had also been an American project in the United States' clearly understood interests. However, the current US Administration now perceives Europe in a very distanced way, as competitors and sometimes even as opponents. The world is not longer regarded as a "global community". Instead, as Cohn and McMaster wrote in a "Wall Street Journal" op-ed that has already become famous, it is seen as an arena in which the world should be governed by competition rather than binding rules. We need to discuss whether this actually means that only stronger countries have the right to get their way in the world and that one needs to seek ever-changing allies to assert one's own interests. This vision is highly focused on the short term and on asserting one's interests quickly. It is very different to the idea of a liberal global order, which focused more on the belief that it was in the United States' clearly understood medium and long-term interests to refrain from seeking to maximise its interests in the short term.

Furthermore, the US has changed politically and socially in recent years, and it will continue to readjust to the world and to tend to move away from Europe rather than towards it, irrespective of Donald Trump. In this way of seeing the world, Europe is one region among many.

In the foreseeable future, the majority of Americans will not be of European descent – they will have Asian, African or Latin American roots. That is why I believe the United States' relations with Europe will not be the same as before, even after Donald Trump. That does not mean relations cannot improve, but they will be different to how they were before Donald Trump.

As the quotation by Sylke Tempel shows, the United States began its withdrawal a long time ago. Obama already started adapting the United States' global presence to the dwindling options of a super-power. This trend is being carried out more radically, and sometimes more

forcefully, under Trump. It sometimes seems as if there is actually no foreign policy at all – everything is merely a reaction to challenges on the home front.

The US President is creating facts in many areas that preclude a “go back to start” in the future.

For decades, we took the United States’ protective role for granted, despite occasional differences of opinion. This certainty is now fading.

This can already be seen in the fact that we disagree with the US on various issues – be they current affairs such as the nuclear deal with Iran or long-term matters like the question of free trade. The

WTO

conference in Argentina has just shown how great these differences of opinion have now become. And if we recall the quotation by Sylke Tempel, who said that a vacuum in international politics will always be filled, we see this most clearly in trade policy. Where the US is abandoning the idea of fair and free – or at least rules-based – world trade, new rules are being proposed, particularly by China, which is perhaps currently the only country in the world that is truly pursuing its own geopolitical strategy. That is not a reason for us to criticise the Chinese. On the contrary, it raises the question of why we ourselves cannot actually manage to ask and answer similarly strategic questions.

The United States will certainly remain our most important global partner. We will continue to need and nurture this partnership in the future. No one should think that even the best-organised Europe would be able to defend the liberal order on its own in the world. But this partnership alone will not be enough to safeguard our interests in a world that will be shaped by new political and economic poles of power and competing models of society.

We will also need to invest far more in this partnership than we have done so far. This means making an even more targeted effort to liaise with constructive partners in the US Administration, Congress, at State level and above all in civil society. One example is the intensive discussion with governors and mayors on climate protection issues.

However, it also means providing greater funding for exchange projects and visit programmes, for example those run by the political foundations and civil society, as well as more intensive discussion with conservative think tanks and institutions, which determine the way of thinking of the current US Administration and large swathes of society in the US.

Sylke Tempel wanted to be part of this work. She was due to become one of the first fellows in Thomas Mann’s former home in LA next summer. She was already making plans. She wanted to take trips outside the more liberal city of LA to Trump’s America. As a journalist,

she was curious to find out more, but she also wanted to represent and defend European and German positions.

That is also the approach we want to take in our German year in the US, which will start next autumn. We want to go beyond the usual suspects and reach people deep in the US hinterlands. We want to reach new target groups that were not really the focus of transatlantic exchange in the past.

The Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe-Institut and the Federation of German Industries want to do this together with a large number of partner organisations from October 2018 until the end of 2019. Many events on a huge range of topics are at the planning stage. These topics range from freedom, diversity, responsibility, the spread of digital technology and the future of work to the role of German heritage and our culture and way of life.

Allow me to also say a few words about the region that is of particular relevance to Sylke Tempel's quotation – the Middle East. Since the Second World War, the regional order there had largely been defined by the United States. Now the United States has less influence. Washington only wants to - and only can - counteract the collapse of states to a limited extent.

The vacuum opened by the withdrawal of the US was indeed filled very quickly. Russia, but also Iran, gradually turned around the dynamics of the Syrian civil war for their own benefit – and for the benefit of the regime in Damascus. So far, this has culminated in the meeting between Presidents Putin and Assad two weeks ago, followed by the meeting between Presidents Rouhani and Erdoğan. A German newspaper wrote "Black souls meet at the Black Sea".

I think Sylke Tempel would have liked that.

And as if the crises in Syria, Iraq and Yemen were not enough, there is now the threat of new turmoil in the region. The Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is an extremely risky step. A step that Washington, it has to be said, took without prior consultation with Europe. We all know how far-reaching the consequences of this step could be.

Whether this heralds a reorientation by the United States towards the Middle East is more than doubtful. It presumably has more to do with implementing a campaign promise in order to paint the end-of-year review of presidential achievements in a more positive light. Incidentally, this step also shows that the assumption that the office and its experienced advisors would tame President Trump was evidently only true to a very limited extent.

One thing is clear: on this issue, the position of the German Government, whatever its constellation in future, remains unchanged. By the way, some who deride the West are

currently using the example of Germany as a focus for their contempt. My response is that in our situation without a government, the institutions are functioning nonetheless, whereas there are other countries which may have a government, but no functioning institutions. That should help put our minds at rest. After all, the worst example is the experience of Belgium: two years without a government, and everything is running smoothly. If people get wind of that, we politicians are in real danger! We don't want to let things get to that stage.

One thing is clear: a solution to the Jerusalem issue can only be found through direct negotiations between both parties. Anything that exacerbates the crisis and hampers the two-state solution is counter-productive.

Of course, we are all wondering what Sylke Tempel would have said about this development. And most of all, how she would have formulated it. Israel's security was, in her view, always crucial to the enduring friendship between our two countries following the ravages, the genocide of the Second World War. Is security for the Jewish and democratic state of Israel possible without the emergence of a viable and democratic Palestinian state alongside it? For our part, we view the dwindling chances of a two-state solution with great concern.

The consequences of the decision regarding the capital for the two-state solution and Israel's security are an issue we will have to discuss. Probably we, along with many others, will have to watch and see what potential for violence in the region re-emerges.

In the face of these complex questions, we nonetheless maintain our stance that however arduous the path towards a two-state solution may be, we will continue to support it, not least by cooperating with civil society players on both sides who monitor and uphold respect for human rights under difficult conditions.

I don't want to take the easy way out this evening and just talk about developments elsewhere. For here in Germany, here in Europe, too, societal changes are giving us cause for concern.

The battlecry of the Brexiteers – “Take back control” – is in many ways the European version of “America first” and has become the motto of those in Europe and beyond who want to score political points through societal and economic isolation. The focus is not on common ground and shared values, but on differences and national egoism.

In this context, the political scientist Herfried Münkler wrote in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung of a “longing for a close-to-home approach and for an increase in states' capacity for control”.

In many places we are witnessing a return to borders and to the supposed strength of the nation state. Diversity and individuality, equality and inclusion are being derided and called into question by populist parties as an expression of excessive “political correctness” – the

impact of these aggressive tones is reaching right down into mainstream society, even here in Germany.

In their often self-centred debates, the liberal elites of Western democracies are in danger of underestimating this need for clarity and order that their societies are feeling. Or, looking to the United States, you could say that anyone who disregards the needs of the Rust Belt cannot expect the hipsters in California to be able to help them.

We need to embrace this challenge, because a middle-ranking trading power like Germany needs openness and accessibility as much as it needs air to breathe. We cannot cut ourselves off from the problems of the world.

And for this reason, we are confronted with two challenges: First, we need to define our new role in the world more clearly. That also requires us to elucidate our interests and not to settle for the banal objective of pursuing a values-based foreign policy. I think we need to commit ourselves to formulating our own interests and to the importance of developing a strategic view of the world. Second, we cannot afford to forget our own citizens in all this.

The annual surveys conducted on behalf of the Körber Foundation clearly show the extent of the challenge we face here: support for restraint in foreign policy remains strong in Germany – even though it has decreased slightly over the years. This in no way corresponds to the expectations placed on Germany from outside, whether in Europe or beyond.

We therefore need to explain to our citizens even more clearly how we view the world and what tasks await us! That we cannot simply keep out of things, that we have to exert our influence if we don't want others to squeeze us into their own mould.

In an age of fake news where public opinion is being deliberately influenced, this is difficult. The goal is to communicate – to communicate political content but also the thought processes behind the complex decisions and conflicts of aims with which policymakers are inevitably confronted. In contrast, social networks tend to demand from us clear answers, black and white theses, right or wrong statements and on no account complicated thought processes.

Yet the goal must be to prevent people gaining the impression that there is a lack of alternatives. That could provide an effective antidote to the ostensibly simple solutions to complex problems that populists and propagandists propose.

How should we deal with this? Certainly not by leaving discussion of foreign policy just to politicians.

That is why the Federal Foreign Office has radically reformed its communication on foreign policy issues in recent years and will need to continue to do so. We need to expand the

number of social media channels we operate. We are sending our diplomats out into the country, into schools and universities, and also into works assemblies and training centres, targeting apprentices and craftspersons at least as much as academics.

We need to ask enterprises and works councils for permission to speak at their events about Europe and the interests of their employees in a united Europe so that this issue does not feature only in the editorials of the liberal media but also reaches those who at the moment often get the impression that Europe is not in their interests.

Our ambassadors are engaging in debate in town hall meetings and taking the opportunity to ask citizens what they expect from Europe or how they view the United States.

Our colleagues don't talk down to people or merely give lectures, they pose questions and involve citizens in our decision-making processes. I am convinced that this is the only way to encourage ownership. At the workshop with the public at the Federal Foreign Office, to which we invite people every year, this was really tangible.

The German Council on Foreign Relations, too, plays a crucial role in this area, and we want to continue to provide you with support for this task. As a membership-based organisation with regional branches throughout Germany, you comprise a vital link with the German public. As a think-tank, you contribute ideas and proposals for action to the foreign policy debate. The German Council on Foreign Relations plays an important role in communicating foreign policy subject matter. I would like this not only to take place among experts but to make deeper inroads into the day-to-day life of society in general.

As an outstanding journalist, Sylke Tempel made a huge contribution in this area. She raised the journal “Internationale Politik” to a whole new level and created a forum for foreign policy exchange in the form of the Berlin Policy Journal. Through her numerous appearances on the radio and television, she made foreign policy issues exciting and comprehensible and brought them literally into people's living rooms.

I can only encourage the German Council on Foreign Relations to continue along this route. You can count on our support for this endeavour.

Sylke Tempel has now left behind a vacuum. It is now down to all of us to fill it, as difficult as that will be.

Thank you for your attention

Overview "Newsroom"

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