

German Day of Unity

Speech of German Consul General Mr. Martin Fleischer

Guangzhou, 10/27/2020

Honorable Chairman Tang, distinguished representatives of provincial and municipal governments, dear compatriots, ladies and gentlemen,

My team, my wife and I welcome you very warmly to celebrate the Day of German Unity with us. It is encouraging that, despite the global pandemic, we can be together tonight and commemorate the peaceful reunification of Germany; even if this year's celebration has to take place on a smaller scale than usual.

Dear guests,

In 2020 everything is different, and we all feel that we are witnessing historical upheavels. I think it is safe to say that, since the end of the East-West confrontation, there hasn't been an event with such a heavy worldwide impact. It is still too early to assess the full economic, social and environmental consequences of the pandemic, but one thing is clear: we are all in the same boat. It is true that some countries are more severely affected than others; in Europe and America, infection rates are rising again, while China has contained the pandemic. But who believes that this virus can be permanently defeated on a national level is mistaken! In the end, we will only overcome COVID-19 if we stand together as a global community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the reunification of Germany. But 2020 offers more joyful occasions for celebration: German Missions already existed here as early as in the 19th century, the Consulate General of Federal Republic of Germany has been opened in 1995 and thus turns 25 this year.

Together with the whole world, we commemorate one of the greatest musical geniuses in history: Ludwig van Beethoven. He was born in Bonn, 250 years ago and his works inspire us until today. The "Ode to Joy", taken from his 9th symphony, was chosen as the European anthem, which we will hear soon hereafter, sung by the wonderful Ting Ting, who studied in Germany.

For more than a generation, we Germans have now been living in a re-united country, surrounded by friends, in a peaceful Europe. This is a privilege we should not take for granted. My parents had to survive one, my grandparents even two horrible world wars.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Germany is aware of its history and the responsibility that arises with it. Thus it is a special honor for me to speak to you today also as representative of the Presidency of the European Union. Despite the challenges Europe is facing today, there is no alternative to the project of European unification. Europe has proven to the world that former foes can become close friends and allies. Europe has also shown that openness, trust and cooperation are the right way to maintain peace, prosperity, democracy and security. These principles belong to the cornerstones of German foreign policy, and also to my very personal convictions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Europe and China have different societal systems and values, but we also share important common interests. Currently it is of fundamental importance – not least for southern China – that substantial progress be made in the negotiations for a comprehensive investment protection agreement between the EU and China. We must also agree on practicable rules for a mutual reopening of travel as soon as possible. Permanent isolation is neither in ours, nor in China's interest. In this regard, Europe is one step ahead, as we have resumed issuing visa for students, because we believe students' exchange is one of the most powerful ways to promote international understanding.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Here in southern China, we generally encounter great openness when it comes to economic issues. This open-mindedness has for long been the unique strength of this region, and it is undoubtedly a main driver for China's phenomenal economic success. It is obviously no coincidence that this success story began in Shenzhen, at the border with Hong Kong. For a further economic development of the Greater Bay Area, it seems essential to continuously apply the principle of "one country, two systems" and pursue the path of reform and opening. And my hope is that continued opening up will also extend to the areas of culture, education, the media and civil society.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues

Tonight marks the fourth German National Day Reception in Guangzhou to which my wife and I have the great honor to welcome you. It will probably also be the last one for us, as I expect to complete my assignment here next summer. Therefore, I would already like to take this opportunity to thank the provinces and cities for their trustful cooperation and support. My special thanks go to the Foreign Office of Guangdong, which has always been exceedingly helpful and cooperative, not only during the current Corona crisis. Be assured that, also in the future, my wife and I will in various ways remain connected to China, and especially to this friendly region and its people.

Let me conclude: The most important goods are health, peace and freedom. Looking at the current global situation, all three of these goods are facing major challenges. But there are also signs of hope, such as progress in the development and production of a vaccine, an effort in which China and Germany are among the leading nations.

In this vein, dear guests, let us work together to make our world more peaceful, more secure and more sustainable! Once again, I am very glad that you could come today. I wish you a pleasant evening, and I thank you for your attention.