

“Coalition of New Possibilities” (November 30, 2005)

Abstract

In her first policy statement, Angela Merkel addresses the most important political challenges facing Germany. She is optimistic that they can be tackled constructively. Echoing one of her predecessors, Willy Brandt, whose first policy statement of 1969 asked Germans to dare more democracy, she called on Germans to “dare more freedom” – specifically, freedom for the economy from bureaucratic regulations.

Source

Policy Statement by Federal Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel in the German Bundestag on November 30, 2005, in Berlin:

Mr. President,

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Allow me first to make some comments in light of current events: A German citizen and her Iraqi driver have been missing in Iraq since last Friday. From what we know at the moment, we have to assume that they have both been kidnapped. The Federal Government and, I am sure, the whole Parliament categorically condemns this act.

And one thing is clear – this Government, this Parliament will not allow itself to be blackmailed.

It is equally clear that in this situation the Federal Government is focusing all its efforts on protecting the life of Susanne Osthoff and her Iraqi companion and obtaining their release. Our thoughts during these hours and days are with the families and friends of the victims. We empathize with them. We want them to know that all Germans share in the plight of the hostages, and that all Germans feel a deep sense of solidarity and connection with them.

I would like to assure all of them that the Federal Government is doing everything in its power to bring the German citizen and her driver to safety as soon as possible.

We still know nothing of the motives or the background to the kidnapping. It would therefore be unwise to draw premature conclusions. Yet we must remember one basic fact – international terrorism remains one of the greatest challenges to the international community. We must not relent in our fight against international terrorism. It targets that which matters to us and that which lies at the heart of our civilization. It targets our entire system of values – freedom, tolerance, respect and consideration for human dignity, democracy and the rule of law. If we were to forfeit these values, we would be forfeiting our very souls.

And we can also sense something else at this time, something that characterizes our country. We close neither our eyes nor our hearts to the suffering of others. We know the strength of solidarity. We have experienced the power that can spring forth from community spirit and compassion. We are aware that a nation is more than a random collection of individuals, and we know that a nation is always a community with a common destiny. If we embrace this notion, we can draw from it the strength and confidence we need to overcome even the toughest challenges.

I feel it is important for Parliament to send this message at the start of the debate. We have come together today to debate the first policy statement of the new Federal Government and will continue to do so over the coming days. Allow me to ask you at the outset – who is most amazed by all this today? Weeks and months ago, who would have thought that a grand coalition would assemble today to jointly lead our country into the future?

Who would have thought that Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) would discover they had so much in common that they could present an in-depth program for the next four years?

Who would have thought that my coalition partner would be led by a party chairman from Brandenburg? Who would have thought that a woman would be appointed to the highest government office this year? Who would have imagined all of this?

All of this has taken us by surprise, and some of it has even taken me by surprise. But it is not the biggest surprise of my life. The biggest surprise of my life is freedom. I expected many things, but I did not expect to be granted the gift of freedom before I reached retirement.

Before 1989, all roads led to a Wall that was only a few yards away from this place and that looked as though it would divide our country forever. When you have already experienced one positive surprise of this sort, you believe many things are possible. I intend to remain firm in that belief.

I have christened the new coalition "a coalition of new possibilities." My hope is that it will open up new possibilities for our country, and for all Germans. And I hope that we will seize this opportunity. Specifically, this means for me that the expectations the new Federal Government has of itself and the country are by no means modest. We intend to create the conditions for Germany to return to the ranks of the top three in Europe in ten years. I feel this is a legitimate and important expectation.

The Basic Law, the Social Market Economy, the dual system of vocational training – all these ideas were an inspiration for the whole world. The first car was built in Germany, the first computer, too, and aspirin was developed here. We are still benefiting from these innovations today. Why shouldn't we in the present day be able to recapture the sense of achievement we had in the founding years of the Federal Republic and usher – what I call – a second founding era?

Let us, then, surprise everyone with what we can do in this country!

A grand coalition between two different mainstream parties provides us with an entirely unexpected opportunity to ask ourselves what we can improve together, without being hampered by mutual accusations, without pointing a finger at the other side and asking who was responsible – solely responsible, of course! – for what mistake. For one thing is clear: whether we admit it or not, we all bear responsibility for the fact that we are still not taking full advantage of the potential of our country. Our growth has been stagnating for several years. Debt has shot up to worrying levels. The catching-up process in the new federal states [*Länder*] has been at a standstill for years. Without its car industry, Germany today would no longer be the kind of high-tech country that I would like it to be. PISA shows that in many instances we can no longer simply call ourselves a nation with a high educational standard. We have not yet come to terms with the rapid transformation of the working world. Germany is not yet sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of an aging society. We have not yet found satisfactory responses to the new type of threats we face and to the blurring of the distinction between internal and external security.

We are all aware of the problems, and I can say: The grand coalition has made an honest assessment of the situation in our country, and together we have also recognized the chance, the opportunity to better exploit our nation's potential. Why shouldn't we all surprise each other with what this country is capable

of achieving?

We know that we have a long, uphill battle to fight. We want to restructure the federal system. We want to inject new life into the labor market. We want to help our schools and universities regain their top position. We want to get our debt under control and sort out our health, pension, and long-term care systems. Nobody can stop us – with the exception of ourselves. Let us dispense with the well-rehearsed rituals, the reflexive howls of protest, if we want to change anything. Surely it ought to be possible for us to leave all that behind and pursue new paths.

When I was preparing this policy statement, I thought long and hard about how I could mention and acknowledge all the groups who are so important for communal life in our country. I thought about whether I should mention individual employers' associations and unions, churches and religious communities by name. Eventually, I decided to forgo such a listing. Because it's not about groups, it's about all of us, our community, and our common future.

Therefore, let us surprise ourselves by not always tackling big issues by breaking them down into individual groups and interests, but rather by treating them as a whole! Let us surprise ourselves by tackling them rationally, fairly, and honestly, and by joining forces to find a solution. Amid all the tasks we face, we must not forget that previous generations had to solve immeasurably greater problems. We only have to think of the reconstruction efforts in East and West after the war, or of the historic achievement of the East Germans in toppling a dictatorship by peaceful means. In comparison, our situation today is enviable.

Of course, light and shadows are never far apart. We only need to look at the reconstruction of East Germany [*Aufbau Ost*]. But one thing remains certain: fifteen years after German unification, enormous progress has been made. Through annual transfer payments amounting to 4 percent of the national product, we have succeeded in rebuilding the new *Länder*. At this juncture, I would like to thank everyone in Germany who contributed to this process.

The environment is recovering, infrastructure is in place, in the coming days – as a resident of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, I am allowed to say this – the final stretch of the Baltic Sea motorway will be open to traffic. Those are only a few examples of everything we have accomplished in fifteen years.

Our country also has good prospects in other areas, and it is high time we made the most of them. Germany is the world's leading exporter. No country in Europe registers more patents. A German scientist has just been awarded a Nobel Prize.

Our cultural diversity is unique.

Germany is a country with ideas, to quote the federal president. A country with ideas needs a government willing to act, and this government plans to be very active.

A vice-chancellor of a previous grand coalition who subsequently became chancellor [i.e. Willy Brandt] once said, "Dare more democracy."

I know that this statement triggered considerable debate, some of it extremely heated. But he obviously struck a chord with people at that time. And speaking personally, I can say that it was music to the ears, particularly for people on the other side of the Wall. Allow me today to amend this statement and to sound the appeal, "Let us dare more freedom."

Let us release the brakes that are holding back growth! Let us free ourselves from bureaucracy and outdated regulations. Many of our European neighbors are showing us what is possible. Germany can do what other countries can do; I am deeply convinced of that.

The last government already introduced steps to help us make the most of the opportunities our country offers. Therefore, leaving all partisan differences aside – and these differences could not be overlooked in the past years – I wish to say the following: I would like to personally thank Federal Chancellor Schröder for his courage and steadfastness in opening a door with Agenda 2010, a door to reform, and for implementing the Agenda in the face of resistance.

In doing so, he did our country a great service. I would like to thank him for this, and other achievements, in the name of all Germans.

I said earlier that I don't intend to mention each group separately, simply to avoid anyone saying at the end that I had forgotten somebody. However, one group is so important that it has to be mentioned. This group will play a key role in all future issues. I am referring to the weak. I am referring to the weak, to those who need the solidarity and the help of all of us. I am referring to the sick, the young, and to the many old. The measure of our society's humanity is how we treat these people.

We – the new Federal Government of the CDU/CSU and the SPD – want to make our country fit for the future so that the weak can remain confident that they will not be left to fend for themselves, that they will receive help. That is our understanding of social justice.

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