



“The Hamburg Summit: China meets Europe”

Speech at the Opening Dinner

by

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Prime Minister Wen, Mayor von Beust,
President Dreyer, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is thirty and one years ago that I for the first time have been a guest of the Chinese government; at that time Chou En-lai was my host; and Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping gave me long conversations. Tonight I am deeply thankful that my home city of Hamburg is giving me the opportunity to reciprocate the hospitality and the generosity which I have received in China – then and later on and again and again.

This Hamburg Summit, as I understand, is in the main dedicated to a meeting of minds on transnational economic relations, exchange of experiences, of questions, also of fears, of hopes, of prognoses and proposals. In my humble capacity as a simple elderly citizen I am convinced that such pragmatic and matter-of-fact-minded discussions between East and West are an urgent necessity. Because being economic competitors, which the Chinese and the Europeans indeed are, we do as well dearly need cooperation and mutual fairness. We do need mutual understanding.

It gives me great satisfaction to welcome our Chinese guests tonight and to say a special welcome to Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Prime Minister, it is indeed an honour for us and at the same time a merit of yours that you have come in order to participate in our deliberations on commerce and trade and traffic and financing.

The almost unbelievable economic upswing that the People's Republic of China has achieved since the late 1970's I consider it to be an outstanding phenomenon that rarely ever has occurred elsewhere in mankind's history. That a nation, which after several millenniums of its own civilizational evolution and history, a nation which has severely suffered from foreign oppression and from decay during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, that the Chinese nation all of a sudden does emerge as an economic

giant and at the same time was capable to improve the quality of life of its citizens, is in my view a real miracle. The Chinese miracle does deserve high respect by us Europeans. Of course I am well aware of the hundred social problems which the enormous economic change and economic growth have presented to you – the infrastructural and environmental problems, also moral and political problems. Nevertheless, China does present a stunning example for all the other developing countries.

I do know it is difficult to govern a country of 80 million inhabitants. But China is fifteen times larger than Germany – to govern China is much more difficult and demanding than to govern Germany. I understand, Prime Minister, you have a complex agenda on your table, a complex task. But I for one, I am confident in regard of the Chinese leadership abilities to deal with their predicaments.

My confidence is founded in the cautious prudence of Chinese leaders which I have observed over the last three decades – thanks to Deng Xiaoping's example. Piecemeal economic and social engineering in domestic affairs plus cautious prudence as well in foreign affairs. Whether about Hongkong, Macao or Taiwan, about Iran, Iraq or North Korea, you have operated with a clear will for moderation, for peace and for compromise. The other world powers have no legitimation to criticize China.

When I grew up as a boy attending school in Hamburg in the 1920's my city did have some trade and traffic with Chinese ports – but for the little boy China was as far away as the moon at night. Since then the number of human beings living on this globe has more than tripled. Mankind numbered 2000 millions at that time, tomorrow mankind will count almost 7000 millions! But the globe and the space on its surface has not enlarged! On the contrary: The space per person has shrunk into less than one third – and it is still shrinking. We are getting ever closer to each other – and modern transportation and communication technologies do enormously add to the shrinking of space and of distance. This ongoing process makes us into closeby neighbours.

My personal wish to our Chinese guests tonight and as well to the European and German guests is this: Let us understand that we are neighbours! Let us like to be neighbours! Let us strive for good neighbourly relations! Because the closer we cooperate the greater the benefit for both sides!

Thank you for listening