

Remarks of Robert B. Zoellick at Laudation for Dr. Helmut Kohl On Receiving the 2011 Henry A. Kissinger Prize

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Introduction

Herr Doktor Kohl; Chancellor Merkel; Mr. President; Dr. Kissinger; Ladies and Gentlemen:

It's a great pleasure to be here tonight to honor former Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl.

It is a particular pleasure that we are here under the auspices of the American Academy in Berlin. The founding of this Academy after the end of the Cold War evidences a wonderful insight about transatlantic ties in a new era.

This singular institution offers a place where American scholars and writers, cultural and political figures, can come together, share their experiences with, and learn from, the people of Berlin and Germany. It was envisaged as a true Academy, "a living center for the exchange of ideas," in the words of the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. And that is exactly what it has become.

There could be no better ambassador for the Academy and what it represents than Dr. Kissinger.

Henry Kissinger left Germany as a refugee. He built an extraordinary new life devoted to service to his new country as both a scholar and a statesman. He returned to Germany as a world figure. The prize that bears his name not only honors Dr. Kissinger's achievements in diplomacy and foreign policy, it also recognizes the strength of the transatlantic relationship – its intellectual, cultural, and political strength.

At times during Dr. Kissinger's long years of service, the ties between Europe and America have been stretched and strained. Yet his international assessments have always been grounded in realities. One essential that Dr. Kissinger always kept at the heart of his *Weltanschauung* is that Europe and the United States must be bound as allies. Though his achievements reached to China, the Middle East, Russia, and beyond, Dr. Kissinger always appreciated the centrality of Europe – and of Germany – because, for a maritime United States, the Atlantic must be a bond, not a barrier, and because of shared values born of entwined histories.

I would also like to say a few words about Richard Holbrooke.

It was while he was serving as U.S. Ambassador to Germany that Richard Holbrooke conceived the idea of an American Academy in Berlin. And as any of you who knew him are well aware, once he had an idea in his head there was no stopping him. Holbrooke was the founding Chairman of the Academy, and he remained an active contributor to its cultural and intellectual energy for the rest of his life. There can be no better legacy of Richard Holbrooke's devotion to German-American relations – and to an American foreign policy infused with imagination, beliefs, and ideas – than the enduring relevance of the American Academy in Berlin. I have been asked tonight to speak about Helmut Kohl.

I have chosen to offer an account, for Germans and Americans, recalling Dr. Kohl's legacy: His unshakeable belief in German and European unity and his commitment to the Atlantic Alliance.

Dr. Kohl's beliefs led him – and Germany – to three decision points that have shaped our world today: German unification; the deployment of medium range missiles and the wielding of dual track diplomacy during the 1980s; and the creation of the European Single Market, the Euro, and the European economy of integration.

Decision Point: A Vision of Unification

Great historical events can appear to be inevitable in hindsight. The reality is that events could have taken a different turn.

In November 1989, the East German regime had to give in to the pressure of the people and opened checkpoints in the Berlin wall, allowing its citizens to travel freely to the West for the first time in almost three decades. At that moment, the most probable outcome was not that there would be a peacefully unified German state in less than a year, firmly anchored in the West.

The issues surrounding the events of 1989 had arisen faster than anyone at the time could have expected. They were driven by many deep historical currents: the growing evidence of a bankruptcy of Soviet-style political systems in Central and Eastern Europe and the courage of Central and East Europeans to challenge those systems; the retrenchment of the Soviet Empire imposed by a collapsing economy; the appeal of West Germany and the new Europe amidst the resolve of the West; and the building demand for freedom and fundamental human and political rights that propelled the East German people to break through that wall.

But once the wall tumbled, statesmanship steered the sequence of events that followed. There were many voices – in London, Paris, Moscow, frankly, all across Europe and even some in Germany – urging caution or even opposing a united Germany. There were few voices calling for unification in the present.

Yet Helmut Kohl had vision. Dr. Kohl understood – perhaps earlier than anyone else at that time – that historical forces were at work in Europe. That this was finally the moment that Adenauer's commitment of *Freiheit vor Einheit* could find its fulfillment through *Freiheit und Einheit*. That unity of the German people needed to go hand-in-hand with a united Europe. And that decisive moments are fleeting.

Dr. Kohl has since said that the moment when he truly sensed unification was coming was on his visit to Dresden a month after the opening of the Berlin Wall. Kohl recalled that “when I landed...on the bumpy concrete runway of the Dresden-Klotzsche airport, it suddenly became clear to me: this regime is finished. Unification is coming!”

He found the streets lined with thousands of people, holding placards proclaiming, “*Deutschland – Einig Vaterland.*” People shouted, “Helmut! Helmut!” and “*Deutschland! Deutschland!*” Kohl realized that the moment was ripe for unity – not in years or in decades, as he himself had believed only a year earlier. But in months. That evening, standing before the blackened ruins of the *Frauenkirche*, he called out to the tens of thousands of Dresdeners with the words “*liebe Landsleute.*”

Dr. Kohl boldly shaped the agenda – guided by his vision – setting forth a 10-point plan for German unity that rapidly set the stage, even though in hindsight it seemed too pedestrian; partnering with Washington; reaching out to Moscow to convince the Soviet leadership. There were no opinion polls or focus groups that could truly measure the political popularity of his vision. There was no prepared plan to refine. There was no fallback. Kohl recognized the historical moment, seized it, and acted. Unification quickly gained unstoppable momentum.

He later explained to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev: “I find something that Bismarck once said to be very good. ‘You cannot do something by yourself. You have to wait to hear the footsteps of God through the events, and then jump up and grab his coattails.’”

Kohl took a tremendous chance by following his instincts, and putting unification on the international agenda before it was ready for it. He was aided by the assurance of a strong relationship with the United States – a relationship characterized by experience, mutual respect, and above all, trust.

The depth of this trust stands out during the negotiations over unification.

In February 1990, within a day of each other, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Chancellor Kohl journeyed to Moscow to meet with President Gorbachev. It had already become apparent that the Cold War order in Europe was collapsing, and there was agreement in Bonn and Washington that a new construction had to center on the rapid unification of Germany. Germany was the key.

But the Soviet Union remained the greatest obstacle in the path to Germany's unification. It was crucial to secure Gorbachev's agreement to proceed within a Two-plus-Four framework, allowing the two Germanies to work out the internal aspects of unification, and then – with the addition of France, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union – to guide the end of the Four Power rights established after World War II within the context of a broader, changing international architecture. That design, too, required vision.

Following his meeting with President Gorbachev, Secretary Baker sensed a possible breakthrough on the creation of the Two-plus-Four process. Bob Gates and I were supposed to fly to brief Kohl. But there was not enough time. So Baker wrote Kohl a confidential letter detailing insights and suggestions on how the Chancellor might proceed in his own discussions.

President Bush followed up Baker's guidance with his own letter to the Chancellor, assuring him of his personal support for a unified Germany within the Western alliance: "As our two countries journey together through this time of hope and promise, we can remain confident of our shared ability to defend the fruits of freedom," President Bush wrote. "Nothing Mr. Gorbachev can say to Jim Baker or to you can change the fundamental fact of our deep and enduring partnership."

In other words: We trust you, Chancellor. And you can trust us.

In his meeting in Moscow, Kohl seemed to gain Gorbachev's support for the Two-Plus-Four process. It was launched a week later.

The effect on Germans, East and West, was electric. For the first time, they could see that other countries would support true unification. A month later, the voters of East Germany, sensing their opportunity, also reached for Providence's cloak.

In July, 1990, Kohl and Gorbachev, along with their senior aides, Horst Teltschik and Anatoly Chernyayev, met alone in Moscow with their interpreters. Gorbachev made it clear that a unified Germany would be a member of NATO. At the time, Kohl showed no visible reaction. But Teltschik would later recall his excitement: "The breakthrough is accomplished! What a sensation!" he wrote, "For the Chancellor this conversation is an unbelievable triumph."

Beliefs

In the end, it was the German people who drove the unification process and determined the pace of events – millions of East Germans with a desire for freedom, ready to come west if German democracy and the Deutschemark did not come to them.

Yet it was Helmut Kohl who made a unified Germany politically conceivable and acceptable, because of who he was and what he believed in.

Rooted in his hometown of Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Kohl's values, geopolitical views, and historical outlook were embedded in the Rhineland. From this western region he inherited an outlook that blended local ties with a sense of a European identity and role, and a close affinity with France.

Conservative and practical, his background to some degree mirrored that of Ronald Reagan, whose sensibilities were shaped by his Midwestern roots. Like Reagan, Kohl instinctively understood that in order to relate to people he had to have a sense of their dreams, fears, and moods – yet, at the same time, he perceived a leader had to shape general sentiments into direction. He understood that this was the essence of democratic leadership: the ability to rally the people at the right moment.

Dr. Kissinger, the adroit and shrewd diplomat-in-chief, recognized the limits of the international strategist, as well as the unique leading role of the democratic leader. “No foreign policy – no matter how ingenious – has any chance of success if it is born in the minds of a few and carried in the hearts of none,” wrote Kissinger.

Kohl's outlook was reinforced by historical events. Born in 1930, Kohl often spoke of the special responsibility of those endowed with the “blessing of being born later” – too young to have been a victim or perpetrator under Nazism, yet gaining political consciousness amid the ruins of war. It shaped a belief in the possibility of Germans being able to express a “normal patriotism” for their country – a pride in culture and history that is taken for granted in other countries. It also shaped a belief in the need to contain German nationalism within an overarching sense of common European values.

At the same time, the spirit of the United States, experienced through post-war relief efforts, made a deep impression on Kohl. In later years, he would love to tell American visitors the story of how he met his future wife, Hannelore, at a local dance: he wearing a suit and she a dress, both received in a CARE package from the United States.

These views were given added weight by the policies of a line of extraordinary German post-war leaders.

Most importantly, Kohl was inspired by the integration and Western-leaning policies of Konrad Adenauer. Indeed, Kohl defined himself as “Adenauer's grandson.” Like the great Chancellor, Kohl was committed to the idea that German and European unity were “two sides of the same coin,” and convinced of the importance of the Atlantic Alliance for German security. These unshakable views were expressed at the start of his federal political career. In his first speech as CDU party chairman in 1973, Kohl told delegates it “is decisive that the idea of militant democracy remain the content of the Atlantic Community and of the movement for European unity.”

Kohl led the CDU to embrace the principles of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr's *Ostpolitik* – which he believed could be complemented with a “*Westpolitik*” that emphasized relations with the European Community and the United States on questions of security.

Decision Point: The Courage to Deploy Euromissiles

These policies – integration with Europe, the Atlantic Alliance, and *Ostpolitik* – laid the foundation for a unified Germany in 1990.

But history is shaped not by policies, but by the decisions of individuals.

And I believe historians will reflect that it was Helmut Kohl's courageous decisions during one of the most critical periods in German history that opened the way to the historical opportunity to unify Germany.

When Kohl became Chancellor in 1982, the political climate in Germany was a ferocious mixture of neutralism, anti-nuclear pacifism, and anti-Americanism. This was a response to the debate over NATO's decision to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe to counter the Soviet SS-20s – a new generation of mobile Soviet

missiles capable of hitting targets in Western Europe. For the Soviets, the SS-20s were a counter to British and French nuclear forces, and to the potency of America's nuclear-armed planes that could strike Soviet territory. For the West, the SS-20s threatened a decoupling between the security of the United States and its NATO allies.

Kohl's predecessor, Helmut Schmidt, along with his Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had hoped that negotiations would persuade the Soviets not to deploy their new weapon. But they believed that if the Soviets could not be convinced, then NATO must respond.

Schmidt's commitment to this dual-track strategy of restoring military parity as a basis for negotiations involved extremely high personal costs. It left him isolated from his own party, the SPD, already deeply divided on economic, environmental, and security issues after 16 years of governing, challenged on the left from the Greens and on the right from the CDU and FDP. The drift of the SPD – one of Germany's two great *Volksparteien* – was no doubt also a sign of the seriousness of political shifts in Germany. Helmut Schmidt showed enormous moral courage in his firm stance on the question of America's military presence in Europe, adhering to a sense of duty even though he knew it might end his political career.

The euromissile debate was the last great political conflict of the Cold War in Europe. At stake were not only Germany's ties to the West, but more broadly, the resilience of the Atlantic Alliance and the political and moral resolve of the Western democracies in the face of Soviet intimidation.

The recollections of the emotional intensity of this issue for Germany will fade with passing generations. Even historians, peering back, will always miss the vantage point of the moment – because they know how the story ended.

Demonstrations against the missiles raged across a country grown weary of nearly 40 years of tension with the East, and steeped in a decade of *Ostpolitik*, which, to some extent, had lent a tone of moral equivalence to East and West. For the German Left, the euromissiles debate only reinforced the focus on similarities between the superpowers – in weapons and foreign policies – rather than on differences in societies and governments. For those protesting against the deployment of American missiles on German soil, the most important line of division ran not between dictatorships and democracies but between nuclear and non-nuclear powers. Paraphrasing von Clausewitz, historian Jeffrey Herf likened the political conflict in 1983 to “war by other means.”

Kohl recalled looking out upon the crowds gathered in the Hofgarten Park at Bonn University in October 1983 – thousands of protesters, who feared that deployment might spark a nuclear Armageddon. Kohl surveyed the scene, and asked himself, “Are they all wrong? Or are you?”

Yet Kohl's courageous commitment to deploying the missiles, and operationalizing the dual-track approach that Schmidt and Genscher had put forward, was unyielding. The Bundestag debate in November 1983 was the 37th on the issue since 1979. Kohl told lawmakers: “We are not wanderers between East and West.... There is no middle way between democracy and dictatorship. We stand on the side of freedom.” Kohl supported the missiles both for defensive purposes and as an unmistakable affirmation of Germany's position in the Western Alliance. He carried the vote in the Bundestag. The missiles were deployed.

Helmut Kohl's decision in the euromissiles debate was not the popular one. He faced considerable opposition, risk, and uncertainty. But it was the right decision.

Kohl's courageous stand helped to boost Western resolve against the Soviets and, in turn, weaken the resolve of the Soviet leadership. We now see his decision as having convinced Moscow to agree to the elimination of a whole category of weapons through the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty. Indeed, Mikhail Gorbachev would later tell Kohl that NATO's steadfastness in this decision “substantially contributed to the ‘new thinking’ in the Kremlin” which allowed for the loosening of Soviet control over Eastern Europe and, ultimately, the collapse of communism.

Kohl's steadfastness as an ally created an echo. When the movement for unification finally came, all of us knew Kohl, knew of his commitment to the Western Alliance, knew that he understood what being allies really meant. For Kohl, an alliance was not just words on a piece of paper or in fine halls followed by press conferences. An alliance was – and is – a shared sense of responsibility and duty to one another.

In 1989, the United States remembered all this.

We remember it still. Celebrating the Day of German Unity together in 2006, President George H. W. Bush remarked of Helmut Kohl, "We would not be standing here if it were not for his vision, his tenacity, his singular leadership." Bush expressed his conviction that history would rank Kohl as Europe's greatest leader in the second half of the 20th Century.

Decision Point: The Commitment to the Euro and European Integration

For truly completing the vision of a free and united Germany, Kohl insisted that his country become inextricably tied to Europe, politically and financially. This commitment had been a key element in securing French support for German unification. By October 1990, Kohl had become the principal advocate for European Monetary Union. Less than a year after unification, the Maastricht Treaty was adopted, laying the groundwork.

Kohl then encouraged fellow leaders to fulfill their commitment to the Single Europe Act, paving the way for 1992's single market. There were deep sensitivities within Germany to giving up the Deutschmark, which had become the repository for modern "acceptable" German nationalism. But Kohl focused not on what was to be given up, but what was to be gained: the [free movement of people, goods, services, and capital](#) within a single space, a European space that could confound the ghosts of Europe's past.

Yet by 1997, when it was clear that Germany was unlikely to meet the Maastricht fiscal criteria, Kohl faced another historic decision point: whether to delay European monetary union or push forward. His commitment propelled him ahead.

Kohl – like any practical political leader – recognized that his designs would remain unfinished. Work was still to be done, to be defined by different times and different people. The European economy would change. So would the world economy.

Kohl had built on the work of those who came before – from all parties, and also all Germans. But looking forward, he always followed a bright beacon. His fundamental question would always be: "What does this issue – faced by Germans – mean for Europe?" Kohl was committed to a peaceful Europe, offering better lives and opportunities for all its people; a closer Europe, but also a Europe in friendship and partnership with the United States.

So in pressing the case for monetary union, Kohl argued that adopting the Euro was not only about economic union, but, ultimately a question of war and peace – a protection against reviving past national rivalries. "Europe will only be a success if we are patient with each other and have respect for each other, respect for the present generation and respect for the history of future generations," Kohl affirmed in a speech on the day that eleven European nations agreed to participate in the Euro.

Conclusion

Dr. Kohl built on the policies of his predecessors. But as a leader, he had to make his own decisions in his own time and place.

Unification called for his vision.

His deployment of Euromissiles drew on his courage.

Monetary Union and the integration of Europe's economy depended on his commitment.

This vision. This courage. And this commitment. Together, they describe what made Kohl great.

Dr. Kohl managed his country's unity with enormous skill: a practical understanding of German interests as well as European apprehensions; a shrewd appreciation of domestic politics; and a well-developed awareness of the personal dimensions of statecraft.

Above all, Kohl has been a pragmatist, prepared and ready to exercise power in a democracy. A steady hand at the rudder, he guided his country in a world of change. In a conversation with an American ambassador, Kohl once remarked, "we Germans have the tendency to keep our heads in the clouds, and often time that leads to trouble. But that's not me. I achieve things by keeping my feet on the ground."

So he did. In doing so, he left one more legacy to his fellow Germans. The privilege to feel proud, as Germans and Europeans.

In the affairs of the world, countries cannot rest on past achievements. Indeed, the more recognition they earn, the more others may look to them. So it is today, for my country and for Germany.

Helmut Kohl heard the footsteps of Providence and grabbed her cloak. Given his size, I think he even managed to steer Providence a bit!

So tonight it is a signal honor for me...

on an occasion hosted by America's living Academy in Berlin...

with an honor named for America's great practitioner and ongoing student of statecraft and history...

to respectfully suggest Helmut Kohl's distinctive place in history.