

Dear Consul General,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,

**Zunächst möchte ich Ihnen, lieber Busso von Alvensleben, und Ihrem Team dafür danken, dass Sie die Französischen Gäste in das Deutsche Generalkonsulat eingeladen haben. Wir sind hier zusammengekommen, um das 50jährige Jubiläum des Elysée-Vertrages und die enge Freundschaft zwischen Frankreich und Deutschland zu feiern. Eine Freundschaft, die so wunderbar in Ihrer aktuellen Ausstellung dargestellt wird.**

Reconciliation among our political elites was a vital prerequisite to bring our people closer together. I would like to start by reminding you of the words Chancellor Adenauer told Charles de Gaulle in 1963: „**Was wir zusammen für unsere Länder geschaffen haben, ist das wichtigste Werk in meinen vierzehn Jahren als Bundeskanzler**“ (“All that we have accomplished together for our two countries is for me the most important work I have accomplished in my fourteen years as chancellor.”) To which he added: „**Die persönliche Freundschaft zwischen Ihnen und mir ist eine der sehr seltenen Mitgaben von Schönheit, die die politische Arbeit bringen kann.**“ (“The personal friendship between us is one of the rare gifts that was given to me during my life in politics.”) It is through this personal relation that the friendship between our two peoples was forged. It is through these strong ties that have linked our leaders that the most memorable symbols were born. Such a moment occurred on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1984 when Chancellor Kohl met François Mitterrand at the Douaumont Ossuary to pay tribute to the soldiers who died during the First World War. Europe has never known so bloody a battle as the Battle of Verdun in 1916, where over 300,000 French and German soldiers perished. The Chancellor and the President stood together, hand in hand, for long minutes, thus sealing the French-German friendship in a symbolic gesture of reconciliation. In an effort to go beyond political differences, the friendship between François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl set the pace for a tangible expression of our partnership.

Reconciliation came at a time of European reconstruction. It was a dream, an ideal of peace as the core of our relationship, an ideal that helped our peoples surpass their differences. The Treaty encouraged frequent encounters on all levels in order to foster our cooperation, an impetus driven by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and Helmut Schmidt.

No other countries can boast of a friendship as deep as the one which unites France and Germany. According to a recent survey, more than 85% of the French think positively of Germany. On the other side of the border, a mirror image can be found with 87% of Germans seeing France in a positive light. These statistics speak for themselves. Allow me to quote our Foreign Ministers, Messrs. Fabius and Westerwelle: “Centuries-old enmity can give way to profound friendship: this is the message of the Elysée Treaty, which is of universal significance.”

French-German initiatives serve as models for various European projects. Here are only a few: EADS and Airbus, the Schengen Area, the Euro currency, the French-German Brigade as a precursor to the EU’s Eurocorps and Defense Policy. Recently, French and German cooperation gave way to a set of measures for stabilizing the Euro. The European Stability Mechanism and the Fiscal Pact were thus adopted on an all-European level.

The European Union is the largest single market in the world based on free trade and the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. Europe, however, is not merely a free market. It is a political body. For its founding generation, it was a means to achieve sustainable peace. They wanted to create the circumstances under which a war between France and Germany would become, as Robert Schuman said: “not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible”. More recently, in his speech given in Oslo last December, the President of the Norwegian Nobel Committee (Thorbjorn Jagland) praised the French-German friendship for its role in transforming Europe from a “continent of war” into a “continent of peace”. He also highlighted the fact that: “it is together [that] we must ensure that we do not lose what we have built on the ruins of the two world wars.”

The European Union also means a stronger say in world matters. As we have been going through an important crisis in the past several years, the internal problems we face inside the Union should encourage us to deepen European relations. If we want to play an important role on the international level and be an effective partner to the United States, we should strengthen the unity among Europeans.

I would like to conclude with a few words about our close relationship with the United States, a partnership mentioned in the introduction to the Elysée Treaty. The transatlantic bond is profoundly embedded in our common history, our cultural heritage and our democratic values. The stronger Europe will be, the more constructive the relations with our American partner will become.

I will finish by quoting the former American Secretary of State, Mrs. Hillary Clinton: “in all, or almost all the challenges we must face today, Europe is the United States’ primary partner”.

With no further delay, I wish you all an excellent evening and invite you to enjoy our respective culinary traditions.

*Es lebe die Deutsche-Französische Freundschaft ! Vive l’amitié franco-allemande !*