



**Speech read on behalf of
Federal President Joachim Gauck
by State Secretary David Gill,
Head of the Office of the Federal President,
on the presentation of the Ewald von Kleist Award
by the Munich Security Conference
in Munich on 18 February 2017**

I would like to begin by saying how grateful I am to be honoured with this prize. I would also like to thank you, President Niinistö, for your kind words. And I would like to thank you, Minister President, our host this evening, and you, too, Mr Ischinger.

In view of its distinguished laureates, starting with Henry Kissinger, it fills me with great pleasure to receive the Ewald von Kleist Award. However, along with this pleasure I am humbled when I think of the man after whom the prize is named. Aged only 22, the young Wehrmacht officer Ewald Heinrich von Kleist was a member of the group of resistance fighters led by Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg – officers willing to sacrifice their own lives and to murder a tyrant in order to save the lives of thousands, if not millions, of other people. They wanted to stand up for the values in which they profoundly believed.

Von Kleist belonged to a minority that showed there was a Germany during the Second World War that rejected the National Socialist dictatorship. Our society should honour the memory of these extraordinary people who upheld the values of humanity, dignity and life in an extreme situation, one that is likely to seem very alien to today's society.

Von Kleist valued peace particularly highly because he had experienced war and National Socialist terror. However, this did not lead him to adopt a pacifist stance, but rather to realise that military deterrence should be preferred over a policy of "wait and see", as he firmly believed the latter would inevitably lead to appeasement. He was unable to regard indecisiveness and weakness as a virtue. In post-war Germany, he was thus among those who opposed the spirit of the

time, advocated rearmament and accession to NATO, rejected unilateral disarmament and championed a transatlantic alliance. It was partly these ideas, which aimed to bring about peace in the Cold War, also through effective deterrence, that gave rise to the *Wehrkunde* conference first organised by von Kleist in Munich in 1963 – an institution has become what may be the most important security policy conference in the world.

The Munich Security Conference provides a forum for thinking aloud and having frank discussions, without a need to reach formal agreement. It is a forum for an exchange of views between representatives of countries that belong to different alliances and pursue different aims. And it is also a forum for exploring differences in one's own alliance before they make their way to the official political arena – differences such as those we are currently experiencing in transatlantic relations in particular.

Ewald Heinrich von Kleist's friends attested to his "understated wisdom and extremely dry sense of humour". Were he still among us, he would most likely wave away our concerns and urge us to remain calm. He would recall the 1970s, when the arms race with the Warsaw Pact countries led the United States to complain that Europe was not sharing the burden properly. When the United States then threatened to withdraw its troops from Europe, this sparked a discussion on the continent that seems strangely familiar to us these days. People wondered if they could still trust the transatlantic partner. This conflict was a perennial topic of discussion at the *Wehrkunde* conference. And at the time, it was only resolved in 1978 with an agreement that defence expenditure would be increased to three percent of GDP, adjusted for inflation.

Mr Ischinger, you recently raised the number three again when you suggested that Germany should invest three percent of its GDP in peace and order, not only to increase defence expenditure, but also for spending on crisis prevention, diplomacy and development cooperation. I think this money would be well invested, as it would enhance both our defence capability and our credibility. It should prove possible to reach agreement with our US partner on the issue of fair burden-sharing – irrespective of what percentage we reach in the end.

However, it is likely to prove more difficult to rebuild the trust lost in the transatlantic alliance. European NATO members were relieved to hear this week – and especially during the past two days here – that the US Administration remains committed to NATO as a cornerstone of our relations. Nevertheless, a trend towards curtailing or partly withdrawing from international activities, something that already began under the previous administration, may continue. Uncertainty has arisen in Germany. And this uncertainty is even greater in the Central European countries. Will the United States

adhere to previous positions or change them? Providing proof of reliability in words, but more importantly in deeds, will be an important task for the future – one side will need to genuinely share the burden, while unambiguous commitment to the duty to render assistance will be required from the other side.

However, it seems to me that the current uncertainty could have a positive effect, that is, if Europe trusts its own capabilities to a greater extent than has been the case so far, not because it could replace the protection afforded by the United States, but because it can and must stand up more resolutely for itself. In view of wars in our neighbourhood, Islamist terror, ongoing pressure from migration, and not least cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns, I am loath to imagine a Europe that is not adequately prepared in terms of security.

When I gave the opening speech at the 50th Munich Security Conference three years ago, as has already been mentioned, I made a point of calling on Germany to act more quickly, decisively and tangibly in view of major new challenges. And in the meantime, our country has in fact taken on greater responsibility as regards addressing a large number of crises and conflicts, in political, military, civilian and humanitarian terms. To mention just a few examples, Germany forms part of the NATO forces in the Baltic states and Poland; Bundeswehr soldiers are deployed in missions in countries including Iraq and Mali; and Germany played a role in curbing the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. Germany is also supporting the strengthening of NATO's European pillar.

On the path to becoming a guarantor rather than merely a consumer of international order and security, Germany has thus already come a long way. But despite all the progress made, Germany is still far from meeting its obligations in full. For example, our country still deploys too few experts to United Nations missions. And we could take on more responsibility as regards drawing up concepts on conflict prevention and peacekeeping. In general, considering our present-day challenges and the means at our disposal, we can and should do much more to support crisis prevention, diplomacy, development cooperation and United Nations missions, but also to enhance defence capabilities in NATO.

In the interlinked world of the 21st century, no country can isolate itself effectively – especially not Germany, which is situated in the heart of Europe and linked in a myriad of ways with other regions around the world. The refugee crisis has heightened awareness in our country that conflicts in other parts of the world also affect us.

Yes, we are facing uncertain times. But what remains crucial for Europe and our partnerships based on shared values is that we must preserve and defend our ideals and achievements.

We must prevent the European Union, which safeguards our peace, from drifting further apart and we must stand up resolutely against all attempts to weaken or even reinterpret the West as something other than a community of shared values committed to human rights, democracy, the separation of powers and the rule of law.

How can we do this? By remaining committed to our values and believing in our power to shape the world. We share Karl Jaspers's belief that "as a space of opportunities, the future is the space for our freedom."

Thank you very much.