



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the University of Pennsylvania
on 6 October 2015
in Philadelphia/USA**

It was here in Philadelphia that President John F. Kennedy, in a speech to commemorate Independence Day on 4 July 1962, put forward a ground-breaking idea. On that day, he proposed that a Declaration of Interdependence be added to America's Declaration of Independence. He suggested that the principle of national independence should be complemented by the concept of mutual interdependence, of enduring ties spanning the Atlantic, building on the idea of the political West, the idea of forging bonds between states brought together by liberal constitutional principles.

In the United States and in an increasingly united Europe, President Kennedy identified partners that would be able to succeed in a task that no country in the world, not even the most powerful, could fulfil single-handedly: The task of fighting poverty, promoting growth and prosperity in the long term, lowering trade barriers, avoiding currency turbulences, and helping "to achieve a world of law and free choice, banishing the world of war and coercion". In the words of the American President, the United States and Europe should work together "on a basis of full equality in all the great and burdensome tasks of building and defending a community of free nations".

Today, more than half a century later, I stand before you as a European citizen and German President to underscore President Kennedy's words. I would like to renew his commitment and extend his vision to embrace a new era. For although we have indeed established an Atlantic community, this major project cannot be regarded as completed. We have indeed confronted the evils of that time. We have even seen the end of aggressive Soviet imperialism and experienced the end of the Cold War, yet European integration, which we have advanced, is not complete and old challenges have been replaced by new perils.

For this reason, we must remember that at a time of rising powers and new challenges, the transatlantic partnership is not an optional alliance, one of several possible constellations. I am certain that the transatlantic partnership – and at its heart also the German-American friendship – is and will remain the essential strategic alliance of our times.

At a time when terrorists are on the rampage, where autocrats and dictators ride roughshod over others, where states are failing and entire regions descending into chaos, where the central legal principles for our co-existence are no longer respected in some places – at such a time, in such a world of old and new dangers, the established alliance of free and democratic nations will be the most important pillar of stability. The power of the like-minded, of those who have committed themselves to freedom and equality, the rule of law and human rights, this power is still the best hope for the persecuted and oppressed throughout the world, and it is likewise still the best hope for us ourselves. We will need one another in the future, too, and we have reason to trust one another.

As Federal President I can hardly imagine a better place in the United States than Philadelphia and the University of Pennsylvania to speak about the deep bonds that have evolved between our two nations and continents. And to talk about the ties that will bind us together in the future. For here, in your city, the spirit of freedom lives on through the maintenance of the tradition that found expression in the Constitutional Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia. Here, in fact, at your university, the mindset on which this constitution is based is passed on to the next generation. Your university, home of the oldest German Studies programme in North America, is one of those key institutions that build bridges between our countries. President Gutmann, I am overjoyed and honored to be visiting your university in particular. I have great respect for everything which has been – and is still being – achieved here. Thank you!

Philadelphia is also a very special place for me because it was here that a great success story began, the story of those millions of Germans who became American citizens. It all began on a small scale: thirteen families from Krefeld. They established a settlement close by. Initially they called it Germanopolis, subsequently renaming it Germantown. On 6 October 1683, 332 years to this very day, they arrived in Philadelphia harbor with little more than their hopes for a better life and the optimism from which they drew their strength. The arrival of these families was the start of German-American relations. Your country even commemorates this moment with a special German-American Day.

We should not forget that from this very first day, nothing less than freedom was at the heart of German-American dialogue. From the

outset it was a transcontinental exchange, which involved wrestling with the nature, essence and limits of freedom. Defining and taking measure of freedom keeps us talking and on occasion – and with good reason – arguing with one another even today, centuries later.

The people from Krefeld left not only poverty and cramped conditions behind them, but also intolerance and oppression. Pennsylvania guaranteed them, as Quakers, something they had not been granted by the authorities at home: freedom of religion and conscience. The same applied to Mennonites and Labadists, to Pietists and Moravians, to Schwenkfelders, "Dunkers" and all the other religious and, often as a result of their faith, political dissidents who followed the "Krefeld friends".

The United States as a place of refuge for those who sought to escape from coercion and oppression in a then undemocratic Germany: In the 19th century that was also the story of the Forty-Eighters, who, following the failed March Revolution, declared: "ubi libertas, ibi patria" – where there is freedom, there is my homeland. And then in the 20th century, that is the story of Hannah Arendt and Arnold Schönberg and all the other asylum seekers, above all Jews, who fled the Nazi dictatorship.

However, we should not paint too one-sided a picture of the German-American dialogue on freedom, along the lines of "here was the prison, there the Promised Land". No, it was no coincidence that the first group of German immigrants wrote America's first anti-slavery pamphlet, thus making Germantown the birthplace of an abolitionist movement. And it was also no coincidence that German Forty-Eighters in particular volunteered for duty in their thousands during the civil war in the 19th century to free the slaves. We can therefore say that German immigrants made their contribution to help define the scope and reach of liberty in the United States. Yesterday I heard a wonderful quote which describes this: "We German-Americans can do freedom". I said something quite similar at the celebration marking the Day of German Unity in relation to the peaceful revolution of 1989: "We Germans can do freedom". I am glad that I can rediscover this historical link here today.

The old continent undoubtedly played a role in the arrival of slavery in America. At the same time, however, Europe made its mark on the history of the New World from the start by providing the means to eliminate and overcome slavery – namely, the enlightened view of humanity. What we now call the western community of shared values is barely conceivable without the early influence of the United States, the United Kingdom and France, yet it is also unimaginable without input from Germany.

There has always been a lively exchange of ideas between the continents, a give-and-take of inspiration and insights. Mutual learning

and mutual criticism are still instrumental in helping to modernize our countries and continents even today: We only need to look at America's leading universities and academic institutions, which Germans and Europeans, indeed the entire world, benefit from and with which we interact. Or think of America's highly developed civil society, its tremendous culture of volunteerism and philanthropy, many aspects of which we in Germany and Europe could take as a role model. Or just consider ideas such as consumer protection and freedom of information, environmental protection and, if you like, even veganism, all of which have found their way to us. Conversely, German concepts, such as the social market economy – most recently in connection with universal health care – influence the debate here in the United States, as do, for instance, German climate protection and vocational training models. And one minor point: Even Germany's car scrapping incentive was resurrected in the United States in the form of the "cash for clunkers" program.

However, and this brings us to the crux of the matter, the most relevant idea which developed over centuries of transatlantic interplay, starting from early European ideas, including German ones, on the separation of powers and on individuality and extending to their codification in the Virginia Declaration of Rights, was that of elevating the protection of human dignity and freedom of the individual to become the core element of state legitimacy.

Today the core of the body of human rights is seen to be universal. Even if this does not yet mean that every individual on this planet could claim to enjoy these rights, he can invoke them. This is something of which we – Germans, Europeans and Americans – can all be proud.

Whoever talks about values, however, must also mention the long revolt by both German authorities and subjects against the core of what had become the West's joint project following the Atlantic Revolutions of 1776 and 1789 – against inalienable human rights, against popular sovereignty, against the rule of law and against representative democracy. The terrible high point of all this resistance was the criminal regime of the National Socialists. It formed the abominable culmination of the state struggle against the political consequences of the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment for which German thinkers had provided such enduring inspiration. And, in the 20th century, Communism, itself certainly claiming universal reach, eventually spread as far as the centre of Europe, including Germany.

And it was the United States, which had never allowed authoritarian rule on its own territory, which was instrumental in finally freeing the Germans from the dictatorship they had not been able to shake off on their own. Thousands upon thousands of young Americans spilled their blood, gave their lives, to make Europe an area of freedom

once again. Together with the Allies, they rescued Germany from the German murderers, put an end to the Holocaust and thus gave us Germans and other Europeans the chance of a new beginning.

Then, after this fresh start, it was also help from America which enabled the fledgling Federal Republic to rediscover the country's liberal traditions. Anyone who watched how American soldiers behaved in Germany could see immediately that they came not as occupiers, but as liberators. That could not be said about all liberators. When the American victors sent CARE packages, designed the Marshall Plan, when they allowed free newspapers and organized the Berlin Airlift, it was clear to everyone that democracy and the rule of law were good foundations on which to develop a new society and a new state. And, speaking here in the United States today for the first time as Germany's President, I feel a strong need to express my profound gratitude for all of this.

It was particularly impressive that the victors gave the conquered the gift of trust. They believed in people's ability to leave behind the delusions and temptations of the demonic. And they invested in this belief. For me, the story of the reconstruction of the destroyed St Michael's Church in Hildesheim was a remarkable, if less well-known, story. With the encouragement of the American Administration, and completely financed by an American businessman, a Jew by the way, work on rebuilding the church began scarcely two years after the end of the War and the Holocaust – at a time when, just a few hundred kilometres further south, the war crimes trials were still going on in Nuremberg. This was another example of trust.

It became clear to the people of Germany, and to me, that America would stand up for the values it represented. Particularly as someone who grew up in the Soviet occupation zone, I always felt I could count on America's determination to defend freedom – even if it strayed off the path occasionally over the years. It seemed to me reassuring and logical that, when the chips were down, in 1989/90, America was Germany's best friend. I would like to expressly mention the leadership of President George H.W. Bush. He was quicker, louder and more sincere in calling for my country's unification than all the other leaders around the world who stood by Germany's side. America, which had been the guarantor of the West Germans' freedom during the Cold War, now also became the guarantor of the freedom of the East Germans and Central and Eastern Europeans, who, after many years of suffering and unsuccessful revolt, were finally able in 1989 to say a resounding "yes" to and live by those values which had linked the United States and Western Europe for decades.

Both as Federal President and as a citizen who experienced the lack of freedom, I feel a great need here today to say: thank you, America!

Yesterday, just a few kilometres away from here, I was able to see the Liberty Bell. Some of you will know that there has been a replica of this bell in Berlin since 1950. It hangs in Schöneberg Town Hall and, in contrast to yours, it is fully intact and still rings. It is an expression of our shared commitment to the defence of freedom and the dignity of the individual. Let me say this, 332 years after the start of emigration, 70 years after the end of the Second World War and 25 years after reunification: Freedom, freedom buoyed by a sense of democratic responsibility, is in good hands in Germany. This freedom is the bond between our two nations.

No-one who takes a look at our shared history, with all its difficulties and conflicts, will be surprised that even today things occasionally get a bit fraught between the United States and Germany. Open societies thrive on differences of opinion. They evolve through controversy and, in the end, compromise, both internally and in relation to each other.

Nevertheless, I have to confess that I am concerned at the image of America emerging in parts of Europe and also, to a certain extent, in Germany. For example, anyone reading the papers in Germany over the last few months could easily get the impression that the reporting on the United States is dominated by criticism. It is mostly about eavesdropping and data collection by the National Security Agency, which – surveys have shown – have made people in Germany less trusting of the United States. It is important to talk about these things during such a visit.

I can understand that some Americans wonder why we Germans, instead of getting ourselves so worked up, do not do more ourselves to tackle terrorism, but prefer to rely on the American security services, and then go on to criticize them. But I would like to turn the question around. Why do details of the phone calls of German cabinet secretaries – for example, those of the agriculture secretary – appear in the American services' lists? What does that have to do with countering terrorism? Or why do German citizens get the impression that incursions into their private sphere are a democratically uncontrollable result of fending off a terrorist threat? It seems to me that we have not yet arrived at a viable balance of interests here. This would be a good opportunity for the United States to win back lost trust.

Some critical observers in my country, however, go much further than the question of spying; they are wondering whether a community of shared values still exists at all between our two countries. Or indeed whether the United States has cut itself loose from our shared foundations.

This much is sure: Many Germans do not share or understand some American standpoints. The barely restricted right to possess

firearms, for example, or the death penalty, where it is used, or the tolerance of extreme poverty and income disparities. Or, more recently, aspects of the security laws, but also interrogation procedures, for example in Guantanamo. Some military interventions in the past have also triggered – and continue to trigger – controversial debate in Germany.

However, we should not draw the wrong conclusions from these observations. Americans are just as likely to be questioning our German interpretation of freedom, from their own perspective. They find it odd that we expect others, especially the United States, to do so much to provide military defense for our own freedom and sovereignty. I can well understand this sentiment, too. Other Americans want to know why we restrict freedom, by obliging citizens always to register their place of residence with the state. Or they wonder why we allow the state, despite its secular neutrality, to levy taxes for religious communities, or why religion is taught in state schools. We Germans have answers to all these questions. But sometimes we simply do not have any responses that satisfy Americans.

So it is worth taking a closer look at the topics of German-American debates. Then it becomes clear that we sometimes misinterpret what are purely political errors as the fundamental rejection of shared values. And sometimes we argue, as historian Heinrich August Winkler says, about “different interpretations of shared values”. For instance, there is a difference of opinion between Germans and Americans – also within both societies – about the balance between the state’s social responsibility on the one hand and individual initiative on the other. The same is true when it comes to the balance between individual freedom and national security. Different historical experiences ultimately lead to different priorities. That said, we each like to impose our own template on the other society. Contrasts are thus brought into sharp focus.

But we should be very clear about this: Despite shared values, the West is not a monoculture. As long as an individual’s freedom is not violated, then the very concept of freedom means being allowed to interpret freedom. There are differences within Europe, indeed even within my own country, when it comes to interpreting the same values and balancing competing values. This is not a big drama, just the reflection of the rich diversity of our political cultures. It is the essence of pluralism.

However, a good friend in particular enjoys the dubious privilege of the dramatic hero’s fall. We expect less from a rogue than we do from a standard-bearer of democracy. Incidentally, Sigmund Freud was familiar with this phenomenon. His theory of “the narcissism of minor differences” describes how otherwise similar peoples rub each other up the wrong way due to these differences. Freud saw this as a

“convenient and relatively harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression”. I believe that this is part of the price we have to pay for being so similar.

And if one of the transatlantic partners really does go astray at some point, open societies have an instrument which no other political system can offer: The self-correction which comes from the heart of society. Allow me to refer to something President Obama said recently to civil right activists in Selma, Alabama: “What greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals?”

President Obama and the American people can rest assured that we in Germany, indeed in all democratic European nations, adhere to this fundamental principle. This confidence in the never-ending democratic reform project constitutes the basis for the confidence which we can place in each other across the Atlantic.

25 years after Germany’s unification and the end of Communist rule in large parts of Europe, the world is not what we dreamed it would be back then. An age of peace has, unfortunately, not materialized. Nor has democracy had a domino effect. Europe did experience such a phenomenon after 1989 but it did not extend much further.

Instead, alongside the endurance of Communist ideology in some places, we have witnessed the emergence of world-views, of groups and regimes whose common denominator is that they despise and actively fight pluralism. These are fundamentalists, terrorists and nihilists who incite violence, instigate conflicts, force people to flee and bring instability into our societies. And they are autocrats who, having been on the defensive for many years, are now flexing their muscles. This is all happening around the world, even in the east of our democratic Europe.

It is clear to me that the democratic world must – and indeed will – renew its ties in the face of these threats. Its shared values, the similarity of its systems of government and of its interests generate closeness and a sense of connection. Despite all the differences between our democracies, the citizens of our countries are intuitively aware on whom they really can count. And, of course, politicians know that too.

We can be certain that the appeal of our model of society is undiminished. The many people who are risking their lives to reach our countries to come and live with us provide daily proof of this. The longing for freedom of all those gathering in large squares in distant

countries to call for rights we ourselves have long enjoyed is further proof.

However, we must not stand by and do nothing. Two things are necessary: greater adherence to our principles and more partnership.

Firstly, we have to learn anew to stand up for what we stand. In the name of respect for other religions and world-views, some have become accustomed to accepting practices which should not be tolerated. Universal rights are indivisible, and human dignity is not negotiable. This has consequences for the priorities in our societies. Speaking out about this is not a show of Western dominance but, rather, it is a rejection of cultural relativism. To put it in a nutshell, we have to remember those Atlantic human ideas of the late 18th century on which our societies have been built during the last decades. Even if we ask ourselves as democratic nations, together and individually, what our role may be in a world of growing threats, this must not render us feeble or indecisive. We champion the principles for which we stand, and we are prepared to let others judge us by this. If, for instance, the West were to give up the idea of the universality of human rights, it would give itself up for lost.

Secondly, we have to step up cooperation among the like-minded. Let us be honest, in recent years we have not treated transatlantic relations with the care they require. After all the years of partnership, we take it for granted that people from both sides of the Atlantic will come together. That the exchange of schoolchildren, students, artists and parliamentarians will continue. That foundations, universities and research institutions cooperate. That the world of politics, the business community and the military are working ever more closely together.

We now realize that nothing can be taken for granted. We have to secure and defend what we have achieved every day anew. We should intervene wherever a link is cut or a tried-and-trusted exchange programme comes to an end. We have to engage in dialogue wherever the interconnected nature of our world is criticized, whether in the sphere of trade or defense, in migration issues or – most especially – in climate change mitigation. We also have to keep on winning over the critics of this cooperation. We have to convince them that cooperation among democrats is better than isolationism. This is especially important now at a time when there is growing support for parties and movements in various European countries for which national interests rather than united Europe is the guiding principle of politics.

However, there is one thing which we in Europe need above all else: We need ongoing American engagement. The United States has been a vital player in Europe for many decades. Indeed, Europe's rebirth after the Second World War was made possible by the support

provided by the United States. It fostered European reconciliation and facilitated, or even helped launch, the process of European integration by allowing Germany's incorporation into NATO. It is an anchor of security and stability, and in many cases a power booster for Europe – and thus for Germany. The United States did all of this during the Cold War for Europe's free peoples, but it was also in its own interest, rightly understood.

Some in the United States are now claiming that a long-term engagement in Europe is no longer necessary. It is not my place as German President to define the national interests of the United States. Perhaps, however, you will allow me to make an observation: I see Europe surrounded by crises. I see the difficulties, indeed the setbacks, in the European integration process, as well as the temptation in various European states to act alone as a nation state. It is not the task of US politicians to intervene in a domineering manner in these national debates. However, I want to take this opportunity to recall the words of the late German sociologist Ulrich Beck who felt that a "merely European Europe", as he called it, that is to say a Europe without America, was in no way desirable and, what is more, that it had little chance of success. In the light of the conflicts of the past and out of concern for the West's ability to shape tomorrow's world, the United States should take the following to heart: Engagement in and with Europe on an enduring basis remains the best conceivable investment in stability – especially when new threats are emerging.

Allow me to add from a German perspective: Germany is not an island protected from all the turmoil in the world. Above all, Germany is not an island somewhere between Russia and America. Germany is and will remain fully integrated in the European Union and in the North Atlantic Alliance. Within this context and together with our European friends, we have taken on responsibility, more responsibility than previously, and that should not make anyone feel fearful – especially in Europe itself and on its periphery. However, greater German responsibility while American engagement simultaneously diminishes would not do Germany – or Europe – any good in the long term. Nor would it benefit the United States or the rest of the free world.

We need organizations to visibly embody the spirit of cooperation. We already have them, but they need to be adapted to today's world. Although the European states cultivate their relations with the United States, the European Union has not yet become the strong partner for America which it could be. Let us look at NATO, which – despite all the new threats – is not at the heart of our security dialogue on a changing world. We must not forget that the North Atlantic Alliance remains absolutely vital to the freedom of most European countries, including Germany. We have to be prepared to work, to renew our efforts, to strengthen this alliance. Freedom should be worth something to us.

One of the major tragedies of our age, an unprecedented tragedy, is taking place in Syria. The war has been going on for four years now and hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, are fleeing from the region. The sentiments which these refugees have about my country are the same as those which our ancestors once had when they sailed towards the Statue of Liberty in New York: They are entering a country of hope and opportunities, of freedom and democracy.

The flight to Europe and Germany shows that in an age of swift information transfer and easy travel, as citizens of one world we are interconnected and interdependent as never before. Closing ourselves off is not an option, it is no longer a solution: not for Germany, not for Europe and, incidentally, not for the USA.

Anyone who is young today and studying, for example here at the University of Pennsylvania or at a German university, has the good fortune to be born in an age of freedom and prosperity. I am certain that even in an environment full of new challenges, we have the means and instruments to prolong this era.

But we cannot do it alone. This is the great insight which President John F. Kennedy once imparted to us here in Philadelphia. If we want to find answers today to the major issues of our time, then we will have to stand together. Freedom is our shared bond. For this reason, it is our bounden duty also today – as it was in the past – to shoulder responsibility and to work with and for each other.