

“A European Germany in a united Europe”

*by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and former Foreign Ministers
Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Klaus Kinkel and Walter Scheel*

Europe finds itself in the midst of considerable turmoil. Running up state debts, a policy pursued by some countries for many years, suddenly became unbearable in the truest sense of the word as the result of the additional burden of the financial and banking crisis. The disastrous consequences of this are doubts about the creditworthiness of state debtors and shaky confidence in united Europe's resolve and capability to take action.

The situation is serious. A high degree of earnestness and a sense of responsibility are therefore absolutely essential for deciding how to proceed. Some are wary of practical solidarity with financially struggling euro zone states. Citizens' confidence in the European project has been hit. The longing for a simple solution, for a supposedly “clean break”, is growing. It is vital that we keep a cool head.

Let us look at Germany's interests. It has become fashionable to contrast German and European interests, as if they were two different, and sometimes opposing, things. While it is true that not everything which is devised and proposed in Brussels deserves immediate and full approval, the central point remains that the table in Brussels around which the 27 member states sit as equals and where they reconcile their interests through fair compromises, is very much in Germany's interest. Brussels, where compromises are churned out, is what guarantees Germany, a large country in the heart of Europe, the confidence and friendship of its many neighbours and European partners. This valuable asset is worth just as much, if not more, than the huge common market of 500 million European citizens, from which we as an export nation reap major benefits.

There were around three billion people in the world when the Rome Treaties were signed in 1957. Just recently, the world's population passed the seven billion mark. Germany's population is falling. The influence of nation-states in the globalized world is diminishing. No country, not even Germany, has enough clout of its own to exert influence on key political and economic decisions. It is therefore all the more important that, as a globally connected economy which depends on open markets,

we have joint rules in and for tomorrow's world. In our own interest, we have to help shape globalization: we have to promote free personal development, respect for the inalienable rights of every individual, as well as free trade. Only if Europeans act together will we have any chance of working together with the world's new centres of power to bring our influence to bear. And this is about safeguarding our values just as much as our interests. Whether our neighbourhood is dominated by democracies or dictatorships will have an impact on our security. For there is no national response to climate change, refugee flows and the scarcity of raw materials. Global norms and standards for the e-mobility of the future will also determine the future of our automobile industry.

The European project will thus remain the foundation on which German foreign policy rests. However, it is currently facing extremely serious challenges which requires us, and our European partners, to show a special sense of responsibility. Whether we want it or not, we Germans have a special responsibility due to our history.

During the last 18 months, we have achieved much to anchor Germany's regulatory framework more firmly in the euro zone. And that is a good thing. Together with the necessary amendment to the European Treaties, this will pave the way to a genuine stability union in which more importance than hitherto is placed on fiscal discipline and competitiveness. Our single currency requires joint action, also in the sphere of fiscal and economic policy. However, fiscal discipline is not just a matter vital to Germany due to our past experience with hyperinflation. Sound budgeting is in our pan-European interest. Bold reform measures in many euro countries, for instance the introduction of national debt brakes, show that the seriousness of the situation has been recognized elsewhere. There is not going to be a quick solution. Indeed, it will take years until the situation in Europe has stabilized and the continent's competitiveness has been strengthened.

It is important that Germany proceeds along this path together with France. It is important that we closely involve Poland in ever closer cooperation among the euro zone countries. It will be in Germany's interest to have France and Poland as its key partners in tomorrow's Europe. However, we have to take the interests as well as the quizzical looks of other neighbouring and partner states seriously. The confidence of our partners in Germany and Germany's confidence in Europe are two sides of the same coin. We must not allow Europe to become a continent dogged by mistrust:

either through our words, or through our actions. What matters is that we show the political will to work together to make European integration project a success. In doing this, we must not only state what is not possible. We have to actively advance towards a stability union. We need a new debate on the future of the European Union throughout Europe. This is about Europe's future institutional make-up. It is about a European constitution which creates the institutional prerequisites for progressive integration, also in the sphere of economic and financial policy, under the oversight of the European Parliament.

International agreement makes it easier to act quickly and with resolve in the face of crisis. However, the European Union's community method has fostered confidence in Europe. It gives everyone a seat and a voice at the table. It must once more determine Europe's actions in the long term.

We must not lose our bearings in the troubled waters of the present crisis. Our main goal continues to be a political union in Europe with open frontiers, with an attractive European way of life, with cultural and political appeal, as well as dynamic economies. In order to achieve this, we have to combine solidity with solidarity today in an intelligent way.

Our country will not have a bright future without European integration. Nor will our neighbours have a bright future without a Germany which is firmly committed to Europe. That was not only true during the Cold War. For it is equally true today. It should continue to determine our policy on Europe tomorrow.