



Speech by German Ambassador Andreas Michaelis
“The First Conference of German and American Mayors:
Common Challenges and Transatlantic Solutions for Cities”

June 14, 2024, New York City, NY

Distinguished Mayors,

Cathryn Clüver-Ashbrook,

Honored Guests,

Welcome to the First Conference of German and American Mayors! Let me start by thanking Mayor Eric Adams for opening today’s conference. We are honored to have you with us and are looking forward to learning more about New York City’s ideas on the topics of today’s conference.

Five years ago, the Special Representative for City and State Diplomacy, Ambassador Nina Hachigian, then first Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles, published an opinion piece in the journal *Foreign Policy* titled “Cities Will Determine the Future of Diplomacy.” In her essay, she wrote: “Mayors are diplomats.” I could not agree more.

In an ever more interconnected world, many cities face the same challenges. The local level is most often the first arena to deal with the effects of global developments – be it extreme weather events, sudden increases in migration, or a global pandemic.

Cities also face the same very practical challenges. During my trips throughout the U.S., I often meet with American mayors and their international teams. In each meeting, I am frequently asked very concrete questions about how German cities tackle specific problems ranging from e-busses to bike lanes.

There is an ever-growing need for municipalities to connect, to learn from each other, and to share best practices ranging from housing migrants to building more effective electric grids to managing major sports events to cutting carbon emissions.

German cities, supported by German engineering solutions and urban development experts, are working hard to develop innovative solutions for some of these pressing questions. And from what I have gathered from my visits throughout the U.S., American mayors and other local officials are working on the same issues.

So when we learned that an important delegation of mayors from key German cities planned to travel to the U.S., we saw a chance to channel these parallel efforts. This is in addition to the efforts already underway by more and more cities to open international offices and strengthen their international networks.

This conference is designed to be as hands-on as possible. We want to establish a forum to discuss current and future pressing political, social, economic, and developmental issues, to learn from each other, and to explore areas for cooperation.

Furthermore, we want to create a lasting U.S.-German network that enables us to disseminate ideas and share best practices.

We are building on a strong foundation: There are over 200 active U.S.-German sister-city partnerships – for example, Darmstadt and San Antonio and Charlotte and Krefeld (both partnerships are represented here in the room today).

Additionally, there are many U.S.-German initiatives focusing on subnational diplomacy, many funded by the German Government or implemented and run by think tanks such as Bertelsmann, the German Marshall Fund, and the Aspen Institute, as well as transatlantic institutions such as the American Council on Germany (ACG).

With today's conference, we want to build on this existing network and, at the same time, take it to the next level.

We need international exchange between cities in order to address our political, economic, and social challenges and shape our cities into modern, prosperous, and livable places. Apart from this practical aspect, the transatlantic exchange between German and American cities also has deeply political meaning.

Our bilateral relationship is not just defined by intergovernmental relations. It has a much deeper foundation. And American and German cities play a central role here.

I think it is important to see this conference not as a one-off, but as a chance to create something sustainable. City diplomacy is not political window-dressing, but political necessity.

I am therefore delighted to announce today that as an immediate follow-up to this event, the Embassy will organize a one-week visit to Germany for representatives of U.S. cities this September. We hope that many of you attending this conference will join us for the occasion.

The Embassy will actively work towards a second installment of this conference next year, either in the U.S. or in Germany, which will again focus on concrete issues and include the U.S. and German private sector in an effort to work towards solutions.

I don't want to anticipate today's discussion and the ideas you will develop together with Cathryn Clüver-Ashbrook over the course of this morning.

However, I would like to propose a very concrete idea: the establishment of a U.S.-German subnational diplomacy database, where U.S. and German cities and their experts could share and exchange best practices.

So that when a mayor asks me the next time about the experiences of German cities with electric busses, I can actually point him or her to a database, where he or she can find a person to contact.

I would like to thank my team at the Embassy, the team at Engagement Global, Cathryn Clüver-Ashbrook, and her colleagues at the Bertelsmann Foundation for making today's conference possible.

Let me also thank all of you for traveling from all over the U.S. and Germany to join us here today.

This conference is designed to be a conversation starter. We are honored to start this conversation with you.

Mayor Adams, the floor is yours.