„Europe in a less comfortable world“

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Why Europe needs a new foreign policy - Federal Foreign Minister Gabriel's speech at the Berlin Foreign Policy Forum

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is evolving in an increasingly uncomfortable world. The liberal intellectual Ralf Dahrendorf once said the following scathing words about our continent: “Europe has no real influence – at any rate, it has no European interest that could inform this influence.”

It was the year 2000 when he said this in an interview. Seen from today, his words require a certain amount of explanation. Put briefly, I would say that Dahrendorf wanted to warn people not to expect too much from Europe in terms of foreign policy.

His verdict was no real surprise, as Europe was founded with a view to internal affairs and not as a player on the global stage. The aim was that it would preserve internal peace and create prosperity after the two devastating world wars.

A role on the world stage was reserved for the European members of the

UN

Security Council, the United Kingdom and France.

German foreign policy was part of the transatlantic alliance with the United States and its western allies. And for many years, it restricted itself to German unification and Ostpolitik.

Our role in resolving or containing the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan was also ultimately part of a transatlantic foreign policy. Germany’s refusal to take part in the Iraq War in 2003 by then Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of the Social Democratic Party of Germany was the only – albeit spectacular – exception to this.

This focus on internal European affairs also continued, and Europe was thriving, after the opening of the Iron Curtain. The introduction of the euro had already been agreed, the path was paved towards massive eastern enlargement, and thus began a challenging debate on the finality of Europe.

Outside Europe, too, the world seemed to be on the right path at the time. Globalisation was making progress, the United States was headed towards its unipolar moment as the victor of the Cold War, and none of us had ever heard of Osama bin Laden.

However, the world has become significantly less comfortable than we expected at the end of the 20th and start of the 21st century. And now we see that although our country enjoys great economic prosperity, we no longer have a comfortable spot on the sidelines of international politics.

That is no longer an option for us Germans or us Europeans.

We need to realise that we can either try to shape the world ourselves or wait to be shaped by the rest of the world.

At any rate, a focus on values alone, as we Germans like to underline in our foreign policy, will no longer be enough to enable us to stand our ground in a world characterised by economic, political and military egoism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In his merciless way, Dahrendorf thus pointed out a problem whose full extent is only now becoming truly clear – the

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is not a real factor in the world.

It will have no real influence until it has defined its own “European interests” clearly – and without this definition of its own interests, it simply will not be able to project power.

Today, after the constitution crisis, the euro crisis and the migration crisis, we have experienced far more than Dahrendorf had in 2000, and not only as regards the

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. International terrorism has left its mark on world politics, globalisation is in crisis and the global dominance of the United States is slowly becoming a thing of the past.

Nevertheless, Dahrendorf’s observation has not lost any of its relevance. On the contrary, in a rapidly changing world order, it is all the more important that Europe focuses on its interests and endeavours to acquire influence.

This won’t fall into the

EU’s

lap. It will take a lot of work. I would like to talk today about why we need to do this and how it can be achieved.

Our relations with the US

Let us start by analysing the most important changes affecting our western world and indeed the world as a whole. The United States' current withdrawal under Trump from its role as a reliable guarantor of western-influenced multilateralism is accelerating the transformation of the global order and has an immediate impact on German and European interests.

Since George Marshall's famous 12-minute speech some 70 years ago, Europe had been an American project in the United States' clearly understood interests. However, the current US Administration now perceives Europe in a very distanced way, regarding previous partners as competitors and sometimes even as at the very least economic opponents.

In the US Administration's new way of seeing things, Europe is thus one region among many others – a point of view that has an impact on society. In addition, US society is changing rapidly. In the foreseeable future, the majority of Americans will not be of European descent – they will have Latin American, Asian or African roots. That is why the United States' relations with Europe will not be the same as before, even after Donald Trump is no longer president.

The collapse of states creates a new balance of power

For a long time, the increasing rate of crises around the world mainly provoked amazement and horror. In the meantime, we can discern patterns that are a cause of concern for Europe as a global stakeholder. These patterns can roughly be divided into two categories.

The collapse of states in our neighbourhood is leading to a dramatic increase in conflicts, which are transnational in nature and destabilise entire regions.

At the same time, the fact that rising nations such as China, Russia, Turkey and Iran are on the offensive means that the global order and regional balances of power are shifting.

This process is being exacerbated by counter-movements to the trends of globalisation and democracy-building, which were predominant for a long time. Tried and tested principles and foundations of international relations such as multilateralism, international law and the universal validity of human rights are being called into question, rather blithely by some, more shamelessly by others. The foundations of security and prosperity are thus being called into question and the risk of trade wars, arms races and armed conflicts is increasing. The demographic discrepancy between the shrinking North and the growing South, as well as the effects of climate change, are taking up more and more space and attention. The migration and refugee movements of recent years are playing a greater role in western countries'

deliberations. To a certain extent, western countries have only now become fully aware of these movements.

This has an impact on the methods and structures of international politics. The international law codified in the Charter of the United Nations and a large number of treaties is in crisis. In annexing Crimea, Russia violated Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and the prohibition on the use of violence contained in the Charter of the United Nations. The Paris Agreement has been weakened by the United States' rejection of it. There is also criticism of the multilateral order of international trade.

And even more dangerously, the former nuclear powers have not been able to prevent more and more countries from acquiring or aiming to acquire nuclear weapons.

And all this is not only happening far away, but close to home. The UK's decision to leave the

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and Donald Trump's election as US President spelled out to us that not only is the big bad world outside the West changing, but that we too are in the midst of upheavals whose impact is likely to keep us busy for decades.

"Global challenges require global solutions" was the mantra of the first decade of the new century, when transnationalism was in its heyday. And now?

"Take back control" and "make America great again" are the battle cries of our day.

"Back" and "again" say it all – the aim is to return to what seem like the good old days. We are witnessing a return to borders and to the supposed strength of the nation state.

Crises in societies

This yearning at an international level can also be found within our societies. There, the responsibility for the growing gulf between rich and poor is laid indiscriminately at the door of globalisation, while the "comfort and care" of the nation state is touted as a remedy.

After decades of "anything goes", as I would sum up the slogan of the post-modern world, a longing for order, clarity, hierarchy and control is now emerging.

Diversity and individuality, equality and inclusion are being derided and called into question by representatives of 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 Europe and 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.

In the face of this anti-postmodernism, one might be tempted to recommend more materialism and less post-modern idealism not only for the social-democratic movements in developed democratic societies.

Yet above all, the debates within American and European societies are causing us to view the world differently – and the world to view us differently.

We can rest assured that people all across the globe, not only in Beijing, Moscow and Tehran, are keeping a very careful eye on how much strength and resolve the West is prepared to muster to defend its values and interests.

Scenarios of a new global order

It is not yet clear what new order this world will adopt. Many things are in flux, and most of the stakeholders, too, are tentatively feeling their way from one stone to the next across this flowing river, to use a Chinese saying.

I believe there are three feasible alternatives for a new global system.

The first is the

G-Zero

world: that is a world in which power is redistributed so widely that no single country has a clear leadership role. The US political scientist Ian Bremmer describes it like this: “... no single country or bloc of countries has the political and economic leverage – or the will – to drive a truly international agenda.” You could also describe it as a sort of Westphalian system 2.0, a new version of the wrestling of sovereign states for hegemony and balance which shaped the period between the end of the Thirty Years’ War and the end of the Second World War. For a middle-ranking trading power like Germany, this kind of free play of forces is highly dangerous. To some, the step into an unregulated world may in some way appear to be the continuation of the individualisation process in international relations. In fact, it would undermine the foundations of our security and our prosperity.

The second alternative is the

G-2

world: this would be a sort of new bipolar order dominated by the competition between two superpowers. The emerging power China would replace the Soviet Union of the Cold War, with the country validating its position through its vision of itself as the Middle Kingdom, based on its history. Given the turmoil in the United States and Europe, it feels justified in its conviction that its own model is superior. In view of the great prosperity promised by the Chinese model, I’m not surprised that many countries are focusing on China.

The third option is the

G-X

world: This world, too, would have many poles, though fewer than the G20 we know, and no doubt they would not be the G7. The crucial difference compared to the G-Zero world would be the existence of binding regulations and structures which would ensure that the interaction of the poles would not depend on the respective balance of powers and the artistry of the 21st century Metternichs and Palmerstons. Multipolarity combined with a binding rules-based order is the hallmark of this system.

You won't be surprised to learn that the third option is the one I would prefer. Whether it is in with a chance depends on how the

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perceives itself and its role.

Whatever direction the world moves in, the

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will only survive if it defines its own interests and projects its power.

In any case, the European Union's lack of power projection to date is the reason why, in areas where the United States has actually or seemingly withdrawn, the focus has shifted not to Europe but to other countries where operationalised power can much more realistically be expected: in the Middle East, for example, to Russia and in Africa, to China.

New powers are filling the vacuum

We are realising that our rivals don't sleep. Two weeks ago, the Russian President held court in Sochi. First the Syrian President paid him a visit, then the Turkish and Iranian leaders. In Syria, a victory was celebrated which those present believed was certain. A German newspaper commented: "Black souls by the Black Sea."

The major powers gathered in Sochi are not friends, but they have plenty in common. They base their identity both at home and abroad on their historical greatness. And that is the crucial factor that distinguishes them from us: they invest considerable capital in throwing their weight about to show the West from time to time.

You could say that they are prepared to pay a kind of "great power tax" to maintain their status. Economic losses, diplomatic sanctions, financial penalties – they are prepared to accept a great deal to stake their claim to regional domination and national sovereignty.

We can see this in Russia's behaviour towards Ukraine. Iran invests considerable resources in supporting militias throughout the region, including terrorist groups, in order to control neighbouring countries or to hamper the efforts of others to exercise control. And Turkey has no qualms about engaging in military operations or confrontations with the United States to defend its interests against Kurdish efforts to obtain independence.

In this respect, Syria has so far been the tragic climax of the advance of the three old empires. Incidentally, we need to regard this with a good dose of self-criticism. Over the past seven years, at no time has the West managed to put its very ambitious demands and the resources invested to achieve them in viable relation to one another.

Theodore Roosevelt once said: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." Our policy towards Syria tended to adopt the opposite approach: "Speak loudly and carry a small stick."

The Middle East is an appropriate example to illustrate my idea of how Europe could define and enforce its interests. Since the Second World War, the regional order there had largely been defined by the United States. In 2017, we are witnessing a weakened projection of order and influence by the United States, which is able and willing to counteract potential collapse in the Middle East only in a limited capacity. Whether this is due to deliberate withdrawal or a lack of power is ultimately irrelevant. What matters is that the United States does not leave a vacuum in its wake, even if it leaves the space. For in politics, any vacuum will soon be filled. Whenever anyone leaves the space, someone else comes to take their place.

In this case, Russia. Russia's military intervention in 2015 gradually altered the dynamics of the civil war in Syria. It put the Assad regime on a stable military footing.

We are now seeing a Russia that will play a decisive role in determining Syria's political future because others have failed to do so. Yet Russia has also changed the regional balance. Nearly all the regional players are shifting the focus of their policy.

At the same time, Russia's new regional dominance is triggering developments at another level. It is creating scope for players who are striving for regional hegemony or who are already achieving it to some extent.

How should we respond to the fact that the United States has made way for players in the direct vicinity of Europe who are pursuing different values and concepts of order than those we have established? And how can we bring German and European interests to bear?

These are questions that go far beyond the regional relevance of the Middle East.

We can also see patterns of withdrawal and displacement similar to those in the Middle East in other parts of the world. We only have to turn our eyes to Asia. There, China is taking over

spaces that used to be exclusively dominated by the United States' presence and policy.

The Belt and Road initiative, the new Silk Road, isn't merely a historic trade-related reminder of Marco Polo, but at the end of the day a geostrategic concept which China is using to enforce its own ideas of order. In the area of trade policy, geographically, geopolitically and ultimately maybe also militarily.

Today it would be true to say that China is the only country in the world that has any sort of long-term geostrategic concept at all.

You can't blame China for that. On the contrary, I respect and admire how quickly this country has developed and the determination it has shown over the last 30 or 40 years.

Yet we in the "old West" can rightfully be blamed for not having a comparable strategy of our own.

Only when both elements have taken shape – the definition of Chinese and European interests and, ideally, also American-European interests – can a sustainable balance be struck between both sides.

That's also the key argument we're making to the United States: in politics, there is no such thing as a vacuum. It will always be filled quite quickly.

That's why it should be in the United States' vested interest to not start a trade war with Europe. Instead, the US should help develop joint strategies that preserve both the liberal international order and a global trade system that rests on a foundation of freedom, fairness, human rights and the rule of law.

Reasons for a more strategic foreign policy

Why am I going into such detail? Because this shows how difficult it will be for us Germans to approach foreign policy from a strategic perspective.

The political scientist Herfried Münkler recently published an interesting book on the Thirty Years' War. In it, he sharply criticises Germany's foreign policy makers. He complains about a German tendency to become "fixated on using legal instruments to tackle political challenges," and he says this is tantamount to denying reality.

Germans lack the courage to unsparingly analyse what's actually happening. Instead, Münkler insists, their gaze always strays to the "horizon of moral norms and imperatives". What they are missing is a "politico-strategic way of thinking".

I think Münkler is addressing the right issues in the right way. It must also be said, however, that the last time Germany pursued its own strategic ideas, life became rather uncomfortable

for the rest of the world and these ideas led to the worst cases of genocide in history. Nevertheless, I think Münkler is right as regards what is going on around us.

So don't misunderstand me. Sticking to the example of Syria, it's right and proper that we insist on a political process that aims to bring true and lasting peace, and that we continue, with the instruments of the international community, to work towards delivering essential humanitarian assistance and ensuring respect for the principles of international law. This remains beyond question.

However, after nearly seven years of war, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that other players have meanwhile created facts on the ground. Often, this has been done in breach of all established norms, and contrary to our moral principles. Unfortunately, it's also been highly effective.

So what needs to be done?

First of all, we must conduct a level-headed analysis of the situation. We need a clear and realistic view of the world – exactly as it is, not a vision of how it should be.

Next, based on this, and with a strong moral compass, we must fight passionately for what we want to preserve and want to achieve. We must do so without being blinkered by an excessively moral or normative worldview. And we must, Münkler writes, be willing to "make strategic compromises".

A new relationship with the US

This includes, for one thing, finding a strategic relationship between Europe and the United States. Since the Second World War, the United States has, from Germany's point of view, been untouchable, as it were.

However, at the latest since Gary Cohn and H.R. McMaster, the US president's national security adviser, published their Wall Street Journal article, it's clear that, to the US, the world is no longer a "global community, but rather an arena in which nations, non-state actors and corporations fight to gain advantage". It's a place where you may have one partner today and a different partner tomorrow – depending on what serves your interests.

In this worldview, the United States, as I see it, is no longer responsible for underpinning the structure and dome of this arena. Rather, it is one of the combatants on its sandy floor.

For years, we took for granted the United States' protective role, despite occasional disputes. These days at the latest, that's turning out to be an illusion.

The United States will remain our most important global partner. Without a doubt, we will need, and we will continue to nurture, this partnership. However, this partnership will not in

and of itself be sufficient for meeting our strategic interests.

The fact that the US is reducing its role in world affairs cannot be tied to the policies of a single president. There will be no major changes to this trend, also after the next election.

There should be no doubt that, given this situation, Germany and Europe must do, and dare to do, far more than in the past.

To put it plainly, in view of the risk we are facing, we are being forced to act. We must not look on while new spheres open up on which we have no influence.

We must act, even if, by taking action, we incur risk – the risk of failure. We must accept this risk. In the past, we've left action up to the United States – and if things went wrong, we had someone to blame.

Germany must invest more in its own strength and in the unity and power of the European Union. Incidentally, it is hard to believe how entrenched public debate in Germany has become regarding our net contributions to the

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. In truth, we are net beneficiaries. Yes, more of our tax money does go via Brussels to the rest of Europe than we receive in return through direct subsidies. But we do in fact have a winning economy only thanks to the European Economic Area.

In future, we will also need to invest more in our partnership with the United States. It is also a political investment, because we will thereby be creating a strategic anchor for tackling the new situation.

Against this background, we must make a sober assessment of in what areas we may suddenly, or possibly permanently, be at odds with one another.

I would like to give three examples: The sanctions that the US Congress imposed on Russia last summer also affect existing German pipelines that run to Russia. These sanctions pose an existential threat to our own economic interests.

A second example: Doing away with the Iran nuclear deal would increase the risk of war in our immediate neighbourhood. This would not only affect, but also jeopardise, our national security.

And a third example: There are signs that the US may in the near future recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel – and incidentally it would be doing so without prior coordination with Europe. We all know how far-reaching the consequences of such a step would be. Germany's position on this issue remains unchanged. A solution to the Jerusalem issue can

only be found through direct negotiations between both parties. Anything exacerbating the crisis is counter-productive.

At any event, Germany cannot afford to wait for decisions to be taken in Washington, just like it cannot afford to simply react to them. We must clearly state our own positions. If need be, we must make clear to our allies at what point they would be overstepping the boundaries of our solidarity.

That’s not an easy thing for us all to do. It’s definitely a new situation. It’s why, as a prerequisite, we must make a massive investment in our capability to analyse and lobby American public opinion on Germany and Europe.

Therefore, we need to make a targeted effort to liaise with constructive partners in the US Administration and in Congress, at State level, and above all in civil society. Based on this, we must be prepared, as partners, to balance our strategic interests – rather than to submit to domination by US policies, which in fact was never the case in the past.

Reasons for a European Ostpolitik

Moreover, we must of course also more clearly and coherently define our interests vis-à-vis Russia. In annexing Crimea and intervening in eastern Ukraine, Moscow has called in question the international order.

Nevertheless, Russia is still Europe’s neighbour, and a highly influential one at that – as I just pointed out in connection with Syria. Security and peace can only be achieved on a long-term basis with – and not against – Russia.

What is more, regarding the threat of the global proliferation of nuclear arsenals, the only way to successfully curb this development will be through the cooperation of Russia and the United States, and meanwhile also of China.

Currently, however, trust between Russia and the US, or

NATO

, has been so profoundly undermined that both sides are even calling into question what was achieved through the nuclear disarmament efforts of the 1980s.

For now, the 1987 ban on land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe is still in place. The question is, how long will it hold?

I believe we may be on the brink of a phase of rearmament in the heart of Europe, one that may include nuclear arms.

No country has a greater motivation to clearly state its interests, and bring these to bear to the best of its ability, than does Germany. If the situation were to deteriorate, we would suffer the most under a Cold War 2.0.

More than ever, our country must again make a resounding case for arms control and disarmament.

The key question is whether or not we can convince Russia to return to a rules-based order like the one that kept the peace in Europe for so long. For this, we need both clear principles and a firm position when it comes to the violation of international principles. This must include the willingness to take specific measures, such as sanctions.

On the other hand, it is Germany's special role to keep channels of communication open and to seek dialogue, even in difficult times.

It would, for example, be a major step forward if we were able to agree with Russia on a viable United Nations peacekeeping mission, in order to finally enforce a lasting ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from eastern Ukraine. All sides have promised that for years – and have broken their promise almost daily.

Our ideas about the form that such a mission could take – and our allies' ideas – still diverge widely from Russia's. But the fact that Russia is in principle willing to accept a mission is a big step forward, given that it had previously rejected any such internationalisation of the conflict and peacemaking efforts.

What we are proposing to Russia is clear: after a lasting ceasefire has been implemented, the Europeans could help rebuild Donbas, and also initiate the first steps towards removing sanctions.

This would not constitute a final settlement to the conflict in Ukraine, and it would fall a long way short of fulfilling the Minsk agreements, but it would definitely be a breakthrough. And a major step towards a new policy of détente with Russia.

It is obvious that there can be no such thing as a German Ostpolitik today. It has to be a European Ostpolitik. We can only forge a successful Ostpolitik if our new

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and

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partners in central and eastern Europe are on board.

With their backgrounds and past experiences which are quite different from our own. But Germans continue to have an existential interest in such détente.

A new start for the

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In the light of these challenges, the demands we are making of the

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are pretty terrifying. We are treating the European Union as if we could get out the spare if anything happens to this one.

Member states are laying the blame at each others' doors, threats are being openly made, plans obstructed, votes are turning belligerent and poisonous stereotypes are being revived.

As Eugen Roth once said, "It takes barely half an hour to fell a mighty tree; but, remember, it takes a century to grow till one admires it so."

Tensions between governments have intensified in the

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. And because governments blame Brussels for the maladies, they play into the hands of those media who revel in identifying new fronts, in claiming this is a case of South against North, or West against East.

Perhaps this is because we still have not understood our common interests, as Dahrendorf said.

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was not in fact established in order to grasp these external interests as an internally binding force. Tragically, at the very moment world events require it to step forward on the world stage, the

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seems to be slowly allowing its project of internal reconciliation to fray.

That's why I maintain that what we need first of all is a dramatic change of direction, if we don't want to be staring out over the ruins of the

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in a few years time – helpless in the world. It is simply wrong to believe that the

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entails a loss of national sovereignty. That form of national sovereignty does not exist in today's world or tomorrow's. We are recovering sovereignty indirectly via the

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. The European Union constitutes a gain in sovereignty for its member states, not a loss.

The European Union has to rise above itself, especially in the foreign policy arena. In the turbulent world of today, we Europeans can only assert our interests if we present a unified front.

Let's not deceive ourselves. The world views Europe as rich but weak. That makes it a tempting target for interventionists and manipulators.

For this reason, the

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needs to work as one to defend our open societies and further integrate our nations and economies.

We have taken the first steps in this direction – cooperation in the field of defence and common European border management.

Further steps must follow. One that occurs to me is mending the often quoted design error in our economic and monetary union – one currency and 19 economic and financial policies.

At present, the farthest-reaching proposals on this issue come from France. But Italy, too, will have something to say. It will be up to the next Federal Government – whoever that involves – to determine Germany's position on these initiatives. This stance will have to be a centrepiece of government policy. And if there is one thing I'm certain of, it's that we cannot afford to waste a chance like this.

It is not enough to protect and praise what has been accomplished so far. If our accomplishments cannot withstand crises, we have to prepare for the next crises while the good times last. This and nothing else is what the French President wants.

Macron identified the downward spiral the

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is in. He compared it with a civil war.

The election of an actively pro-European President in France is a piece of luck of historic proportions.

The survey results published today by the Körber Foundation in the “Berlin Pulse” corroborate this. 90 percent of Germans want us to cooperate more with France in the future. Incidentally, if almost 50 percent of respondents want a more active foreign policy, that’s a pretty good result for Germany.

Germany and France won’t work together simply because we like each other.

Germany and France will only work together if we can agree on common points of reference for the future of Europe.

We have to agree on the direction. But how exactly we get there, what concrete steps we should take – these are matters we will still have to discuss in detail.

What we need now is to inject new dynamism into European integration. Any such zeal must not be blind and aimless, but must build on strategic points and address the core issues relating to power structures and the future.

Germany, too, has to provide fresh impetus if we want to see this dynamism. Our country has adopted a wait-and-see or obstructive position too often in the past years – when it wasn’t being eccentric.

France is currently winning hands down as regards initiatives on the future of the European Union. It’s time for us to score some points.

Moving ahead will entail numerous serious debates on economic and financial issues. Security policy is another area in which France and Germany are called upon to find common ground for the sake of Europe.

None of this will be easy. Perhaps France will have to become slightly more German on financial issues and Germany somewhat more French on security policy.

The history of Franco-German relations to date is an impressive example of the fact that this consensus can grow and bear fruit through constant dialogue, even if the points of departure are widely divergent.

We can build on this and must not slacken our efforts. For we Germans should be in no doubt about the source of our current strength. It stems primarily from the fact that Germany was able to develop peacefully, surrounded by friends in Europe.

Our present relative economic strength is due in large part to Europe. And to the confidence our European neighbours, in particular France, placed in a peaceful Germany. Without this European integration, based on Franco-German reconciliation and cooperation, we would never have been able to achieve what we have.

In his speech at the opening of this year's Frankfurt Book Fair, Emmanuel Macron passionately and concisely described what holds us together.

Macron, who is a very well-read politician, described how it was often German and French authors who understood the works from each others' countries particularly well, and made them accessible to a wider audience.

By way of example, Macron said it was through the German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin that he truly discovered the French poet Baudelaire.

Distance probably focuses the mind on the exceptional. Europeans – and in particular the French and the Germans – have thus learned that people can be different from us without threatening or casting doubt on our identity. The contrary is true, as Macron also pointed out. The otherness of our immediate neighbours nourishes our own identity – be it French, German, or European. And it is precisely this diversity that is Europe's strength.

Conclusion

Indeed, Europe is also a project that has something to offer our bellicose and conflict-ridden world of today. It demonstrates that enemies can become partners and ultimately friends. Even today, it seems miraculous that the very people who suffered most under Germany's tyranny later invited us to return to the fold of civilised nations and to build a shared and peaceful Europe. It is not least because of this uniquely successful precedent that we Germans have a special responsibility for the future of this shared Europe.

However, we still have our work cut out for us, as Germans and Europeans, if we are to live up to Dahrendorf's demands.

Do we have the necessary strength? I don't know. But we have to try, and we have to start by defining our own interests.

Then begins the jousting for power and position, which will not be pleasant. But what was it Willy Brandt said?

"It may be true that power corrupts the character, but powerlessness does so too, to no less a degree."

With this in mind, this is not the time to take shelter in our alleged powerlessness.

Thank you for your Attention.

Overview "Newsroom"

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