

Speech: Britain and Germany: an alliance of values

Introduction

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak here at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. There are moments in history that remind us that we are all part of something greater than ourselves.

As I landed at Tegel Airport this morning, I thought of one such moment.

Seventy years ago, the people of this city were engaged in a daily struggle to keep West Berlin alive through Stalin's blockade.

The skies above Berlin were filled with British and American aircraft laden with fuel, food and medicine, landing or taking off every 45 seconds, day and night.

For 11 months, pilots who had previously dropped bombs on Berlin mounted the greatest humanitarian airlift in history, delivering 2.3 million tons of supplies.

At first, Berlin did not have enough runways to receive the inflow.

So the people of Berlin built Tegel Airport with their own hands, taking only 90 days to construct what was then the longest runway in Europe.

Our countries were just a few years away from a devastating war.

And yet we were united.

United by shared values.

And united in opposition to those who sought to destroy them.

The people of Berlin overcame their ordeal, transforming this city into what President Kennedy later called a "defended island of freedom".

Then, thirty years ago this year, Berlin ceased to be an island when the Wall came down. As the crowds surged through Brandenburg Gate in 1989, Berlin and its people reminded us never to take liberty for granted.

Those events show that some values transcend individuals, nations or groups of nations.

And indeed transcend Brexit too – however absorbing or challenging that may seem.

Alliance of Values

For whatever treaties or organisations our two countries may join or leave, our friendship is based on something infinitely more important and durable.

Britain and Germany cherish the same freedoms, defend the same values, respect the same fundamental laws and face the same dangers.

We are bound together not simply by institutions, but by the beliefs that inspired the creation of those institutions: democracy, openness and equality before the law regardless of race, class, gender or sexuality.

Karl Popper, the Austrian-born philosopher, defined the distinctive quality of an open society in these words:

“We ought to be proud that we do not have one idea but many ideas, good ones and bad ones; that we do not have a single belief: not one religion but many, good ones and bad ones....It is not the unity of an idea but the diversity of our many ideas, of which the West may be proud: the pluralism of its ideas.”

More than anything else, Britain and Germany believe in pluralism as the best way of releasing the nobility of the human spirit.

There is nothing new about this.

We shared these ideals in 1972 before Britain joined the European Economic Community.

And we will continue to share them in 2019 when we leave the European Union.

Because as I said in my response to the wonderful letter written to The Times last month by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Prof. Dr Norbert Lammert and other distinguished Germans, Britain is not going anywhere.

We are not relocating our island to the far side of the world.

Our two countries may no longer be bound by the structures of the European Union, but we will remain part of a wider alliance, an alliance of values.

Nations united not solely by institutions but by beliefs: in freedom, the rule of law and human rights.

An alliance that doesn't just believe in those ideals but is willing to defend them, as demonstrated by my predecessor, Ernest Bevin, when he helped to establish NATO.

Success of the rules-based system

He was part of the generation of humane and far-sighted leaders, including Konrad Adenauer, who built an assembly of rules and institutions – including the United Nations, the World Bank and what became the World Trade Organisation – to create an era defined not by bloodshed but by peace and prosperity. The goals of the world order that emerged after 1945 were

summarised by the former Mayor of Berlin and Chancellor of Germany, Willy Brandt, who said:

“I re-emphasise my faith in the universal principles of general international law...They found binding expression in the principles of the United Nations Charter: sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-violence, the right of self-determination.”

By any objective measure, that international order has been remarkably successful.

Despite the bloodshed in Syria and elsewhere, the number of conflict-related deaths as a proportion of the global population fell by an astonishing 80 percent between 1984 and 2016.

Relative peace has allowed millions to raise themselves from destitution.

When I was born, half of humanity lived in absolute poverty; today, it is less than 10%.

Life expectancy has shot up and since 2000 alone 1.1 billion people have been connected to electricity for the first time.

The rules-based system is not some cynical construct designed solely to protect the interests of the West. Nor will the biggest losers be in the West if it is allowed to crumble.

So when people ask what will Britain's role in the world be after Brexit, I say this:

We will put to work the remarkable array of connections across the globe that history has given the United Kingdom.

Whether through our European friends, our Atlantic allies or the Commonwealth family, we will seek to bind the democracies of the world together.

Only if we are joined together by an invisible chain or thread of shared values will we be strong enough to withstand the challenges we face.

And strong enough to uphold an international order that has served humanity so well.

Threats to rules-based system

Right now it would be an enormous mistake if Europe were to allow Brexit and other internal challenges to make us introspective.

Because when we look inwards, our adversaries sense an opportunity.

Russia has broken the prohibition on acquiring territory by force by redrawing a European frontier and annexing 10,000 square miles of Ukraine.

Having taken Crimea, Russia then deployed troops and tanks in eastern

Ukraine, igniting a conflict that has claimed nearly 11,000 lives and driven 2.3 million people from their homes.

At the same time the global ban on the use of chemical weapons, dating back almost a century to 1925, has been violated time and again in Syria – and even on the soil of my own country.

Meanwhile the onward march of democracy that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall has come to a halt and started to go into reverse.

In the 2 decades after 1989, there were 29 new democracies. This century it has been different: last week Freedom House reported that 2018 was the 13th successive year of decline for political rights and civil liberties around the world.

We must never assume that the arc of history will automatically bend towards democracy and liberalism.

Wise decisions made by a generation of leaders in the last century shaped the world as we know it. The question is whether this generation of leaders will do the same?

Anglo-German co-operation

Hence the overriding importance of Britain and Germany working side-by-side.

There is much to celebrate.

Together we are preserving the Iran nuclear agreement, keeping Iran free of nuclear weapons and the world safer as a result;

together we are resisting the evil of chemical weapons, from Salisbury to Syria, ensuring the price is always too high for countries to use these terrible weapons;

together we are upholding the Paris Climate Change Treaty, ensuring future generations will not pay the price of our prosperity today;

together we are working for lasting peace in the Western Balkans; indeed on my first day as Foreign Secretary I met Chancellor Merkel at a summit in London to discuss that very issue. Chancellor Merkel approached me and said, "Congratulations, if that's the right word".

At the same time, our security services and police are cooperating silently and tirelessly to guard our citizens and our European friends from terrorism and organised crime.

Our diplomats are training side-by-side; only last week, 76 British and German diplomats were attending joint classes in the Foreign Office in London.

Our soldiers are serving together in Afghanistan, where yours are the second biggest contribution to the NATO mission.

Our soldiers are also protecting NATO's Eastern borders, where UK troops comprise the single largest component of the "enhanced forward presence" in Poland and the Baltic states.

Some in Germany have seen our decision to leave the EU as a retreat: a retreat from the global stage and from common European security interests.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Britain remains the only European nation to meet the UN and NATO targets of spending 0.7 percent of national income on aid, 2 percent of GDP on defence and 20 percent of our defence budget on capital.

The Prime Minister has restated that Britain's commitment to the defence of Europe is immovable and unconditional.

And I'm delighted that Germany has been elected to serve on the Security Council; later today, Heiko Maas and I will discuss how our missions in New York can best cooperate on areas of common interest, including Libya and Darfur.

The UK-EU partnership

So at a time when the global balance of wealth and power is changing with remarkable speed – perhaps faster than ever before – we must not allow Brexit to be all-consuming.

That means an orderly departure from the EU is of paramount importance.

Of course when you leave a club you cannot enjoy all its benefits.

And nor will we: after Brexit, the UK will no longer be part of the councils of the EU. We will no longer have a say or vote in European directives or laws.

But nor – if we are to stand together against common threats – can Britain ever be just another "third country".

The future partnership that Britain seeks to build with the EU starts with the belief that our security is indivisible.

The Political Declaration sets out a vision of the closest relationship in foreign policy the EU has ever had with another country, something that Chancellor Merkel herself has emphasised.

It states that where and when our interests converge – as they often will – Britain and the EU will "combine efforts" to the "greatest effect, including in times of crisis".

We must also maintain the closest economic partnership, consistent with the spirit of the British referendum and the integrity of the single market.

The flow of trade between Britain and the EU amounts to one of the biggest

economic relationships in the world.

In 2017, total trade between the UK and the other 27 members of the EU came to £615 billion [Euros 695 billion].

This is a colossal figure, about 8% bigger than the EU's trade with China and 12 percent higher than trade between China and the United States.

Millions of jobs on both sides of the Channel depend on this flow of commerce so everyone has an interest in ensuring that it continues to flourish.

There are those who say that strategic and security partnerships can continue unaffected by economic relationships. We must remember the lesson of history: trading relations have always been the first link between countries, and they act as the foundation of all other relations.

So none of us should have any doubt that failing to secure a ratified Withdrawal Agreement between Britain and the EU would be deeply damaging, politically as well as economically.

In the vital weeks ahead, standing back and hoping that Brexit solves itself will not be enough.

The stakes are just too high: we must all do what we can to ensure such a deal is reached.

Last Saturday, Chancellor Merkel delivered a powerful defence of what she called the "classic" world order.

She urged all countries to "put yourself in the other's shoes" and "see whether we can get win-win solutions together".

I would urge our European friends to approach this crucial stage of the Brexit negotiations in that spirit.

Because in the future, we do not want historians to puzzle over our actions and ask themselves how it was that Europe failed to achieve an amicable change in its relationship with Britain – a friend and ally in every possible sense – and thereby inflicted grave and avoidable damage to our continent at exactly the moment when the world order was under threat from other directions.

Now is the hour for the generous and far-sighted leadership of which Chancellor Merkel spoke.

If we are to secure the future of a world order that has allowed our countries to enjoy the peace and prosperity that eluded our ancestors – if we are to avoid, in Chancellor Merkel's phrase, falling "apart into pieces of a puzzle" – then achieving a smooth and orderly Brexit is profoundly necessary.

Conclusion

It would not be right to end this speech without an apposite quote from

Konrad Adenauer, a towering figure in the history of the Federal Republic and the CDU, in whose honour this Foundation is named. He once said:

“Wenn die anderen glauben, man ist am Ende, so muss man erst richtig anfangen.” (“when others think we’ve reached the end, that’s when we’ve got to really begin”).

The UK’s departure from the EU is the end of one phase of our relationship. But it’s the beginning of another, and we are determined to remain the best of friends.

So let me finish by returning to that letter written by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and other distinguished Germans to the Times.

The signatories were generous to Britain.

So let me say in response, Britain shares the same admiration and warmth for the people of Germany, for your moral courage, your tolerance and magnanimity, and for your towering achievement in building a nation that is, at once, a model democracy and the economic powerhouse of Europe.

When 2.1 million Berliners were blockaded and besieged 70 years ago, they could not be sure they would withstand the ordeal and eventually triumph.

They survived because of their courage and resilience, supported by the resolute action of friends who shared their ideals and were determined not to abandon this city.

Those friends did not come to Berlin’s support because of treaties or formal unions.

They acted because of something more powerful, though less tangible: the values that united them, just as values unite us today.

Those values remain constant whatever else changes. Let us remember that as we do our duty in the critical few weeks ahead.