



**AMERICAN
COUNCIL ON
GERMANY**

CONFERENCE REPORT

**“Is 70 the New 40? Assessing Transatlantic
Relations 30 Years After the Fall of the Wall”**

41st AMERICAN-GERMAN YOUNG LEADERS CONFERENCE

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Report prepared by
Mariam Khan and Julie Yang
(2019 Young Leaders)

American Council on Germany
14 East 60th Street, Suite 1000 | New York, NY 10022
T: 212-826-3636 | F: 212-758-3445
www.acgusa.org | info@acgusa.org

INTRODUCTION

The 41st American-German Young Leaders Conference consisted of 22 Americans and 30 Germans. A diverse group of mid-career professionals, the participants represented a range of industries from the automotive and banking sectors to government and media. The fact that 2019 marked the 30th year since the fall of the Berlin Wall gave participants more context to reflect on Germany's history and the transatlantic relationship.

After a welcome dinner the night before, the U.S. delegation set forth on a walking tour of Berlin themed "Echoes of a Divided City." Many of the American participants were visiting Berlin for the first time. Participants were taken by how much history was kept alive in the city; yet there were also modern elements throughout Berlin that gave a nod to Germany's position as a global economic and technology powerhouse.

In addition to the Berlin Wall, sights on the walking tour included Museum Island and the Berlin Cathedral, as well as Checkpoint Charlie. The delegation also passed by the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, the Reichstag Building and the Government Quarter, as well as Unter den Linden and Humboldt University.

The day concluded with a relaxing boat tour through the inner city and over the Spree River. The day of sightseeing allowed for the U.S. delegation to get to know each other before meeting the German delegation. But the tour also contributed to a greater understanding of why history continues to influence policy making and public sentiment in Germany.

The 41st Young Leaders Conference was being held at a time when geopolitical tensions were straining longtime alliances and trade disputes were threatening economic growth. The benefits of multilateral cooperation were being questioned by some governments, while public trust in international institutions was falling.

Yet, emerging technologies, the rise of China, and growing public support for populist rhetoric make cooperation between the United States and Germany even more critical. Mutual recognition of the benefits to a strong 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 the transatlantic dialogue.

Day 1

Plenary Discussion I

Identity Politics: What Does It Mean to be a German? An American?

The first day of the 2019 Young Leaders Conference brought with it a heavy topic. What does it mean to be a German? What does it mean to be an American? The conversation – while tough – was invigorating and insightful. It launched a week's worth of friendships and conversations that truly impacted each of us in ways we didn't know were possible.

The American presenter leading the conversation spoke about nationalism and pride, and the values one carries as a citizen of the United States. The presenter also spoke about the opportunity afforded to most people in the United States. If you work hard and dedicate yourself to a life of achievement, you will find success in the United States, the American presenter claimed. Many in the conference agreed with his thinking.

Being a son of immigrants, the American presenter said he was raised with a strong work ethic, having seen his parents struggle to make ends meet when they first arrived in America. It instilled in him values and morals that

he claims he might not have otherwise. The American presenter spoke about the work and energy he put into his education and work opportunities – an effort he said was inherently valuable to him the older he grew.

There were some differences of opinion when the American presenter raised the idea of “assimilation,” however. The American presenter said that coming to America as an immigrant affords one the ability to assimilate with the more dominant cultural identity or “Americanness.”

Cultural assimilation – the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a dominant group, assuming the values, behaviors, and beliefs of another group – was definitely a touchy subject for some among the audience. Not all felt that immigrants to the United States must assimilate to fit in. Some in the group said it is our differences and uniqueness that makes one intrinsically American.

The German presenter also offered up interesting – and tough – facts about the German way of life. He spoke about the humility and guilt he felt as a German in a post-World War II world. Many of the Americans in the group were stunned to hear that their German counterparts still carried with them feelings of shame and responsibility over the events that happened decades before their time. It was an eye-opening conversation for some of the Americans in the group, leading to some spirited discussion.

On that note, some of the Americans in the group also spoke about the difficult times in American history, including the United States’ history with African-American slavery and Native Americans. The United States certainly has a dark history as well. And Germans shouldn’t feel alone in that regard, some of the Americans said. The group concluded that the conference was a fantastic place to start in opening the door to these tough conversations – hopefully allowing each of us to gain a better understanding and perspective about a different way of life – and learn something new in the process.

Plenary Discussion II

What Do Values, Principles, Populism, and Socialism Mean Today?

Since President Donald Trump was inaugurated in January 2017, the United States has seen a rise in anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, anti-mainstream media ideologies. Never before has the phrase “fake news” been uttered more.

Populism is considered a dirty word in today’s world, and that’s mostly due to the politics of Trump. In the last few years since Trump has taken office, we have seen other political systems on either side of the Atlantic under enormous strain as traditional political parties are being done away with for more fractured political systems.

In this discussion, we spoke plenty about populism in the Trump era. The 45th President of the United States, the American presenter said, has divided the nation, promoted fear, and infringed on individual rights. Populism is on the rise, the American presenter said.

Trump tapped into the anger and resentment of the white working and middle-class American throughout his presidential campaign. Despite his billionaire status, he vowed to fight for the “ordinary” and “normal” American, promoting an us-vs.-them ideology that resonated with Americans who had severe disdain for the coastal elites (the Elizabeth Warrens and Hillary Clintons of the world).

It was maintained that Trump knew exactly what he was doing – and because of it the presidency fell right into his lap. He has now emboldened a populist agenda in this country, the American presenter concluded.

On socialism, we are seeing millions of Americans flock to presidential candidates such as Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, who are touting Medicare for All and Green New Deal policies. While more institutional Democrats believe dramatic change is not necessary, followers of Warren and Sanders are growing

by the millions. The American presenter said that while the socialist movement is small, it is well organized and will be a force to be reckoned with in the 2020 election.

The German presenter said populism in Germany certainly has a “the people” and “one people” vibe. He also said that populism is on the rise in Germany today – but also across Europe. There is a rising level of complexity and globalization, he said, but also a lack of perspective among many Europeans.

The German presenter said he believes that populism hurts democracy. It has a chilling effect on what people across Europe think, and it has resulted in a lack of trust in the government. To combat this rise of populism, the German presenter said “the people” must confront racism and nationalism. They must include different perspectives in their thinking. Voters, he said, shouldn’t be blamed. It must be rooted out from within.

On a separate note, the German presenter said socialism, like populism in the U.S., is not considered a dirty word. The equity of chances in health care, education, work opportunities in Germany and also across Europe is free. It is not considered socialism, unlike in the United States.

Day 2

Plenary Discussion III

Strategic Thinking: Outside the Box or Out of Bounds?

The second day of discussions was held at the offices of the Bundestag. Participants were presented with the question of whether chaos and self-determination can be successful strategies in geopolitics. The potential benefits and risks to such strategies were raised, including how each approach provides a country with more leverage over its competitors.

Many of the American and German participants argued that a reasonable degree of consistency and predictability in policies was critical to maintaining strong ties with allies and partners. However, some participants also voiced the merits and benefits of having some degree of unpredictability and that even allies should not take each other for granted.

Participants were also asked whether strategic solitude could serve as an effective approach for a country navigating today’s political landscape. Additional questions participants considered included whether a global power can remain so without the long-accepted economic and diplomatic conventions that have sustained the post-World War II and post-Cold War era.

Plenary Discussion IV

Unfinished Business: Assessing 1999 NATO Expansion and the EU’s Evolution

The working groups discussed the history of the European Union and its establishment. Participants noted that there remain diverging interests and policies given the important distinction between the political and fiscal unions. One German stressed that a lack of a common budget makes it much more difficult to fulfill political projects. There was a broad consensus on the critical role Germany plays in the EU but also how important the EU is for Germany.

The group largely agreed there are substantial political benefits for EU member states and that the complex bailout systems during the financial crisis can also provide a positive cost-benefit analysis for member states. Participants largely agreed that strong integration was an ultimate prerequisite for a common EU currency.

Yet, participants also recognized that there can be differences in EU values and identity across member states. The discussion highlighted that the interests driving EU integration are not simply economic, but the desire for sustainable peace remains an underlying current.

Against the backdrop of a new German Defense Minister (Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer) taking office and positioning herself in the “2 percent debate” in her first newspaper interviews, the working group discussed the state of NATO and respective perspectives on the transatlantic balance of labor in providing security in the framework of NATO. What came out very clearly in the working group conversation is that U.S. and German national discourses on the topic are rather disconnected and that there is not a lot of understanding regarding expectations and considerations on the other side.

One German discussant made the point that the insistence of the American side on the “2 percent” goal failed to address the fundamental question of capabilities. The real question should rather be: What capabilities do we really need? American discussants intervened, stressing that “2 percent” served as a symbol. The U.S. simply wants to see more burden sharing and more commitment from its European allies, especially in light of a dynamic threat landscape. They stressed that the capabilities question could be answered easily: the “shopping list” is long from an American point of view. Thus, the capabilities question posed by the German side was labeled as a distraction.

American participants, moreover, went back to the history of NATO and the U.S. commitment to transatlantic security to explain that Europe and the Atlantic had always only been one part of the equation for the U.S. side: Asia and the Pacific were just as important for American security, arguably even more so than Europe. In light of an ascendant and increasingly assertive China, it is all the more important to invest more resources in this theater and let Europe take care of its “homework” vis-à-vis the threat from the east. The American discussants pointed to Poland and the Baltic states as being cognizant of this duty.

While German and American participants did not really reach common ground on this question of military spending and German responsibility for and in NATO, they agreed on the urgent need to devote more attention and resources to new technology challenges, especially in the field of cybersecurity. Finally, there was a consensus that irrespective of the current differences, NATO has demonstrated its value over the last decades and that Americans and Europeans should work together to preserve and strengthen the Atlantic alliance.

Plenary Discussion V

Trading Places: The Economics of Friendship

In light of current events and trade tensions around the globe, the discussion focused primarily on protectionist trade policies. The German presenter began the session with a broad overview of the WTO and its role of facilitating the smooth flow of trade between nations as predictably and freely as possible.

The presenter explained the typical dispute resolution process, and how the United States’ actions to block replacements for retiring judges has affected the appeals process, adding that this strategy could potentially dismantle our global trading system, and the WTO as we know it, for the long term.

The American presenter homed in on U.S. trade policy and the WTO’s special treatment of major emerging markets, namely China. The U.S. Administration has called for several reforms that would level the playing field among countries. The American presenter insisted that the U.S. (particularly Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer) is very methodical about our free trade agreements and tariffs.

The presenter cited the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement as an example of a successful renegotiated trade agreement, as it includes incredibly strong labor agreements, environmental agreements, and updates to reflect an increasingly digital economy. The presenter added that while the U.S. appreciates that 232 tariffs (on aluminum and steel) are disruptive, they are not imposed to hurt or punish our allies. Rather, they are intended to prevent those industries from disappearing completely in the U.S. The American presenter said that it would be more constructive if all parties would approach the issue from a “good faith” perspective rather than one of suspicion.

A German said that from their perspective, it seems as if during the last few years the U.S. has taken a shotgun approach to tariffs and abused its authority under the guise of national security, which is why it is easier to approach negotiations with skepticism rather than optimism and good faith. The group debated what that might mean, and how national security is an overly broad justification for imposing tariffs. If tariffs are really just being used as leverage in negotiating tactics, this could create a bad precedent for the world trade order.

An American talked about the politics of trade policy and noted that in the U.S., this is an issue that doesn't necessarily divide people among party lines, but is mostly regional and based on local economic impact. However, the “America First” message resonates with many Trump supporters, and even those who are negatively impacted for the moment (whether short term or long term remains to be seen) believe that the U.S., and they, might get a better deal when all is said and done.

The group collectively agreed that free trade is important, but subsidies from certain countries can create an uneven playing field and impact global competitiveness. Each of our countries acts in its own interests, but it is important to find mutual benefits among allies. And, a full-scale trade war would not be in anyone's best interest. When it comes to U.S. trade policy, the world is learning to expect the unexpected.

It became clear relatively quickly in the working group that the participants share a high level of support for free trade. After discussing the trade dispute between the United States and the EU regarding Boeing and Airbus and referring to the 15-year WTO process, one participant asked whether such conflicts should be resolved within the WTO in the future or whether other solutions are needed to resolve such issues.

This was followed by a passionate discussion about the auto industry. While Trump had raised the question of whether auto imports are a matter of national security, an American participant pointed out that already today a significant number of Americans owe their work to the German automotive industry within the U.S. and that many cars are produced in the U.S. for export.

Regions such as South Carolina and Tennessee were highlighted, for example, as they would face considerable difficulties without the commitment of the German automotive industry. It was also pointed out that the current debate in the U.S. was viewed by some as rather populist.

The reason for the heated debate was probably that the topic is relevant for many swing states and therefore played a role in the election. One participant asked why the U.S. does not export more of its own cars, whereupon it was mentioned that the cars from the U.S. are usually bigger, do not attach so much importance to ecological aspects, and do not always meet the tastes of other countries. The discussion about tariffs on German cars was then questioned. One participant mentioned that this probably had only a short-term effect. In addition, this would lead to countermeasures, for example in relation to Google, Amazon, or Facebook.

One German participant expressed concerns about whether there would be more cooperation at the economic level in the future if environmental aspects were not sufficiently acknowledged by the United States. In addition,

a German participant pointed out that, in his view, it would be problematic if the U.S. increasingly used economic sanctions to “punish” a country rather than advance its economic interests.

Some participants expressed concern that such actions could be met with stronger resistance in the EU in the future. The majority of participants agreed with the view that in an increasingly competitive environment, there is a need for resilient regulations and corresponding institutions for enforcement.

Day 3

Plenary Discussion VI

Strategic Competition: Are the U.S. and Europe Really Ready for China?

During the course of the conversation on China, the group as a whole determined that relationships between Germany and China and between the U.S. and China are quite complex. China is increasingly taking on a leadership role in the global economy. But at the same time, there are several concerns when it comes to intellectual property theft and trade, and the country’s values.

There is a mentality that both Germans and Americans agreed on when it comes to China: “We can’t live with them, we can’t live without them.”

Both Germans and Americans at the conference concluded that there are major issues when it comes to China not only with IP theft, but also on cyber and data protection, and the country’s moral standing. China does not have a good record on human rights, civil rights, and democracy. On issues like climate change, the group agreed that China needs to “do its part.”

Chinese tariffs were also a big topic of discussion among the group. While the President has the ability to place tariffs on Chinese goods, it is not with the support of most members of Congress, and even the majority of Americans do not agree with the tariffs. Americans rely on Chinese goods and for their support in order to be financially and economically successful.

Tariffs on Chinese goods mean increased prices for farmers and businesses in the U.S. It is the American voter who has to pick up the tab for the tariffs.

Germany’s relationship with China might be even more complicated. While the German economy has benefited tremendously due to its relationship with China, the Germans in the group took major issue with some of the concerns listed above, including China’s moral standing in the world and its role in IP theft and data protection.

On the one hand, China is clearly a rival, but on the other hand, it is encouraging countries like the United States and Germany to step up and “up our game.”

The group concluded that China has to be a partner with Germany and the United States. Their current model might be dangerous, the group said, because while their economy is advancing and growing, their failure to address human rights issues could be detrimental to its success. It is our challenge – in the U.S. and Germany – to address it. But the question is how.

In a separate group discussion on China, the participants agreed that China is a competitor for both the U.S. and Europe. The question raised in that context was: Can we compete with China? It was mentioned that China is not new as a threat, but the West shouldn’t underestimate China anymore.

The Americans in the group had hoped that China would become more liberal after joining the World Trade Organization in the early 2000s. But there is no level playing field, as market access is still unfair. Hence, the perception of China and its international role has changed drastically.

It was felt that China tries to divide, and its priority is to weaken the West. The Chinese regime is doing this very strategically (with formats like 16+1 and the case of German company Kuka). China is not only copying technology anymore, it is also inventing a lot on its own – often used to control its people by surveillance.

The participants in this group emphasized that no matter what the U.S. does, China will be a superpower economically and diplomatically. The task rather is how to integrate the Chinese and how to engage them more in multilateral affairs. Arguing with China on a world stage has become more difficult, as the WTO and other formats like the United Nations are not as functional anymore.

A question was raised among the group about the perception of the U.S.-China trade negotiations. The Europeans feared that any agreement could change the U.S. focus on tariffs to Europe again. Therefore, a compromise might not be the best solution for Europe. The group then asked why it was not possible to join forces against China. Doing that is probably too late, as free trade agreements would have been the answer, the group assessed.

The participants asked finally if the U.S. is willing to do enough to make tough decisions on China, because as democracies there is a lower threshold for pain than in Chinese society. Possibly 5G could become a factor as its impacts on a new digital transformation phase might challenge China's influence.

Plenary Discussion VII

Power Adaption: Is a Green Economy Conducive to Energy Security?

The threat of climate change is real, and there will be massive global repercussions if the world doesn't act fast. Americans and Europeans are clearly struggling with how to deal with their visions for energy in the future, the groups discussed.

There was agreement among the Germans and Americans that we need to become net zero in emissions by 2050 to avoid catastrophe, and move out of using coal by 2030. Germans and Americans both remarked that they are seeing a big push towards gas and renewables vs. coal.

The U.S. is seen as a net energy importer, while the Germans and Europe as a whole are net energy exporters. The Germans told the Americans that climate change is a really major issue for Europeans. They commented on President Trump's decision to leave the Paris climate agreement, which they called "really disturbing." They agreed that when it comes to climate change, Germany is on the "right way."

There was also a discussion about energy production vs. energy consumption. The burden is on European integrated grids, but Germany, the group said, is still on its way to "figuring it out."

Day 4

Plenary Discussion VIII

Shadows of the Past: The Politics of History and Memory

The participants began with a broad question of whether history is told fully and sufficiently in both countries. The German participants reflected on their country's history and said that personal narratives have not been elevated enough and that certain aspects of German history can get overshadowed.

Participants agreed that Germany's role and responsibility in the Holocaust presented a responsibility for leading the remembrance and commitment to never forget. As one German participant emphasized, the singularity of the Holocaust presents Germany with a particular responsibility to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.

With regard to U.S. history, American participants offered a range of reflections. One participant noted that the United States can fall short of fully acknowledging past mistakes, because it can contradict the narrative of American dominance and greatness. Another American participant added that the attitude that it was not my responsibility, nor my actions, makes it challenging to have a constructive dialogue on repairing past or systemic injustices.

Some American participants offered that the United States lacks a culture of remembrance and commented that Germany seems to have made more progress on acknowledging and healing from its history.

The group closed by exchanging thoughts on the objective of remembrance culture and the lessons Germany and the United States can each learn from each other. Lastly, participants considered the policy actions that could be taken to address the historical issues raised.

Björn Böhning, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, spoke with participants about "What Is Germany's Place in the Shifting World of AI?" Mr. Böhning's remarks helped inform participants about how Germany and the EU view the competitive and quickly evolving landscape of AI.

Plenary Discussion IX

Like This: Technology, Society, and the Future of Free Speech

The discussion on data protection, privacy, and free speech led to an exchange of strong opinions and lively debate. Participants argued whether more or less regulation of technology companies was necessary to ensure people had sufficient control of the use of their data and acknowledgement of where their data was being transferred.

The impact of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on data privacy regulation was raised numerous times by both Germans and Americans. An American participant questioned whether the policies on data and privacy emanating from Germany and the EU were disproportionately targeted at American technology companies. Another American participant said that Germany's demonstrated leadership on data issues was appreciated and necessary.

Participants discussed how different degrees of public trust in government and in business can affect attitudes toward data collection and privacy. German and American participants pointed out that artificial intelligence needs data to scale, and concerns over privacy can limit data collection and stifle advancements in AI. China's progress in AI and collection of data was also raised as an area of concern. There was an overall agreement that the collection and use of individual data should be transparent and "human-centric."

The need for skilled labor and greater workforce development to fully realize the potential of AI was also raised. Examples of cooperation in AI and emerging technologies between U.S. and German governments and businesses were also cited as mutually beneficial growth opportunities.

Claudia Dörr-Voss, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, was a luncheon speaker and shared her views on transatlantic trade policies. The discussion covered challenges in the global

trading system, including protectionist policies and punitive tariffs. A German participant asked about Nord Stream 2, while an American participant asked about Huawei and Germany's approach on 5G, telecommunications, and cybersecurity.

Plenary Discussion X

Southern Exposure: Does the Developed World Forget the Other Hemisphere?

For this discussion, participants analyzed how Germany, Europe, and the United States have engaged in developing countries, including Africa and Southeast Asia. An American presenter pointed out that Africa has been called the "Forgotten Continent," while another American noted the different approaches the United States and China have adopted toward Africa.

Some participants emphasized the importance of viewing developing countries as partners and not simply as aid recipients. A German participant spoke about China's development assistance beyond Asia and Africa, including heavy investment in Latin America. The question of whether aid distribution should be conditional led to an active debate among participants.

Participants considered how Germany and the United States could more effectively engage in development support, including telecommunications and digital infrastructure, in emerging economies. The group also discussed the role of international institutions and the impact of new regional banks or financial institutions serving as an additional resource for developing economies.

The day concluded with a dinner at Haus Huth and remarks by **Steffen Kampeter**, CEO of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA). Mr. Kampeter provided an overview of the transatlantic agenda for 2020.

Plenary Discussion XI

Political Potables: Prognosticating Elections in 2020 and 2021

It is fair to say that in this discussion there was widespread agreement among the Americans and Germans that there really is no prognosticating when it comes to the future of our respective countries' elections.

Anything goes. Donald Trump has clearly changed the playing field. His historic election in 2016 was a reckoning. The 2018 midterm election was certainly an answer to his presidency.

Despite the growing concerns over his presidency, including a long-winded investigation into ties between the Kremlin and the President's campaign – he is still fairly popular among his base.

National elections certainly do have important international consequences. There was concern among some of the German participants over the United States' commitment to allies like Germany. Should Trump be re-elected, will he uphold his allegiance to NATO and other international agreements?

The current Democratic presidential contenders facing Trump have vowed to return the United States to normalcy. Will there be another blue wave in 2020? Only time will tell. The world is watching closely.

A German participant shared how elections in Germany tend to focus heavily on the party's position more so than the individual candidate. He said he noticed in the United States, it is much more about building a narrative about the candidate and his/her life story. A few Germans agreed that is one difference they had noticed, too.

Day 5

Plenary Discussion XII

An Addled Atlantic? Finding the West's Place in the World

In our final plenary discussion, the Americans and Germans addressed crucial questions about the future of the transatlantic relationship: How will Europe and the United States address the global challenges we face? Is it possible to find common ground between the West and its challengers?

The shared history of countries on either side of the Atlantic runs deep, and it is in Germany's and America's best interests to find a way forward together to allow transatlantic relations to remain strong in the future, one of the working groups discussed.

There is immense value in cooperating and adapting historical lessons; many economic and cultural values are shared. While nationalism is on the rise, it is important to consider evolving relationships that go beyond bilateral ones and include strategically thinking about the dynamics between a U.S.-German relationship versus a U.S.-EU one. A strong partner yields a more successful relationship.

Going forward, one must consider who is a trustworthy partner in trade and meet as equals when negotiating, engaging frequently and cooperating on a global level. Each side must bring value to continue a strong economic partnership across one common market. Transatlantic relations are inherently driven by economic bases; there is simply too much business that transcends borders to sever ties due to strained political relations.

The economy is driven by human relationships interacting on a personal level. Without that, the global economy falters. Given the strong economic relationship between Germany and the U.S., it is important to view it with a long-term perspective. The influence of major companies with long-lasting economic interests continually proves stronger than shortsighted political maneuverings. Strategic interests facilitate transatlantic relationships; it is crucial to foster the alliance and prevent its deterioration.

Some ways in which the transatlantic alliance may be buttressed include furthering the exchange of ideas and encouraging more Germans and Americans to study abroad, across the Atlantic rather than farther afield in rising Asia. Americans tend to be insular and domestic, and would benefit from more exposure to other cultures and experiences abroad. Tourism ought to be promoted more widely. Embassies might consider opening their doors to foster further engagement within their communities.

While the transatlantic relationship is fragile at present, it is built upon a firm foundation. Through steady alliances and respect of cultural differences, there is a way forward despite the current political climate. Interpersonal relationships will be paramount in keeping trade open and ideas flowing across the Atlantic.

In a separate working group, the Americans and Germans focused on the challenges between the U.S. and Europe, and why it is rather difficult to find a joint narrative.

"It is not all about a single person, it is important that the administrations work together," one of the Young Leaders said.

It was pointed out that there is certainly an "America First" ideology that is dampening the progress of the transatlantic relationship. "America First" is a phrase mostly used as an inner political strategy to satisfy the base, the group determined.

Some of the Germans said Germany is not promoting “Germany First” because Germany is “not big enough to be able to be successful on its own – so it is not a valid strategy for Germany.”

Another narrative the group determined is that it’s not “America First” but rather “America first and Europe second” meaning that it is not a win-win situation, but rather “I win, you lose.”

The group concluded that while some Europeans and Americans share the same values and want to work closely together, we just don’t know how feasible that is in the current political climate.

CONCLUSION

The last day included a discussion on what participants would like to see in transatlantic relations 10 years from now. Participants highlighted a range of key issues ripe for greater cooperation, including more educational and cultural exchanges; a new EU-U.S. Free Trade Agreement; and more effective communication between the U.S. and German governments and also between the government and the general public, as it relates to policies affecting both countries. The discussion concluded with a shared commitment that participants will contribute to advancing bilateral and transatlantic relations.

By the end of the conference, the Young Leaders agreed that the weeklong discussions provided new perspectives and deeper understanding of various issues the transatlantic relationship faces.

Over the course of constructive debates and shared meals, the Young Leaders were able to build lifelong relationships and mutual respect. As the Americans and Germans learned more about their friends across the Atlantic, the conference was also an opportunity to hear diverging views between Americans and Germans.

The Young Leaders Conference demonstrates the value of people-to-people exchanges in strengthening bilateral relations and the critical role of dialogue in overcoming differences. Within a few months, a number of participants had already reunited across the United States and Germany, signaling that the momentum and relationships built in Berlin will continue for years to come.



American Delegation

Amanda Critchfield Blum

Communications Director
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and
Urban Affairs

Kiara Boone

Deputy Director of Community Education
Equal Justice Initiative

Kyle Jillian Burgess

Technology Specialist
Deloitte

Autumn Carulli

Channel Partner Manager
SEEGRID

Lawrence A. Darby, IV

LNG Trader, Gazprom Marketing & Trading
Gazprom

Christopher Ehlinger

Management Consultant
Wilson Perumal & Company

Abbas Elegba

Director
Deutsche Bank

Steven Robert Goocey

Organic Farm Owner and Operator

Robert Taylor Hall

Senior Director of Public Affairs
State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE)

Skiffington Holderness

Special Projects Director
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mariam Khan

Congressional Reporter and Producer
ABC News

Robert M. Kimmitt, Jr.

Counsel
Kirkland & Ellis LLP

Ryan Edward Mackenzie

Member & Deputy Majority Whip
Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Danique Masingill

Founder and President
Leashes of Valor

John M. Montgomery II

Head of Marketing Excellence, Nutrition & Health
BASF Corporation

Bimal Patel

Deputy Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury

Andrew Eaton Phillips

Advocacy & Government Team Member
LinkedIn

Kathleen Rudis

Staff Director & Tax and Economic Counsel
U.S. Senate

Christina Thomas

Counsel to SEC Commissioner Elad L. Roisman
U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission

Elizabeth C. Urstadt

Co-Founder, Business Development
PartnerVine LLC

Julie Yang

Policy Director
National Center for APEC

German Delegation

Moritz von Bar

Policy Officer
German Federal Chancellery

Jens Brandenburg

Member of Parliament
Deutscher Bundestag

Magdalene Böbel

Marketing Manager, Human Machine Interface
Infineon Technologies AG

Tanja Dzukowski

Manager, Operations Office
Manpower

Raphael Eisenmann

Associate Director
Hering Schuppener Consulting

Askold Falkenberg

Executive Assistant to the Head of
Military Aircraft
Airbus Defense and Space

Sonja Gillert

Editor, Foreign Desk
WELT and *WELT am Sonntag*

Sören Heitkamp

Policy Officer for EU Coordination
German Federal Foreign Office

Christian-Hendrik Heusermann

Advisor, Parliamentary and Cabinet Affairs
German Federal Foreign Office

Matthias Hilble

Vice President, Office of the Chairman of the
Supervisory Board
Deutsche Bank AG

Moritz Holzgraefe

Head of Governmental Affairs
Axel Springer SE

Steven Höfner

Desk Officer, European Affairs/North America
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

Raphaël Métais

Policy Officer
German Federal Chancellery

Katharina Metzler

German Federal Office of Bundeswehr Equipment,
Information Technology, and In-Service Support

Benjamin Nägele

Director of EU Affairs
B'nai B'rith International

Patrick Nepper

Product Manager
Google

Josefina Nungesser

Director, Trend and Innovation Scouting
Germany Trade & Invest

Tobias Radon

Fighter Squadron Company Commander
German Air Force, Ministry of Defense

Oke Röhe

Senior Economist
Deutsche Bundesbank

Sabrina Schärf

Desk Officer, Policy Planning Staff
Federal Foreign Office

Mitja Schulz

Policy Advisor
German Association of the Automotive Industry (VDA)

Thomas Seidel

Deputy Head of Division 20
Office of the President of the Federal
Republic of Germany

Eva Siegrist

Senior Brand Manager, Global RCC/IO Portfolio
Pfizer Inc

Maike Thier

Policy Officer
German Federal Chancellery

Laurenz Tholen

Associated Partner
Noerr LLP

Marie-Therese Vohrer

Senior Expert, Organizational Development
and Process Management
BMW Group

Maria Wienker

Personal Advisor and Spokesperson to Dorothee Bär,
Minister of State for Digital Affairs
German Federal Chancellery

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