

Remarks on Signing the German-American Day Proclamation at a White House Ceremony Celebrating the Reunification of Germany

October 3, 1990

Thank you very, very much. And to Ambassador Ruhfus and Bruce Gelb, Elsbeth Seewald, Mr. Theune, Mr. Kruger, Senators Biden and Lugar and Pressler, and all of you, welcome to the White House.

I want to especially thank the German Army Band for their stirring rendition of our national anthem. Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you all. And I don't want to leave out the Marines, either. They're back here, and I thought they did a good job on the German national anthem.

And of course, I think we would all agree that this special event is all the richer for the participation of these kids here today. Thank you, guys. Both of you, men and women.

I just hung up from talking to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and I told him that on this very special day the people of America send their heartiest congratulations to all Germans. Even as we meet here in our Rose Garden, Germans are celebrating their new unity from Berlin to Bonn, from Munich to Bremen, from the urban plazas of Leipzig to the golden vineyards along the hills of the Rhine.

And throughout this newly united nation, Germans celebrate a wonderful moment, delayed for almost half a century. And as part of that celebration, I've sent a video address to the people of Germany -- sentiments that I'd like to just share with you here today briefly.

For 45 years, at the heart of a divided continent lived a divided people. A cruel wall of concrete literally cut off neighbor from neighbor, husband from wife, child from parent, a nation from itself. And on this fault line on the East-West conflict, one people split literally between two worlds. And as the German people suffered through this long ordeal, Americans were much more than sympathetic observers. After all, we are united by bonds of culture that reach back to the early colonial times, when Germans first became German-Americans.

And at the invitation of William Penn, Germans arrived in America to start a new life. And life was tough. Their first homes were caves hollowed out in the ground. And their determination, though, was harder. And they built a community -- Germantown, Pennsylvania -- inspiring millions more to follow and to continue to build.

German-Americans founded Hagerstown and Frederick, Maryland; Mecklenburg County, North Carolina; New Braunfels in my State, Texas; Frankfort, Kentucky; Berlin, Wisconsin; Anaheim, California. And they went on to help build some of the great cities of America: Philadelphia, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Milwaukee.

And the 60 million American sons and daughters of these German pioneers, like all Americans, felt a deep tie to both Germanys -- one, a new democracy in the heart of Europe; the other struggling to be free.

And after all, our own country once lived under oppression. We remember John Peter Zenger, a young German-American newspaper editor who dared to challenge authority way back in 1734. And it was this same German immigrant who helped America establish our most cherished tradition, freedom of speech.

And so, now, Ambassador Ruhfus, when East Germans were punished for dissent, we shared your spirit of defiance. And when German people were shot for attempting to flee to freedom, we shared your outrage. And when West German leaders dared to hope for a Germany united in freedom, we shared your dream.

And so, I guess what we're here to do is to affirm that dreams sometimes do come true. Germany is united; Germany is free. This day was very clearly envisioned by Konrad Adenauer, who said that a solution to a divided Germany is only possible with the help of our friends. And over the decades, Adenauer's vision of a friendship between Germany and the United States, between Germany and the free peoples of the world, has indeed been realized. And this moment has come because Americans stood by the people of Berlin, from the daredevil pilots of the airlift to a young President who made his bold declaration before the Wall.

This moment has also come because of the determination of West German leaders to make Germany whole and free -- not only Adenauer but Ernst Reuter and Ludwig Erhard, Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt and, of course, today's Chancellor Helmut Kohl. And this day has come because in 1989 the people of Germany stood their ground for freedom.

The United States is proud to have joined your countrymen in building the foundations of freedom, proud to have been a steady partner in your quest. America is also proud to count itself among the friends and allies of a free Germany now and forevermore.

This has been a year of change for America; for a united Germany; for the Atlantic alliance, of which we are both a part. And I'm certain that our two nations will meet the challenges of the future as we have in the past: as partners in leadership. This day, so meaningful for Germany, also inspires the world. Meters away from the walls of the Reichstadt, scene of the first session of the newly reunited German Parliament, stood the Berlin Wall. For years free men and women everywhere dreamed of the day that the Berlin Wall would cease to exist, when a world without the Wall would mean a Germany made whole once more, and when Germany, united and sovereign, would contribute in full measure as a force for peace and stability in world affairs.

Well, today it is the Wall that lies in ruins, and our eyes open on a new world of hope. The last remnants of the Wall remain there at the heart of a free Berlin, a ragged monument in brick and barbed wire; proof that no wall is ever strong enough to strangle

the human spirit, that no wall can ever crush a nation's soul. And this is my message to the German people, and that is the heartfelt sentiment of the American people.

But before I sign this document proclaiming this very special German-American Day, let me just add one more thing. Last Sunday I attended the World Summit for Children up there at the United Nations. More than 70 heads of state, heads of government, and chiefs of state were there. And we discussed many critical issues: health care, education -- many others. But we were profoundly touched by the knowledge that we must entrust the future of our nations to another generation. And looking at these kids here today, I believe I can see the future of the new Germany -- a future of liberty and leadership, good will, and greatness.

So, once again, my heartfelt congratulations to the people of this united Germany. I know I confidently speak for all Americans. Thank you very much for coming.

Note: The President spoke at 11:09 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ambassador Juergen Ruhfus of Germany; Bruce S. Gelb, Director of the U.S. Information Agency; Elsbeth Seewald, national president of the German-American National Congress; Adalbert Theune, national chairman of the Steuben Society of America; Helmut Kruger, president of the United German-American Committee of the U.S.A.; Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany; and Konrad Adenauer, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. The proclamation is listed in Appendix E at the end of this volume.