

Speed Networking Career Boost

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Motivational Speeches

London, November 22th, 2014

Thank you very much for inviting me to your conference. My name is Thorsten Geissler and I am the Director of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

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I have been asked to answer three questions:

1. Why have I accepted the offer to become Director of the Rule of Law Program SEE of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Behind this question there is another question. Why do you live in Romania?
2. Why should young Romanians who live abroad go back to Romania?
3. Which progress has been made in the justice system in the recent years?

So why do I work in my present capacity?

To understand this you must know my background. I grew up along the former inner German border in the Federal Republic. It was a free country, with democratic elec-

tions, respect for human rights, a free press, I could travel where I wanted etc. things that did not exist in the so-called former German Democratic Republic. And it was a prosperous country while in the East the standard of living was very low compared to ours. Already at that time my conviction was that democracy and freedom must be defended and this can only be done by people who work for this ideal and don't remain passive. So I joined the youth organization of the Christian Democratic Union and later the party because it stood for Transatlantic Relations and a strong NATO, European integration and social market economy which is based on catholic social teaching and protestant social ethics. And I became an active party member, was elected city councillor at the age of 22 and a member of the state parliament of Schleswig-Holstein at the age of 27. After some electoral periods as a state legislator I became a Senator in my home town the Hanseatic City of Lübeck. The title is confusing because a Senator in Germany is not a member of a house of parliament rather in the old hanseatic cities it is the head of one of the departments of the city administra-

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tion – a deputy mayor. In 2010 my term of office ended and I did not get re-elected because the majority in the city council had changed. A defeat but every defeat is also a great chance to do something new. I had always been in touch with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation but I had never lived abroad. When I went to grammar school I had turned down an offer to spend a year in the US and when I studied law I attended summer schools in other countries but never studied abroad – for personal reasons.

So I asked the foundation if they had a job offer for me and in fact there were several options. One of them was to become Director of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe. You must know that during my time as state legislator I was spokesman of my parliamentary party for justice policy. And as deputy mayor it was my job among others to ensure that the law was respected by the administration.

So what I do now is actually a continuation of what I always did but in a totally new environment and in a new context. And I had always liked to work for the rule of law, democracy, freedom and the respect for human and minority rights. And I will never lose my passion for this work.

Did I hesitate to move to Romania? Only for a short moment. I had been to many countries but never to Romania, but I had friends who had worked in your country. They all told me: You will like it. So I signed the contract. I never regretted this step. I like Bucharest, the old city which from spring to autumn is a very lively place, I like the parks of Bucharest, the great cultural life, the excellent shopping opportunities. And it is great to live as an ex-pat but this I don't need to tell you.

I must add that it is also fascinating to work in ten different countries although it is sometimes very stressful. But I consider my work meaningful because in all these coun-

tries in regard to the rule of law there is a great potential for improvement.

The second question: Why should people like you return to Romania?

My first answer is: your country needs you.

Romania is a country with a huge potential but this potential is not exploited. The country could be in a better shape. During electoral campaigns some politicians try to sell something that with a lot of good will can be described as a strategy or vision for Romania. But the results could be much better. Problems must not only be identified and discussed but also resolved.

We have the Program "Leaders for Justice" because we believe that there is a lack of leadership in your country. So we teach them leadership and management skills, things you don't learn at university. And we encourage them to use these skills. The motto of the program is "schimbarea"-change.

One of the biggest problems of Romania is that it has already lost many thousands of people, intelligent, willing to work hard, sometimes unconventional yet very creative.

The first response that I get when I ask someone why he or she has left or wants to leave is always: because we have better job opportunities abroad and can make more money.

The second response is: It's more fun to live in a city like London, Berlin or Amsterdam, there is more diversity. I can live the life I want to live, Romania as a society is too traditional.

Romania has a brain drain problem.

But I hope that this can be changed.

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I cannot promise you a well- paid job in Bucharest, Timisoara or Constanta. But I know that gifted and intelligent people like you have are sought after on the Romanian labour market and I have no doubt that you would find an interesting and challenging job in your own country. And salaries in Romania will grow especially for highly qualified people like you.

And you could help to modernize Romania's society thus also increasing its economic perspectives. The more open a society is, the more successful it is in economic terms because it is not at risk of losing highly talented people who in a highly conformist society are at risk to get marginalized.

When I see the thousands of young visitors who come to the screenings and discussions of our annual Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, when I look at their open-mindedness and enthusiasm then I know that this country still has a creative class that is determined to steer Romania in the right direction. But they are too few because many bright and open-minded Romanians have left their country.

I know, however, that Romanians who live abroad still care about their country. The queues in front of the embassies spoke for themselves.

And as someone who lives abroad and intends to live abroad for another few years I still know one thing for sure. The day will come when I will move back to Germany because that is my country, my people the country in which I truly feel at home.

And I have heard from many Romanians who moved back to their country, quite a few of them involuntarily because due the economic crisis in many countries they lost a job, "ok we had a great time abroad, but it's also great to be back to Romania, to live in your own country, in which people

speak your language, the country of your parents and grand-parents."

So I have some answers. Whether they convince you I don't know. And I must add. You only have one life. Live it in social responsibility but live it the way you want to live it.

Third question. Is there progress in the justice system?

Fortunately there is.

Romanians tell me that not that many years ago corruption was not considered a problem but a phenomenon that was more or less accepted by society.

A couple of years ago some people could do what they wanted to do without having to fear to be prosecuted.

This has changed.

Corruption is now widely considered a problem and many Romanians are no longer willing to accept it as a fact of life.

There are institutions that investigate cases of corruption and prosecute offenders, institutions like the DNA. And some high-ranking politicians that a couple of years ago enjoyed impunity have been sentenced and sent to prison.

So there is progress and all we need to do is to ensure that the progress that has already been made is irreversible – something you cannot take for granted and you have to ensure that further progress is made.

I have lived in Romania for four years now and I do not hesitate a single moment to call Romania a great country.

But Romania needs people like you.