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„Transatlantic Ties for a New Generation“

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ES GILT DAS GESPROCHENE WORT!

Dear Strobe Talbott,
Dear Fiona Hill,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It's good to be back in D.C.! I always enjoy coming back. As opposed to most of the crowded capitals I know, D.C. is a city that is spacious and that lets you see the sky. In that, it reminds me a little bit of Berlin.

There is another similarity with Berlin:

No matter which bar you walk into, no matter what time of day it is, you will be sure to find somebody talking about politics...

I quite enjoyed this culture of permanent debate when I first came here when I was 36, visiting my girlfriend during her year-abroad. Today, she is my wife of 19 years. And whenever I'm back in D.C., I still enjoy those debates and those bars.

On my way here, on the plane, I was flicking through some old issues of the New Yorker magazine. What I enjoyed most - and you may find that surprising coming from a German - were the cartoons.

One I remember in particular. It showed husband and wife sitting on the sofa at home, husband with a painful expression on his face. His wife says: "Don't be so hard on yourself - let me do that!"

You may guess why I am describing this to you. The discords that happen in every long and proven relationship: they are not foreign to the transatlantic relationship, either.

Being bored by routines, mistrust creeping in, being annoyed at the 'little differences', feeling the draw of new attractions - or pivoting to other oceans.... Yes, these are facts about us.

But what I want to suggest today is not a therapy session for an elderly couple. What I want to do is to explore what this long and proven relationship can mean for an entirely new generation!

Let's begin this discussion with another fact. It may sound worrying, but it's not. The fact is this: To the generation of tomorrow, the value of the transatlantic partnership is in no way as self-evident as it is to my generation and to many of us in this room.

And that shouldn't surprise us because the world just looks so very different through the eyes of different generations.

Take, for example, your Secretary of State, my colleague John Kerry. The world of his youth was the world in the aftermath of World War Two. As a little boy, he cycled through the rubble of Berlin Kurfürstendamm. He looked up at the first big house that was being rebuilt and it had a sign: 'Supported by the

Marshall Plan'. These images implanted the transatlantic partnership in John Kerry's moral cosmos.

As for myself, the world of my youth was a world divided into two blocs, East and West, black and white. As a student, I lived in a town not even seventy miles away from the Iron Curtain that ran right through the middle of my country. And I remember my student days quite well, because I took many more years studying than probably most students in this room... We were certain which side we belonged to. To us living at the frontlines of the Western world, this certainty was the anchor of our security.

But today, when I talk to my daughter it turns out that hers is an entirely different world. That is: If I get to talk to her at all, because she is seventeen... The world she is growing up in is a world more open, more diverse, more fascinating, but also more confusing than ever. Each continent, each way of life is just a tweet or a blog-post away. She asks me: "How do I find my own way in all this openness?"

Now I might tell her to look first to Europe and across the Atlantic. She will look at me and say: "Why should I care?"

I might respond that the U.S. and Europe stand for the 'community of Western values'. At this point, she will roll her eyes and turn back to her smartphone...

And you know what? I think she's right! Value talk is not enough. What my daughter's generation wants to know is how to put these values to work in the 21st century!

There are many tough questions that she and her generation ask:

- What will my job look like in a completely interconnected world?
- How will I still be in control, when much of what I do and much of who I am happens online?
- How will we keep our planet safe when threats spread around at broadband speed?
- How will we treat this planet's natural resources when an ever-growing population asks for the same standard of living that we are used to?

With these big questions on their plate, young people have every reason to ask: "Why should we care about the transatlantic relationship?"

Well, you shouldn't care just because people of my age are nostalgic or afraid of change. I personally believe that the U.S. and Europe remain partners of first choice for tackling the problems we face.

But the reality is that a new generation will only accept this belief and carry it forward if we adapt our relationship to their tough questions. Only if we put our values to work on the questions of today, will young people care about our partnership.

(1) Opportunity

The first value we need to put to work is opportunity. In his State of the Union a few weeks ago, President Obama said: “Opportunity is who we are”. Well, you should tell your President: That makes two of us! Enlarging opportunity across borders is what drives the European Union today.

I think that opportunity is just the right starting point to think about the transatlantic ties for a new generation. After all: When you’re my daughter’s age, all you see is opportunity!

When President Obama said “Opportunity is who we are”, there is one little word I would have added and that may sound very European to you. I would say: “Equal opportunity is who we are”!

That every young person gets a fair shot in life –regardless of gender or skin color or ZIP code or pocket money– that is the promise of our democracies! And let’s be honest: We are not keeping that promise in every part of Europe or the United States today.

If we share the challenge, let’s share the solutions! We should open up a debate, a platform for policies and experiences to widen opportunities on both sides. To name just one example: We can learn from your experience with a federal minimum wage that we are currently introducing in Germany. And you can learn from our experience with a dual vocational training system.

Also, did you know that in Germany the proportion of people born abroad is just as large as in the U.S – namely around 13%? Germany, just like the U.S., has become a diverse society. Let’s learn from each other how to turn diversity into a strength.

Mutual curiosity is still the strongest tie between our young people. And just to prove my point: My 17-year old daughter usually doesn’t show too much interest in my official business. But the one time in the past year she was absolutely determined to accompany me to an official event, was when George Clooney came to present ‘Monuments Men’ at the Berlinale Film Festival...

It is this curiosity that our opportunities are built on: cultural, social and economic. Every dollar and every Euro we invest into this exchange is money well-invested.

Our single biggest lever of opportunity is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. What TTIP will do is more than cutting tariffs. It will cut the red-tape and the special interests that stand in the way of innovation. Most of all, this will benefit the small and medium-sized firms.

(2) Fair Standards

Speaking of TTIP brings me to the second value that we need to put to work. TTIP isn’t just about trade and investments and jobs. It’s about setting standards.

The planet that our children are growing up on is becoming more interconnected and more crowded than ever before. So more than ever, we need a fair set of rules by which we treat each other and the planet we live on.

TTIP is a huge opportunity to shape the rules of the next phase of globalization together. And let me be clear: Neither side will lower its standards when it comes to the protection and safety of its citizens. Quite the contrary: The goal is to agree on high-level standards that can serve as a benchmark for other countries. In our view, TTIP is a landmark for free trade worldwide – not a retreat into bilateralism. In our view, TTIP will inspire our diversity – not reduce us to uniformity.

We also need global rules for our environment and natural resources. Climate change is a threat to our children's prosperity, health and increasingly to their political security.

I am glad that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have renewed their commitment to act. Germany will put climate change at the top of the agenda during our G8 presidency in 2015.

After all: If the U.S. and Europe don't lead the way, how will we work things out on a global scale?

Talk of rules may sound abstract. But it truly isn't. When my daughter looks at this open world, it is rules that will have to make sure she can navigate it safely. It is rules that turn the world's offerings into opportunities rather than threats. In no other area is this need for rules as apparent as in the internet. And in case you were wondering: From our perspective, it's not been going very well so far!

Because the internet has brought us closer than ever before, the loss of trust runs all the deeper – especially among young people, who lead much of their lives online. I am not here to pass judgment on Edward Snowden.

But one thing is clear: The practices he revealed have eroded the trust of America's friends to an extent where it threatens to get in the way of all the other tasks, and all the other opportunities that we have.

And just to clarify: The problem is not the political trouble that the news of these practices have caused us. The problem is the practices themselves!

We shouldn't allow a logic of mistrust to contaminate all the areas where cooperation holds the greater mutual benefit. So instead of more confrontation, let me offer a change of perspective: Finding the right rules to govern the digital world is a huge challenge. We both face that challenge. And we both haven't figured it out. So I suggest we work together on the solutions that we need:

- how to govern the internet,
- how to protect European and American data,
- how to tap the huge economic potential of the fourth industrial revolution,
- and how to keep us safe at the same time.

That is why I am suggesting a broader "Transatlantic Cyber Dialogue" that involves government agencies, but also companies and civil society. I hope that the young generation - from Silicon Valley and from Berlin or Munich - will take part in this dialogue. Finding a common understanding of

the proper rules for the age of “big data” is a defining challenge for our relationship.

(3) Democracy

This challenge is also a debate that goes to the heart of our democracies in the United States as well as in Europe.

It is a debate about freedom and security, about the private sphere and the public interest and how to balance them all in the digital age. None of us have found the right balance yet! That is why emotions run high and controversies are fierce.

Democracy is always work-in-progress. Even in this country, where it is over 200 years old!

In that way, a heated debate is also a sign of a healthy democracy. After all, other countries under different regimes are not even having this debate!

I think we should share this debate across the Atlantic. For reasons of culture and history, we will not end up with the same answers on every issue. But the basic principle is what connects us: That it is up to democracy - and not to private firms or to government agencies - to set the rules of the game.

I see some of you looking at the clock, probably wondering: “When is he going to talk about the bread-and-butter business of foreign policy?”

The answer is: Now. But I talked about values first, for a reason: These values - opportunity, fairness, freedom and democracy - we owe them not just to our own children. They are values that young people dream of far beyond our borders!

They are, for instance, the dream of many young people on the Maidan in Kyiv. When the struggle for their dream was spiraling down into bloodshed last week, my Polish and French colleagues and I travelled to Kyiv to try to break the spiral and bring the parties back to the table. The odds were small, but the agreement we achieved allowed the country to step back from the brink of civil war. The latest signs still leave me worried – so we keep working to ensure a peaceful transition. This transition will have to be achieved by the Ukrainians themselves. But Europe, the U.S. and Russia should work to provide Ukraine with stability - political as well as economic - rather than pulling it further apart. Ukraine is one example in a larger picture: Neither the U.S. nor Europe can take on its global responsibility alone.

But as one President, who inspired both of our nations, once said: “United, there is little we cannot do.”

German foreign policy –firmly embedded in its European partnership– is willing to carry its share. I am committed to a foreign policy that will expand and leverage the toolbox of diplomacy, in order to act earlier, more substantively and more decisively to prevent and to solve conflicts.

In some cases, Europe will take the diplomatic lead, as we are doing in Ukraine. In other cases, the U.S. will take the diplomatic lead, as Secretary Kerry is currently doing with great energy in the Middle-East peace process.

But our division of labor will only work out with the combined strength we can muster. That is why we expressed our full support for the peace effort, when the German and Israeli government met in Jerusalem three days ago.

Diplomacy is 'Perception', as Henry Kissinger likes to say. It requires seeing the world through a lens that might not always be one's own. I believe that our joint efforts will only be fruitful if we keep our channels of diplomacy open wherever we can. I am convinced that diplomatic persistence pays off eventually.

Here are two examples: After 10 long years of negotiating, we are finally seeing results in Iran with our E3+3 allies. And in Syria, we undertook a joint initiative with Russia to get rid of the chemical weapons. Now each must play their part to make sure that these murderous weapons are actually destroyed.

As I said earlier, I spent many years at university. I was working on my PhD when - a few miles east - the Wall started to crumble. At that time, there were many who thought that the end of the Cold War would mark the ultimate victory of the Western model – as it were, “the end of history”.

Far from it! We live in a world that has lost its old order, but hasn't found a new one yet.

New powers are rising; each with their own history, culture and proud way of doing things. And even if most of them aren't exactly Westminster democracies: Each is determined to have a say in this world. Some people in the West reacted with resignation. After all, global population growth is making Western societies fade into the shadow.

Some reacted with nostalgia for the golden transatlantic times. But those, by the way, never existed. There have always been differences – from Schröder and Bush all the way back to Adenauer and that same inspiring President – JFK – whom I quoted above.

Others reacted by turning inward. For some years now, both Europe and the U.S. have been preoccupied with their crises at home. Still others reacted by turning away from the old Western alliance. After all, the new power centers of the world would lie elsewhere.

I think that none of these reactions is right. I think we should neither resign nor despair nor turn in nor turn away. We should welcome the competition of this multi-polar world and be confident that the Western model still has the most to offer! The ultimate test if the transatlantic relationship is alive and well is not if we can look at each other and say there are no differences between us. The ultimate test is if we can stand side by side, look at the world around us and embrace the competition.

Just a few weeks ago in Munich, my colleague John Kerry called for a “transatlantic Renaissance”. I couldn’t agree more with him.

But let’s keep this in mind: The Renaissance wasn’t the rebuilding of ancient Rome. The Renaissance was the building of something new, inspired by the values of the past. And what’s even more important: The Renaissance wasn’t built by the ancient Romans – it was built by new generations.

By this I do not mean to say that I am ancient...despite the color of my hair... What I am saying is: It is you, the generations of tomorrow who will build those bridges. They will be based on your connections, initiatives and communities. I thank the many foundations, universities, and NGOs, also in this city and in this room. Your tireless work is the foundation of our Renaissance!

In a world more open than ever before, young people face tough questions. These are global questions. They’re not unique to the U.S. or Europe.

But there is still something that makes our partnership unique: that when we tackle those tough questions, we share the starting point of our history and the compass of our values.

We may be an old couple, but our values still move us a long way ahead. If we put those values to work on today’s tough questions, young people have all the reason to care for each other across the Atlantic.

So let’s do care, and put them to work.

It’s worth it.