

Fourth Young Leaders Alumni Conference of the Atlantik-Brücke

Estoril, Portugal, June 21 to 24, 2007

“Where Thirst for Knowledge Meets Food for Thought”

By Tamara Anthony and Frank Jahn

This was a memorable scene: a palatial hotel, palm trees in the garden, the beach just across the lawn. A group of some 150 people talking, laughing, warmly greeting each other. A scene reminiscent of a family reunion. And indeed, the Fourth Meeting of the Atlantik-Brücke Young Leaders Alumni, which was held in Estoril from June 21 to 24, resembled very much a get-together of a big family.

“Once a Young Leader, always a Young Leader,” said Executive Vice-Chairman Beate Lindemann, emphasizing the strong sense of community and allegiance of the Young Leaders Alumni as she addressed the conference participants. As if in acquiescence, three small children staying with their parents raised their voices. This was seen as a good omen, and the toddlers were immediately pronounced ‘Future Young Leaders’ by Honorary Chairman Walther Leisler Kiep.

In his speech, the Honorary Chairman pointed out that the interest in the Young Leaders program was growing fast and that more and more young people in leading positions in politics, business, culture, and media seek to take part in it. The Young Leaders conferences started in 1973 as a German–American project, the success of which prompted the creation of a European Young Leaders program in the 1990s. On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, Atlantik-Brücke inaugurated the Young Leaders Alumni conferences in 2002. Today, the Young Leaders program counts Alumni from over 30 countries, as was in evidence at the gathering in Estoril.

“Where Thirst for Knowledge Meets Food for Thought” was the topic of the Conference. Only a week after Germany’s G8 summit and with Portugal’s presidency just a week ahead, the time and place of the Conference could not have been more appropriately chosen.

Portugal’s aptitude as a transatlantic link was highlighted during the dinner speech delivered by the Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament Dr. Jamie Gama. Being the geographically most western country in Europe and – more importantly – having a long tradition of strong ties with the American continent, Portugal is in a unique position to influence the transatlantic policy of the EU. As to the forthcoming Portuguese Presidency of the EU, Gama made tongue-in-cheek remarks about the different styles of the two respective countries. “Germans are always so thorough,” he said. When asked by Jörg Schönborn of ARD how Chancellor Angela Merkel was perceived in Portugal, he said: “Why does she always want to appear so perfect? People in Portugal are a bit more relaxed.”

Friday morning started with a tough schedule. The first topic on the agenda was **“American-European Economic Harmonization. When the Dollar Dates the Euro: Closed Shop or a New Blueprint for the World?”**

Matthias Wissmann, former Federal Minister of Transport and recently appointed President of the Federation of the German Automotive Industry, was supposed to introduce the topic, but could

not make it due to his new position. ZDF anchorman Theo Koll stood in for Wissmann. He read out the manuscript and found the task quite enjoyable: "It is the first time that a journalist reads out what a politician thinks without cutting his words."

Oceans may divide, but common values unite, Matthias Wissmann wrote in his message to the panel. A lively debate followed: the Dollar may date the Euro, but they should avoid getting married, said Sebastian Schäfer. Common values matter much more than currencies. Commitment is to be strengthened, said Marco Vicenzino and in this respect Atlantik-Brücke can help. André Loesekrug-Pietri agreed to the fact that we need to keep our minds and markets open. Today, Chinese bid for American oil companies, and Indians buy steel plants wherever they can get them. As the world changes, politicians have to find the right answers to make people ready for the new challenges. As one participant concluded: to make people shed their own fears, we ought first to make them understand that politicians strive to make changes for the better and for the good of the people.

Following the introductory panel discussion, the participants in the working groups had a choice of global issues to tackle. The working groups all bore the names of savory dishes from some focal points in the world, thus alluding to diversity facing globalization. They also literally highlighted the topic of the conference: "Where Thirst for Knowledge Meets Food for Thought."

"TOTALLY RATATOUILLE"

Globalization: Who Attacks?

Is globalization an attack? For years, people from all over the world have been profiting from civil aviation, global telecommunication, and broadcasting networks, but it is only recently that "globalization" is being regarded with 'Angst' and sometimes even hatred. Why now? But above all: what is globalization all about? A lively debate ensued, focusing on the economic dimensions of the issue. Why is the affluent Western world interested in Asia but not in Africa? What are the strategic assets? Can politics change them? Certainly education, labor ethics, and infrastructure play a role. Is Confucianism helpful in the process? Does secularism solve the problem? Does globalization help propagate global values? Values determine legal systems. Values are the basis of our economic exchange. There could be no economic transaction recognized without the law, i.e., common values. But how does one cope with different values? From economy to values and from the ecological dimension to the military perspective (is a globalized world a peaceful world?) – indeed a difficult mix to tackle. Calling it 'ratatouille' was appropriate. The participants liked it, and the discussion was very lively.

"THE REAL AMBROSIA"

Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Confucius: Who Tolerates Who?

From indifference to tolerance? Tolerance comes from the Latin word 'burden.' It is only when the strangeness of other people bothers us that we speak of tolerance. During the 1990s, the notion prevailed that being different, i.e., strangeness as an alienating element among peoples, was over. But recent years have shown that the notion of strangeness of other peoples is far from being extinct. On the contrary – due to globalization – it has become even more obvious to us, so obvious that we cannot remain indifferent. Are we then tolerant? The working group discussed the definition of tolerance and the need to have an idea of your own identity and values. Do we need a clear-cut identity if we want to keep up our position in the face of the other, as some argued? Or should we become more neutral and open-minded? Can we claim universal values

and at same time be tolerant? A philosophical debate about tolerance within different cultures and religions broadened the highly interesting discussion.

"TANDOORI CHICKEN SWEET AND SOUR"

Asia: Who Wins?

Without a doubt, the world order will be different for our grand children: China and India have the potential to rank first among the world's largest economies. Figures about China's industrial growth and its mounting home consumption are astounding. India is following suit, but will it be the next hyper power? Will the strengths outweigh the weaknesses, such as the imbalance between urban and rural populations, the caste system, the ongoing conflict in Kashmir, and the fight against Islamic terrorists? The working group discussed the path of Asia, the global effects of wealth, and possible intra Asian conflicts. Will China be a new geopolitical superpower? Will the growth in Asia lead to global pollution and power shortage? What will be the role of Europe? Perhaps a Disneyland for Asian tourists, as one participant of the working group mockingly suggested.

"THE SPECIAL BURGER SURPRISE MEAL"

U.S. Elections: What Comes Next?

The upcoming elections are in various respects special ones: no current president or vice-president is running for election, more money than ever has been raised so far, and campaigning has started earlier than ever before. What are the profiles of the candidates? Or are profiles deliberately kept blurred? Is the U.S. ready to vote in a woman as president? Will the electorate accept a Bush-Clinton-Bush-Clinton episode? The American participants of the working group gave an insight into the complexities of the U.S. presidential elections, told anecdotes about campaigning events, and explained the importance of the war in Iraq as an issue for the upcoming election.

"FALAFEL HOT AND SPICY"

The Middle East: Resources or Explosives for the World?

The demand for oil will continue, the reliance on oil – and thus the dependence on Middle East countries as oil suppliers – will remain. What strategy should the Western world adopt towards these countries? While the entire working group agreed that the West should be more involved in the region, it was very divided on how the region should be influenced. A vote in the working group showed that exactly half of the group said "yes" to a motion approving EU cash payments to a Hamas government in the Palestinian territories. Eight people voted "yes" to Turkey joining the EU; five voted against it. Is Iraq worse off today than it was under Saddam? Eight participants agreed and only two believed the invasion was helpful. The striking thing about any Middle East debate is its potential for controversy. The discussion of the working group was no exception.

But not only discussions in working groups can provide food for thought: A ride in the historical tram through the old city of Lisbon is very inspiring. No **visit to Lisbon** is complete without riding the 1930s Tram No. 28, which goes up and down the seven hills of the city. A walk from the Rossio square, which has been the traditional meeting place of Lisboans for centuries, led us to the oldest district of the city, Alfama. On its palace-like premises, with a magnificent view of the old city churches, the Deutsche Bank AG invited us for an outdoor dinner.

Jürgen Fitschen, member of the Group Executive Committee of the Deutsche Bank AG, impressed the audience with a strong speech in favour of globalisation, stating that globalisation is "the best that can happen". "Globalization is for everyone," he underlined and urged us to accept the rules of capitalism and the role of corporate leaders. Rules of making business may change, but nation states will definitely play a weaker role. "Globalization is no zero sum game," he said and urged everyone to strive for better achievement and not to lag behind others. Jürgen Fitschen highlighted the importance of Europe's demography and at the same time dwelt on the opportunities African countries have to offer. Globalization should not be regarded as a scapegoat. It should be given credit for the fact that we enjoy a world that has never been as peaceful as now.

Culture and leisure were on the agenda for Saturday. A **visit to famous monuments in Lisbon** and its surroundings took us on a journey through the great history of Portugal. Famous discoverers such as Vasco da Gama, Magellan, Henry the Navigator, and Pedro Alvares Cabral are honoured in a huge monument on the bank of River Tejo – The Discoveries Monument. The country's Age of Discovery is also celebrated in the nearby Jeronimos Monastery. This "Cultural Heritage of All Humanity" (UNESCO 1984) combines late baroque and Renaissance styles as well as unique masterpieces of "Manueline" decoration in its interiors.

In the afternoon we visited the **UNESCO World Heritage Site Sintra**, with its 19th century Romantic architecture. During a tour through the picturesque old town and the castle of Ferdinand Sachsen-Coburg Gotha, many Alumni made a mental note to come back to this place sometime.

Saturday was also a heyday for the golfers among the Alumni. They had the opportunity to play on one of the finest golf courses ever, as one of the participants put it. The winners of the **golf tournament** were presented with the "Young Leaders Alumni Golf Award." Congratulations are extended to: Meike Müller and Alexander von Cramm (First Place and Challenge Cup), Patrick von Ribbentrop and Philipp Gossow (Second), Tobias Tafel and Frank Böhnke (Third), Katharina Tafel and Patrick von Ribbentropp (Longest Drive) and Nearest to the PIN: Katharina Tafel.

The conference ended that evening aboard the MS Lisboa Vista Tejo, which took us on a **cruise on the river Tejo**. The view of the Vasco da Gama bridge is most impressive. It is the longest bridge in Europe, with a span of 17 kilometres. The spectacular tour offered both an impressive view of Lisbon and an opportunity to look back on a remarkable Alumni meeting.

For those who did not get silver plates and bowls as awards, there were plenty of unforgettable moments to remember from that inspiring long Alumni weekend in Portugal. There is a deep feeling of gratitude for those who made it all possible: the steering committee (Beate Lindemann, Walther Leisler Kiep, Martin Seyfarth, Theo Koll, Matthias Graf von Kielmannsegg und Christoph Schwegmann) and most of all Honorary Chairman Walther Leisler Kiep, who, at the end of the day, was given a standing ovation and made "Honorary Senior Young Leader."

A perfect ending for a 'family reunion' that began with three toddlers being made Future Young Leaders. This made it pretty obvious that Atlantik-Brücke is quite capable of bridging the generation gap as well as being a bridge over the Atlantic.