



Speech by the
Federal Minister of Defense,
Dr. Ursula von der Leyen,
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Leadership from the Centre

Ambassador Ischinger,

you have, as usual, managed to arrange an impressive programme for the security conference which features both: Key debates on today's most pressing crises, as well as contemplation on strategic developments and goals.

In preparation for this conference, you published a truly intriguing and thought-provoking paper: The "Munich Security Report 2015".

In one of the very first articles, a quite provocative question is raised: "Is Germany ready to lead?". My answer is: Yes, we are. The German people, when asked, answer that question more reluctantly. 62% of those interviewed said they were not in favour of greater German commitment in international crises – while only 34% stated their support. This could easily give the outside world the impression that Germany is trying to appear smaller than it actually is. Like an adult who refuses to accept that along with increased strength and maturity comes greater responsibility. Is the German sentiment, therefore, out of place in today's world? No, it is not, also because the painful history of Germany in the 20th century has become part of the DNA of our people. Only 70 years ago, Germany was a politically and morally bankrupt country. And this dark shadow will always be present and make us a little more thoughtful. To think twice is the lesson we have learned from our history. But it also our moral obligation to stand up for universal human rights with all our might.

Considering our history in particular, indifference is definitely not an option.

Thus, we need to tirelessly communicate and explain throughout Germany that the commitment to unity, justice and freedom today is no longer a purely domestic, national affair. And we need to explain that the grueling, often painful and hard struggle in defense of human rights, democracy and freedom worldwide is not a duty for others to fulfil, but equally concerns us Germans.

This is what the unimaginable atrocities of Rwanda and Srebrenica as well as the attempted genocide of the Yezidi people teach us.

"Indifference is and will not be an option." The general tenor of last year's Security Conference was that Germany is ready to shoulder greater responsibility, to make

contributions, to take action. How does this translate into specific measures? Does this involve greater responsibility in the diplomatic arena? Or in development cooperation? Or also in tough military action?

When I said earlier in my speech: Germany is ready to lead - The key question is:

What kind of leadership are we talking about today? Do we all share the same idea of leadership? A word that in German has such a different connotation than it does in English? Do we think of it in terms of Prussian-style leadership? No! Do we think of leadership in terms of Germany putting itself in charge and telling others what to do? No! Do we think of leadership in terms of Germany storming ahead in the belief that it has to be number one in Europe? No! None of this represents Germany's political culture in the 21st century. I will tell you what type of leadership Germany is very much prepared to exercise: **It is leadership from the centre.** This is what our partners expect of us - and what we should expect of ourselves. **Leading from the centre** means to contribute one's best resources and capabilities to alliances and partnerships. This applies to Germany more than it does to others. Everyone here in the audience is certainly aware of the words of then Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, saying that he was worried more about a weak Germany than a strong Germany. Many commentators saw in this a desire or even an invitation that it was time for Germany take on a more dominant role again. In our eyes, however, this does not mean dominance over our neighbours or decision-making over their heads. On the contrary. You cannot lead from the centre all by yourself. **Leadership from the centre** is as we understand it means to enable others with less resources to make their vital contributions as equal partners. With this logic in mind we combine our respective capabilities. This is why Germany and the Netherlands have assigned airborne and armoured units to each other. This is why we have the French-German-Brigade. This is why Germany and Poland deepen the cooperation of their land and naval forces. Seventy years ago we were deadly enemies. Today we interconnect our armed forces and share a level of trust that is without compare.

Leadership from the centre - yes, it sometimes means to fight together. But it is more than that. It also means to make others fit to assume responsibility for security in their own regions. In the past year, we followed this logic in places ranging from Mali through Afghanistan, Lebanon and Somalia to Iraq.

Leadership from the centre also means: The unconditional willingness to analyse and make decisions in a common approach – the willingness to create a common

legitimacy, also in the form of new partnerships, for a commitment that in a globalised world no longer has any geographical limits: No nation – whatever its size – to successfully and permanently resolve conflicts on its own. Decision making within partnerships of equal states may often appear to be very cumbersome and slow. However, the decisions taken have greater legitimacy and, in hindsight, often turn out to be smarter. In a byline article published in a German daily last week, US Secretary of State Kerry makes a fine point of how *neighbourhood is everywhere* in a world where threats no longer emerge along geographical lines. In his article he further said that: “*We left behind a world where power relied on hierarchies. Now we are entering a world where power is based on networks.*” The challenges we are currently facing are so complex that the simultaneous efforts of several alliances or completely new partnerships are needed to come to grips with them.

One example is the Ukraine crisis: It commits NATO and the EU and the OSCE. For all three organisations it is a chance to prove their specific added value. For NATO, because the Kremlin’s course of action threatens the entire Alliance and the Eastern member states in particular need a sense of security. For the OSCE, because it is, more than any other organisation, capable of creating transparency in this hybrid conflict, ensuring objectivity and leaving enough room for talks. And for the EU, because economic pressure is needed as there can be no military solution to this conflict.

In this context, we Europeans must be aware of one thing: we have formed a union because we share common values. We have made great efforts to defend these common values in years of security and economic crises. We may argue about details. But there should be no doubt of our unity and the bonds between us and no one should carelessly put them at risk. In each of these three organisations Germany has demonstrated appropriate commitment at an early stage. Germany is not only a framework nation and key enabler of the new NATO spearhead force, but we also help setting up the Multinational Corps Northeast as well as the bases which NATO establishes in its Eastern and southern member states. Therefore, the contribution of the Bundeswehr to implementing the decisions taken at the NATO summit in Wales is just as indispensable as the untiring commitment of the Federal Government to strengthen the role of the OSCE and to ensure that the EU adopts a common

position with regard to Russia. Germany is thus at the centre of transatlantic and European policy.

If we take a look at Europe's southern periphery, we see an alliance of nearly 60 states that fight against the ISIS terror threat. States of different hues united in their will to put an end to the terrible barbarity. Arab states of that region, Muslim states and Western states from all parts of the world. The West undoubtedly has enormous political, economic and military capabilities. But tearing the pseudo-religious mask from the face of the ideologically charged ISIS can only be achieved through a broad alliance with the Muslim states that make this conflict their own. Here as well, Germany has brought its influence to bear at an early stage – not only in favour of a broad political approach. In the wake of a highly controversial debate in Germany, our country also has broken some taboos. In addition to humanitarian relief we provided weapons and ammunition to the Peshmerga forces. And last week, the German Bundestag decided to send troops to Northern Iraq for a training mission.

Also, let us not forget how many states have cooperated in the fight against Ebola. Who would have thought one year ago that volunteers from Cuba, China, the United States and Europe work side by side in Monrovia to combat the epidemic. Here, too, Germany's response was quick. Not only in terms of medical relief. Within days, we established an airlift in West Africa through which the German Air Force has, to date, carried 560 tons of relief supplies in approximately 150 flights to the areas affected by Ebola.

Leadership from the centre also means that two things must come together: The will to act and the capability to act. Therefore, we have shown with the Iraq mandate for our soldiers that the German law leaves room to act if humanitarian and security policy interest so require. This is why we are working hard to bring Bundeswehr armaments and equipment into a state that ensures our capability of meeting our commitments in partnerships and in the Alliance in the long term.

Last but not least, **leadership from the centre** also means commitment to address the most urgent questions concerning future security policy: This encompasses hybrid warfare and its digital dimension, whether it be the covert infiltration of intelligence, military and weapons, fuelling regional or ethnic tensions, political destabilisation, economic strangulation, massive information campaigns to disavow the established order, the use of social media to influence public opinion or attacks on IT structures.

What is fundamentally new is the combination and the orchestration of this undeclared war which requires an overall assessment of the single pieces to reveal the aggressive nature of the scheme. And I am saying this also in the light of the current debate on Ukraine. Focussing merely on weapons could add fuel to the conflict and rather lead us away from a desired solution. The population is suffering bitterly. There are already far too many weapons in Ukraine. Supply to the separatists is potentially unlimited. There is no doubt that Moscow has intervened. This entails responsibility. It must be possible to find a balance of interests within Ukraine which guarantees both: national integrity and an adequate degree of autonomy.

It is the unconventional and diverse instruments of hybrid warfare that need to be countered with unconventional and diverse methods. We need to unmask the destructive narrative, whether it concerns ISIS fantasies of omnipotence or pseudohistorical attacks on the integrity of the Ukraine. The instruments may be new, but the underlying issue here is the same as in many wars, past and present. It is the redrawing of borders, the breach of international law and the massive violation of human rights. It is these mechanisms and patterns that we need to highlight. But how? We have got the means! What is mocked as our weakness, is in fact, our strongpoints: doubt, a culture of objection, and criticism. They are the building blocks for freedom of opinion, a free press, tolerance and pluralism. This is what makes a society immune against disinformation and propaganda.

During a discussion with Henry Kissinger last summer, he told me that Germany is virtually condemned to play an increasingly important part. Well, this is true. With a sense of proportion. With the courage to act, but with humility in action. Committed to our security interests, our humanitarian obligation and our historic responsibility.