Address given by Joschka Fischer on the future of Europe and the Franco-German partnership (Freiburg, 30 January 2001)

Caption: On 30 January 2001, in a speech at the University of Freiburg's French Cultural Center, Joschka Fischer, German Foreign Minister, highlights the importance of stronger Franco-German relations for the future of European integration.

Source: Web-Archiv - Die Zukunft Europas und die deutsch-französische Partnerschaft, Rede von Bundesaußenminister Joschka Fischer am 30. Januar 2001 vor dem Frankreich-Zentrum der Universität Freiburg. [ONLINE]. [Berlin]: Auswärtiges Amt, [05.11.2004]. Disponible sur http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/infoservice/presse/presse_archiv?archiv_id=1239.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_joschka_fischer_on_the_future_of_europe_and_the_franco_german_partnership_freiburg_30_january_2001-en-19480146-ae28-4934-bf58-87a2f7a4fe67.html

Last updated: 01/08/2016

Address given by Joschka Fischer, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 30 January 2001 at the French Cultural Center of the University of Freiburg

The future of Europe and the Franco-German partnership

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tomorrow, President Chirac, Prime Minister Jospin, Federal Chancellor Schröder and their Foreign Ministers will meet not far from here, in Strasbourg. I am sure that you will understand that today I cannot, and must not, anticipate what is on the agenda for tomorrow. The University of Freiburg's French Cultural Center did not deliberately schedule this lecture for today as a political move, and I do not intend to spend the time speculating about tomorrow. Instead I should like us to consider a number of fundamental points concerning the Franco-German partnership and its significance for the future of Europe.

In the weeks since the Nice European Council many views have been put forward in the press on both sides of the Rhine, with murmurings about alleged winners and shifts of influence.

I give no weight whatsoever to such views. To look at the situation in this light is a backward step and will not take Europe forward. What is more, this view of Nice is quite simply wrong. It confuses far too many issues and, even more importantly, it completely fails to recognise the nature of the partnership between Germany and France and the European unification process. Whether Germany is now more dependent on France or *vice versa*, and whether it was otherwise in the past, is also a completely fallacious question.

Europe is based on Franco-German understanding, on our close partnership. There is no substitute for this relationship, and that will also apply to future European integration. To understand why that is so, we must consider very carefully what changes have affected Europe, Germany and France since 1989 and what is still valid today. I mention 1989 because it was the year when the Cold War ended and the frozen political landscape of Central Europe thawed out rapidly, marking a 'tectonic shift' in the political situation on our continent.

I.

So what was the situation prior to 1989? Two great French Europeans looking at a Europe laid waste by Hitler's Germany in the post-war years saw the opportunity for a radical new beginning. They were, of course, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman. Their principle of integration overcame the balance-of-power system and the considerable threats of war that it posed on the European continent: ever since Germany had become a nation-state, it had been too large for the delicate balance of power but too small for hegemony. The pooling of parts of the sovereignty of the original six Member States in a move towards European integration, initially in the 'High Authority' of the European Coal and Steel Community (the forerunner of the European Commission), was a politically 'revolutionary' achievement. The nations and peoples that have participated in this integration process have enjoyed 50 years of freedom, peace and unprecedented prosperity as a result.

Bearing in mind that Germany had invaded France three times in 70 years, we should not overestimate the importance of France's strategic farsightedness and political courage in making 'common cause' (in the best sense of the word) with its 'arch-enemy' for the purposes of European integration. Along with the US decision to retain a presence in Europe after 1945, this political move was a response to the historically explosive question 'Where is Germany?', which had plagued Europe since the 19th century and had caused two world wars. The picture of de Gaulle and Adenauer in Reims Cathedral symbolises this triumph of the concept of integration over the devastation that occurred during the reign of nationalism.

What has changed since 1989? The fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall meant that European integration no longer had to be restricted to Western Europe and the former Federal Republic. Since that time, Germany has vigorously campaigned for the admission of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. After all, enlargement will also provide Eastern Europe with a permanent and unalterable answer to the old question 'Where is Germany?' for a united Germany; that is to say, Germany has found its place within immovable

borders in an undivided and integrated Europe. From Germany's viewpoint, Poland's accession to NATO and the EU will complete a policy symbolically initiated 30 years ago when Willy Brandt fell to his knees in front of the Warsaw Ghetto monument.

The fact that EU enlargement is so important to Germany by no means signifies that enlargement to include the countries of Eastern Europe is mainly a German project. It was the Frenchman Robert Schuman who stated very clearly in 1963: 'We must build the United Europe not only in the interest of the free peoples but also in order to be able to welcome in it the peoples of Eastern Europe who, freed from the repression under which they live, will want to join and seek our moral support.' This support for a free, undivided Europe and for enlargement continues to shape French policy today.

The enlargement of the EU is both a historic opportunity and a political necessity. A refusal by the EU to admit the democracies of Central and Eastern Europe would inevitably undermine the concept of integration itself and ultimately threaten its existence. To leave these countries to the old balance-of-power system and its focus on individual nations, its constraints of coalition and traditional interest-led politics would in the long term make Europe a continent of insecurity. The wars in the Balkans should suffice as a warning to us. EU enlargement therefore means more security and more prosperity for all Member States, both present and future.

The idea of a Europe seeking unification for itself was conceived in Paris and bore French traits from the outset. That will continue to be the case for the larger Europe that is to come. What makes European integration so attractive to the Central and Eastern European countries are the values of the French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment; that is to say, liberty, equality, fraternity. The candidate countries very much want to join the EU because they are attracted by the rule of law, the equality of rights — particularly between small and large Member States — and the solidarity shown between the prosperous and the less prosperous. These are values and institutions that bear very French traits in the history of the EU.

The European community of values, and specifically human rights in the form self-evident to us today, has been decisively shaped by the history of French thought and French culture. The UK has, in the course of its history, naturally also made very significant contributions (parliamentary democracy), as did the American Revolution. The Charter of Fundamental Rights, which the Heads of State and of Government solemnly proclaimed in Nice and which we intend to use as the foundation for EU values, reflects the power of these universal values. In keeping with this tradition and even in the age of globalisation France is particularly watchful over Europe's cultural heritage — what is called *diversité culturelle*. And that is very important for us all.

At this point, however, let me also challenge the view that Germany alone will make economic capital out of enlargement. In my view it is high time to discard the old clichés and to focus on the economic realities. In recent years the French economy, which is so closely interlocked with Germany, has been much more dynamic than the German economy — reunification is something with which we have to get to grips, and we intend to do so. Furthermore, in the years before the launch of the euro, the French franc was also much more stable than the German mark. Having recently moved with the German Government to Berlin, I can also add that my tap water comes from a French source — from the biggest water supply company in the world.

II.

But what changes are in store for the European Union as it faces the most extensive enlargement in its history? And what does that mean for France and Germany?

The EU of 27 will face different challenges from those faced by the Community of the Six, by the European Community of the Twelve and by the EU of the Fifteen. European integration has always evolved through a balanced process of widening and deepening. As it faces the biggest enlargement since its foundation, the Union has to make appropriate changes to its institutions and decision-making mechanisms if it is to retain its capacity to act and if it is to legitimise its actions in a democratically convincing manner. Both enlargement and the challenges of globalisation require Europe to have a greater and not a lesser capacity to act.

I find it remarkable that this debate has evolved to such an extent over the past few months. Now the need for further deepening as a result of enlargement is more or less universally accepted. The reason why the Nice Summit is of such historic importance is that it has opened the way for practical preparations both for the enlargement of the EU and the deepening of the Union: in other words, it ensures that widening and deepening can proceed in parallel, as they should. Nice was therefore a great success, and for that we have to thank the French Presidency.

All the partners unquestionably had different opinions, and these the French Presidency had to draw together in difficult talks so as to produce an outcome. This situation indicated the stage that European integration has reached. That is to say, if enlargement necessitates greater integration to ensure that Europe has the capacity to act, we must think not only of efficiency but also of democratic legitimisation.

One of the major issues that will have to be resolved in the coming years is the relationship between the Union and nation-states. After all, the people of Europe will continue to identify with the nation-state, with its cultural and democratic traditions. The nation-state is the major framework for language, culture and tradition; even in a large Union, it will be an absolutely vital factor in democratically legitimising European decisions. Yet in the 21st century the Member States will be essentially dependent on a European Union that not only has the capacity to act but is also democratically legitimised.

So what shape will the Europe of tomorrow take?

It will be a lean Union with the capacity to act and with a transparent allocation of powers. There will be a division of competences between Europe, its nation-states and the regions. But that is not all: how will we manage to shape European democracy so that it represents equally the Europe of the citizens and the Europe of the nation-states? How might and ought a European executive with the capacity to act look? How do we intend to achieve a deepening of the Union — is it sufficient to expand enhanced cooperation as agreed? What shape will the relationship of intergovernmental cooperation and integrated structures take in the future? And how will this converging Europe shape its close partnership with the United States, which will continue to be absolutely vital to Europe's security in the future?

The debate on these issues has only just begun. And it is taking place in something of a minefield, since traditional constitutional and international law does not provide a model for what is being created in Europe.

III.

There is also a second question, and that is whether this European project can succeed. No one can predict how Europe will look in 10 or 15 years' time. And yet one thing is certain: European integration, which I hope will provide the answer to the challenges of the future and which the German Government actively supports, can and will be successfully completed only if Germany and France make it their common cause. This is why there is no alternative to the Franco-German partnership in the 21st century although, of course, we also need to maintain good and close neighbourly relations.

The more European the terms in which Germany defines its interests, the more likely they are to be translated into practice; and that probably applies more now to a unified Germany than it did prior to 1989. The more clearly its interests are formulated in national terms, the more likely they are to be viewed with mistrust and disapproval. The more consistently Germany operates in the common European institutions, the greater its room for manoeuvre with its partners, especially with France. Germans cannot choose whether or not to be Europeans; they have to be Europeans if common sense is to prevail and if they consider where their interests lie and learn the lessons of their history. The dictates of voluntary restraint did not cease to apply when the Wall came down, any more than Germany grew out of its history at the time of reunification — the same dictates apply to a unified Germany.

That also means, however, that without a close European and transatlantic partnership Germany is all too likely to meet with a cool and sceptical reception. In the context of the completion of European integration,

such a partner can — for us — only be France. This partnership has always included and never excluded other Europeans. But our history unites us, like no other two countries in Europe, in joint responsibility for the future. We have very different traditions and cultural traits, and this diversity is undoubtedly also one of the constants that have survived the changes of 1989. But France's strengths and Germany's strengths complement each other in a particular and consistently very productive manner. Only together shall we continue to be the driving force behind Europe even in an enlarged Union, forging ahead with integration alongside our other friends and neighbours.

In Freiburg and along the Rhine there is probably a greater awareness than anywhere else in Germany that, even in the Internet age, the bond between Germany and France is by no means virtual or one that could be formed with other partners. It is actually a historic bond in the true sense. Fifty years of integration have given rise to a Franco-German network to which most of you probably belong. This network involves not only common sense and common interests but also an emotional attachment encompassing many personal friendships and a bond of trust that has grown over the years.

And we should now build on that trust. In France the future of Europe is currently the subject of intense public debate. I believe that it is extremely important to debate this issue publicly amongst ourselves in as many sections of the population as possible — not only at government, parliamentary and party level but also amongst intellectuals, the general public and the media. What are needed are not quick or concocted results. These will emerge from the discussion. What is far more important is that we — and by 'we' here I am actually talking about Germans in the first instance — listen and understand what the leap into the new enlarged Europe means for the other partner both conceptually and, above all, emotionally. Then we shall reach joint decisions that meet with approval in our parliaments and in both our nations.