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Melinda Crane (MC): Ambassador Timken, people on both sides of the Atlantic had been hoping for smoother relations between the new German government and the US. Due to the controversy over reports of secret CIA activities on German and European territory, is this controversy clouding that hope?

Amb. Timken: No, I don't think so at all. Both Germany and the United States, the governments realize that there are many very large world issues that they have to tackle together and as a result I don't believe that this will impinge on that in any way.

MC: People in Germany were watching very closely as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Berlin in December. She met with the new chancellor, Angela Merkel, what was your impression of those meetings?

Amb. Timken: They were excellent meetings. I couldn't be any happier. The two principals got along extremely well in a warm, friendly way. And in addition, they showed great respect for each other and in the course of their discussions, their capability of understanding all the major issues of the world were well demonstrated. And I think that makes a good probability that our countries will be working closer together.

Rüdiger Lentz (RL): Ambassador Ischinger, you came to Washington one day before 9/11 and you stayed here in Washington throughout the Iraq War when the relations between the two of our countries did go sour. How did you feel about that and do you think that with the new German government relations will be better?

Amb. Ischinger: Well, a year and a half ago, I think our two governments decided to put the dispute, the disagreement about Iraq behind us and to decide to look at the agenda ahead. So I think for the new German government there is really in a way the red carpet already being rolled out in Washington. We can build on what we have and I'm delighted to see that there is such a positive level of expectation in Washington to work with the new team.

RL: Ambassador, this seems to be very optimistic concerning the outlook. Let's come back for a moment to the so-called “CIA renditions” which are said to be part of the war against terror. This raises the larger question: What is allowed and where are the limits in this war against terror?

Amb. Ischinger: I think there are some real questions here, but I'm afraid that some of the media excitement has, at least in my view, gone a little bit overboard. These are very serious issues. It's very important for us as The West – the United States and Europe – to make sure that the rest of the world understands that The West is on the high moral ground. And that's really the challenge: How can we deal with terrorists who not only do not respect our laws but who are doing everything to undermine our system and the rule of law. How can we deal with them while we continue to respect the rule of law and our system of justice? I think that's an important issue that needs to be addressed in not only the bilateral context but in the context of the European-American debate over the next weeks and months.

RL: Jack, we just heard it from the two ambassadors that the officials are trying to improve the relations on both sides of the Atlantic. But what about the public – will they follow the political lead?

Jackson Janes (JJ): I think that depends on the political leaders themselves. In other words, I think we have to define why it is that we are confronted with common problems and common issues? While we do not have a complete agreement on means, we need to make sure that we have an agreement on the ends. I think that it's important to realize that the domestic debates that are going on in Germany and throughout Europe and the United States are very much in sync with each other. We are both confronted with the same questions: How do we define the challenges that we face in 2006? We both have a vested interest in finding the answers to that. .

MC: I'd like to pick up on that, Eberhard Sandschneider, and ask you about Ambassador Ischinger's remarks about the media. It did sometimes seem in the past couple of weeks that the German media were worrying more about potential misdeeds on the part of the CIA than they are about the very real crime committed against Susanne Osthoff who was abducted in Iraq. What accounts for this German readiness to criticize the U.S.?

Eberhard Sandschneider (ES): I'm not sure whether it is really about the German readiness to criticize the U.S. It's first and foremost about media excitement and it is an overexcitement. We should perhaps remind ourselves all over these last 3 years whenever it came to this transatlantic debate, to the rift between Germany and the United States, we were always proud to mention we never worked closer together than when it came to fighting terror. This cooperation has been a success despite all debates in transatlantic relations. There are mistakes happening sometimes and the German chancellor is absolutely right in pointing to the fact that we should correct them, that we should find out why they happened and we should go on cooperating.

RL: Jack, you are an old hand in transatlantic relations. You have seen many ups and downs in the past decades. So was this current crisis only a dent or does that go much deeper?

JJ: It strikes me that what we are looking at is a change in the references toward each other in a world that is very different from 1989/1990 when we needed each other in different ways and I think that as the world changes, we change and therefore our relationship changes. There shouldn't be any problem with that. The fact that we disagree, the fact that we have different ideas about how to reach the same goals has got to be something that, I think, we take as part of that change. But I don't think we have to be concerned about that. The major concern is that when we lose sight of why we need each other. And that is really the responsibility of our political leadership to constantly point that out.

RL: But did we handle disagreements all the time in the right way, especially concerning the political confrontation on both sides?

JJ: No, I don't think so. Political leadership on both sides sometimes appeals to domestic forces more than they did to looking at what was at stake in international relationships. I think we have to bring that back into synergy.

RL: Ambassador Ischinger, the new government in Germany underlines that their foreign policy is following the principle of "continuity". This is the key word. But doesn't Washington expect more than continuity from Angela Merkel and the Grand Coalition? Like, for instance, a policy of less Putin and more Bush, or less France and more Poland?

Amb. Ischinger: I discovered that a surprisingly large number of policy-makers here in Washington have actually read not the entire coalition agreement but at least the foreign policy parts of it and those people who read that paper have also read chancellor Merkel's first declaration to the German Bundestag. These documents are being seen as very, very important documents: such as making sure that Americans understand that we in Germany want NATO to be our central instrument of decision-making in security and defense policy. And that we in Germany are not in the business of defining Europe as a counterweight to but as partner of the United States. I don't know whether you want to call that "continuity"? But these are points that Americans like to hear over and over again. And I'm glad that we have made them and that's a good, new start.

MC: Let's come back to some of the points Wolfgang Ischinger just raised. Ambassador Timken, in your first major speech here you talked about the need to look out the front window of the car rather than the rear window. Staying with that image: Where would you like that car to be heading? What would be your priorities for the transatlantic relationship?

Amb. Timken: Well, as you know I come from outside of government .So in the business world we are always looking out from the window trying to figure out how we can steer a better course for the car and there is always lots of options but certainly the first thing that the United States wants to see is an economically more strong Germany that can take its position that is has always occupied as a key to a stronger European Union. So, we wish the best for the Germans and their search for a better economy, lower unemployment – which would, by the way, provide more resources to the budget in the long term and enable them to do more, not only in Germany but certainly on the world front. One of the issues is Iraq: It will need lots of support not only from the United States but the entire world community including Germany in developing its ability to run its institutions and to continue to rebuild its infrastructure.

MC: One of the Bush Administration's big projects in the larger world, of course, has been to try to build democracy in the Middle East. Is that something that you can imagine cooperating on with the Germans?

Amb. Timken: Well, I mean, Germany is one of the great democracies in the world and the German people are interested in democracy for all .So, I continue to expect the Germans will be interested in developing democracies whether it be in the Middle East or in the Balkans. It's in the best interest not only of the people in those countries but it is in the best interest of the entire world.

RL: One area in which we certainly differ, and Ambassador Timken just mentioned it, is the economy. Here we see clear distinctions between the U.S. and Europe and Germany – continuous growth in the U.S. and only little or no growth at all, in Europe and especially in Germany. Ambassador Ischinger, you have been living many times in the U.S. first, in New York, then in Washington twice, and you know both sides of the Atlantic. What can we learn economically from the Americans and what can they learn from us?

Amb. Ischinger: I think there is one thing that Germans could benefit from looking at how America functions as an economy. We could be quite generally, not only politically, a little more optimistic and in the economy optimism is expressed for example in the savings rate. Germans seems to be more on the gloomy side which is why they don't spend a considerable percentage of their money. Americans are far more optimistic. They spend actually more than they have; they have a negative savings rate. I would suggest that if we could learn a little bit from one another and meet somewhere in the middle, America would be better off and Germany would be far better off.

RL: Jack, many economists believe that it's not productivity or only investment which produces growth on one side, or no growth on the other side. As Ambassador Ischinger just mentioned it's also a mentality problem. Are the Germans shying away from risks and are they not as entrepreneurial as the Americans?

JJ: I don't think Siemens, Daimler-Chrysler or many of the other big companies in Germany need any instruction about how to take risks. There are out there, they are competing and Germany is the export leader in the world. I think the issue is how do you make it possible for the entire economy to function on all six cylinders? But my thinking is that Germany has all the prerequisites to do that. It has the educated labor force, it has the infrastructure, it has a great deal of the requirements that many other countries are still building. It just simply has to implement them. And maybe to talk about Germany as being a two-speed economy, this wonderfully explosive export power that it has and the problems that it has at home. It has to bring those back into sync. And as Ambassador Timken said, we have to look to Germany – this is the largest economy, it's the most powerful one when it's running on all six cylinders. We are waiting for that Germany.

MC: Are the 'Arbeitslosen', the unemployed Germany's biggest problem? Eberhard Sandschneider, but sometimes I think the people here are more worried about American-style social welfare cutbacks than they are about joblessness. Why?

ES: It is difficult to explain. One of our self-made problems is that we still seem to think that job market problems are all domestic and it's in the hands of our government to solve these problems. We have to learn that globalization is a mighty factor and has a strong impact, especially on job markets, on labor markets and there is no way of solving these problems on a national basis.

MC: Ambassador Timken, you were the head of a global company. We've talked about the fact that this is one of your major qualifications for being an ambassador, managing that very large enterprise with offices all over the world. In that respect, what would be your three priorities for how to manage a turn-around in the German economy?

Amb. Timken: It's obviously hard to say, especially after only four months in Germany but the first thing everybody should understand is that investors invest to earn a return on the investment. And whatever government can do to help engender larger returns or stop doing when it hinders returns, will be beneficial in that economy. I'd say; secondly the word 'globalization' was mentioned. In fact, the root of globalization is the individual consumer's desire to purchase the best value at the lowest price and nobody and no government is going to stop that as we found out in the United States. So, globalization is inevitable when the choice is in the consumer's hands which it will always be in free economies. Therefore it is necessary to help the nation understand what globalization is, what their part in it is, what advantage there is for them and help them to understand the inevitability.

MC: There is certainly a lot of fear here of globalization. You've talked in the past about your German forefathers and their values. You summed them up as a balance between continuity and change. Would you say that Germans in your experience now still have the same kind of balance? Many people would say they are clinging perhaps a little too much to continuity and are not open enough to change.

Amb. Timken: Well, let's be honest with ourselves. Humans do not like change. Change engenders risk and humans are naturally risk-averse whether they are Americans or Germans. At the same time, you have to face the prospect of continual change and, therefore, taking smaller risks – so that you avoid some sort of catastrophic risk down the road. This is the way to go and I would suspect that perhaps Americans are a little bit further along in their ability to risk smaller change up front to avoid some significant risk down the road.