

Welcome Address by Dr. Klaus Wehmeier, Vice Chairman of the Executive Board of the Körber Foundation

on the occasion of a speech given by Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, as part of his state visit to the Federal Republic of Germany.

Hotel InterContinental, Berlin, 28. März 2014

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**Your Excellency Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China
Mrs. Peng Liyuan,
Richard von Weizsäcker, former President of the Federal Republic of Germany,
Helmut Schmidt, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the Chinese Delegation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour and gives me great pleasure to greet you, Mr. President, and your wife on behalf of the Körber Foundation on the occasion of your visit to Berlin.

For more than 50 years the Körber Foundation has encouraged and facilitated international dialogue. The idea of talking to each other – and not about each other – is at the heart of our activities. Our aim has always been and continues to be to promote mutual understanding and then to come to some kind of agreement.

In 2000 the Bergedorf Round Table, the oldest and most prestigious dialogue project of the Körber Foundation, which is chaired by former Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker, made a point of taking us to Beijing for its first session in the 21st century. The topic on that occasion was “China: Partner in the Global Economy.” The high point of our visit was a meeting with Jiang Zemin, the then President of the People's Republic of China.

Since then our relations have grown steadily. In 2010, we were honoured to make your acquaintance in Beijing on the occasion of the 147th Bergedorf Round Table, when you welcomed us to the Great Hall of the People.

In 2012, the Round Table met in Huangshan in the province of Anshui. And in 2013 the Young Leaders of the Körber Network Foreign Policy visited your country and had many stimulating discussions with representatives of the political, business and academic communities, and civil society organizations.

In addition to our visits to China, in recent years the Körber Foundation had the honour to welcome to Germany numerous distinguished guests from your country. They included the visit of a delegation with the Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in May 2011.

It would be wrong to claim that in these talks we reached a consensus in all areas. But we have learned to understand each other better, and to talk openly about the things where we agree to disagree.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, allow me at this point to extend a warm welcome to two statesmen who are here with us today. In many parts of the world their names are synonymous with dialogue and mutual understanding, and we at the Körber Foundation owe them a great debt of gratitude.

Please join me in extending a hearty welcome to former Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker, who for two decades has served as chairman of the Bergedorf Round Table, and former Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a long-standing friend of our founder, Kurt A. Körber, a participant in many of the Körber Foundation's dialogue forums, and someone who knows China extremely well.

Ladies and gentlemen, the rise of China is changing the world in a very fundamental way. The volume of trade between the EU and China now exceeds €400 billion, and between Germany and China it has already reached €140 billion. It means that China is now our third most important trading partner, and is even more important than the United States. As a result of these links, and if for no other reason, we are very interested in the political and economic development of China.

Your country, Mr. President, has come a long way in the last few decades. The Chinese economic miracle has enabled hundreds of millions of people to break out of the poverty trap. This development is unparalleled in the history of mankind. It is something for which China has earned respect and admiration from all around the world, and quite rightly so.

However, much remains to be done. More social justice, better environmental protection, the fight against corruption, the establishment of a sustainable pension and social insurance system.

Many of these issues are also on the agenda here in Europe. But as far as we are concerned, Mr. President, the subject of political participation and freedom rights in China should also be on this list.

There are now numerous discussion forums in which our two countries are talking about these subjects in great detail. It is our belief that this exchange of views should be intensified, especially on the civil society level.

Ladies and gentlemen, the role of China in international politics is of fundamental significance for us in Europe. Without China it is impossible to meet today's global challenges. At the same time China has clearly enunciated its core interests in international politics and is pursuing them with great self-confidence. Here again there are quite a few questions which we hope that China, a world power, will answer. Possibly the most important one is how in future Beijing can assume more responsibility for what is happening in the field of international politics, or perhaps I should say, whether China wishes to assume more responsibility in this area.

We are very pleased, Mr. President, that you will be talking to us today about China's role in the globalized world, and that you have expressed your willingness, after your speech is over, to talk about one or two points in greater detail. At our Berlin Foreign Policy Forum the former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd once put it thus.

We would like to treat each other as "zhengyou," that is, as critical friends who are quite open about what they think, and with whom one can join forces in order to look for solutions. In this way we will make a genuine contribution to international understanding.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be able to welcome you to the Körber Foundation today. But above all, I am very grateful to you, Mr. President, for finding the time to talk to us.

And now the floor is yours.