



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the presentation of the Henry A. Kissinger Prize
to Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General,
on 10 November 2023
in Berlin**

I have decided to deliver my brief remarks in English – not just because this is the American Academy, and this is a transatlantic celebration. But mainly, Jens, because I want to liberate you from a life-long affliction that has befallen you here in my country, in Germany. As you know, you have many friends, many admirers here in Germany: in politics, the military, in the media, in business. But – what can I say – our language isn't always the most elegant. So as I speak very carefully in English tonight, I will make sure to honor this year's Henry Kissinger Prize winner Jens S-toltenberg – not like we Germans like to say: Jens Sch-toltenberg!

As I thought about preparing this very special event tonight, I thought about monuments.

First of all, I thought about the living monument in whose name we are gathered here tonight. The witness of a century, the driving spirit of decades of U.S. foreign policy, the good steward of transatlantic relations: Henry Kissinger. Henry was in Germany for his birthday in June, and I was so moved to see that this country, his home country, which once drove him out, is now "ein Flecken Heimat", a piece of home, for him again. I am sure all of us here are sending him our heartfelt good wishes to New York!

There are three other monuments on my mind tonight, three actual stone monuments – one in New York, one in Oslo, and one in Berlin.

On New York's Upper Westside, looming over Morningside Park and the rooftops of Central Harlem, stands Carl Schurz, the 1848 Revolutionary, who fought for freedom and democracy in Germany, left for America and became one of Abraham Lincoln's closest advisors and brothers-in-arms.

In Oslo, Jens, your hometown, Franklin Delano Roosevelt sits on a stone chair by the ocean, watching the ferries in the harbor – F.D.R., who not only inspired so many Norwegians to fight against German occupation, but who led the United States to enter World War II and to liberate Europe from Nazi terror.

Here in Berlin, rising out of the noisy traffic on Mehringdamm, the Airlift Memorial reminds us of the vision and bravery of Harry Truman, Gail Halvorsen and many others who saved Berliners during the blockade and sowed the seeds for the founding of NATO in the spring of 1949.

I speak of these monuments to remind us of what the Henry Kissinger Prize is really about. What we are here to celebrate, what we believe in as a transatlantic community, and what we honor Jens Stoltenberg for, that is so much bigger, so much older, so much deeper than the headline of the day. It is the vision of freedom and democracy for our nations, of security and partnership within our alliance, of peace and stability in the world around us.

None of that could ever be taken for granted in the past. None of that can be taken for granted today. Each of the leaders I have mentioned fought for this vision in times of existential challenge. And you, Jens, are fighting for this vision at the most critical juncture since the Cold War. As war has returned to the European continent, NATO stands to protect almost one billion citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. In your decade of leadership, you have increased NATO's membership by three, – I am sure and I hope – very soon four countries. You have strengthened our military posture from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and, not least, you have proven Putin wrong! When Putin invaded Ukraine more than 20 months ago, he thought the West would be weak and divided. You, Jens, have made sure that NATO is stronger and more united than ever in the face of Putin's war! We are really grateful for that. Thank you so much.

What makes the leaders I've mentioned great leaders? Did they see the storms coming? Did they know how they would come out on the other side?

Did Carl Schurz know that the young republic would soon be tested by Civil War when he reached America's shores in 1852?

Did Roosevelt know of Europe's looming peril when Hitler and his brownshirts started marching the streets of Munich?

Did Jens Stoltenberg know that Vladimir Putin would launch a full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022, plunging Ukraine and our continent into an abyss we thought long overcome?

Or, as we think back only a month, did any of us anticipate the barbaric attack by Hamas on Israel, on grandparents, parents and children, on youngsters dancing at a festival?

No. Leadership isn't clairvoyance. None of these leaders knew what history would ask of them. But they lived up to it! They lived up to the monumental tests of their time! And this is what Jens Stoltenberg did. Jens, you have been at the helm of NATO in times of monumental challenge – and you lived up to it!

I remember well: When you and I first met, a good 16 years ago, through our wonderful friend Jonas Gahr Støre, we were debating ways to make the whole of Europe safer, based on shared values, rules, and principles, and in those days based on the visions of Helsinki and Paris. But I also remember: When you became Secretary General almost 10 years ago, a lot, really a lot, had changed. Russia had just annexed Crimea and continued to escalate and destabilize the Donbas. We knew we had to respond strongly. We knew with this increasingly assertive Russia there could be no dialogue without deterrence. So at your first summit in Wales, we bolstered the Eastern Flank, we reassured our Eastern European allies with a "Readiness Action Plan", and we committed, for the first time as an Alliance, to the 2 percent national defense spending target – a decision for which we, the German Government of the time, were not exactly praised back at home. When you were nominated in 2014, I remember, I issued a statement at the time as Foreign Minister saying "I could not imagine a better choice" for Secretary General. 10 years later, I want to repeat that with even more conviction. You are steering our Alliance through the storm and you will bring it out stronger on the other side! There truly couldn't have been a better choice than you, Jens!

Storms – there were many of them in these last few years. The recent past has taught us that history isn't linear. It is curvy at best. Jens, you knew you had to prepare for the curves. You thought ahead into the unknown and you took NATO on that journey. More than once during your tenure, NATO was called obsolete, even brain-dead. More than once you proved that wrong. You knew that change was ahead – and you took on the change! From cyber to China, from Syria to Afghanistan: You steered the Alliance through change, crisis, and bitter, bitter disagreements. I think nobody can tell a more vivid account of the 2018 summit than you can. I hear your diplomatic skills were tested to the extreme. Now again, you're thinking ahead into the unknown. You're thinking about Ukraine's security beyond this war and you are thinking about the Washington summit, which will be historic for at least two reasons: it will be NATO's 75th birthday, and provided your wish comes true, it will be, if reality follows your request, your last summit as Secretary General.

Thinking ahead, Jens, is what we all should be doing! Of course, we are looking to the US elections next year. Of course, we have to be prepared – and quite frankly, we have to be better prepared than in the past. But "thinking ahead" means looking beyond November 2024. It means doing our parts, as Germans, as Europeans, to keep this Alliance

strong – no matter what. There are many good reasons, regardless of election outcomes, to deliver on what we have promised: to spend 2 percent on defense, reliably and sustainably; to build a stronger European pillar within NATO; and, Mr Ambassador, to stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes.

When I saw President Biden at the White House a month ago, I told him that it is a historic fortune that this U.S. Administration is by Europe's side at this time of war and that it does everything to keep our Alliance strong and united. We in Germany, we in Europe must and will do our part to make sure it stays that way. Come what may!

One last thought on leadership: Living up to history doesn't just mean thinking ahead, doing the right thing, saying the right words. No, it's more personal than that. It is being there. It's being in it. Leadership doesn't start with toughness. It starts with empathy.

Jens, I don't think I have ever seen that more powerfully than in Utøya. You were there for these youngsters, you were there for your country. The same Utøya, the same youth camp, where you had been every single summer since 1974, as a student, training as an economist, hoping to be a statistician – with no idea you would ever lead your own country, much less the world's most powerful military Alliance.

Utøya, "the most beautiful place in the world" as you have called it, was struck in the summer of 2011 by a brutal, hate-filled terrorist, killing 77 people, young people who were getting ready to build a better world – just as you and your friends did years before. Your speech after the Utøya massacre made a deep impression – and it sticks with me today. Your speech wasn't about military force, it wasn't about revenge. It was about values. It was about who we are. You said "Our response is more democracy, more openness, and more humanity."

Jens, in a time where our unity, where our ideal of living together peacefully in a diverse society is tested every day in Western democracies, your speech and your example stand as an inspiration to all of us. They stand for the very vision that is the core of our transatlantic alliance.

In 2019, you went to Washington and addressed both chambers of Congress at the invitation of speaker Pelosi. I quote from your historic speech: "Since we cannot foresee the future, we have to be prepared for the unforeseen. We need a strategy to deal with uncertainty. We have one. That strategy is NATO."

Jens, you have made sure that NATO is that strategy! You have made our Alliance fit for the monumental changes of our time. You have made NATO fit for the future.

My dear friend Jens, congratulations on the Henry Kissinger Prize!