

Speech of Vice-President of German Parliament Thomas Oppermann,
in the Parliament building in Wellington on the German National Day on 3rd of October 2019

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted that my first journey to New Zealand gives me the opportunity to celebrate our national holiday with you!

When the Berlin Wall had fallen in November 1989 and Germany was ultimately reunified in the following year those events were moments of great joy in German history.

30 years ago, people in Eastern Germany went out onto the streets and protested against the rigid dictatorship of the ruling Communist Party.

These actions were quite courageous because almost everybody expected a violent response from the secret service (Stasi) and the police. Fortunately that did not happen. The demonstrators and the revolution remained peaceful. It is one of the rare examples in history where people successfully fought for freedom and democracy without bloodshed.

The unification that followed was not an automatic process and not everybody was happy about it. On the contrary: Many in Europe were afraid of a reunited Germany. Former French president François Mitterrand once said: “I love Germany so much I’m glad there are two of them.” But again, like after World War II, it was America that supported Germany like no other country in the world. Without the US and the leadership of President George H. W. Bush, German unification would not have been possible. And that is something that Germans will never forget.

So where does Germany stand today, almost 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Well, that depends on your perspective. If you look at Germany from the inside the first thing you might see are problems:

- growing social inequality;
- a lack of investment in infrastructure;
- and difficulties in integrating migrants.

- However, if you look at Germany from the outside (and most people in the world look at Germany from the outside-perspective), you might see a completely different picture:
 - a well-organised, free and democratic country;
 - free access to education from school to university;
 - healthcare for everybody with full medical treatment, no matter whether you have a job or you are unemployed or poor;
 - a well-functioning system of vocational training;
 - and a strong economy: a long period of growth, with a strong labor market and great job opportunities (more than one million job vacancies);
 - To put it in a nutshell: today Germany is a country many people want to live in!

All this is only possible thanks to Germany's firm integration in the Western alliance: EU, NATO and the transatlantic partnership are the basis of our democracy and our economic success. And not least: Like many other countries in the world, Germany has benefited a great deal from an international environment largely based on cooperation and the acceptance of rules.

Western Countries have enjoyed freedom and peace for more than seven decades now. But some dangerous tendencies are emerging. We now face the rise of nationalism and isolationism all around the world.

- We see right-wing populist movements promoting racism, white supremacy, anti-Semitism, hatred and violence;
- In Christchurch you suffered one of the most horrific right wing terrorist attack in recent years;
- But the people of New Zealand and especially your prime minister showed a strong reaction making clear that you would not allow anybody to destroy our freedom and religious tolerance.

Thank you for being so determined and so clear in this crucial situation!

In Germany we face a new political situation:

- After 1 million refugees had come to our country in 2015 a right wing party was elected to our parliament that is aggressively opposing and type of migration;
- That hurts our country, because Germany needs young and talented people. Experts predict that in the next 15 years six million people will retire who, without immigration, cannot be replaced by young people entering the labor market.
- So Germany needs immigration. And we urgently need to find a consensus on how to handle it in a controlled way.

I am optimistic that we can solve these problems. When our democratic system is under pressure, the answer must be even more emphasizing and appreciating democracy, democratic values and democratic procedures! The opponents of democracy spread fear and destructiveness. The answer of democrats must be: confidence and optimism!

Today we are celebrating German Unity and we are also celebrating the friendship between New Zealanders and Germans. There is probably no other country at a greater geographical distance from Germany than New Zealand. We are 18.000 kilometres away from each other. But at the same time we are very close! Germany and New Zealand share the same values. And in one case: we even admire the same hero! I am talking about Wynton Rufer, the fabulous football player. In his 9 years in Germany he scored 104 goals for Werder Bremen and won the German championship in 1993!

For most Germans New Zealand is one of the most sympathetic countries in the world.

We believe in the same principles and have the same view on most international issues; in particular, both our countries believe in the benefits of a multilateral rule based international order.

Economic cooperation, free trade, the migration crisis, fighting terrorism or climate change: All these problems cannot be solved at the national level. It's only possible if nations cooperate, if we act like global citizens with a global responsibility.

New Zealand and Germany share this conviction. So let us work closely together to defend the values of an open society and liberal democracy!

And let us celebrate global citizenship!