

Day of German Unity 2009
Reception on 10/02/2009 at the Consulate General

Dear Guests,

I would like to welcome you most heartily – also on behalf of my wife and my colleagues from the consulate – here at the German Residence tonight. We are very grateful and honored that so many of you have come here to celebrate with us Germany's Day of Unity. Und jetzt noch einmal auf Deutsch: Ich möchte Sie alle hier sehr herzlich willkommen heißen, auch im Namen meiner Frau und meiner Kolleginnen und Kollegen vom Konsulat. Wir freuen uns sehr, dass Sie so zahlreich heute hier erschienen sind, um mit uns den Deutschen Nationaltag, den Tag der Deutschen Einheit, zu feiern.

For Germany, the quest to regain our national unity after WWII has always been closely linked to the process of building a European Union, and it is in this perspective that I am particularly pleased to have with us today a group of German members of the European Parliament. They have come to San Francisco to find out more about California's importance for Europe, and I am sure that they will find their trip worthwhile. A particular welcome to you and thank you for joining us tonight!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year is very special to Germany because it marks two „grand“ anniversaries:

- First, we celebrate this year the 60th anniversary of our constitution, the so-called „Basic Law“. In May 1949, this constitution came into force and, by that, brought into being the modern, post WWII Germany, a truly democratic state, based on the rule of law and the strict and unqualified observance of human rights. But this great achievement happened only in the Western part of Germany and it was only exactly 20 years back that freedom, democracy and the rule of law could be extended to the whole of our country – and to all of Central and Eastern Europe
- This year, we are therefore also proud to be able to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the „Fall of the Berlin Wall“ - which in fact ended not only 40 years of division of Germany but also of the whole European continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The events that took place 20 years back in Germany and other parts of Europe were nothing less than a political earthquake of a major magnitude that shook up the whole continent. We, Germany, were at the epicentre of the earthquake.

I was there at the time, in the West, and I remember very vividly these history-making days and weeks at the end of 1989. Let me just tell you that nobody expected this course of events, and nobody anticipated the speed with which these events developed. Not only German citizens in the West and in the East, but also the whole West German political class – and I presume even more so the East German political class - were completely caught by surprise.

When we now celebrate the „Fall of the Wall“, we can consider ourselves very fortunate the way everything worked out. We somehow sensed it already then, but in retrospect, it has become very clear that it all could have worked out very differently - had not the right people been at the right places at that decisive time. Because what happened in Europe 20 years back, was a fully-fledged revolution that within days liberated numbers of countries from oppressive regimes. And the real miracle is that this revolution, so gigantic in scale and impact, was almost completely peaceful.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I personally feel that, over time, the importance of one man in this process is increasingly underestimated. Let me therefore recall here that this peaceful revolution in Europe would not have been possible without President Gorbatshev of what then was still the Soviet Union. We owe a great lot to this man who was a true visionary, and this is why I would like to pay special tribute to him tonight.

But, of course, there are also others to whom tribute has to be paid. Germany would not have been able to regain its full unity and sovereignty without the support of our Western friends and allies who stood by us in these decisive moments.

And among our friends, the US stood out like the literal „beacon on the hill“, firmly standing by us in the most difficult hours and thereby proving to be a true friend indeed.

It is thus, ladies and gentlemen, that this very important moment in modern German history has also become a landmark of US-German friendship. And it is therefore my particular pleasure to be able to celebrate this anniversary here in the US, a partner and friend who played such a crucial role for Germany not only in becoming a modern democracy 60 years back, but also in achieving, after more than 40 years of enforced separation, our national unity!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me add two things:

First, I would like to thank our sponsor, Siemens, for so generously supporting us tonight. And let me clarify: I am not talking about a faceless multinational company way back in Germany – I am referring to a Californian „local“, to Siemens Sacramento, a truly US company, based in California's state capital already for over 20 years and running there a huge plant building light-rail trains which serve all over the US and Canada. They are a perfect example for the way German companies have made contributions to California's development over time: they came here, they integrated fast and they are here to stay. And ready to continue making further contributions to California's development. In the case of Siemens Sacramento, to the modernization of California's rail infrastructure.

Second, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Government of the State of California as well as to the City of San Francisco who have both provided us with wonderful messages of congratulation to our National Day. Let me conclude by reading out these two messages.

= First the message from Governor Schwarzenegger: ...

= And now the proclamation by Mayor Newsom: ...

Thank you once more for being here tonight -and please enjoy yourselves now with great food and drinks.