

European Dinner

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you for the European Dinner which is meant to start a European Forum in Munich.

Let me specially thank President Christian Wulff and former Austrian chancellor Dr. Schüssel for coming and sharing their views with us. I would also like to greet Dr. Ingo Friedrich, former Vice President of European Parliament, Head of the European Economic Senat Association who will moderate and coordinate questions. Also many thanks to Dr. Wolfgang Ischinger and his team for supporting our initiative for starting a European Strategic Forum and thanks to the members of the Founding Committee and Sponsors of this Dinner. We are very happy, that so many important and distinguished guests of the Security Conference, representatives of the Press and Family Entrepreneurs and friends have joined us tonight.

If you follow the media, you are not sure whether Europe is in a crisis, whether it is falling apart, of whether it is the center of peace, human rights and hope, surrounded by regions who are more obviously passing turbulent times. Henry Kissinger once said on a dinner of Wolfgang Seibold here during the Security Conference "if this is a crisis let me have it".

So there really is confusion in the public opinion about the strength, the value, the vision and the mission of the European Union.

On the other hand, the European Family Entrepreneurs (I am the Bavarian Chairman of this Association) who account for more than 70 % of the work force in Europe are interested for their own and their employee's sake in a strong, safe, friendly and peaceful Europe and are also more optimistic about it, than most of the things you can read and hear.

And this is what has led us to see a need for an additional independent Strategic Forum which allows raising important strategic topics with regard to the European Union economically and politically.

We also think that we Europeans are on a very good track on many fronts. However we need to better communicate and to have more dialogue and best practice also outside the political parties, lobby and official agendas. I am therefore very happy the Munich Security Conference is supporting this idea and that such high profiled speakers and guests have come together.

We would like to give this evening a common theme regarding our coming lectures and discussions: Europe stands for peace and hope surrounded by neighbors that in difficult situations.

I wish you all a pleasant and inspiring evening and apart from dinner sufficient food for discussion. Following the first course we will listen to former Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel and following the main course we will hear Bundespräsident Christian Wulff. The speeches can be downloaded from our website as of tomorrow. After the speeches feel free to ask questions.

Thank you.