



**First Vice-President of the Bundesrat, Michael Müller,
acting on behalf of the Federal President at the dismissal
of the Federal Minister of Defence, Ursula von der Leyen,
and the appointment of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer
at Schloss Bellevue
on 17 July 2019**

Today isn't just a normal day at Schloss Bellevue. It is not, as is customary, the Federal President who stands before you today – which you will have probably noticed – but me as Vice-President of the Bundesrat. And there's another reason why today isn't just a normal day. Ms Merkel, permit me, and I'm sure also on behalf of everyone else here, to wish you all the very best, as well as great stamina and happiness in your private life on the occasion of your birthday today. Happy birthday!

Madam Minister, Ms von der Leyen, please accept my warmest congratulations on your election as President of the European Commission.

Today, you are resigning from your post as Federal Minister of Defence in order to devote all your energy to your future tasks. We all know how closely national and European policy are bound up with each other. Your dismissal as Federal Minister of Defence is thus not a question of bidding farewell, but marks the prelude to a new phase of your life in the service of Europe. Permit me to wish you all the best and every success for your new post.

You were a member of the Federal Cabinet for 14 years. I don't know whether you kept count, but, on Wednesdays, you sat at the long cabinet table in the Federal Chancellery around 700 times. A glance at the history of the Federal Republic of Germany reveals that only very few people have been able to look back on such a long term in office as a Federal Minister.

Over the course of these 14 years, you have served Germany and you have made an outstanding contribution to our country. We would like to thank you for this today.

In all your posts, if you considered a goal to be right and necessary, then you devoted yourself to it with great personal

commitment, and sometimes in the face of resistance. You didn't want any half measures. Your commitment to a binding quota for women in supervisory boards is just one example of this.

Many of your decisions were groundbreaking. As Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, you placed a better balance between work and family life at the heart of your policy – for men and for women. You came to realise, before many others, that life and work belong together in a society that has made equal rights for men and women part of its constitution. The Family Minister, or so a newspaper wrote at the time, had made this issue “a top priority of the coalition”. Indeed, you did much more than that. You saw it through.

We need only think of the expansion of childcare and the implementation of parental allowance. When increasing numbers of men take parental leave today and are grateful to have more time for their children, then this is also thanks to your policies. Traditional roles have changed – for the better. You have also played your part in this.

“Taking care and empowering” – this is how you yourself once described the guiding principle of your political action. You launched the education package while at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The aim was to allow children from low-income families to be able to participate in community life, go to music school and attend sports clubs in the same way as everyone else.

The fact that you are committed to changing traditional roles at a most personal level was demonstrated in 2013 when you assumed the office of Federal Minister of Defence – as the first woman to hold that post. From the outset, you worked to consolidate and strengthen the Bundeswehr, clearly identified material and financial weaknesses and initiated necessary reforms. Not all of the shortcomings with respect to equipment have been remedied. Much remains to be done. But it is clear that the Bundeswehr has become more attractive as an employer and that the defence budget has increased considerably.

This is urgently required in view of our obligations towards NATO and our allies, as well as the numerous foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr and the new geopolitical challenges that we face. At the 2014 Munich Security Conference, you expressed a clear commitment to Germany's responsibility in the area of security policy. And you rightly pointed out that the Federal Republic of Germany can only live up to its international obligations if the Bundeswehr is adequately equipped for this. In addition to land, naval and air forces, this also applies to defending against digital threats, for which you have set up the Cyber and Information Space Command.

Germany's security can only be guaranteed as part of the Alliance. Our cooperation within the EU plays an increasingly important

role in this respect alongside NATO. It is also thanks to you that the EU agreed to permanent structured cooperation in defence policy. After all, the EU is also a defence union in which we have pledged to offer one another mutual assistance.

So now you are trading Berlin for Brussels and the Cabinet for the Commission.

This step took many by surprise. This was one of the reasons why your election was preceded by controversy over the future role of the lead candidates for this office. This underscores the importance of continuing to develop the procedure for appointing leading European figures – together with all the institutions involved.

Great tasks now lie ahead of you. The EU is being challenged. Democracy and the rule of law are being called into question. Indeed, the liberal model of society is being put to the test within the community and is under attack from opponents from without.

However, in joining together to defend against these attacks lies an opportunity. My hope is that these challenges will also sharpen our focus of what Europe actually is.

Fortunately for us all, Europe is united. This fortune lies in an alliance for mutual benefit. This fortune lies in our common goal to achieve prosperity, security and freedom together and for all Europeans. This fortune lies in the responsibility for preserving our planet as a place worth living in for future generations. And this fortune lies in what we have promised each other, namely that we act together – and for each other – in the world.

All of these are far from easy tasks. But I don't mind repeating myself when I wish you great strength, the best of luck and every success for your office. And a smattering of fun never hurt anyone either.

Ms Kramp-Karrenbauer,

You are assuming the office of Minister of Defence from Ms von der Leyen – an office that comes with the greatest responsibility for the security of our country and for the operational readiness of our Bundeswehr.

Great tasks lie ahead of you. Two things are required at the end of the day. Our country needs a strong Bundeswehr, and the Bundeswehr needs strong support from politicians and society at large. I wish you a sure hand and every success for these immensely important tasks.