

GERMAN UNIFICATION SYMPOSIUM  
THE ROLE OF GERMANY AND EUROPE IN THE WORLD:  
15 YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE  
EAST-WEST CONFLICT

Symposium at the GHI, October 6, 2004. Speaker: Markus Meckel (German Bundestag). Convener: Christof Mauch (GHI). Made possible by a grant from E.ON AG, North America.

A German Unification Symposium in recognition of October 3 as the "Day of German Unity" has now become an annual tradition at the GHI. This year's event was the fourth of its kind at the GHI. In previous years, the GHI has been able to feature distinguished figures such as Jens Reich, Joachim Gauck, Michael Mertes, and Regine Hildebrandt as featured speakers. This year, as in 2003, a generous grant from the E.ON corporation enabled us to bring an equally eminent speaker to the GHI. Markus Meckel, presently a member of the German Bundestag and the foreign policy spokesperson for the SPD in the Bundestag, served as foreign minister of the German Democratic Republic and represented the GDR at the "two plus four" negotiations that led to reunification. He presented a talk entitled "Die Rolle Deutschlands und Europas in der Welt – 15 Jahre nach dem Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts" [The Role of Germany and Europe in the World: 15 Years after the End of the East-West Conflict]. A simultaneous translation made his talk accessible to both English and German speakers in the audience.

Meckel began his assessment of united Germany's role in a changing world with a reminder of the twin poles of post-war German foreign policy: European integration and the transatlantic alliance. He took stock of the remarkable recent successes such as EU expansion and the establishment of a single European currency. On the other hand, Meckel provided insight into many of the new developments in international relations that have resulted from the war on terrorism, including the tensions that have emerged over the American-led invasion of Iraq. In the aftermath of the Madrid bombing, Meckel dismissed any notion that Europe does not take seriously its central stake in the war on terrorism, and he regretted that NATO was not used as a forum where differences could be aired and compromise sought.

Taking stock of related factors in the changing international situation, Meckel commented on Turkey's application for EU membership as well as on evolving relations with Russia in light of EU expansion and the struggle against terrorism. For Meckel, central to the complexity of both

of these issues is the continued quest for what he called a “common set of values.” He emphatically noted that Russia’s conduct in regard to Chechen separatism continues to show that these common values are elusive, despite his recognition that Russia and Europe are partners in combating international terrorism.

Meckel took time to answer questions from the audience, most of which concerned German-American relations and the war in Iraq. He concluded with a wish that transatlantic relations could be both strengthened and refocused. Although on that October day, no one in the audience could have anticipated how significant the term “values” would become in the wake of the American election, when reconsidering Meckel’s judicious consideration of long-term trends, one wonders if a “common set of values” might be a subject for discussion if transatlantic relations are reassessed along the lines he suggests.

*Jonathan Skolnik*