Center for Strategic and International Studies

“The Marshall Plan at 70: What We Must Remember and What We Must Do for the Future”

Featuring:
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HEATHER A. CONLEY: Well, good morning again. Let me once again welcome you to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

My name is Heather Conley. I have the great privilege of directing our Europe research here.

And it is a great honor for me to be in close partnership for today’s event with our friends at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. And with us Dr. Karen Donfried, president of GMF.

What a perfect moment to talk about a historical moment 70 years ago, when Secretary of State George Marshall traveled to Harvard University to give an extraordinary speech in 1947. This speech was about creating an incredible assistance program for Europe, rebuilding Europe, and most importantly restoring Europe’s confidence. And it is an important moment for us to remember that Europe, for the United States, is our greatest foreign policy success.

There is no better person to help us commemorate this historic moment and give it application for today than German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs His Excellency Sigmar Gabriel. Minister Gabriel has been foreign minister since January, previously serving as federal minister for economic affairs and energy from 2013 to 2017, and prior to that serving as federal minister of the environment, nature conservation, and nuclear safety from 2005 to 2009. He has served as the chairman of the Social Democratic Party from 2009 to 2017.

We are delighted to welcome the foreign minister. After he gives his opening remarks, Dr. Donfried and I will join the minister on the stage for a conversation, and we look forward to welcoming your questions and answers at the end. With your applause, please join me in welcoming Foreign Minister Gabriel. (Applause.)

MINISTER SIGMAR GABRIEL: Heather Conley, Karen Donfried, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, thank you very much for inviting me to this conference.

And two days ago we had a big event in the Foreign Ministry in Germany together with the Atlantik-Brücke and with colleagues from the United States to remember this famous speech of George Marshall, 5th of June 1947. And when we started the preparations of the conference, it was the time where, when the new administration came in, some of the guys which surrounded the new U.S. administration discussed about Europe like something which was a Germany-driven conspiracy against the United States. And we thought it may be a good idea to show that the success of Europe was an American idea and in the American interest, not only for the sake of Germany or Europe. It was in the American interest. And so I think it’s the best time to remember what’s possible if Europe and the United States join hands.

I’m delighted to be here in Washington again, and not just because of the political meetings but also it gives me the opportunity to have a conversation with you this morning. Again, many thanks to the hosts, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the German Marshall Fund, for making this possible.

And thank you, also, that you gave me such a generous amount of time for my introductory remarks. Seriously, I’m not joking. I’m saying this because George Marshall was only given 11 minutes – (laughter) – when he held his famous speech in Harvard almost 70 years ago. Actually,
when I met Rex Tillerson yesterday, he showed me the original text of Marshall’s speech. Fascinating: a document of only four pages, but full of thinking that has so greatly influenced our world in a positive way. Sometimes we have a lot of pages and ideas, and the end it’s the opposite of good ideas. So Marshall is a good example that it’s not the question how long a speech is, but the quality of the content is what really matters.

I think it is very interesting that this important speech occupies a prominent spot in the Department of State. With this short speech, George Marshall launched a policy that reshaped our relation with the United States. The Marshall Plan is firmly rooted in this collective memory of Germany. It stands for the helping hand given by the U.S. to Germany, despite Germany having been responsible for so much violence and destruction. Instead of demanding reparations, the U.S. helped us to rebuild our economy. We are still immensely grateful in Germany for this.

But the plan’s importance goes way beyond the reconstruction of Germany. As Henry Kissinger put it, the speech marked a historic departure in American foreign policy. The Marshall Plan set the course. As my colleague Rex Tillerson told me yesterday, the U.S. could have gone home after the Second World War, but they decided to stay and got invested in Europe in the interest of the United States. This was an important and good decision, I believe.

We are also living in a decisive period today. No, dear fans of the Washington Wizards, I’m not referring to the NBA playoffs. (Laughter.) I am referring to our transatlantic partnership. I’m convinced we urgently need to renew this crucial transatlantic bond. Therefore, I think it would be smart to remember how Marshall helped to shape the world order that was so beneficial to the U.S. and Europe over the last seven decades.

First, George Marshall’s policy primarily had nothing to with altruism. It was a forward-looking policy, and a policy the U.S. adopted in pursuit of its own interest. As George Marshall put it, it is only logical that “the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world.” And as he then went to say that without this economic health, “there can be no political stability and no assured peace.”

Today we are in a situation where, in the U.S. and Europe and elsewhere in the world, we are discussing about our military defense spending, and of course it’s necessary. But if you go to the Iraq, to Somali(a), to Mali, to other parts where the crises and the civil wars are actually getting worse every day, you will hear from all the citizens that, of course, military actions are necessary to fight against IS, but to come to a stable and secure situation it’s necessary to give hope back to the people, especially to the young generation. And without economic development, without getting a better life or hope for a better life, nothing will be stable, and peace will not come back, and there will no sustainable situation.

So, although the Marshall Plan focused mainly on economic issues, its political intention was also very clear. Not only should the U.S. market be closely linked to European markets. In addition, the plan was meant to promote political ties between Europe(an) countries and with the U.S. So this is my second observation. Marshall knew that a strong and united Europe was in the interest of the United States. And it was in the interest of the U.S. to become involved in the world, not just through military alliances but also by creating a close transatlantic community based on common interests and common values.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are of course facing different challenges today than the world was facing during the times of George Marshall, but we are perhaps in a similar critical phase. The liberal
world order that Marshall contributed so much to is increasingly being called into question. Yesterday, we met some colleagues coming back from or coming from Beijing to Washington. They were at the conference on the One Road One Belt conference, invited by the Chinese president. And they told us that there was a map in the back of the Chinese president. The map showed where the One Belt One Road initiative should be implemented. It was, of course, China, India, Asia, Russia, Africa, Europe, but not the U.S. It was not part of the map. Maybe because he knows that there are rules in the United States which are different to those in China, but I would say our rules in Europe are also different.

And so what we can learn now is if the two biggest economies of the world, Europe and the United States, will cross their hands, and would join their hands, we can set the standards for the international order – not only in respect to the economic order of the world but, if we are failing, other will replace us. In the vacuum, Chinese ideas about the international order will come in. And so it’s absolutely necessary for us to come back to a common track, especially in the fields of economic, but not only in the field of economic. We should be ambitious enough to set the standards for the 21st century in economic issues, but also with the issue of Western ideas about human rights, democracy, freedom of speech, and others – against those ideas of antiliberal and authoritarian ideas in these countries.

Of course, economic balances are shifting. Asia, for example, has become a leading economic player. But we also have to realize that this world order is itself is no longer accepted by those countries. More countries than before are now demanding a greater voice. They are setting up international institutions that they think serve them better than those set up in New York and here in Washington 70 years ago. And we have to realize as well as that illiberal countries and systems are on the rise. So the question is, should we just stand by and watch this happening? Or should we do everything to make this world order fit for the 21st century?

I assume that George Marshall would have taken on this task with a lot of optimism. And he even suggests a starting point for us today. He said in his speech that the initiative must come from Europe. I believe, as a European, he was right – not only to wait what the American government was thinking or doing. We, as Europeans, we should act and we should go a step forward in the direction of the United States, but also to others in the world. For us, as Europeans, to take the initiative again in our transatlantic relations should tackle a few things at home in Europe.

First of all, we should not lean back now that Emmanuel Macron has won the elections in France – a victory I’m delighted about. This victory represents a huge opportunity for Europe, but it also means a great deal of responsibility for us. We should remember that 11 million voters in France voted for extreme right-wing, anti-European, anti-multilateral party, which was invited by Vladimir Putin some weeks ago. So it’s not over. We have to do a lot of things to give Emmanuel Macron support. His success is the success of Europe. If he is a failure, Le Pen could be really the next president of France. And then we will be in heavy troubles in the European Union.

We must now ensure that we strengthen Europe – and I mean all countries in the European Union – politically and economically. Germany, as a nation at the heart of Europe, will be expected to take on even more responsibility as we, as Germans, should be more willing to compromise. I am also convinced that we, Europeans, should not waste too much energy on internal wrangling. We must, instead, strengthen Europe so that we are able to assume greater international responsibility for peace and security. And Washington, but also Moscow and Beijing, should recognize that to speak with Europe is not the same then to speak with Germany.
Everybody wants to speak with my country because of our economic success. But the reality is, Europe is more than Germany. Europe is more than Germany plus France. Europe is very special, integrated region, where we have more small countries than bigger ones, and everybody has the same right. We are partners on the same eye level. And the world is changing. Asia is growing. Latin America is growing. Africa is growing. Europe is shrinking because we do know the theory of becoming – or getting children, but in practice it’s a little bit difficult in Europe today. Not, Nicole (sp), by you and me, but I have three daughters so I’ve done my job. (Laughter.) But even the strong Germany will not have a voice in the world of tomorrow if it’s not a common European voice. So we have to be integrated. And we ask our partners to have a fair look on the whole range of Europe, not only to one country.

We are doing quite a lot already. For example, the European Union is working hard in Mali to help strengthen the country’s government and fight terrorism there. Germany too has stepped up its international engagement. In recent weeks, I visited both Iraq and Somalia. In these countries, for example, we are helping to stabilize regions that have been devastated by ISIS and Al-Shabaab. Through means of stabilization and development aid, we are giving the local population better prospects for the future. And we are denying the terrorists their breeding grounds. On broad engagement, it is in part military, but it is just as much a civilian effort. Because the success of the Marshall Plan has taught us that promoting policy aims through civilian means, soft power, is at last as important as hard power.

That said, I also very much understand that the United States is asking Europe to invest more in its hard power, also by increasing its contributions to NATO military capabilities. This effort is already underway. Germany is spending more on defense and has increased its – in 2017 military budget by nearly 10 percent. But we must not pretend that more military spending will automatically bring about more security and more peace. And I personally think, to lower the military defense and to decrease the spending for humanitarian aid and international cooperation is not the right way to do it. We need both.

And to be very honest, I said it also to Rex Tillerson and other colleagues, I mean, to spend more does not mean to have topic agendas. To spend 2 percent of the GDP every year on the German Army means to double our defense spending. And we are a non-nuclear power. It means to spend more than 70 billion euros every year on the Germany army. French is a nuclear power. They are spending 40 billion. I ask Chancellor Merkel and Rex Tillerson where the new aircraft carriers should bring to, because we are not allowed to bring a container ship to Hamburg. So we have no parking space for the new – (laughter).

So I only want to say, to invest more, it’s necessary – especially in our capabilities. But we should not overestimate what’s necessary. And looking to Europe, Europe spends 45 percent of the offense spending of the United States, but it has only 15 percent of the efficiency. So better spending is much more interested to come into a more integrated military force in Europe. That’s what we should do. And, of course, to have sufficient spending and investments in our national armies.

We firmly believe that greater investment in defense must not occur at the expense of diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and development aid. On the contrary, we must be focused on diplomacy. We need a diplomatic surge. As the current U.S. secretary of defense said in 2013: If you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately. Ladies and gentlemen, Europe has to do its homework, that much is clear. Europe and the U.S. has all – also have to work together so that our societies can become closer again.
We are facing a common problem. Our societies, whether in Europe or here in the United States, are becoming increasingly polarized internally. That is not good for many reasons. It’s also dangerous for the transatlantic relationship. Allow me to explain with an example. Many in Europe and in the United States are worried about their economic future. Economic nationalism is becoming more popular on both sides of the Atlantic. I believe we must do a better job of communicating to our populations why the right answer still lies in the ideas of George Marshall, in his goal of a close economic transatlantic partnership.

When I hear that here in the U.S. there is discussion about Germany’s economic activities of the current account surplus, then I must say, we are prepared to have a dialogue on this. We will glad explain how we see the connection of our economies. Many of the best and highest-paid manufacturing jobs in the entire United States are created thanks to the investments of German corporations. This is why a number of representatives of large German companies that invites in the U.S. are accompanying me on this trip – that invests in the U.S. are accompanying me on this trip. And we will travel onto Pittsburgh today, where we will look at how structural change can be shaped in a positive way, also with the help of German investments. By the way, George Marshall was born not far from Pittsburgh. So we always can come back to him.

I’m convinced that we need more and broader dialogue. This will require more than visits by ministers, but transatlantic experts convening in Washington, Berlin or Brussels. That is why, in a joint effort with the business, academic, and cultural communities we want to help raise Germany’s profile in the United States. I’m therefore promoting both here and in Germany that we will have a year of Germany in the United States, and the other way around, in 2018 and 2019. It must become more normal again for younger generations to look – or to take a look at life on the other side of the Atlantic. I want us to find new formats and ways to bring into contact the greatest possible range of people in our two societies. I want us to reach precisely those who would never think – or who could never afford – to take part in an exchange of travel programs across the Atlantic. Moreover, we have to continue to promote or establish pillars of people-to-people dialogue, and therefore strongly in favor of continuing our classic exchange format, the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think that both the German and the U.S. governments should commit to a new common transatlantic agenda. We should renew the partnership that seeks to defend a peaceful and rules-based order, for it is rules-based international cooperation that will yield the best deals in the long run. Of that, I’m convinced. A partnership that fights for the separation of powers for inalienable human rights, for the rule of law, for the representative democracy – those values are in need to defend today. If we see eye-to-eye on this between the U.S. and Germany, I’m not worried that we sometime disagree on specific topics – topics like climate change that – hmm. (Laughter.) Saving energy is the best way to protect the climate. (Laughter, applause.)

By the way, I always explain the climate policy of Germany to our friends in the U.S., that we say: The policy or the instruments which you need to fight against climate change, they are helpful and useful, even if there would not be any climate change, because to save energy, to reduce the energy consumption, to produce energy more efficient is good for the economy. We used the idea of fighting against the climate change as an industrial strategy. I come from a part of Germany, the north part, where we lost thousands of jobs during the last 30 years – steel, shipyards, others. Now, for many five or 10 years, for the first time we get more jobs back in the industry by building windmills, ships, and many other issues of the renewable energies.
So, for us, it was always an industrial policy, an industrial strategy, and not only driven by ecological issues. They are – may be the starting point of the development, but we need an industrial strategy – not to tackle to the industrial success or the economic growth. And maybe this is the only way to convince some parts of your society that the debate on climate is not a conspiracy coming out of the KGB. And I was witness of the majority some years ago in the Senate and the Congress. And I was a little bit astonished what kind of theories are underway. I never thought that it’s possible in a parliament, but of course we have to deal with that. (Laughter.)

And I believe that on key foreign policy issues – and we will certainly talk about this shortly – our positions are very similar on both sides of the Atlantic. This applies to the conflict in Syria, and it also applies to policy on North Korea and on Iran. The list could go on. However, despite having fundamentally similar interests, our beliefs sometimes differ with regard to the right strategy. In Europe, for example, we are convinced that the nuclear deal with Iran is the best option for preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Some herein Washington are far more skeptical. These are not trivial details. These are serious political questions. That is why these debates are so intense and in actual a good thing.

Yet, in the end, we should be clear about one thing. In a world that is becoming increasingly complex, joint action by the United States and Europe can make a tremendous difference. Therefore, we must renew our transatlantic partnership. Together, we must defend our liberal and rules-based world order. And to close with the words of George Marshall, it is to be hoped that he democratic nations can provide the necessary leadership. We should take his words seriously.

Thank you very much for your attention. (Applause.)

MS. CONLEY: Minister, we’ll put your right in the middle. Mr. Minister, thank you so much for that inspiring message. We did plan the lights and the climate – that was all planned. But thank you. I think George Marshall would be thrilled about this new initiative you just discussed, about reaching people who don’t necessarily feel part of the transatlantic relationship. And I think certainly reminding Americans that the Marshall Plan, the construction of NATO was certainly done in America’s economic and security interests. So thank you for reminding us of that.

Karen Donfried and I have been looking forward to this conversation. We have a long list of issues and the time is sort. So I’m just going to turn, Karen, to you to begin our conversation with the foreign minister. And then we look forward to welcoming our audience into this discussion. Karen, please.

KAREN DONFRIED: Well, thanks so much, Heather. It’s great to be here. And GMF is delighted to be cooperating with CSIS on this.

And, Mr. Minister, it’s a great privilege to be able to cosponsor this event with you. And of course, GMF, in many ways, is a gift from the then-West German government to say thank you to us Americans for Marshall Plan aid. And our mission is strengthening transatlantic cooperation in the spirit of the Marshall Plan. And, Mr. Minister, you did a terrific job of explaining what that spirit is. And when we look back, you can make the case – as you so compellingly did, that the Marshall Plan was the foundation for a strong transatlantic relationship, as well as for a European project of integration that led to the coal and steel community, the European community, the European Union that is so important today.
And when I look back on those foundational elements, you can make the case that they’ve never been more challenged then they are today, that strong transatlantic relationship and the European Union. And you talked about the need to renew this crucial transatlantic bond. And I’m interested in your sharing with us perhaps what came out of the meetings you’ve just had? You saw our secretary of state, the secretary of the treasury, our national security advisor. Do you find that same engagement on the American side to renew that transatlantic bond?

MIN. GABRIEL: Yes. That was my feeling. I mean, we started to be honest in our first meetings. And we were not really sure what’s the perspective of the new administration in the U.S. towards Europe and towards Germany? And sometimes, we get the feeling that enemy number one is China, and then we can choose number two or number three, Mexico or Germany or the other way around.

But it’s changed completely, to be very honest. I mean, I was asked by many Germans. And they always waited for a sentence from me that it was a horrible situation. But it was not. It was a – during the last months and weeks, we had more and more the feeling that, especially the secretary of state, was very much involved in all these security and international issues, which are so important for us as Europeans.

Look to the Ukraine, at the beginning we had the feeling that maybe it’s not in their – in their focus. But now, they have exactly the same position that we have, that coming to a better solution or a better cooperation with Russia – which is obvious and necessary for different reasons, Syria and other parts of the world – we have to have a solution in the Ukraine. And we have to start with the ceasefire – a real ceasefire, the withdrawal of weapons. And the – and the American administration is willing to be much more – to be much more involved in this issue.

And so of course, as I said, there are also different analyses – coming to Iran, for example. But on Syria, on Russia, and North Korea, for example, and China, we have always the same analysis and also the same ideas about how to react. Now, in Germany, every person – or nearly every person is fan of soccer. And in the soccer game we say: The truth is on the field. So now we have to look what will come out of all these debates. And we are ready to be even more engaged together with the U.S.

MS. DONFRIED: Let me just do one follow-up, and then I’m going to pass it over to Heather. But just on this, one of the real differences, if you look back 70 years to today, is the fact that the European Union has developed in the way that it has. And I was struck – you authored a very interesting piece in Die Zeit earlier this month, where you made the case that this is maybe a moment for Europe to emancipate itself from the U.S. And that at this time, when there’s an American administration that is speaking in quite start terms about American interests and American First policy, that maybe Europe needs to fill that vacuum and actually stand up and take on more responsibility. Could you reflect on the shifting roles, particularly in the wake of a French election where Germany may now have a partner in France to also renew the European Union?

MIN. GABRIEL: First of all, I have to beg your pardon for my bad English. I was too much engaged in politics than in learning languages –

MS. DONFRIED: It is terrific. And we’re so grateful to you for speaking English. So thank you.
MIN. GABRIEL: But I hope it’s not too difficult for your ears. (Laughter.) But I will try to explain my position. If there would be the same administration in the U.S. like before, no change in the government, nothing happened, Obama would get the third or fourth period or whatever, or Mrs. Clinton would be the president – in all these cases, Europe has to discuss about its own role in world policy. Our decisions, what to do, how to be stronger, how to be more integrated, have nothing to do with the American position. It’s in our interest. Hopefully, we will find common interests between the U.S. and us, because then we are stronger.

But the reform process in the European Union, it’s up to us. We should not tell the public, oh, look, the Americans are pushing us to do more in security or others. That’s not the reason. For me, it’s not the reason. I think we have to do what Europe needs. And Europe was not founded as a global actor. Europe was founded by looking inside of Europe as to prevent us for the difficult times we had before. My grandmother, they – (audio break) – and that generation about the French as the archenemies of Germany. If I would tell her, oh, there will be the time your grandson will be one of the good friends of the French president, she would say: Never!

When I went as a young – a young boy to the Netherlands, people were very reluctant to us Germans because they remembered. And, by the way, they must have been very brave people who invited us in Europe directly after the Second World War to come back to the table of the civilized nations. I don’t think that it was really easy for them to explain that in their own population because some years before we burned down every house, we killed the people, we occupied their lands. But, nevertheless, they invited us. Must be very brave people and very brave decisions. And so I think we have to remember what they have done, and now we have to look to the rest of the world.

There is always you call it the American exceptionalism. But you will also –

MS. DONFRIED: We’re very modest. (Laughter.)

MIN. GABRIEL: You will – you will also find a European exceptionalism, but it’s exactly the opposite. The Americans always think we know how to live together, we will teach it to every other country. We say we know – we know how to live together, but please do not come to us and discuss with us. We will not be engaged in any other part of the world. And now the world is coming to us by refugees, by Chinese strategies about One Belt One Road, by implementing trade standards which are not in our interest. And so, as Europeans, I think we have not the alternative not to be a world actor in the future.

I mean, there is a big civil war since years in Syria, and it’s in our direct neighborhood. And we always wait, as Europeans, until the American and the Russian foreign ministers took the initiative to do something. And we are always – we are always visitors in asking is there any part of the world we can spend money. We have no power projection in Europe.

There was a time when the previous president of the United States decided to go out of the Middle East. What happened was that countries like Egypt and others, they did not turn around to Europe. They turned around to the only other power projection which is there, and this is Russia.

And so I think Europe has to change its own attitude by our interest, not driven by the American interest. And then, of course, there will be common ground for a lot of common interests. But we should not have the imagination that because of the U.S.’s pushing us, now we have to change our attitude. We have it to do because of our own interests.
MS. CONLEY: Mr. Minister, I’d like to turn a little south. And historically, not only is it the 70th anniversary of the Marshall Plan, it’s the 70th anniversary of the Truman Doctrine, which in some ways was a very Turkish/Greece-centric concept, to anchor those two countries firmly towards Euro-Atlantic structures, and was the first formal articulation of our containment strategy against the Soviet Union. German-Turkish relations are incredibly tense.

MIN. GABRIEL: Ooh. I think, unfortunately, time is over. (Laughter.)

MS. CONLEY: Yeah, is it time to go? (Laughs.) I told you this might be the hot seat earlier. Slightly warm.

President Erdogan was here meeting with President Trump on Tuesday. We had an extraordinary situation where protesters were assaulted here in Washington. Our challenges – you quoted the other day saying that you warned Turkey against blackmailing Germany, that German parliamentarians could not visit their own soldiers that are based in Incirlik. Help us put this into context. Turkey is an important partner. Turkey is a partner that is changing profoundly.

MIN. GABRIEL: Turkey is changing profoundly, and not in the best direction. On the other side, we don’t bring them closer to Russia. That’s the trap we are – we are in.

We tried through the last weeks and months to calm down the tensions, not – I mean, they told to their public that Germany is full of Nazis. Mrs. Merkel was painted as Hitler, and others. I mean, this is a really crazy kind of campaigning for their own referendum. And even though we tried to calm down the tensions – because we know that it’s our neighbor. And, by the way, Europe has only one friendly neighbor, that’s the polar bear in the Arctic. It’s too hot, so if we do not have too much climate change he will not come. But then Russia, Turkey, North Africa, we have to deal with them.

But now we are in a stage where it’s very difficult for us because Erdogan’s government asked us, yes, you can – your members of parliament can visit the German soldiers in Turkey if you would hand over the asylum-seekers from Turkey – from Germany to Turkey. And it’s forbidden by law, and that’s forbidden by constitution. There are among – around 450 asylum seekers. Eighty of them, we decided to give them asylum. And now they are asking us to bring them to Turkey and to prison. And this is a situation where one NATO partner tries to press another NATO partner that’s completely impossible. And you must know, by constitution, the German army is not under the control of the German government; it’s under the control of the German parliament. And we have a – we have a mandate for the German army to be in Turkey, by the way, at Incirlik and in Konya. In Konya, there are AWACS, the system is located. One-third of the pilots are Germans. It’s a NATO mission. It’s not only a Turkish or a German bilateral cooperation.

And the German parliament, every party will say if our members of parliament are not allowed to visit German soldiers, we’ll bring them out of the country. I mean, imagine congressmen would ask for a visit for U.S. Marines, and the country where they are located would say no, it’s not possible, but if you change some laws in America then maybe we will allow it to you. That’s the situation. And now it’s – we will try to have a debate with Erdogan at the NATO summit, and I’m very glad that Tillerson and others promised me that they also will take the message to Erdogan. But I don’t know what’s happening there.

MS. CONLEY: Very difficult.
Karen?

MS. DONFRIED: Maybe to stay with this theme of liberal democracies, there’s also a challenge, of course, closer to Germany’s borders. And we’ve seen German criticism, EU criticism of the judicial reforms that Poland has put in place. We’ve also seen a great deal of some of the policies that Hungary has put in place. You talked very eloquently about the values and principles that undergirded the Marshall Plan, and these are also under challenge within the EU proper. And maybe you could help us, as an American audience, understand how this will play out in that EU context.

MIN. GABRIEL: Yes, there is a difference in the – in the respected values between some parts of the East – or East and South European partners and the rest. But, first of all, I would like to say that’s a debate 25, 26 member states on the one hand side, and two on the other side. So it’s not the European Union.

Secondly, you have to look very carefully what’s happened in the countries. Hungary and Poland is not the same. The current Polish government came not to power because they are so anti-liberal or they are so – they are pressing against the free press. They came to power because of the social situation in Poland. And the years before, they had a very liberal government, economic growth was good, but the people in the country did not participate on the growth. And so, more and more, there was a debate that it’s not justified what they are doing, it’s inequality which is raising. And people voted for the current government in Poland not because of political issues; they voted for them because they promised to do more for the people in the rural areas, to – the first thing they did is to increase the state payings for families, for children, in a way which would be impossible in my country. But people felt that now there are people who are respecting us. It’s a little bit – maybe a little bit like happened in the U.S.

I mean, when I met Rex Tillerson first, I asked him what kind of election do you had? And he said it was, from his interpretation – I’m not – I do not know if it’s correct, but he said it was a “can you hear me now” election. And in Poland, you also had a “can you hear me now” election, because the liberal parties, they neglected everything what’s going on in the society. And then they said, OK, let’s vote for this government. Now they are doing ideological terms, say, against the free EU restrictions, the separation of powers. But they are not – they have not been elected because of their anti-liberal position.

In Hungary, it’s different. It’s the result of a collapsed political system there.

And, by the way, that Emanuel Macron could be the president without any party, it’s also a sign for the collapse of the political system in France.

Whenever you or whenever we are criticizing populist movements, I would give us the advice to look what are the reasons for the populist movements. I’m a Social Democrat, and sometimes I’m afraid that my party is discussing about a lot of liberal issues which are interesting for people which have good living conditions. But parties like the Social Democrats, and maybe also the Democrats in the U.S., have to be – have to have deep roots in the society. And in Germany you can be, as a minister or if you live in a private house, you can be a fan and you can love multicultural ideas, because the only foreign person you will meet is the taxi driver who gets you up from your home to your office. It’s a little bit different if you live in a part of the city where 90 percent of your pupils in a classroom coming from 25 other nations.
So I will not – I give – I will not give an excuse to populism, not an excuse to those politicians which are using the fears of the population. But if we want to fight against populism, we have to fight against the conditions of populism, the reasons of populism. That’s my – that’s my interpretation. After the American elections, I told my party if you forget the workers in the Rust Belt, the hipsters in California will not help you. (Laughter.)

MS. CONLEY: Those are some prescient political words. (Laughs, applause.)

MIN. GABRIEL: But it was not in the direction of your country, it’s more the direction of my party. (Laughter.) We have also our rust belt and our hipsters. (Laughter.)

MS. CONLEY: It speaks to the political truth. And as you said, the truth is on the pitch, and I think that’s exactly where it is.

I would love to bring our audience into the conversation. We’re going to do – it’s not speed dating, it’s speed questioning. We’re going to bundle a couple of questions, Minister, if we may, and then we’ll let you have the final word.

Colleagues, I’m going to ask you – we’re going to pass a microphone. You have to speak very clearly into that microphone. Please introduce yourself and just ask your question, because we really want to get as many questions as possible. So I’m going to start here, Max, and then just please wait for the microphone, and we’re going to take these in turn. Thank you.

Q: Dr. Christiana Mayer-Wilchek (ph).

When the prime minister, Angela Merkel, came to Poland recently, she told Germany are unify, thank you. So now a time came to go forward, unify all humanity, target peace, because all these institution which does exist does not give peace guarantee. We have a lot of problems all over the world. So why don’t we create a new competitive international organization, such which can give a peace guarantee for entire world? And it will protect every nation, and united European Union as well. My vision and my proposal is to create a new – use military, not for fighting between themselves, but to create a new international organization of military leaders to guarantee peace where target is prevention of conflict, prevention of war. So it mean to jump to higher level of civilization and culture.

MS. CONLEY: Thank you. Thank you so much.

We’re just going to have to pass the microphone. Give it to my colleague right there, please, ma’am. Thank you.

Max, right behind – right there. Yes, sir.

Q: Thank you.

MS. CONLEY: Do you want to stand up, please, so we can see you? It’s a little hard. Thank you. Sorry.

Q: You spoke about the Marshall Fund. Do you see any possibility for a new Marshall Plan for Greece?
MS. CONLEY: OK. And we have – we’ll just work our way around. Donna, right there, please. Very quickly.

Q: Hi. My name is Jan (sp). I work at the World Bank.

Thank you, Minister, for your analysis that Europe is more than Germany and France, and for the call for a united, stronger Europe. The reality, unfortunately, especially in foreign politics, looks much different. And we have 27 and 28 different embassies in every major capital. What are you going to change about this that Europe can speak with one voice?

MS. CONLEY: Thank you.

Donna, we’ll just keep going right there. Right there. Thank you.

Q: Hi. I’m Phyllis Berry from the NIC.

I have a question. You seem to be arguing for TTIP but without calling it TTIP, but talking about setting standards for U.S. and Europe. So would you support the resumption of talks for something, either TTIP or something with some other name that would be equivalent?

MS. CONLEY: Thank you.

And Anders right there.

Q: Thank you very much, Minister. My name is Anders Åslund. I’m from the Atlantic Council.

You have been the strongest supporter of Nord Stream 2 in Germany. And I would be interested in hearing your position on that. Thank you.

MS. CONLEY: I’m going to just close out with the last two or three questions. Right there; very quickly.

Q: Of course. Thank you so much for this. I’m Emily Tamkin from Foreign Policy.

You spoke about illiberalism in certain places of Europe. I was curious as to whether you thought the United States should be more engaged in that. If so, how? And, if not, why not? Thank you.

MS. CONLEY: Thank you – illiberalism. I’ll recap the questions.

Right there, Donna, please, and then we’ll take the last one in the back. Yes, ma’am.

Q: Hi. I’m Tatiana Kalmykova. I’m a reporter for a news agency, RIA Novosti.

You know that Russia is topic number one now in the United States, especially regarding the elections. And American officials, they urge that Russia might meddle in the German elections this
year. Do you have any information in this regard? And have you brought up this question with your Russian counterparts?

MS. CONLEY: And the last question is far in the back. Matt, right there. Thank you.

Q: Yeah, thank you. My name is Mio Soric. I’m with Deutsche Welle.

My question is your Turkish colleague just said that he’s OK if German troops would leave – NATO troops are going to leave Incirlik. I would like to hear your reaction on that. Thank you very much.

MS. CONLEY: Well – (laughter) – I was going to summarize, but I think I won’t. I’ll just turn to you. (Laughs.) Mr. Minister, you can answer the ones you wish. (Laughs.)

MIN. GABRIEL: First question was do we need a new organization, a kind of military organization? I would say we need a reform of the United Nations. You say no. I say yes. (Laughter.) That’s no. I think there is –

Q: (Off mic.)

MIN. GABRIEL: I don’t think that there is really an alternative to strengthening the United Nations, because what should be the role of a separate military organization? So I think that we need reform because the Security Council obviously is not able to answer the international questions. And look to the Syria, to the chemical weapons and others. But, nevertheless, I cannot see that there is any alternative.

Q: You know, I’m Swiss. I know – (off mic) –

MS. CONLEY: OK.

MIN. GABRIEL: Yes, I love –

MS. CONLEY: We’ll need to go through the rest of the questions.

MIN. GABRIEL: I love the Swiss if they do not –

Q: (Off mic.)

MIN. GABRIEL: I love Swiss with one example, if they give – if they want to be a safe haven for people who don’t want to pay taxes in Germany. (Laughter, applause.)

And, second, yes, I think that’s – I mean, if you ask a German politician, there’s a big crisis, a big or a huge problem – what’s your answer? He will answer a new Marshall Plan. That’s a signal that the Marshall Plan and the idea of the Marshall Plan is deep in our minds. I’m not sure if it’s the same in other parts of Europe, but in Germany it’s the synonym for economic development and a peaceful development.

Now, if you look to Africa, I think that maybe this century is also an Asian century, but I’m sure it will be an African century. And you have a lot of potentials there, but you have also a lot of
difficulties, of dangerous developments. And I think we have to join hands between Europe, America. I think if China want to be a serious partner in the international order, also China has to be part of it; the Gulf region; and then to develop something like a so-called Marshall Plan for good governance, anti-corruption, sustainable development.

I think this is – this is necessary, because only with military actions we will not come to peace and stability on this continent. I feel – I mean, they will double their citizens during the next years. And it’s in the direct neighborhood of Europe. And we cannot longer ignore the development in Africa, and we are not the patrons. We are – we must be fair partners, on the same eye level. And this was the idea of the Marshall Plan.

And third question was, yes, foreign policy. My personal feeling is in Europe we are starting the debate about foreign defense policy. But to be honest, my political view is defense policy is an instrument of foreign policy. First you have to develop the same perspective to the world, and then you can decide which kind of defense policy is necessary. So we need to have a more integrated foreign policy in Europe.

But, as I said, Europe was not founded as a world actor. And so it will come step by step, hopefully faster than during the last 10 years. But if you go to Africa, you have French policy to Africa, U.K. policy, sometimes also Portuguese or Spanish one or Italian one. And it sometimes is difficult for the African states if there are different interventions from different European member states to the same issue, like Libya. It’s much more necessary to have a common foreign policy in the European Union. And it’s interesting. Every foreign minister of the European Union will say this on Sunday. From Monday to Saturday – (laughter) – he will do – it’s the other way around. But it’s absolutely necessary.

So, coming to TTIP, whatever name you will use, it’s a question of content. I was supporter of CETA, the agreement with Canada, because I thought these are – this is an excellent agreement and it sets fair standards. It was unfortunately the negotiator of the United States who said, and was under the Obama administration, that these standards of CETA cannot be accepted by the United States. So it’s not – it’s not – it was not a difficulty with the current government. It was difficult with the Obama administration.

But, nevertheless, we should start again the negotiations. We need – we need a common market, because Europe is the biggest market, United States the second-biggest. If we join hands, we would be able to set standards, not only for free trade, but also for fair trade. And we should not have the imagination that a free-trade agreement is again against workers’ interests, against public institutions.

So we have to be careful by dealing with these difficult issues. But there is – I think there is no alternative. If not, China will set the standards. Look to the One Belt, One Road initiative. They want to replace the WTO regulation through One Belt, One Road regulation. Hundred countries were in China. They raised a $200 billion program for investment in all these countries. And there is only one major or one major economy which can come to a balanced situation, and that is if U.S. and Europe join its forces, not because China is an enemy, but to have a fair competition and not be a victim of competition.

Then you asked to Nord Stream 2. Yes, I’m a supporter. Why? Because some years ago – by the way, by the advice of the Americans – in Europe we decided to liberalize the gas market, to bring it
out of politics, out of state regulation; only the framework as a European regulation, but the rest should be a market issue. Companies should decide from which part of the world they will get their gas or their oil. We liberalized the gas and the oil market.

Now, because of political reasons, there are some forces who want to come back to political interventions in the gas market. And I’m a Social Democrat, but I’m a market economist. I don’t want to go back to the old times where countries – and sometimes they are left wingers, sometimes right wingers – they always want to intervene.

There are some political preconditions. We told the Russians first you have to make sure that the trans-Ukraine pipeline will be used after 2019, with a serious volume of gas. It’s necessary for the Ukraine and it’s necessary for some other countries.

Second, you have to make an infrastructure where the East Europeans and the Southeast European countries will not be negative affected.

And the third is you have to come under the regulation of German regulator, and we are under the third energy package.

Now, that are the preconditions. But these interventions that, to be very often and very frank, that, competitive to Russian gas, want to bring us to the situation that we have to buy liquid gas, which is more expensive, because they don’t want to have these market-based, market-driven economy. It cannot be our interest – not the interest of France, not the interest of Italy, not the interest of Netherlands and Austria. It’s not only a German issue.

So that’s my – it’s not very popular. I’m always struggling with Rex Tillerson and the rest of his friends. But I’m a very strong supporter of these liberalized gas and oil market and a market-driven economy in the energy field. And so that’s my position. It’s – I know it’s not very popular in the U.S., but you can criticize me whenever you want.

Then it was –

MS. CONLEY: There was a question on, I think, generally illiberalism, a question if you wish to comment on U.S. domestic political factors. And I know your time is getting short, so I –

MIN. GABRIEL: No, I don’t – no, no, my – we cannot – we are not the judges about your interior political debates. But, I mean, we need a stable international engaged U.S. administration. I mean, you are citizens of a real superpower. And if America is too much engaged with its interior problems, there will be a vacuum in the international sphere.

And in this vacuum, there are some guys who want to go inside the room. And we want to have our friends of America in the room, not others. And that’s the reason we hope that your country will overcome the difficulties and to have enough power for the necessary engagement in the international. The rest is dangerous. America could not stay away. It’s for us, for the rest of the world, for what we call the West, which is not a geographical position. It’s a unilateral idea of human rights, freedom and democracy and the division of power. Therefore, the United States, it’s so critical that they are on board.
And then Cavusoglu – I mean, that’s the way they deal with it. And that’s not the way we – I mean, we are not raising tensions. But I discussed with the prime minister – I discussed with Cavusoglu – not in public, behind doors, I explained to him – the chancellor did it. We explained to them several times this is a dangerous situation. Please do not underestimate that this is an army under the control of the parliament. And whatever we say, the parliament has the decision.

And then, not because we asked for this, they published publicly that we would be not allowed if we will not change our laws for asylum seekers. I mean, that’s impossible. And so I personally called my good friend, Mevlut Cavusoglu, and told him let’s try to solve the problem. Unfortunately, the answer was like you mentioned.

MS. CONLEY: Mr. Minister, this has been an extraordinary conversation. I think Secretary Marshall would be very pleased that we were having such a significant conversation. Thank you for your comments.

Karen Donfried, thank you. German Marshall Fund.

And, colleagues, please join me in thanking the minister. (Applause.)

(END)