

Berlin – Roles in History, Today and Tomorrow

**Vortrag vor der Studiengruppe des American Council on Germany (ACG)
am 9. Dezember 2014**

It is a great pleasure to meet with you and discuss issues of common interest on the international stage or in the development of open societies under current conditions and in the light of perceptions of society currently under discussion, for instance in response to the electronic data processing and new forms of warfare.

This time you left the choice of the main theme to me.

I thought we could discuss the role of Berlin in world affairs – but not only under contemporary conditions, but also under those of the past and perhaps under conditions that will emerge in the time to come.

I am sure – everyone among you has his own perception of Berlin as a city, as a place where history was made and as a city in which the holocaust was invented and carried through, as well as the city that started WW II and ended in almost total destruction of the city and the country, but also as a city that became the symbol of freedom in a communist central and East European Soviet Empire under the conditions of the Berlin blockade in 1948/49 and after the erection of the wall around West-Berlin in 1961. The wall erected in 1961 was to save survival of the GDR – the wall came down peacefully – by chance as a result of a statement to the media by Mr. Schabowski, the spokesman of the SED-PolitBureau on November 9, 1989 in the most peaceful way you could possibly imagine. Without authorization he said that the wall is open as of now: East

Berliners not trusting this news from West German Radio stations went to explore what was to happen.

Without instructions the frontier police just opened the gates – and the rest is known to you: The cold war ended in this way. No one was willing and able to close the wall again.

During large parts of in the 19th and 20th century Berlin was one of the largest industrial conglomerations of the world, including research, innovation and diversification. It was the place where Socialists – Lasalle – and conservatizes – von Bismarck - agreed on the establishment of a nation-wide pension-system, insurance on invalidity and social security system. This system changed the German Socialists into Social Democrats who were seeking political control not by revolution and violence but by free and fair elections. In 1912, they were the strongest parliamentary faction in the German Parliament – the Reichstag.

You can still see remnants of the Berlin based industrial complexes in East Berlin that have not yet been turned into thriving sectors of Berlin again. It simply takes much more time, much more imagination and investments to turn this industrial dead body into thriving life again.

In these days I wrote my annual report on happenings in my personal and on my views on international issues. In the end I spoke of Berlin and the three roles it now has to play and respond to:

It is to be the memorial for the victims of German Nazi terror, in particular of the murder of our Jewish brothers and sisters.

It is to be the light house in Europe of our days to promote respect for the dignity and the creative power of the human being under the conditions of the 21st century.

And it is to serve as a magnet for people from abroad, mainly from Europe to share and contribute to one of the most innovative, competitive and globally active economies in Europe and beyond.

Last year Germany was second to the US on the global scale in numbers of immigrants – round about half a million.

What used to be the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) in terms of territory in 1940 that part of Germany had 40 million inhabitants? 25 years later – in 1965 - 62 Million people were living on that territory and made it the third largest economy on the global scale. It integrated more than 15 million refugees and expellees from former parts of Germany, from the GDR and from other parts of Europe.

In 1990 it had to absorb 17 million East Germans who had lived under the conditions of Soviet styled planned stated economy and barely made it to maintain Soviet standards of living. The modernization of the new federal states caused expenditures from public funds of annually more than 50 billion Euro – but the country at large maintained and improved its international competitiveness in spite of these financial burdens on the public budgets and under the conditions of a stable Euro currency that means high priced products on the global markets.

But Berlin has resumed also a role on the international stage of multi-faceted life style, modernity and workshops in art and literature. It is a brother or sister in arms with New York and that city's unique role on the international state.

All in all, what you see and experience is an open society geared to the notion of peace and wellbeing on the European scale and on cooperation with the rest of the world in order to save the world and mankind against climatic catastrophe by

replacing the through-away economic system by a recycling system. It may take long time and enormous efforts but it can be done – so the deep seated conviction of most Germans.

The other day, Egon Bahr, no stranger to you, confessed that he was not in favor of German unification for fear of the re-emergence of German imperialism – as was feared as well by neighboring countries – as he thought. He reflected the sentiments not only of a few in West Germany. I always took the position, that such a renunciation would not be believed by other nations and demonstrated a lack of confidence in the strength of open society in Germany that had set free enormous human resources for a socially rooted non state economy based on success orientated cooperation of labor and entrepreneurship on eyes level – a system, not really understood in the United States, in Great Britain and in France – not to speak of Russia. It is rooted in the social structures of free cities during the Ancient Roman Empire of German nation. Nurnberg, Augsburg, Hamburg come to mind.

In 1946 it was the USA who offered support for the reconstruction for the war torn Europe, including the Soviet Union – under one condition, Germany would have to be included, because without the German economic potential Europe could not be rebuild and a third WW would be probable as a result of new tensions between Germany and the rest of Europe.

It had been Winston Churchill who invited the new US President Henry Truman on May 12, 1945 to come and see what Europe was alike in the face of the emerging Soviet threat. The USA was primarily confronted with the tall task of assuring victory against the fiercely fighting Japan.

Truman introduced the Point 4 program to counteract communist expansion into the Mediterranean zone and into the Near and Middle East – and during the Berlin Blockade 1948/1949 NATO was established. Germany was protected on

the basis of the Three/Four Power rights in Germany. This safety umbrella enabled non state investments into Germany and brought about the surprisingly fast recovery of the German economy. This should be remembered in today's situation of Ukraine that seeks integration into the European Union and is in urgent need for a safety net in order to be able to attract non state investment for the modernization of the Ukrainian economy.

This leads us to issues of the day:

The other day – on the occasion of a panel discussion at the Viadrina University the two panelists – Mr.Verheugen, former Commission member of the EU commission and Minister of State at the Foreign Office and I had to answer the question: Does the EU program of Eastern Partnership constitute a threat to Russia.? I answered:

“In 1991 – on the occasion of the adoption of the Paris Charta for the establishment of a common European House on the basis of the European value system of pluralistic democratic structures with separation of state power, an independent judiciary, free and fair elections and an economy based on private entrepreneurship the Soviet Union as partner to this agreement was not threatened. It wanted to bring about such conditions in the Soviet Union itself. In today's world Russia has abandoned the common platform of European values – at the latest with the Medvedev-Doctrine of 2008 claiming the right for Russia to interfere in neighboring countries on strategic grounds and for the protection of Russian citizens. Under such conditions and Russia has sharpened its intervention policy in connection with the Ukraine crisis – the European value system and this Eastern Partnership constitute in deed a threat to Russia's internal structure and its policy objectives in Ukraine”

Berlin seeks a peaceful solution to the conflict – as it was trying- together with NATO-partners – on the East-West issues during the 20th century (Kennan Doctrine of Containment). But it has no illusions about the conflictual situation with Russia. Angela Merkel addresses this issue openly and she can rely- - to the surprise of not only a few – on broad support within Parliament. Only the Left – DIE LINKE – opposes her position.

For long Germany tried hard to find common grounds with Russia – on the basis of the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation concluded in 1997 between the European Union and Russia. But it never matured to a partnership filled with life and gains for both sides. It remained on paper. Investment conditions in Russia were simply not appropriate for the sought after modernization partnership. Russia stayed at the level of an oil and gas exporter and inferior partner in industrial production and competition or cooperation.

Now it has established a kind of wall between its authoritarian regime and the free parts of Europe.

Germany is aware of the concerns of Eastern and South Eastern European members of the EU. These countries on the other hand support the policy of modernization n on the basis of a stable currency and want the EURO sector of the European Union to stick to its principles.

Berlin's first choice is the cohesion of the European Union

Berlin's second partner is the US – a difficult partner in these days.

Berlin's third partner is global free trade (WTO) und thus open markets in China Japan, India, Brazil, South Africa and the other countries.

Russia is potentially a very important partner. However it decided to go it its own way and seek alliances with countries that have difficulties with the EU and the USA. That resembles the policy of the Soviet Union during the Cold war.

So, I come back to Berlin and its roles in the past and today n and may be tomorrow:

Other countries and nations may feel that they are singled out as great nations – and also as nation states. Against the background of the Nazi regime and the Communist perception that was dominant in East Germany for forty years Germany has abandoned such notions, but is aware of the potential of the human being with his talents to contribute to the transformation of mankind into a recycling gear and make the world safe for freedom and safe from a destructive mankind. But this is not to be accomplished by domination but by setting free energies and creativity in societies of different structures. This is to be done by cooperation, innovation, competition. WTO is such a model. The UN was meant to serve this purpose but it cannot on the basis of veto rights of singled out nations.

Today the world seems to be derailed in this regard.

Civil society must be strengthened. Independent judiciary has to be strengthened in order to limit the power of state institution and of big business.

Berlin is open for both these avenues.