



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
on being awarded the Henry A. Kissinger Prize
on 16 November 2022
in New York/USA**

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you in New York today. And I am very thankful and feel extraordinarily honored to be presented with the Henry A. Kissinger Prize, this very special award.

It is special because of the institution that presents it, the American Academy in Berlin, which stands like few others for the German-American friendship, for the shared democratic values that unite us, and for the spirit of transatlantic cooperation.

This prize is also special because of all of the figures who have been honored with it before me. Each and every one of them shaped a period of history, each and every one of them sought security and peace, stability and justice, understanding and cooperation. And I cannot deny that I feel rather proud to now number among their ranks.

This award ceremony is special, in my view, because of today's speaker. Condoleezza Rice, you are not just one of the most intelligent and well-known figures of recent decades in world politics. You also stand for the America that we Europeans, we Germans in particular admire. Your great career was not handed to you. You suffered discrimination yourself in your youth, and your rise exemplifies the opportunities that a free, democratic society can provide to each and every individual.

The two of us, dear Condoleezza, certainly looked at conflicts from different perspectives during our time in office as Secretary of State and Foreign Minister respectively – you from the perspective of a great American power, I from that of a larger EU member state that history had just gifted with the fortune of reunification. What united us was sincerity in our dealings with one another, a readiness to listen to one another, and the shared will and aim to resolve the conflicts that affected us around the world, each making our contribution. And our contact did

not end with the end of your time in office. We have met frequently since then, in Berlin and recently during my visit to Stanford.

Many thanks for your wonderful words today. I would quite honestly prefer not to say any more myself, but to let these words resonate with me for a while! And be sure: I am very touched.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, the Henry A. Kissinger Prize is so special above all because of the person whose name it bears: Henry Kissinger.

Four years ago, we had the privilege of holding a celebration in his honor in Berlin, at Schloss Bellevue, to mark his ninety-fifth birthday. It was a celebration of the boy from Fürth in Franconia who was able to flee just in time from the National Socialist tyranny and its antisemitic delirium of destruction – and who, many years later, just a few meters from the former headquarters of terror in Berlin, was honored by the head of state of a democratic, liberal, an entirely different Germany. A man who for decades served the country whose politicians, generals, and soldiers laid the foundations for this Germany, free and united, to take up its place in the family of free peoples.

This award ceremony is taking place in challenging, indeed in dangerous times. And perhaps, Henry Kissinger has in the last few months occasionally thought of the lines of the deeply existential poem *Borrowed Time*, by the great Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann, who was a friend of his: "Harder days are coming".

Yes, harder days are coming, days such as we no longer believed possible, days in which other lines by this poet, too, seem relevant once again, although they were written in a completely different context:

"War is no longer declared,
but rather continued. The outrageous
has become the everyday."

Ingeborg Bachmann herself experienced the brutal occupation of her country as an eleven-year-old child. She described it thus: "There was one particular moment that destroyed my childhood. When Hitler's troops marched into Klagenfurt. It was something so awful that my memory begins with this day [...] this monstrous brutality [...] that advent of my first mortal terror."

Two weeks ago, I listened to tales of this "first mortal terror" from the inhabitants of a small town in the north of Ukraine, near the Belarusian border. There, in Koriukivka, they told me how, on 24 February, the horror of war erupted into their lives: the terrible noise of the bombardments, the smoke, the fire, their naked fear – these men and women trembled as they spoke to me.

24 February was an epochal shift. It plunged us into a different time, into an uncertainty that we thought we had left behind us: a time

marked by war, violence, and displacement, by concerns that the war would spread across Europe like wildfire. In his imperial obsession, the Russian President has broken international law, committed land grabs, called borders into question.

Just how brutal and dangerous this war is, we all witnessed yesterday, with dozens of Russian missiles raining down on Ukraine, and with a fatal incident on Polish territory. We have not yet conclusive evidence from where this missile came. But we know one thing for sure: None of this would have happened without Russia's continued and reckless war.

The world has been a different one since 24 February – and my country's view of the world has been a different one. 24 February marked the eruption of war in Europe – and thus also the failure of decades of political efforts, including my own efforts, to prevent precisely this war and to integrate Russia more firmly into a European security architecture. And not just that! 24 February marked the end of an age in which the wind was at our backs, an age in which we Germans, spurred on by the fortune of our peaceful reunification, looked upon our neighbors full of optimism and hopes. For years we counted on the conviction that we were surrounded by friends and that war in Europe, at least, had become inconceivable. Freedom and democracy seemed to be gaining ground everywhere, trade and prosperity seemed possible in every direction.

And this optimism, this quest for understanding, cooperation, connections in our mutual interest shaped our view of the world for many years and fomented the hope that conflicts would increasingly be resolved through political action, and less often through military force. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has destroyed this hope of an increasingly peaceful world for a long time to come.

24 February also marked a pivotal moment for the transatlantic Alliance, a moment to renew our focus on the vital importance of a strong and united NATO. The events of the last nine months have reinforced the transatlantic Alliance's bonds, and we now stand probably more united than ever since the end of the Cold War. Germany has approved enormous increases in its defense expenditure. Russia's war of aggression and Putin's disgraceful and irresponsible threats of nuclear escalation have made many of my compatriots aware – including many young people, I suspect, for the first time – of the vital importance of NATO for our security in Europe. It is not for nothing that I visited the U.S. troops in Germany this summer, as the first Federal President to do so in almost thirty years, with a clear and very simple message: thank you! And I say the same here and now, I say it to the generations of servicemen and servicewomen – the grandfathers who liberated Europe from the Nazi terror, and their children and grandchildren who protect

freedom and democracy in Europe to this day: Thank you, America!
Thank you for your service!

NATO, the G7 countries, and the European Union stand with unity and resolve by Ukraine's side. We are providing political, humanitarian, and economic as well as military support. My country, together with the U.S., today numbers among the leading supporters of the Ukrainian defense, particularly in the field of air defense, which is especially important in light of the perfidious missile and drone attacks that Russia is now carrying out. And we will assist Ukraine for as long as it takes – so that Ukraine can defend its freedom and sovereignty.

I know how many people in Europe, in Germany, long for peace. But a forced truce that only sealed Putin's land grabs would be no peace. It would leave many people in Ukraine at the mercy of their Russian occupiers' arbitrary violence. And a sham peace like this, an unjust peace, would only increase Putin's hunger. It would strengthen all those in the world whose quest for power knows no law and no rules. An unjust peace would carry the seed of new wars within it!

The world has been a different one since 24 February – and that means that we must cast off old ways of thinking and old hopes. The history of European-Russian and German-Russian relations is proof that there is no guarantee, no certainty that economic exchange will bring about political convergence. For the future, this means that we must learn lessons, we must reduce one-sided dependencies, and that applies not just to Russia, but also – all the more so – to China.

It was Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing, it was two days in July 1971 that initiated China's opening to the West, particularly to the U.S. What mattered to him, as he later wrote in his book *On China*, was not friendship but something much more pragmatic – enabling coexistence. Enabling this coexistence, making a crucial contribution to promoting China's opening, this is one of Kissinger's great, indisputable achievements.

But today, we must also see that China has changed. The time of opening is now followed by a time of hardening. Not just domestically, through authoritarian policies that suppress any dissent. Not just with China's claims to hegemony in the South Pacific region. No, China has recently been following a changed philosophy, a threatening one: Making China independent from the world and making the world dependent on China – that is how President Xi Jinping describes the strategic aim of China's role in the global economy. Those are rules for a game that we do not want to – and cannot! – play. We must respond to this.

Responding does not mean putting an end to discussion and dialogue and to economic relations. Its sheer size alone means that China will continue to be a factor in the global economy, and we need

China's cooperation in the fight against climate change. China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. And so I believe that President Biden is right to be seeking dialogue with the Chinese President.

But we must protect ourselves. We must prevent ourselves from being politically and economically vulnerable. We must reduce our dependencies, both on supplies from China and on Chinese raw materials. We must make our national economies more resilient. Not through protectionism or deglobalization, let alone the naive pursuit of autarky. On the contrary! We must expand our network of links with the world, not concentrating the opportunities, let alone the economic risks, in one country but distributing them across many and more countries around the world.

I have just returned from Japan and South Korea, two countries that have things to teach us Germans, including when it comes to addressing the Chinese challenge. Before that I was in Singapore and Indonesia, and the Federal Chancellor has been in Viet Nam. Five countries among many with whom we need to and want to cooperate even more closely, in order to resolve the challenges of this epochal shift together.

Yes, it is true that many countries cannot be placed clearly on either side. Some of these countries are neither liberal democracies nor authoritarian regimes. They do not desire to join one camp, one party to the conflict, or an old or new bloc. These are countries that, while they do not consider themselves part of the West, do share our interest in reliable rules, economic development, and exchange. And we must win these countries over! Dividing the world in two, pitting "us against them", a new formation of two antagonistic blocs is, I believe, not in our interest. In my opinion, striving for international cooperation, establishing common rules, pursuing dialogue between different-minded parties, and seeking to establish partnerships is not a question of style. It is a question of survival.

If the West is to be more than just a cardinal point, it must remain firm on its principles, yet at the same time be open, open to participation by people from all parts of the world – including cultures with other histories, other experiences, and other traditions. It must be appealing and have the better solutions to offer for humane, peaceful, just human coexistence. To me, "the West" is not an exclusive club or a rallying cry for geopolitical confrontation. But rather that which we stand for, which our Alliance stands for: an idea, and mainly a promise.

We must fulfill this promise within our own societies before anything else. We ourselves must prove that freedom and democracy benefit people, in their day-to-day needs and concerns. We must show that we are capable of tackling the crises and attacks of this time – both the external and the internal. The growing polarization of our societies,

the total lack of common ground between political groups, the discrediting of political opponents, the daily hatred and daily lies on the internet, all of this is well underway in European societies, too, but in the U.S. – spurred on daily by a radicalized section of the media – it has certainly progressed much further.

I have faith in the American system of checks and balances. But – if you will permit me this view from the outside – a halt can only be put to these threats if the parties remember it is their role to compete with each other as part of the formation of political will. If they become enemies engaged in wars of opinion where, at every turn, everything is at stake, things simply will not work out in the long run. And it is not an expression of European arrogance, but rather of concern, when I say that if the foundations of American democracy were to be shaken, this quake would not be limited to the United States, but would be felt in Germany too, in Europe too – and this would call into question the credibility of all liberal Western societies.

We have always admired the shared responsibility that the government and the opposition bear for their country in American democracy. And perhaps the results of the midterms will create the conditions needed to breathe new life into this currently endangered virtue. Because American democracy remaining strong, the legitimacy and fairness of elections being preserved, and trust once again growing – not only the U.S. but its democratic friends depend on this.

History and all of the lessons that are reflected in Henry Kissinger's life, a life story that has already become historic, should represent a profound duty for us all. And they should encourage us to believe – even in our time, in this twenty-first century that has become so much darker than we hoped as it began – that the ideas of freedom and democracy will continue to shine!

Thank you, dear Henry, for your friendship. And thank you to the American Academy for presenting me with the Henry A. Kissinger Prize. I am moved, touched, I am proud. And believe me: This is really a great evening in my life. Thank you very much.