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Prize of the Peace of Westphalia 2012
Laudatory speech for former Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt by Dr.
Reinhard Zinkann
Chairman of the Economic Society for Westphalia and Lippe

Dear Chancellor Schmidt, ladies and gentlemen!

Before I attempt to put into words the importance of our award winner today for the preservation and safeguarding of peace in Germany and Europe, allow me to make a brief reference on my own behalf.

For me, this is both a moving moment and a great challenge.

It is a moving moment because my own political socialization, my early political thinking was and is inextricably linked to the man who took over as Federal Chancellor when I myself was 14 years old. When you, Chancellor Schmidt, handed over the office to your successor, I was a 23-year-old student. And I still remember very well the strange mood, even trepidation, that gripped many people at the time who were not exactly regular voters for your party. In between were eventful years, characterized by challenges that the then still young Federal Republic had never experienced before: the first oil crisis, inflation and recession, the RAF terror, the escalation of the Cold War.

Last Monday, September 17, was exactly 30 years to the day since the end of the social-liberal coalition, sealed by the resignation of the four FDP ministers. "The pilot leaves the ship", was the headline in Der Spiegel, in reference to the legendary caricature of Otto von Bismarck's dismissal, which laid the foundations for a gradual, later of the already elderly Chancellor, which continues to this day.

Referring to you, Mr. Chancellor, the great publicist Marion Gräfin Dönhoff made this statement without any significant delay:

"What is certain is that it will be a long, very long time before such a politically gifted, intellectually superior leader will sit in the Federal Chancellery again."

And Rudolf Augstein, not exactly known for having reflexively shared every one of your positions at the time, Mr. Chancellor, wrote:

"Germany is losing one of those chancellors and statesmen since 1871 who will be remembered, from Bismarck to Stresemann and Adenauer to Brandt."

I see the task of summarizing in just a few minutes what Helmut Schmidt contributed to maintaining and securing peace as a great challenge, because your contribution was by no means limited to the eight years of your chancellorship.

Anyone seeking to place this peace policy, this longing for peace, in its historical and biographical context will inevitably end up with Helmut Schmidt, born in 1918 and a former soldier in the Wehrmacht.

Influenced by your war experiences, you regarded the liberation of the Germans from National Socialism and the pursuit of peace and freedom in Europe as your mission.

You formulated this somewhat more clearly, even drastically, more than six decades later in an interview with Ulrich Wickert. Ostensibly, the question was how you felt about ambition. Your answer, which can be read in the newspaper "Die Welt" on December 20, 2008, was as follows, and I quote:

"Ambition is a term I wouldn't apply to myself; of course I was interested in public recognition, but the driving force lay elsewhere. The driving force was typical of the generation I belonged to: We came out of the war, we experienced a lot of misery and shit during the war, and we were all determined to make a contribution to ensuring that all these horrible things would never happen again in Germany. That was the real driving force."

End of quote.

In 1966, long before your election as German Chancellor, you had drafted, presented and justified an executive resolution on foreign and security policy for the SPD party conference, in which you postulated three equally important goals:

- The preservation of peace
- The safeguarding of freedom
- The peaceful implementation of the right to self-determination for the entire German people

And you explained:

"Today, there can hardly be any doubt that the peaceful reunification of the German people will only be possible in connection with the restoration of Europe."

You remained true to this principle throughout your life, for example when you, now Federal Chancellor, set a number of decisive steps towards European integration with your friend Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. You created the European Council of Heads of State and Government as a counterweight to the fragmentation of European policy caused by the proliferation of meetings of the Council of Ministers; you helped the European Parliament to gain more legitimacy by convincing your colleagues of the usefulness of direct elections of MEPs; after overcoming the consequences of the oil price shock, you were one of the most powerful protagonists of a course towards economic and monetary union; you created the G6 summit, the ECU and the European Monetary System EMS, which came into force in 1979.

Without a common currency, the then EC would remain a customs union with a few additional common economic regulations and institutions, you wrote in 1989 in DIE ZEIT. And in fact you were not essentially concerned with dismantling customs duties and border controls - you wanted lasting peace. No more carpets of bombs and soldiers' graves in Europe - that was the true vision. And those who are closely intertwined economically, was the obvious next thought, will not wage war against each other. Later, under the impression of the global population explosion and the rapid rise of large emerging countries such as China and India, your concern about Europe's importance in the world was added. If we did not want to slowly but surely marginalize ourselves, Europe would have to speak as a whole and with one voice.

The Social Democrat Helmut Schmidt and the Conservative Giscard d'Estaing had even more in common: the two convinced Europeans were brothers in spirit and had the courage to make decisions. They combined the will to defend each other with a willingness to negotiate and ease tensions. They pushed ahead with the negotiations of the "Conference on Security and Cooperation" in Europe, in which the countries of the Eastern Bloc were given some humanitarian concessions were wrested from the countries of the Eastern Bloc and relations between East and West relaxed further.

Last but not least, this led to your consistent commitment to the NATO Double-Track Decision, which you developed and which was highly controversial in Germany itself, i.e. the threat to deploy Western medium-range missiles, but with the offer to negotiate with the Soviet Union to renounce these weapons systems on both sides. For you, the unilateral deployment of Soviet medium-range missiles, which enabled both superpowers to engage in a nuclear exchange limited to Europe, was unacceptable under any circumstances.

You were just as unperturbed by the growing public sentiment of "better red than dead" as you were by the fact that you had to manage without the support of your own party when it came to rearmament. Ultimately, your adherence to the NATO Dual-Track Decision proved to be a decisive contribution to ending the Cold War and overcoming the division of Germany and Europe.

Today, 30 years after his departure from the office of Federal Chancellor and at the age of 93, Helmut Schmidt is held in unparalleled esteem by countless people in Germany and beyond, including those who were not even born 30 years ago. This was also and especially noticeable in the reactions when we announced in spring who would receive the Peace of Westphalia Prize this year. As an "elder statesman" of unparalleled intellectual precision and steadfastness in standing up for his convictions, Helmut Schmidt is one of the most popular and respected Germans, both nationally and internationally. According to surveys, he is "the Germans' greatest living role model", newspapers describe him as a "symbol of leadership and knowledge", as "the political conscience of the Germans".

This may be due to the fact, Chancellor Schmidt, that you have been heard from occasionally since the end of your chancellorship, but not with the beckoning attitude of someone who gives unsolicited advice to his successors in office. Nevertheless, you are one of the few politicians whose publications can typically only be mentioned "in excerpts" in the relevant lists due to their large number. Your work as co-editor of "DIE ZEIT" represents an enormous enrichment of journalistic and political culture in

our country. The same applies to your newspaper interviews and television appearances, which have unfortunately become less frequent.

All the more reason for us to follow your every publicly or semi-publicly expressed thought with grateful interest. In this context, I myself remember one of the last episodes of "Menschen bei Maischberger", in which you commented, among other things, on the current debt crisis in the eurozone, which we are all following with concern, especially as viable solutions with a guarantee of success are not in sight.

I would like to recall three of your thoughts from that program, which I believe are essential in the search for a solution.

Firstly, we do not have a euro crisis, but a debt crisis. To overcome this crisis, we need politicians with an overview, judgment, drive and the power to act. We have 27 Commissioners, but no contractual basis for joint action.

Secondly, the mistakes that were made at the start of monetary union are history. We now have to live with the consequences.

And thirdly: Hitler, the Second World War and Auschwitz carry such a heavy weight in the subconscious of the European peoples that a leadership of Europe by Germany is still out of the question. The solidarity between Germany and France was therefore indispensable.

The third point in particular reflects the experiences and events that have left a lasting impression on you, Chancellor Schmidt.

In the wake of the above-mentioned television report, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung raised the question of whether anyone still understands what a 93-year-old man has to say, because the experiences that shaped him hardly play a role today.

Chancellor Schmidt, ladies and gentlemen, let us all see it as our duty to counter such a development.

Once again I would like to quote Helmut Schmidt, this time from his book "People and Powers", published in 1987:

"Over three decades of parliamentary-political work - in more than eight years as Chancellor, in 13 years as a member of the Federal Government and also since then - I have always made every effort to contribute to understanding between peoples. This task remains immense and arises anew for every generation."

End of quote.

On behalf of the Economic Society for Westphalia and Lippe and on behalf of the jury, I personally hope that we can make a modest contribution to this today by awarding the Peace of Westphalia Prize to former Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

Chancellor Schmidt, we are honoring you today for your peace-building life's work. We do so in the spirit of the Peace of Westphalia, which is based on the will to reconcile different political wishes not by military means, but by negotiation, not by force, but by argument, a willingness to compromise and a desire to work together. If a military conflict between the states of Europe is no longer conceivable today, then we have people like Helmut Schmidt to thank for this.

Even decades after his retirement from active politics, Helmut Schmidt continues to make passionate pleas for Europe. With precise messages, he continues to advocate close cooperation with all our neighbors and partners in Europe, but also in the Atlantic Alliance. Most recently, Helmut Schmidt repeatedly expressed his alarm at the state of the European Union and its institutions.

Mr. Chancellor, we are pleased and grateful that we are able to honour you today - and we feel honored that you have come to Münster today to accept this award.

And now we are particularly looking forward to the words you are about to speak to us. Beforehand, we will see some film scenes from your political work as well as words of appreciation from two of your most important international companions.