

LONDON

GEORG BOOMGARDEN

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London's loss will be Madrid's gain

SPEECH OF THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR GEORG BOOMGARDEN DUE TO THE LEAVE OF THOMAS B. STEHLING, HEAD OF KAS LONDON

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Thomas Stehling and a special welcome to the Right Honorable David Cameron, International and bilateral relations have become rather different. Under the first Elisabeth, foreign Ambassadors tried to convince the Queen to take a husband from their sovereign's family – unsuccessfully as we know.

Today relations are much broader and encompass the whole society far beyond diplomatic or government contacts.

Political parties have become the cornerstone for the transformation of the political will of the people into a coherent and well devised policy. Think tanks have become indispensable instruments for the deliberative power of representative democracy.

Political problem solving has to cope with the fact that all politics may be local, but most solutions need global approaches.

So it would be absurd to have a debate confined to the parochial borders. The big challenges: local workplaces depend on global markets, local air, water and climate depend on global climate change and pollution, and local security depends on global peace and security.

This is why the dialogue between parties and think tanks, between politicians and researchers needs an international dimension. And the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is a long-standing platform for this dialogue.

Embassies don't mix up with party to party relations, but it is a privilege to have experienced and resourceful allies in the important task of fostering and strengthening bilateral relations with their host country on the level of society and parties.

I am referring to the representations of our political foundations in many parts of the world, and today in particular to the London Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the representative of the Foundation in London, Mr Thomas Stehling.

Our German system of political foundations is rather unique throughout the world. They are each affiliated to a political party, but financed mostly by the taxpayer's money, by the way strictly proportional to the appeal every party has to the voters. The six existing political foundations play an important role in the citizens' political education inside our country, in strengthening the understanding of our democratic institutions and fundamental values, and in carrying forward the debate on key political, social and economic issues of our time.

The work of the political foundations is, however, not limited to Germany, and most of you who have come today to bid farewell to Thomas Stehling are much more familiar with the foundations' work abroad, and, of course, here in London. Outside Germany, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is currently running over 200 projects in around 120 countries on four continents with 81 field offices.

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The London Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation was established almost 30 years ago and thus will celebrate its 30th anniversary next year. May be this could be a good occasion to meet again in our premises.

During his term of office, Thomas Stehling brought together a strong and extensive network of contacts which brought together politicians, journalists, academics, representatives of companies and active members of our civil societies.

It co-operates with parties – and more particularly, of course, with the Conservative Party – as well as with think tanks, universities and research institutions. It organises bilateral visits, lectures and panel discussions. The meetings between British and German members of parliament have been especially helpful in forging closer relations and better understanding of our respective viewpoints and policies. And without going into details I feel there is still some work to be done.

Thomas Stehling and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation have very much focussed on initiating and intensifying a dialogue on the future of Europe.

However critically some may look at the European Union in its present state, it is a fact that none of its member state can meet the global challenges of our time on its own. We need a strong, efficient and united Europe, and we need Britain to play a strong role within the European Union.

Thomas Stehling's office has played an important role not only in the United Kingdom, but also in Ireland and especially in the Nordic states and the other littoral states of the Baltic Sea. The London Office has covered these countries since Thomas Stehling's arrival here in 2001. One of Thomas Stehling's most remarkable achievements - and perhaps not such an obvious one for those of us who are more concerned with the United Kingdom and British-German relations - is his contribution to multilateral cooperation amongst the countries bordering the Baltic Sea.

This includes the Scandinavian countries as well as the Baltic states and also Poland and Russia. His success in inter-connecting partners all around the Baltic Sea is not surprising for those who know that one of his foremost talents is networking. During over four years in Manila, from 1996 to 2001, as the Foundation's Chief Officer for Media Projects in East and South-East Asia, he built the biggest network amongst newspapers in the Asian region, promoting not only the exchange of news material and stories, but also high standards in journalists' training and an exchange of expertise.

In this, he could draw upon his previous experience in managing positions in one of Germany's largest regional radio corporations, the NDR, with a shorter spell in 1986 as Director of TV and Radio at RIAS Berlin, the prominent broadcasting station set up after WW II in the American Sector of Berlin. He was not only associated with NDR for over ten years, but also served on the boards of several other media bodies.

By the way we do not only share our Northern German origin but we also were at the same time at the University in Kiel – you in the law department, I doing geophysics. When I joined the foreign service shortly after that, you gained a lot of political experience in joining a member of Parliament, Karl Carstens, who later became our Federal President.

As Thomas Stehling is now leaving his London Office for Madrid, he can look back with pride and satisfaction on almost eight years of highly successful work. His networking has won him many friends, and he has brought many others together who will gratefully remember that it was Thomas Stehling who helped to forge the links between them.

Herr Stehling, you will be missed by many here in London. But London's loss will be Madrid's gain. I am certain that you will do a superb job as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's representative for Spain and Portugal. As a former Ambassador to Spain from 2003-2005 I know that you will work on very fertile ground.

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In conclusion, let me quote Mark Twain:
"Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest." Herr Stehling, you were even better than Mark Twain could have hoped: You did the right thing and you gratified so many people that there is no one left to be astonished. Many thanks for the excellent cooperation we have enjoyed over the past seven years. We wish you all the best for your future, both professionally and personally.