

Rede

des Bundeskanzlers a.D.

Olaf Scholz, MdB,

**anlässlich der Young Leaders
Conference des American Council
on Germany**

am 23. Juli 2026

Dear President Sokol,
Ladies and gentlemen!

Welcome to Berlin!

It is a special honor and pleasure for me to welcome you all here in the German capital.

For more than 70 years, the American Council on Germany has made significant contributions to building and continually strengthening German-American relations.

Your program in particular – the Young Leaders Conference – has been extremely important in this regard.

It has been in existence for more than half a century, in fact since 1973.

Incidentally, the first of these conferences (in 1973) was held in Hamburg.

That choice of place was actually very appropriate.

As a citizen and former mayor of Hamburg what has always moved me deeply was this:

The American Council on Germany was co-founded in 1952 by a Jewish man from Hamburg who had fled to New York in 1938 to escape the Nazis.

That man was Eric M. Warburg, one of the founders of the ACG alongside McCloy.

To remember Eric Warburg is to recall the unspeakable crime that Germans committed against their Jewish fellow citizens.

This remembrance must never cease!

But by succumbing to anti-Semitic madness, Germany also inflicted a terrible loss upon itself.

Up to 140,000 Jewish Germans like Warburg left their homeland between 1933 and 1941 to find refuge in the United States while they still could.

Great names among them:

Scientists like Albert Einstein, of course,

Thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer,

Historians like Hans Rosenberg and Felix Gilbert,

Artists like Billy Wilder, Vicki Baum or Mascha Kaléko.

And many others.

All of them were deeply shaped by the catastrophes and atrocities of the first half of the 20th century.

They all brought these influences with them to America.

They all left their mark here, they all were, in turn, shaped by America.

And they still have something to tell us.

That is most certainly true in the cases of some of the most important political thinkers and practitioners of the post-World War II transatlantic order.

Just as Eric Warburg from Hamburg, they were German Jews – from Fürth or Coburg in Franconia, from Berlin, Cologne or Munich.

Henry Kissinger comes to mind, but others too: Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Hans Morgenthau, Ernst Fraenkel or Karl Loewenstein.

As we discuss the current state and future prospects of transatlantic relations today, it is important that we remember those who did so much to shape these relations in the first place.

The ACG's fundamental goal from the very beginning has been to bring Germans and Americans closer together, to foster mutual understanding, and to firmly anchor Germany within Europe and the West.

As John Kornblum, U.S. Ambassador to Berlin from 1997 to 2001, once said: "For the United States, that issue was settled in 1990."

This is true – and it is a good thing.

Since Germany's peaceful reunification in 1990, Germany has been surrounded exclusively by friendly neighbours.

No one doubts our firm integration into Europe, into the family of democratic nations and into NATO, the transatlantic framework for our common defense.

In historical terms, Germany is in a favourable international position today – one it wasn't in for so long during the 20th century – to the detriment of the world and also to Germany's own detriment.

Quite simply: Today we are no longer the problem!

You could say: The whole situation with Germany and the West has turned out well.

A key aspect of our commitment to the West is that today we stand unequivocally with Ukraine in its defensive struggle against Russia's war of aggression.

The fact that we are now so clearly part of the West is due above all to the United States, not least to the long-standing work of the ACG and its German sister organization, the Atlantik-Brücke.

Unfortunately, however, it's precisely now that another question has suddenly become less clear:

How deeply embedded in the West will the United States remain?

And also: How close should the United States and its transatlantic partners remain.

That is the question I would like to address tonight from my perspective:

- The transatlantic partnership remains of particular importance to both the North American democracies and the European democracies.
- The ideological foundation of this partnership is rooted in the democratic American Revolution of 250 years ago.
- The United States became a democratic republic before any other nation. I am deeply convinced that this legacy will remain a defining and shaping force for the United States.

- It remains important that we recognize and acknowledge each other as democracies.
- Consequently, we have shared security interests, which have rightly found expression in our North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This will continue to be crucial in the future.
- One thing has long been clear: European Union member states must spend (even) more on national defence and alliance defence.
- Preserving our industrial strength remains crucial to preventing attacks and repelling them in the event of an emergency.
- One should never underestimate the resilience and the inherent stability of democracies, once they have been established.
- The U.S. established rules that initially denied rights to women and Black people. As a democracy, it then managed to correct these shortcomings. It overcame the Jim Crow laws. And in the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson initiated landmark civil rights legislation that legally ended segregation and protected voting rights for Black Americans.
- I firmly believe that the gains we have made will be preserved and that – if necessary – democratic stability will be restored.
- The history of liberal democracy in Europe does not stretch back unbroken for centuries. Here, too, there have been many ups and downs throughout history.
- As former German Chancellor and Social Democratic leader Willy Brandt once said: “Nothing comes by itself. And very little lasts.” That is why we, as democrats (with a small “d”), must always fight to ensure that

democracy is secured and preserved – each of us in our own corner of the world. But at the same time united in our democratic convictions.

Thank you very much!