



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
to mark the 20th anniversary of the American Academy
at Schloss Bellevue
on 7 October 2014**

Allow me to begin with a few remarks on this building where we are gathered today. It is very familiar to most of you, but perhaps not to everyone: Schloss Bellevue is the Federal President's official residence. However, it is also a forum in which people meet to exchange views and to discuss with one another. It is a forum in which the events of the past bloody century have been commemorated this year in a variety of ways – the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War from many different perspectives. Or take another example: citizens of outstanding merit were presented with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in this very room and at this very hour yesterday. You should see this palace as a forum in which Germans can meet and talk with each other, with institutions, about who they are. It is a forum for better understanding, a forum where people can come together. That is the reason why I am beginning today with these remarks about this building – for it is serving us too as a forum for coming together.

Bringing people together and widening horizons, that is the task of the American Academy and that is why this forum is so well suited to the occasion we are celebrating.

Gary Smith,

I saw in your eyes that you agreed with me straightaway.

There are many links across the Atlantic: first of all, the many, many personal friendships and family ties, then business relations, the wide range of cultural links and the academic partnerships. And the planes across the Atlantic are full of politicians, schoolchildren, students, researchers, artists and business people. There is always something that has to be discussed with someone on the other side of

the Big Pond. Our links are therefore institutional, but also individual. No other two regions of the world have established a more close-knit network of contacts than the United States and European countries. Within this meshwork of transatlantic relations, however, there is a special organisation here in Berlin, which plays a very special role: the American Academy.

Housed in the former villa of a family which was once driven out by the National Socialists and was forced to sell it well under its market value, and now generously supported by the very same family, the Arnhold-Kellens, the American Academy has become a centre of American intellectual life in Europe. It is a cultural gem here in Berlin, on the Wannsee lakeside.

This was made possible by good ideas and hard work – and especially talented individuals. Gary Smith, you first came to Germany because of your love of the works of Walter Benjamin. You built up the Einstein Forum in Potsdam and then the American Academy, which had been founded by Richard Holbrooke. To this very day, I still catch my breath a little when I mention the name Richard Holbrooke, whom I had the honour of meeting several times in person. How we would all have loved to have him with us today. And now, Gary, you are returning after a break of 17 years to what fascinated you at the outset of your remarkable career: writing and researching. I wish you all the best for the future. And I would like to thank you for all your ideas and for your commitment to American-German relations. Above all, however, I would like to thank you for making the Academy an “intellectual airlift”, as you said yourself. The transfer via this airlift has benefited both Berlin and Germany. Many thanks for that!

We can see this most impressively in the shape of the fellowship programme: Fellows of the American Academy, you have come from all corners of the United States, from all academic disciplines and from all cultural spheres to spend an academic semester in Berlin. You are the ambassadors of a country of thinkers and writers, a country of universities and research institutes. Anyone in Europe who wants to take a close look at current American debates should visit that magnificent lakeside villa. Anyone who wants to find out more about a wealth of issues beyond the usual images and clichés, is in the right place here at the American Academy. Let me therefore express my wish for the American Academy: may it continue to be a magnet for the intellect, a forum for transatlantic exchange, under its new director.

And I have to add another comment here – quite spontaneously. As I just read the sentences I wrote earlier – how I have just described America – it occurred to me how differently some people, especially here in Europe, perceive the United States these days. Not all of that was in the sentences in which I described America’s intellectual life and

culture. Currently, enlightened people who are aware of the cultural diversity in America and have helped to raise awareness of it here in Europe have a tough job, for too many people with too little knowledge say too much about this other country. Here in Berlin, we are very much aware what this very different country has done for the freedom of Germany and Europe. As recently as 1989/90. We cannot therefore sit back and allow public opinion in Europe and in the United States to drift apart.

I am pleased that two great pioneers who have supported the American Academy are with us today. Both of them were once US Secretary of State and both of them fostered the transatlantic partnership. Henry Kissinger, James Baker, welcome to Schloss Bellevue!

About ten years ago we debated whether Europeans and Americans lived on different planets. For some observers felt that our security policy cultures were so different. Today, the world has fallen into disorder in a new and troubling way, and Europeans and Americans once more have a very similar take on the challenges and threats of the present.

However, a new debate has now emerged. Again, it seems, I have just briefly touched on this, as if Germans and Americans live on different planets when we look at the Americans' different approach to counterterrorism, data protection or the work done by intelligence services. A recent survey by the German Marshall Fund even provides statistics on the growing alienation of Germans from America.

Such data should be a cause for concern for anyone to whom the transatlantic alliance is important. It is patently clear that there is a need for discussion. We welcome this discussion, which we should foster together. Many of you here today can, and indeed will, contribute towards this crucial American-German dialogue. And I am firmly convinced that even if differences remain, what we have in common will once more prove to be more important than what may separate us. The debate on the relationship between freedom and security in the United States and Germany must be conducted in earnest and it must be conducted with strong arguments. And if the weighing up of the options in each country sometimes leads to a different conclusion, the reasons for this should then be clearly named.

The transatlantic partnership is not an accident of history. It has firm and deep roots on which we should pause and reflect time and again. Those who stand for nothing, fall for anything, said one of the founding fathers of the United States, Alexander Hamilton. What the United States stands for – for a free society and for open, critical debate – has been brought into very sharp focus here in Berlin, in the American Academy. Complex issues are approached as they deserve to be approached – with profundity and in a way which highlights subtle

nuances. And as for our encounters with art and culture, we experience surprises, inspiration and joy. I therefore hope that the atmosphere in Wannsee will be found at many more encounters between Germans and Americans, between people from both sides of the Atlantic, thus helping to advance our partnership.

Thank you very much.