

Words of Welcome

By Dr Klaus Wehmeier,

Deputy Chairman of the Executive Board of the Körber
Foundation

*on the occasion of the speech of the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic
of Vietnam, H.E. Nguyen Tan Dung
within the framework of his visit to the Federal Republic of Germany*

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- Check against delivery -

Dear Prime Minister,

Dear Madame Ambassador,

Your Excellencies,

Dear Members of the German Bundestag,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to be able to welcome you, esteemed Prime Minister,
to Berlin on behalf of the Körber Foundation.

For more than 50 years, the Körber Foundation has been promoting international dialogue.
Speaking with one another and not about one another has always been at the heart of our
efforts. The aim was and still is to learn to understand each other in order to communicate
successfully.

For many years now, there have been discussions under the heading of the “Asian Century”
focussing on a shift of the economic, political and cultural epicentre from Europe and
America to Asia.

Within a single generation, many Asian states have developed from poorhouses to rapidly growing global economic nations. Meanwhile, 60 per cent of the world's population live in Asia. This majority of the population is becoming more prosperous, more educated and more innovative. Today, the countries of Asia are already contributing nearly one third of the world's value creation. Growth rates of more than 6 per cent, of which we can only dream in Europe, are the order of the day. We have to adapt to these changes in Europe.

This is the reason why we at the Körber Foundation decided a few years ago to shift the focus of our activities in the area of international politics in the direction of Asia. In doing so, we do not only address the rise of China but we consider the entire region.

Mentioning just a few selected events of the last six months makes our approach clear: In March, we were able to welcome the Chinese State President Xi Jinping; and recently, the Philippine President Aquino as well as two high-ranking politicians from Myanmar visited us: State President Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Last year, we paid Indonesia a visit with the Bergedorf Round Table, the oldest project of our Foundation, addressing the issue of "Peace and Security in the Asia-Pacific". And in a few weeks time, we are going to convene the Bergedorf Round Table in Hamburg on the subject of "The responsibility of global trading nations in the Asian century".

Ladies and gentlemen, Asia is not only the powerhouse of the world economy today, but at the same time it represents a complex and tense hotspot of international security policy.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam plays a sovereign role in the region. There have been many territorial conflicts between Vietnam, China and other states bordering on the South China Sea, which have even cost lives in the past. As a European observer, one sometimes has the impression that it just needs a single spark to trigger an uncontrollable spiral of escalation. Thus, we need ideas and concepts for how to solve these conflicts peacefully. International mechanisms for the settlement of disputes play a key role, we believe.

However, there are also opportunities and challenges in the domestic development: Just like many other countries, Vietnam is also struggling to overcome the consequences of the

economic and financial crisis, with a rising rate of inflation and with the necessary structural change of the economy. Still, the population regards the future with great optimism: 94 per cent are convinced that the children will be better off financially than their parents in the future. Vietnam ranks top in the world with this unbridled optimism.

The progress made by Vietnam in fighting poverty and developing the school system, as reported by the UN Human Rights Council at the beginning of this year, no doubt play an important role in this context. However, the Human Rights Council also criticised the restrictions of the freedom of the press and opinion. You yourself esteemed Prime Minister demanded more democracy for your country at the beginning of this year. We look forward to learning more about this tonight.

Ladies and gentlemen, the US Secretary of State John Kerry quite rightly stressed at a recent ASEAN foreign minister meeting: “What is happening in this region affects ... everyone in the world.” Thus, I am very happy indeed that we, in the “Far Europe” if you so will, are able to discuss the security policy opportunities and challenges in Asia, in Berlin tonight.

I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his readiness to answer our questions following his speech. And, of course, I would like to thank all of you who have taken the time to be here and I am happy to welcome you as our guests.

Prime Minister, the floor is yours.