

Check against delivery

Speech of the German Ambassador, Dr. Georg Birgelen, on the occasion of the Day of German Unity 2018

Honorable Minister Raed Khoury, representing President General Michel Aoun,
Honorable Member of Parliament Ali Bazzi, representing the Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri,
Honorable Minister of Telecommunications Jamal Jarrah, representing Prime Minister Saad Hariri,
Honorable Ambassador Hussein Haidar, representing Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil,
Honorable members of the Lebanese Parliament,
Eminencies, excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to the Day of German Unity 2018!

Ahlan wa sahlan bikum!

First of all, let me seize the occasion and introduce my wife and myself to those of you whom we have not met in person yet. My wife, Sibylle, and myself have both been working with the Federal Foreign Office for over 30 years, in Germany as well as on a number of foreign postings. Before coming to Beirut, we spent three years in Istanbul. We actually both applied actively to be posted here, to Beirut because of the fascinating mix of politics, culture, heritage and, let's be honest, quality of life. No wonder so many Lebanese living abroad are coming back home regularly. As one famous German author, Uwe Johnson, put it: Heimat ist dort, wo Erinnerungen sich auskennen – Home is, where you memories know their way around.

In short, my wife and I are grateful and excited to be here and to welcome you warmly to tonight's reception!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are celebrating tonight because Germany has been reunited in democracy and freedom for 28 years to the day. In the mid-1980s, hardly anyone in the divided Germany believed that the fall of the Berlin Wall was a possibility, and yet fall it did. Mainly, people from Eastern Germany were instrumental in bringing the Wall down.

After this peaceful revolution, however, Germany's unification came not automatically. An international political and diplomatic process had to follow, in which our partner states played a crucial role. Germany in its borders of today would not have been possible without the trust of our partners in a positive development of a united Germany in Europe.

Speaking of trust invested to us: 2019 Germany will be represented again in the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member. Many states have voted for us and given us their confidence: We will assume this responsibility with a clear project in mind: we will continue to do everything to promote peace and security. We will do so in cooperation with our partners. To our belief, this is only possible within a rules-based international order. True multilateralism and true team work must not impose the law of the strong but needs to create fair conditions for everyone and maintain the strength of the law.

It is in this spirit exactly, that Germany has committed itself internationally since many years to this region and in particular of course to Lebanon.

How close the ties between Lebanon and Germany have grown, was highlighted by Chancellor Merkel's and Federal President Steinmeier's visits to Beirut this year. These high ranking visits show clearly how much importance Berlin attributes to your country.

Both our nations have – in the past years – dealt with challenges that are somehow comparable: Certainly, the number of refugees in Lebanon is considerably higher than in Germany, not to speak of the relative burden on the country. Still, we – as Germans feel – very close – to you in the sense that some of the experiences you face are familiar to us. That is why Germany, indeed, accords its utmost respect to the enormous challenge you are mastering.

Naturally, in this regard Germany aims at being a constructive partner and extends a helping hand. We do so in close cooperation with you: the Lebanese authorities and the Lebanese society, and also: in coordination with the European Union and the international community.

Clearly, not everybody is happy with the situation we have today. The question is asked whether or not supporting refugees in Lebanon prevents them from returning to their home country. Well, I think as member of the United Nations we all are well advised to respect the principles developed there for the treatment of such massive refugee crises as the one created by the recent events in Syria. The crucial question therefore is: what are we doing? How do we give support? Do we foster a system where people become dependent? Or do we help people to help themselves? Do we manage to equip people to – in the future – return to their home country, without pressure, in safety and in dignity and rebuild it?

It is against this background, that one of our main focusses in LBN clearly lies on education: All children have a right to go to school, to learn and to just be kids. We cannot afford a generation of children who do not go to school, who are traumatized, who are forced to work. Therefore, Germany and Lebanon work closely together to ensure education for all Syrian and, let me stress that, also all Lebanese children. This is an investment into the future not only of the children, but also of the whole region.

Lebanon's contribution to the program is crucial: Dozens of Lebanese schools all over the country generously open their doors day to day for Syrian children to attend school together with Lebanese kids – a contribution that Germany commends greatly! Chancellor Merkel had visited one of the schools, when she was here in June. She was convinced: For the current school year Germany contributes an amount of 60 million USD, bringing the overall support to this program to nearly 300 million USD since 2014.

But children need not only education – they also need safe water. The protection of the environment and fight against pollution are a task for all of us working to create a better future. Therefore, we are committed to support the water and wastewater sector in Lebanon. Germany supports quick-impact measures to improve the situation in host communities like new wells, water reservoirs and better irrigation channels. In addition, Germany also invests into large-scale water infrastructure like the new waste management treatment plant in Kersouan. This treatment plant will protect the environment around the Jeita grotto and will contribute greatly to a cleaner Mediterranean sea. In total the current German contribution to the water sector has a volume of over 100 million USD.

Yet let me emphasize this: our strong commitment for Lebanon goes far beyond the host aspect. The importance we accord to your nation is very well reflected in our support to your military and the UNIFIL mission: Since 12 years Germany contributes to the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force (MTF). Moreover, we support the Lebanese navy with joint training and equipment, which has helped the navy in making progress towards controlling its own territorial waters. One cornerstone is our support for the coastal radar system. In this context, let me seize the occasion to greet Commander of the LAF

Navy Admiral DAHER and UNIFIL Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Yann GAVETHE as well as all the soldiers of UNIFIL:

Herzlich Willkommen!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Lebanon has achieved a lot in the past years. This country has made crucial steps forward with regard to its political stability and international standing. Two years ago, there was no election law, no budget law, no Capital Investment Program, no CEDRE conference, no ROME conference. There is one similarity: there was no government. – I am very confident that, contrary to two years ago, the period without government will not last! And let me reassure you: Germany will continue to stand ready to cooperate.

As the famous Gibran Khalil Gibran states in *A Handful of Sand*: “Progress lies not in focusing on the past, but in advancing towards what will be.”

I am confident that all the achievements, Lebanon recently accomplished, will carry you forward and will bring about what the Lebanese people wish for!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last but not least, before I invite you to join us tonight for some Nuremberg Bratwurst or Black Forest Ham and beer, let me shortly thank our sponsors:

Mr. Mohsen, Mosan Bakery, Beirut Beer, Colonel Beer, Boeringer Ingelheim, Real Capital, SLID Beiersdorf, Abu Merhi Cruises, Allianz SNA, Bauer Lebanon, Henkel Obegi, Rational, Abiaco, Kettaneh, Vresso, and Bosch.

Thank you very much for your contributions!

And now finally, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me raise my glass: My wife and I are most grateful for the hospitality that Lebanon has extended to us since our arrival, tonight we want to give some of it back.

To the German-Lebanese relations and to the friendship of our people!

Enjoy the evening! Herzlich willkommen! Ahlan wa sahlan!