

Translation

Speech by
Frau Ursula Seiler-Albring,
Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office,
at the presentation of the
Appeal of Conscience Foundation Award
New York, 10 October 1991

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I deem it a great honour to be able to speak to you today and to accept on behalf of Federal Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher the great award you have bestowed on him.

Federal Minister Genscher sincerely regrets that his numerous engagements have prevented him from coming here today. Even his proverbial ubiquity is being put to the test at present.

He himself told me before my departure that the presentation of the Appeal of Conscience Award is very special to him.

For the objectives and principles of your Foundation correspond fully to the liberal concepts behind his political actions: readiness to reach understanding and respect for the dignity of the individual.

With your initiative, in which leading personalities have joined together to form an effective organization, you are serving the cause of understanding among people throughout the world in exemplary fashion.

One year ago, Germany regained its unity.

German foreign policy was always based on the principle that unity was conceivable only in freedom.

Both could only be achieved in conditions of peace.

Our firm establishment in the community of values we share with our Western partners was the basis which rendered German unity possible.

The free self-determination of the Germans could not be gained at the cost of other nations.

For the first time in its history, Germany is now united in one state which lives in harmony with all its neighbours and whose borders have been definitively recognized by us and all others.

This is an immeasurable gain for the stability of Europe and the whole world.

The mandate contained in our Basic Law continues to be the constitutional foundation of united Germany.

There it says that Germany intends to "serve the peace of the world as an equal partner in a united Europe".

"An equal partner" - this is a commitment to international partnership and an emphatic rejection of endeavours to secure a position of supremacy or spheres of influence.

"In a united Europe" - this confirms our will to integrate.

Any idea of Germany pursuing a separate course or vascillating between two worlds is out of the question.

"Serve the peace of the world" - this establishes the framework for a policy of peace which renounces force or the threat of force.

Germany intends to fully assume all rights and obligations contained in the United Nations Charter, including measures to ensure collective security.

Our objective remains the European Union and its further development into the United States of Europe.

Full membership must be open to all European states which embrace democracy and the market economy.

German and European unity remain inextricably linked.

At present, the task of rebuilding the eastern federal states requires exceptional efforts.

The latest indications have made us optimistic.

Self-sustaining economic growth and development are increasingly gaining ground in the new federal states.

There is thus no reason for concern that an inward-looking Germany could forget the rest of the world because of its own problems.

Germany as a whole cannot flourish if one part permanently lags behind. The same goes for Europe: the countries in Western Europe will only be able to maintain prosperity and stability if they allow the countries in Eastern Europe to share in this.

Just as the division of Germany was a symbol of the division of Europe, German unification will contribute towards the process of European integration.

President Václav Havel stated on one occasion that it was hard to imagine a divided Germany in a united Europe and equally hard to imagine a united Germany in a divided Europe.

It will take time before the objective of comprehensive integration on a pan-European scale can be realized.

However, movement towards this aim is unmistakable.

The first new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe are already members of the Council of Europe.

The important thing now is to introduce the states in Central and Eastern Europe to the established instruments of coordination in Europe, for example the EPC.

NATO's liaison concept is being broadened.

The whole of Europe must now be regarded as a uniform communications, transport and energy network.

Europe's ecological interdependence requires pan-European decision-making structures.

Europe must develop into a uniform legal area in which all citizens have direct access to the common European cultural heritage.

A community of shared political values and the common legacy of the Enlightenment - these are the foundations of the transatlantic partnership. Secretary of State Baker emphasized this in his memorable speech in Berlin on 18 June this year.

We welcome President Bush's recent disarmament initiative.

It conforms fully with our long-standing demand for the complete elimination of nuclear short-range missiles and nuclear artillery shells.

We do not doubt that, for its part, the Soviet Union will not be long in taking similar steps.

Together with America, Europe is working towards a new world order and a new culture of international coexistence.

The process initiated in Helsinki paved the way for the triumph of the concept of freedom.

It must now be provided with the necessary instruments to consolidate this victory in the long term.

The Federal Government continues to stand by the established principles of its Ostpolitik under the changed circumstances.

Our goal remains to open borders and to strip them of their separating nature.

After the fall of the old Wall, no new walls between rich and poor should be erected.

The major set of treaties we concluded with the Soviet Union reflects our desire to establish forward-looking foundations for the constructive coexistence of peoples beyond all borders.

Our treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia and the still outstanding treaties with the other states in Central and Eastern Europe serve to promote the development towards a united Europe in which the old East-West conflict and all its consequences will be overcome.

We do not want to forge any new alliances between states, but rather to smooth the way for people to meet each other freely.

The democratic revolutions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are in themselves an effective contribution to the preservation of peace. Democracies are oriented more towards defence than totalitarian systems. It is easy for an authoritarian state to start a war and just as easy to make peace as it sees fit.

In the 18th century, the population was not involved in the wars waged by their rulers.

The age of wars waged by authoritarian governments in Europe offers endless illustrations of this.

In the case of a democracy, by contrast, exceptional circumstances are required to plunge it into war.

However, once hostilities have broken out it is very difficult for passions to die down again.

Where hate and prejudice have set in, it takes many generations to achieve reconciliation.

Two world wars have shown what tremendous effort is required to reconcile estranged peoples.

The age of democracy has imposed on us a special responsibility to preserve peace.

That is why Europe is endeavouring to mediate in Yugoslavia.

The attempt to ensure the harmonious coexistence of peoples through the power politics of 19th century nation-states is an anachronism.

No state can be held together permanently by force of arms.

And independence cannot endure in times of peace if it was wrung from one's neighbours by force of arms.

Geography and history compel the peoples of Yugoslavia to get along with one another.

Every drop of blood now shed will impede the process of reconciliation which sooner or later will become inevitable.

Every human being is born into a community.

This is already evident from the linguistic root of the word "nation".

An awareness of our own nationality and the right to profess it freely, form part of human dignity.

It is precisely this awareness that increases our consciousness of the dignity of other nations.

The greatest gain of the new culture of international coexistence is that each nation and each culture has the same right to develop without interference. Today's intellectual diversity arises from the free dialogue between differing value systems.

No-one should be afraid of having a balanced, self-critical awareness of his own nationality.

Could the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe have survived decades of totalitarian rule if they had not found sustenance in their inviolable national identity?

However, it is dangerous when this balanced patriotic self-awareness turns to jingoism.

Love for one's own nation is quite natural.

However, it should not make one blind either to the failings of one's own nation or, what is more important, to the tremendous achievements of other nations and cultures.

The foundation for free coexistence is the willingness to see oneself through the eyes of others and to respect the way others see themselves.

This makes it imperative to show tolerance and a readiness to engage in dialogue, the causes embraced by your organization.

Willingness for cooperation and integration does not imply assimilation or uniformity.

The European Community convincingly illustrates that sensible integration furthers the free development of the individual peoples concerned - in the same way as a just community is the prerequisite for the free development of the personality.

There is no contradiction between being an ardent European and at the same time a convinced Frenchman, German or Italian.

Peace is not a balance of terror but, as the prophet says, it is the fruit of justice.

The New World Order must be an order of law and justice.

Justice presupposes the concept of the equality of all men.

In international terms this implies that no-one has the right to keep other peoples or states in tutelage.

The right of self-determination of peoples and the duty to protect minorities within given national borders are an expression of respect for the individuality of every people.

At the same time, the primacy of individual human rights must be ensured in every community.

Our Basic Law stipulates clearly and bindingly that the dignity of man is inviolable.

That means that the dignity of every human being is inviolable.

The Jewish-Christian faith says that man was created in the image of God. It demands that this image be honoured in every human face.

We advocate a policy which centres on man, in which human dignity and human rights constitute the criteria for all actions and in which the energy, personal initiative and imagination of all men can develop freely.

In Eastern Europe, people are now starting to recall the great philosophers and protagonists of individual and inalienable human rights: Immanuel Kant, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, John Stuart Mill and Karl Popper. Philosophers whose works were condemned there in the past now provide the ideas for building the future.

Peace and freedom are both indivisible.

There can be no lasting peace without freedom.

Peoples cannot be free unless the individual is free.

And the individual cannot be free without liberty of conscience.

This is the tradition of the Enlightenment.

It is a tradition of reason and cosmopolitan humanism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last century, Franz Grillparzer feared the decline of humanism via nationalism to bestiality.

This decline was to be found in the fanatic racism and in the heinous policy of racial extermination pursued by the national socialist regime.

Our responsibility today to resolutely counter all attempts at a policy which does not respect human rights is thus all the greater.

No government can justify violations of fundamental human rights by invoking domestic interests or its own sovereignty.

These are initial steps.

We need to do more.

We actively support the establishment of an international court of justice in the United Nations where actions can be brought against those suspected of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and environmental crimes.

We need an international court of human rights.

Our experiences with the European Court of Human Rights can be of use in this respect.

Torture and the death penalty must be abolished.

We must set about creating a global legal area in which the use of force is effectively outlawed - both the use of force between states and indiscriminate acts of violence by individual governments against their citizens.

Alongside the elementary right to freedom from bodily harm, the fundamental rights to freedom of faith and expression are gaining increasingly in importance.

The collapse of Communist ideology has left a moral vacuum in the countries where it prevailed.

The people there are seeking new ethical standards.

They are finding them in old religious ideals.

They are aware that it is difficult to distinguish between good and evil without referring back to religion.

Where religion has been destroyed by force, the ethical substance of a society is also destroyed.

The great martyrs of the resistance against totalitarianism who drew strength from their faith are unforgotten: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Cardinal Mindszenty, Father Popielusko and Pastor Brüsewitz.

Through their upright stance, they set an example for thousands and sustained the awareness that wrong does not become right, even if it triumphs outwardly.

Wherever ideological pressure has disappeared, religious life flourishes once more.

We also remember the impressive example of resolutely non-violent resistance based on religious conviction as personified by the Dalai Lama.

Freedom of faith and freedom of expression are interdependent.

People in the Communist countries paid a high price for the violent repression of all opinions which differed from the party line.

Those who had to languish in prison or were killed just because they had dared to think and speak for themselves paid a terrible price in terms of human suffering.

The price this forced dependence claimed with regard to the inner development of these societies was perhaps even greater.

Was the tragedy of Galileo Galilei not repeated over and over in the countless cases of scientists who had to remain silent in the face of Ideology's claim to infallibility?

I am not only thinking of the wilful genetics of the infamous Lysenko, but also of the sciences of history and economics and the social sciences which were deprived of intellectual incentive under the dictate of the Party and can offer no solutions to the real problems of today.

The worst form of deception is self-deception.

Those who wrongly imagine that they can lay claim to the truth paralyse their own energies - those who seek the truth redouble their energies.

It is to Karl Popper that we owe the recognition that an open, freely developing society lives off its willingness to constantly re-examine its findings and to let it be disproved.

The dynamism of development released by an open society is tremendous. But the problems which this dynamism entails, are also tremendous:

- protection of the environment, of the diversity of species and the world's climate,

- safeguarding of humane living conditions in view of the almost unbridled growth of the world's population,
- conservation of fertile farmland and the prevention of a virtual desertification of our planet,
- reliable control of the threats we ourselves created in the form of weapons of mass extermination and their proliferation.

In order to overcome these problems, we require all of man's inventiveness. That is why a diversity of opinions and free competition between opinions are indispensable prerequisites for modern civilization's ability to survive.

Respect for the opinions of others is based on the realization that one's own knowledge is limited.

A diversity of opinions and open dialogue cannot prevent errors and wrong decisions.

However, they are the best means of preventing errors and mistakes being perpetuated and leading to further unforeseeable mistakes.

The repression of free thoughts and all criticism is fatal for any totalitarian system.

Communism did not collapse as a result of the perfect state of Western society.

Every self-critical look at the state of our society shows that we are far from perfect.

Our only advantage is that we realize we are not perfect and retain our flexibility in seeking ever new improvements in the awareness that this process will never come to an end.

This one and only advantage is crucial.

Tolerance is an expression of - and I deliberately use a word which sounds slightly old-fashioned - humility.

Humility is the best means against arrogance, "hybris" in ancient Greek. Greek mythology is full of examples in which hybris leads inevitably to disaster.

It is wrong to conclude that the failure of totalitarian communism means the end of history.

This line of argument originates ultimately from the concept of the dialectic regularity of historical processes which was characteristic of the Marxist doctrine.

No, the future remains open.

The rivalry between differing schools of thought continues.

Excessive fixation on the precarious security balance between two superpowers has disappeared.

However, new challenges are already emerging which have to be mastered:

- the gap between rich and poor continues to widen all over the world,
- the foundations of human existence seem increasingly endangered,
- fear for their own cultural heritage provides the breeding ground for new fundamentalist movements,
- the race for global markets and trade creates frictions of a new kind.

One can say, on the contrary, that the Cold War ultimately reduced history to one single dimension.

Now a new variety of developments are unfolding.

President Bush talks of a "revival of history".

This diversity implies greater complexity which is making new demands on our understanding and discernment.

There is little reason to believe that world history will become more monotonous and boring than it has been until now.

We have no cause to believe that we are now permanently immune to the temptations of totalitarianism.

It is not only our knowledge which is still imperfect.

Our moral strength remains imperfect, too.

The history of this century tells us that man is easily led into temptation.

At present, people are hungry for freedom.

However, when the hunger for bread becomes stronger, it can suffocate the hunger for freedom.

In Germany, we remember very well how quickly misery and despair can combine to create an explosive mixture which then turns into aggression and violence.

It was mainly due to the generous support of the USA that our young democracy became a lasting success after 1945.

The assistance we received then was not only material.

First and foremost, it was of a moral and spiritual nature.

Today similar efforts must be made to help the young democracies which emerged after the collapse of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe.

The free world must now show just as active a concern for the fate of those who recently regained freedom and democracy as it did 45 years ago.

The road to new and stable social systems will not be easy.

Failures and setbacks cannot be ruled out.

The systemic changes will put these societies to the test.

It is up to us to strengthen the new democratic institutions to such an extent that they pass these tests unharmed.

The gigantic endeavours to create paradise on Earth have left ruins reminiscent of hell.

We would do well to never forget this warning.

It makes us modest.

Hans Jonas, who lived in exile in New York for many years, once pointed out that from the aspect of responsibility it is more important to reliably prevent disaster than to risk the plunge into one of the known hells on the unknown path to paradise.

In other words, it is better to minimize misfortune than to maximize good fortune.

The principles of free democracy are experiencing a new breakthrough throughout the world.

Such radical changes as we have seen in the last few years have seldom occurred in world history in such a short space of time and with such little violence.

This is greatly encouraging for us.

We now have an opportunity to create a new world order

- where law and not force prevails,
- where the right of self-determination of peoples is in harmony with the protection of minorities and the need for stability,
- where respect for individual human rights is accompanied by responsibility for humanity as a whole and for the survival of Creation,
- where freedom of conscience and the individual concept of the pursuit of happiness remain inviolable.

It is up to us to grasp this opportunity.