



AMERICAN
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2023 CONFERENCE REPORT

“Global Zeiten-when?”

43rd AMERICAN-GERMAN YOUNG LEADERS CONFERENCE

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Introduction

The 43rd American-German Young Leaders Conference brought together 22 Americans and 27 Germans. The diverse group of mid-career professionals represented a range of industries, fields, and personal backgrounds from the areas of business, law, and government. This year's conference took place almost a year and a half after Russia invaded Ukraine, approximately a month after Germany released its first-ever national security strategy, and days after its much-anticipated China strategy was published. These developments shaped many of the Young Leaders' conversations on a range of topics, including the future of transatlantic relations, China, the Global South, the global economy, and the health of democracy. One notable feature of this year's Young Leaders that was clear early on was their desire to not only discuss critical issues but also problem-solve and develop concrete solutions and policy proposals.

After a welcome dinner the night before, the U.S. delegation set forth on a walking tour of Berlin, led by the ACG's President and CEO, **Dr. Steven E. Sokol**, and Steering Committee Chairman **Ed McFadden**. Many of the American participants were visiting Berlin for the first time and were struck by the mix of old and new and how the city preserved its history. During the walking tour, the American delegates saw how the Berlin Wall had once divided the city. And in addition to seeing remnants of the wall, other sites visited and passed by included Checkpoint Charlie, the Topography of Terror Museum, the Gendarmenmarkt, Humboldt University, the book-burning memorial Empty Library, the Brandenburg Gate, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

After this introduction to Berlin, the Americans got a further opportunity to explore the city, this time with the German delegation. U.S. Young Leaders were paired with their German counterparts for a scavenger hunt (*Schnitzeljagd*) that included visits to important historical landmarks and trivia questions. The activity not only allowed delegates to become better acquainted but also contributed to a greater understanding of why history continues to influence policymaking and public sentiment in Germany.

The 43rd Young Leaders Conference was held in a time of great flux, as the United States and Germany confront war in Ukraine and the threat posed by China. Meeting these challenges, as well as others like climate change and the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, is complicated by polarization at home, the lack of public trust in international institutions, and concerns over the strength of democracy at home and abroad. But the conference illustrated that the two nations need not face these issues alone. Mutual recognition of the benefits of a robust U.S.-German relationship fueled much of the week's discussions and allowed participants to point to remaining challenges and unrealized opportunities. While reasons for participating in the conference may have varied, there was a common desire to advance U.S.-German relations and make meaningful contributions to transatlantic dialogue.

Day 1

Plenary Discussion I

Identity Politics

The first day of the 2023 Young Leaders Conference began with questions of national identity. In today's world, what does it mean to be German? To be American?

The American presenter began the conversation by discussing how defining national identity in the United States has been a constant battle throughout its history. In a diverse place like the United States, how

does it even begin constructing a national identity? Freedom is a concept many Americans use to define themselves and their nation. But as the American presenter noted, freedom to do what?

The German presenter raised the prospect that perhaps the importance of German identity is declining, as many younger Germans might consider themselves more European than German. Also mentioned was how the changing nature of German identity can be seen in proposed changes to Germany's citizenship laws, which would shorten residency requirements and allow individuals to keep their original citizenship. Thus, the presenter noted that what it means to be German is being reconceptualized – and pushed the group to consider what a modern, more inclusive German identity would look like.

In the discussion that followed, the complexity of national identity became even clearer. For many in the German delegation, their European identity was stronger than their German one. Having grown up only knowing life in the European Union, where crossing borders was easy, it seemed natural to many that they were more European than German. However, this sentiment was not shared by all of the German Young Leaders. For example, one stated that while they were pro-Europe, they had yet to hear a convincing definition of exactly what European identity is.

Some German delegates noted that they felt more German the more time they spent abroad. This was a sentiment that many Americans related to. At home, many American Young Leaders said they often associate more with other identities, especially if those identities tend to be marginalized in American society. Yet, when abroad, they felt more American and connected to their country.

Delegates from both countries also raised the point that terms like nationalism and national identity have come to have negative connotations and are frequently used pejoratively. While aware of the dangers involved, for these delegates, national identity could be a valuable concept, helping to unite a country. From this perspective, the key point about national identity was its purpose. Was it meant to unite or divide?

Plenary II

Value Propositions

The second conversation of the day centered on the foundations of the transatlantic alliance. Is it built on principles? Values? Is there a difference between the two? How has our understanding of the underlying principles/values changed over time?

The American presenter began by asking why values matter and raised a set of questions allies have to ask themselves: 1) Are we stronger together? 2) Do we trust each other? and 3) Do we have more in common than not? The German presenter highlighted the importance of maintaining healthy relationships but noted the difficulty as dynamics shift and nations begin to have different goals or changing values. They also asked how much values and principles need to overlap to continue an alliance and whether having a common enemy is the same as having common values.

In grappling with the difference between values and principles and their overall importance, many American and German delegates raised the issue of trust. A lack of trust undermines the entire transatlantic relationship even if values and principles are shared. However, trust is hard to maintain and often influenced by changes in governments. Some delegates from both countries also suggested that any conversation about principles and values could not ignore interests. For example, while some Young Leaders spoke of NATO as a community of shared values, one German delegate argued that any political project needs a narrative (like shared values). But at its core NATO is a tool used by nations to pursue their

national interests. Overall, the conversation forced the Young Leaders to consider how much alignment partners need. How much difference between principles, values, and interests can exist before a relationship breaks up?

Plenary III

Generational Rift: Time for a Soylent Green Solution?

The final topic of Day 1 centered on the differences in outlook between current and past generations. What happens when generations differ on principles, priorities, and values? How can those differences be reconciled?

The American presenter began the session by discussing the difference in outlook between current and past generations in the United States and noting how every generation's values are based on the times they live in. Yet, they asked if generational rifts are as stark as they appear, how productive is making sharp distinctions between generations? The German presenter said that in Germany, the discourse is focused on the idea of significant divisions between generations and asked where this sense of generational rift comes from. They also highlighted a major challenge: How can we ensure that young people's interests are represented in policy decisions? Similarly, how do we find outlets for politically concerned individuals to participate in the political process?

In the following discussion, most delegates agreed with the proposition that there was a rift between generations. Some stated that there is a direct connection between today's problems and instability and the policies and inaction of past generations. Others noted that older generations don't understand the lived experiences of younger generations and thus prioritize different issues and values. But not all the Young Leaders agreed that past generations should shoulder the bulk of the blame for today's troubles. Some thought the lens of generational rift was the wrong one to use. We should be seeking understanding, not creating more conflict.

A defining feature of the conversation was the frequent mention of the need to create opportunities for young people to participate in the political process. Multiple delegates expressed concern that if younger generations' interests aren't represented, they will eventually go to the fringes of the political spectrum or work outside the system rather than inside it.

Day 1 concluded with a reception and dinner that featured **Lieutenant General Markus Laubenthal**, Deputy Chief of Defense. He spoke on a range of topics including NATO, the war in Ukraine, and Germany's defense posture.

Day 2

Plenary IV and V

Agenda at Home, Agenda Abroad

The second day of discussions was held at Jakob-Kaiser-Haus, the home of offices of the Bundestag. Whereas the previous day's sessions focused more on broad philosophical questions, Day 2 shifted to the more concrete issues of the influence of domestic politics on international relations and the top foreign policy priorities for the United States and Germany.

To start, the German and American delegations were separated and asked to come up with a list of what they saw as their nation's top five priorities. There was an overlap in how the two delegations viewed their nation's greatest priorities. But there was a clear difference in the rankings, as the Germans saw climate change and sustainability as the most pressing issues, while the Americans ranked it fifth.

Americans' Top Priorities:

1. Fiscal and monetary policy
2. National security and strategic competition
3. Democratic reform and governance
4. Education and innovation
5. Climate and sustainability

Germans' Top Priorities:

1. Climate change and sustainability
2. Internal/external/cyber security
3. Confronting demographic change
4. Strengthening political participation
5. Digitalization

After this exercise, the American and German presenters framed the discussion. First were the presenters on each nation's domestic situations. The German presenter began by noting the challenges facing the still relatively new German government, which came to power after 16 years of Angela Merkel being in charge. National security issues had not been at the forefront for the current governing coalition, but they quickly were after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Additional challenges cited were economic pressures, coalition disagreements on issues like heat pumps and forming a U.S.-style national security council, and demographic change. The struggle to meet such challenges helps explain why the appeal of a party like the Alternative for Germany (AfD) is growing. The American presenter highlighted the strengths of American democracy yet noted the variety of challenges that face the United States, including the economy, immigration, the national debt, public safety, and energy.

Next, new presenters discussed foreign policy priorities. The American presenter stated that the closest thing to a shared goal in the United States is confronting China. Though Donald Trump and Joe Biden approached most policy issues from vastly different perspectives, Biden has continued Trump's China policy and sought to toughen it, though using a less heavy-handed approach and through greater collaboration with allies. However, even as China pervades so many policy domains, the presenter argued that the United States couldn't afford to ignore other issues. The German presenter highlighted the major changes taking place in German foreign policy. One example of this is the announcement by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of a feminist foreign policy. But the most significant change was spurred by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Chancellor Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* ("watershed") speech. But critics wonder, is the German government serious about its more muscular approach? Will it take a harder line against aggressor nations like Russia and China in the long term?

In the conversation that followed, much of the focus was on China. Overall, the American Young Leaders took a harder line. However, the German delegates also expressed the need to confront China. Traditionally, Germany had been seen as an intermediary capable of communicating with a diverse group of nations, but now it had to choose sides. Some German delegates expressed confidence that their nation was on the right track. Their nation was serious about its new, tougher approach to China. But as one

delegate noted, in a democracy, changes take time. The new approach of de-risking and not decoupling has disrupted the status quo. Results will take time.

Border security was also brought up. The American delegates mostly talked about the issue through the lens of national security. However, some did note how there is a strong domestic component to the issue, as increased immigration would most likely lead to an increase in spending on social services. For some Germans, the discourse on immigration and border security in the United States made them uncomfortable, as it often took a negative tone.

Plenary VI

Debt, Dysfunction, and Depopulation: The Future of the Global Economy

The final session of Day 2 focused on economic issues and the challenges that Germany and the United States face. The German and American presenters began the discussion by focusing on similar topics such as debt, spending, life expectancy, and birthrates. Regarding the changing demographics in each nation, both presenters highlighted the challenges that an aging population will create and already has created for the long-term economic health of each nation and its effect on debt and spending.

After the opening presentations, delegates broke off into groups. One group focused on energy and food security. There was consensus that both are needed in Germany, the United States, and globally. On energy security, the group believed it was more of an issue for Europe and Germany than the United States. One of the significant challenges discussed was Germany's reliance on energy imports. To help end that, Germany/the European Union needs to become a major player in energy-related technology and invest in green technologies. As global corporations are still focused on fossil fuels that make money, investment couldn't be the work of the private sector alone; governments will need to invest heavily in green solutions. The group recognized that this will be expensive in the near term but that Germany/Europe will reap long-term benefits from such spending. They also acknowledged some challenges of green energy, like how the systems and technologies required might adversely affect wildlife or potentially contain toxic materials. On food security, the group thought that this might be more of an issue in the United States than in Germany, as the European Union provides agricultural subsidies. Additionally, the United States has seen small farms vanish at an increasing rate due to pressure on prices and the fact that land might be more valuable left unfarmed. The group explored different approaches, such as the need for sustainable farming, new methods like artificial intelligence and vertical farming, and continued innovation and research and development by private companies. Water security was also discussed. Since water is obviously used in food production, it could actually be the main issue in food security. A connection was also made to energy security, as water is needed for some clean energy production like hydroelectricity.

Another group discussed the social safety net, and interesting differences between the German and American delegates were clear. Despite the German Young Leaders representing a range of political parties, they were closely aligned. They had differing views on the government's role in society, but overall, they believed that their national and state governments are tools for addressing societal problems. By contrast, the American Young Leaders had more debate. But overall, they seemed more skeptical about their government's ability to effectively deal with societal challenges such as education, demographic shifts, and climate and sustainability issues. The source of this doubt is the frequent threat of government shutdowns and debates over the debt limit that have made once-routine disputes become ideological contests, resulting in debilitating brinksmanship. These perspectives framed the group's discussion comparing the German and U.S. welfare states. The conversation primarily focused on universal health care. The Germans all agreed that the government should provide health care. They

accepted that high individual tax rates were necessary to provide robust public services. The Americans tried to explain the domestic debate over the Affordable Care Act and why despite its goal of universal coverage, there are still significant challenges regarding affordability and access for millions of Americans. By the end of the conversation, one of the main observations by the American delegates was that the United States lacks a shared understanding of the welfare state's purpose and what it should look like. Two main reasons for this were suggested. First, compared to Germany, America is a much less homogenous society. Second, in the United States, equality of opportunity is often valued more than equality of outcome. Thus, Americans are less likely to accept high taxes to fund a generous welfare state.

The last group's conversation centered on education. In considering how to strengthen access to education and produce better outcomes, delegates discussed a variety of policy proposals, including pushing for more vocational training, providing people the ability to attend two-year colleges for free, more government spending on education, improving critical thinking and decision-making, and improving teacher-to-student ratios, in part by hiring more teachers.

Day 2 also included multiple speakers. During lunch, the Young Leaders heard from Bundestag members **Torsten Herbst** (FDP) (2011 Young Leader), **Ottolie Klein** (CDU) (2022 Young Leader), and **Annika Klose** (SPD). They covered various topics including the state of Germany's coalition government, the AfD, and youth political participation. Later in the day, **Ricarda Lang**, Co-Chair of Alliance 90/The Green Party, spoke with delegates on "The Future of Transatlantic Relations."

The day ended with a tour of the Reichstag. After a short break, delegates convened for dinner and a presentation by **Dr. Thomas Steffen**, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Health, who spoke on "Building a New Transatlantic Partnership to Address Post-Pandemic Global Health Priorities and Challenges," which included a discussion of the challenges of pandemics and the differences in the German and U.S. health systems.

After dinner, there was a gathering at the hotel organized by Steering Committee member **Sarmad Hussain** that allowed this year's delegates the chance to meet and converse informally with Young Leader alumni.

Day 3

Plenary VII

How Fragile Is Democracy?

Day 3 began with a discussion on democracy and its discontents. The German presenter started the conversation by noting how the long-held assumption that the world would continue to become more democratic was no longer valid, as autocratic states were on the rise globally. And adding to the challenge is that an increasing number of people no longer feel represented by democracy. The German presenter raised a series of questions for the group to consider, asking: What legitimizes democracy? How can we learn and practice democracy? What must be changed?

The American presenter began by citing a variety of metrics on issues like elections and press freedoms that show the United States is a strong democracy. Yet, they noted that plenty of qualitative evidence shows the flaws of American democracy. There are numerous areas the United States should focus on to

bolster its democracy, they argued, including free and fair elections, greater civic engagement, rights of marginalized groups, and political pluralism. The American presenter ended their remarks by asking delegates how the United States and Germany can protect democracy at home and abroad.

In the breakout sessions, Working Group A began by focusing on democracy in the United States and explored features of the American political system. Next, the group discussed uniquely contemporary challenges like social media (which it said had turned politics into a spectacle) and artificial intelligence. Additionally, it lamented that science-based politics was not occurring. The group concluded its discussion by offering solutions that mainly focused on education. It advocated for improved teaching of critical thinking and better civics training. Solutions for redistricting were also discussed, such as having objective criteria for drawing lines and giving the power to create voting districts to independent or bipartisan panels.

Working Group B noted the importance of consensus. All groups needed to exchange meaningful dialogue and agree on how their democratic system should be organized. One way to achieve this was early and frequent engagement with marginalized and disengaged groups. They noted that one of the challenges to doing this is that people often lack a shared reality today. Also mentioned were other challenges like the role of money in elections (particularly in the United States) and the role of fake news. Overall, the group believed that the three main pillars needed to bolster democracy were education, maturity, and civility.

For Working Group C, a big question framing its conversation was: Is it inherently undemocratic when groups on the political extremes use the democratic system to undermine it? Or are extreme groups using the democratic system to change it? The group expressed concern over social media and its potential to create echo chambers. But members of the group disagreed on the government's role in regulating social-media companies, with the Germans being more comfortable with it than the Americans. There were also concerns about far-right movements. Overall, the group believed that respect, civil discourse, reliable information, and critical thinking were key in a democracy.

Working Group D discussed a variety of challenges facing democracy. First was technology and tech companies' role in democracy, particularly thinking about how to use AI responsibly. Next, the group grappled with the issue of direct voting. Does it foster engagement and give people a greater voice? Various pros and cons were discussed. For example, while direct voting allows individuals to weigh in on specific issues, they might not have had time to educate themselves adequately on the matter. Also discussed was the need for explaining governmental policies to disenfranchised groups in language that resonates with them. To address these challenges, the group offered numerous solutions. In the United States, they proposed campaign finance reform to broaden and diversify the types of candidates who run and get elected, and improving education so citizens have enhanced critical-thinking skills and become smarter consumers of information. For Germany, the group also noted the need for education (though the emphasis was on informing people of the tools they could use to enact change), better communication between the government and its citizens to foster awareness and inclusion, and lastly, the need to create more opportunities for people to engage in politics.

In the plenary that followed the breakout sessions, many of the German delegates expressed pessimism about the health of democracy. One of the major issues cited was the lack of a shared reality, which disinformation helps to foster. There was a feeling that common understanding is nearly impossible when there isn't a shared reality. American delegates, while expressing concerns, seemed more optimistic. They tended to emphasize the need for understanding. Those who are angry with the political system need to

be heard. We don't need to agree with them, but they must feel their concerns are being taken seriously. Some delegates admitted that though hearing different voices across the political spectrum and having a dialogue is valuable, the real challenge is solving people's grievances. The events of January 6, 2021, were also brought up. No one questioned that the events of that day were awful and embarrassing for the nation. However, a couple of the American delegates felt that rather than see the day as a major breakdown of democracy, we should see the opposite, because the nation's institutional and legal processes prevailed and are holding those responsible accountable.

Social media's role in society was also discussed. For most of the delegates, social media in and of itself wasn't a problem. The real issue is how it's used, with data mining mentioned as one example. Additionally, for many, the problem was that most people don't engage in critical thinking and analysis of this content, making them more susceptible to things they might see on social media. Better training in these areas was mentioned as a possible solution to the challenge of social media to democracy. However, one German delegate noted that we can't expect everyone to be tech literate and thinking we can train everyone is unrealistic. An American delegate agreed but said we should at least try and train as many people as possible.

During lunch, delegates heard from **Professor Dr. Luise Hölscher**, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Finance, on "The Ukraine War's Harmful Impact on the Global Economy."

In the second half of the day, delegates traveled to the Chancellery for a joint policy briefing with **Dr. Christian Bluth** of the International Economic Policy Division and **Dominik Bohnen** of the North America Division. They covered various topics, including NATO and the war in Ukraine, the Inflation Reduction Act, China, and U.S. elections.

The day culminated with a reception and dinner hosted by Deutsche Bank AG. Delegates were welcomed by **Ambassador John B. Emerson**, Chairman of the American Council on Germany, and heard from **Hans-Georg Engelke**, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, on "U.S.-German Cooperation in the Area of Freedom and Security."

Day 4

Plenary Discussion VIII

China, Russia, and the West: Present Tense, Future Uncertain

Day 4 started with a focused discussion on the geopolitical challenge Russia and China pose to the West and how the United States and Germany approach each nation. The American and German presenters began their remarks with China. The American presenter stated that China was one of the biggest threats to the United States' way of life and expressed concern about what the world would look like if and when China became the dominant power. On the bright side, they noted a bipartisan consensus that China is a threat. However, Republicans and Democrats differ in their approach, with the former favoring a more hawkish approach and the latter leaning toward more cooperation. The American presenter ended by asking delegates what could realistically be done to counter China. What concrete proposals exist to exploit China's weaknesses? The German presenter noted Germany's new China strategy calling for de-risking, not decoupling. German leaders appear aligned on the nation's approach to China, but can differ in their language. They said China is both a rival and a partner, making it a

complicated relationship to manage. Also, since China is the greatest consumer and producer of energy and largest producer of carbon dioxide, the world needs to be able to engage the country on climate change.

The German presenter then turned to Russia, noting that Russia's invasion of Ukraine fundamentally altered relations and caused Germany to reassess its security strategy and renew its commitment to increased defense spending. Similarly, the American presenter said Russia was not a friend and that attempts to bring it and China into the international community have failed. They ended with questions for delegates to consider, including: What could the West have done differently? What went wrong in the lead-up to the invasion of Ukraine? What can events in Ukraine teach us about potential conflict over Taiwan? What comes after Russian President Vladimir Putin?

Each working group was asked to develop a strategic approach to China. Working Group A considered the United States and Germany's economic relationship with China. The United States' main objective should be to seek independence from the Chinese economy. The group believed this could be achieved in three ways. First is technical superiority, including space technology, cybersecurity, AI, and hypersonics. The second area where independence could be achieved is in economic and financial matters, particularly in reducing the percentage of debt owed by the United States to China. Lastly, the group noted democratic resilience, which it connected to protecting liberal ideals in Taiwan. Regarding Germany, the group noted that economic independence was probably not possible because it is much smaller than the United States. However, it remains vital that Germany protect its way of life and its values, prevent economic or military invasion, and form alliances with nations that share its values. The group also recognized China's human rights abuses. It noted that, along with states like Russia and North Korea, China is a threat to the liberal order and that the United States and Germany need to work with other like-minded states proactively to offer positive alternatives to nations that otherwise might be lured by China.

Working Group B began by discussing perceptions of China. It agreed that China is a threat. China does not share American/German values, and its aggression must be confronted. However, there was acknowledgment that China is still essential for certain critical consumer goods and that the costs of confronting China would be high. In crafting its strategic approach, the group believed that a first step required a better understanding of China's internal and cultural workings. It thought the West had a small window of five to 10 years to operationalize its strategy. But there wasn't agreement on the best approach: a less-hawkish track where the West could de-escalate where possible or a more aggressive, forceful posture. The group offered a series of proposals. First, it advocated strengthening intellectual property protection, in part by strengthening cooperation between the private sector and governments. Second, it suggested working to balance trade with China, partly by increasing tariffs. Third would be a focus on strategic outreach to help foster additional partnerships and bolster relations with allies. This includes institutional reform in forums like the UN Security Council and the World Trade Organization and strategic debt reduction. Fourth, the United States and Germany/Europe should be proactive and prepare to diversify their economies, focusing on becoming producers and not just consumers. Lastly, the group offered proposals that those advocating a more hawkish approach would champion, including kicking China out of the WTO and abandoning the policy of strategic ambiguity concerning Taiwan. Instead, the United States should make clear that any military move on Taiwan would be met with a military response.

When the groups reconvened, it was noted that human rights weren't a main focus for either group. Both acknowledged that while important, it was difficult to include human rights in a strategy because of the United States and Germany/Europe lack of leverage to change China's behavior. It was a pragmatic recognition of limits.

Plenary IX

The West and the Rest

The last session of Day 4 focused on the West's relationship with the Global South and what constructive engagement and smart strategy toward regions like Africa and Central and South America might look like. The American presenter began highlighting the importance of the United States' alliance system. Alliances need to be as strong as possible, especially during a conflict. Thus, the United States needs the Global South on its side and not aligned with Russia and China. However, many in the Global South don't consider Russia and China a threat. The American presenter argued that the United States needs to change the current status quo and deal with the critiques and anger that large portions of the Global South have with the West in general and the United States in particular. They concluded by raising the prospect that with the United States so focused on China and Russia, there will be little bandwidth to deal with the Global South. They also asked to what extent the United States and the Global South can be equal partners.

The German presenter challenged the premise of the session and took issue with its title. They asked: What is the "West"? Is it a geographic, historical, or cultural term? Regarding how the United States and European nations might approach the Global South, they raised various issues, including trade relations, migration, and climate change. They ended by discussing how to attain better relations and greater equity. Much of this work will happen on the bilateral level, but they argued that more international engagement in global bodies is also necessary. Nations of the Global South need to be represented and have their voice heard in international forums.

For many delegates, the question of leadership was central. The United States/the West would obviously like to lead the Global South, but its leadership is contested, especially by China. Many Young Leaders questioned why developing nations should even look to the United States/the West. What do they have to offer? Some suggested that the West needs to find ways to allow the nations of the Global South to pursue their interests in international institutions that weren't designed for them. Additionally, the West needs to better communicate that developing nations are entirely free to engage with any nation, but that deepening ties, particularly economic ones with China, comes with risks such as environmental degradation and resource extraction. China isn't trying to help these countries develop sustainably, thus the West needs to offer a different model. The conversation also focused on rare earth minerals. Multiple Americans suggested that the United States needs to do more to exploit its supply of critical minerals.

Day 4 also included another fascinating lineup of speakers. First was **Professor Dr. Jens Weidmann** (2004 Young Leader), Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Commerzbank and former President of the German Bundesbank, who spoke on "Structural Change in an Uncertain World." In his remarks, he noted that every generation has had its challenges, but the pace of today's crises seems to be on the rise in the last few years. He also discussed issues such as inflation, fiscal and monetary policy, and grappling with structural change.

During lunch, delegates heard from **H.E. Cem Özdemir** (2001 Young Leader), Federal Minister for Food and Agriculture, who spoke on "Reinventing the Transatlantic Agenda – Climate Stewardship, Food Security, and Peace." He covered issues such as climate stewardship, food security, and the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Later in the day **Dr. Ole Diehl**, Vice President of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (Foreign Intelligence) met with the Young Leaders, followed by **Steffen Kampeter**, Managing Director of the BDA (Confederation of

German Employers' Associations), who led a discussion on "Is the German Economy Sputtering? Prospects for Transatlantic Trade." He covered a wide range of economic challenges, including climate change, supply chains, inflation, interest rates, and debt. Additionally, he provided an overview of the economic ties between Europe and the United States and snapshots of the German and global economy.

In the evening, delegates were treated to a dinner hosted by Mercedes-Benz Group AG. They heard from **Dr. Tobias Lindner**, State Minister at the Federal Foreign Office, who spoke on "Germany's New Foreign Policy – Has Russia's War on Ukraine Transformed Transatlantic Relations?"

Day 5

Plenary X

An Agenda for Our Time

The conference's final day began with the delegates split into two groups and tasked with developing a mission statement for the transatlantic relationship moving forward in the next five to 10 years. Also, they were asked to draft a vision statement identifying challenges and spelling out how they would seek to address them. Both working groups struggled over how broad or vague to be. They found it challenging to be concise yet encompassing.

Working Group A developed the following mission statement: "To build and defend a resilient democratic system supporting a rules-based order through trust and partnership to promote economic prosperity, equity, peace, and sustainability." Their vision statement read as follows: "A transatlantic relationship for global prosperity and peace."

Working Group B's mission statement stated: "Our mission is to strengthen the transatlantic partnership to present unity against strategic rivals and build a sustainable future." Their vision statement declared: "Over the next five years we want to reduce reliance on strategic rivals through increased engagement with allied economies and invest in self-sufficiency.

- Within our own countries we want to strengthen our democratic institutions to lead by example.
- Outside our own countries we want to promote democracy and promote individual freedoms and responsibilities.
- In international institutions we recognize there are countries who are not yet part of that but we fight based on the rule of law for the global implementation of democratic values."

Plenary XI

This is How It Ends ...

In the final session of the conference, delegates focused on China. The conversation was spurred by a question from an American Young Leader who said that throughout the week, the German speakers the delegates heard from seemed to have different views on how much to de-risk and how much to cooperate. Overall, the United States treated China as a more serious threat. Did the German Young Leaders believe that Germany would actually de-risk from China?

A lively discussion followed. Most of the German delegates did believe that their nation was serious about de-risking. However, they cautioned that it won't happen overnight. Many said they would like to see Germany act more quickly, but the nation is moving in the right direction. Some raised the point that Germany has come under criticism for its business ties with China, but the United States has a similar problem. An American delegate echoed this sentiment, noting that the United States' hardline approach

against China is a relatively recent development. A couple of German delegates also stated that when considering Germany's approach to China, the European Union needs to be a part of the conversation. At least one German was skeptical about their country's approach. They believed that the government's newly released China strategy erred in defining China as a partner, competitor, and systemic rival. They said it is only a systemic rival and everything needs to be viewed through that lens.

Seeing China as a systemic rival aligned with the view of many Americans. For them, China looks at everything strategically, and the United States also needs to do so. One American delegate thought the United States needed to ready itself to go further. They said the conversation was viewing China through a reactive lens and would prefer the delegates to think more proactively.

On the final day of the conference, delegates heard from **Thomas Haldenwang**, President of the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Domestic Intelligence). During lunch, U.S. Ambassador to Germany **Dr. Amy Gutmann** joined the Young Leaders. She spoke enthusiastically about the U.S.-German relationship and was confident about its future. The conference concluded with a wonderful closing dinner sponsored by Noerr and held in the beautiful Spiegelsaal at Clärchens Ballhaus. In that memorable setting, delegates heard from **Steffen Hebestreit**, State Secretary, Federal Government Spokesperson, and Head of the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, who spoke on "Addressing the Challenges of the Current German Government."

**The ACG would like to extend special thanks to the
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