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ATLANTIK-BRÜCKE E.V.

## ATLANTIK - BRÜCKE - A BRIEF HISTORY

*Bridges don't just appear – they need to be artfully designed, carefully built, and constantly maintained. Otherwise, they won't serve a need, or they are in danger of creeping corrosion or sudden collapse.*

*Atlantik-Brücke – that bridge across the Atlantic conceived and constructed fifty years ago – has stood the test of hard times and rough weather.*

*President George Bush on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Atlantik-Brücke, Berlin, 2002*

Atlantik-Brücke (Atlantic Bridge) is a private, non-partisan association dedicated to fostering transatlantic understanding and cooperation. Since its founding in 1952, Atlantik-Brücke has developed a range of programs designed to strengthen German-American and German-Canadian relations by arranging personal meetings between Germans and Americans, as well as Germans and Canadians, in the economic, political, and cultural centers of the three countries. In more recent years, it has recognized that an increasingly globalized world demands more expansive approaches to international understanding and cooperation, broadening its mandate with programs directed at Europe and at other parts of the world, such as China. Despite a constantly evolving set of activities, Atlantik-Brücke has remained committed to its core vision of strengthening ties between Germany and the United States by cultivating close personal relationships across national borders. As a leading German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, has noted, "Atlantik-Brücke is one of the rare attempts made in the private sector in Germany to exert influence – by creating friendship, arranging contracts, acting as a catalyst – in the political sphere." Atlantik-Brücke supplements this work by publishing books and other informational materials about Germany.

Atlantik-Brücke holds a series of conferences and workshops bringing together representatives from both sides of the Atlantic to discuss significant world issues. The "Conferences on North America, Germany, and Asia," organized in conjunction with The Pacific Council on International Policy in Los Angeles, bring together German and American experts from politics, business, and the media to consider significant international developments. Atlantik-Brücke also cooperates with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, to hold the biennial "Workshop on German-American Relations." This workshop series was inaugurated in 2003 to provide German and American parliamentarians and government representatives with a forum for a constructive exchange of ideas. Recognizing that transatlantic relations encompassed more than just the United States, Atlantik-Brücke began organizing German-Canadian Conferences in 1986.

These annual conferences, alternating between Germany and Canada, furnish high-level representatives from the two countries with the context for tackling issues affecting German-Canadian relations. In the wake of globalization and with the emergence of new major players on the world scene, Atlantik-Brücke recognized a growing need for close cooperation between North America and the European Union in establishing strong relations and promoting the exchange of information with China, India, and as far as possible, with Third World countries. In order to achieve these goals, Atlantik-Brücke founded an International Advisory Council made up of key figures from North America, Europe, and Asia. Ratan N. Tata is representing Asia in this council.

In order to facilitate close relationships between members of future generations of policymakers, Atlantik-Brücke held its first German-American Young Leaders Conference in 1973. These annual conferences bring together Germans and Americans between the ages of 28 and 35 who have demonstrated significant leadership potential. The meetings allow young professionals from both countries to discuss major issues on their own terms, exploring and debating differences and common interests. The domestic and international developments at the end of the nineties – particularly the accelerating processes of European integration and globalization – prompted Atlantik-Brücke to broaden its efforts to bring together future leaders. In 2001, it held its first European Young Leaders Conferences, open to participants from all countries of the European Union. Subsequent European Young Leaders Conferences, held annually, have also included attendees from countries that are candidates for membership in the European Union or that hope to become members. Atlantik-Brücke maintains close relationships with the alumni of its Young Leaders program, many of whom go on to occupy important positions in American and European governments and parliaments, in business, and in other areas of public life. The “Atlantik-Gespräche” for Young Leaders Alumni take place monthly in Berlin and several times a year in major German, European, and American cities. In response to the high level of interest in these talks, Atlantik-Brücke announced the creation of Young Leaders Alumni Conferences on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002. These biennial conferences build upon the successes of the Young Leaders program by bringing together former participants for further dialogue and networking. Former Young Leaders are frequently considered for membership in Atlantik-Brücke, maintaining a diversity of opinions within the organization through fruitful dialogue and exchange across generations.

In addition to its work facilitating exchange among current and future leaders, Atlantik-Brücke administers a number of programs meant to expand knowledge about Germany among Americans. Since 1989, Atlantik-Brücke has organized educational trips bringing American social studies teachers to Germany in order to learn about life in the country. During their two-week trips in Germany, the teachers meet with their German counterparts, high school students, political figures, and business and trade union leaders. They experience everyday life in Germany by staying with host families and visiting schools, universities, political institutions, corporations, museums, Holocaust memorials, and sites of resistance against National Socialism. The result is a deeper understanding of German culture and history, particularly since the Second World War, which the teachers can then bring to their classrooms in the United States. Atlantik-Brücke works with individual states’ departments of education to bring over teachers from across the United States; to date, it has hosted over 2,500 teachers from Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Florida, Georgia, New York, New Jersey, Tennessee, California, Kentucky, North Dakota, Wisconsin, Idaho, and the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). To help finance this program, the Vernon A. Walters Award for outstanding service to the German-American partnership is presented annually at a

fundraising dinner in New York. Every two years, Atlantik-Brücke also organizes study trips for professors from Emory University and other universities in the Atlanta metropolitan area who are interested in learning more about contemporary Germany. These professors, coming from a wide variety of fields and never having worked on Germany or German-related subjects before, visit several major German cities and meet with leaders in government, business, education, culture, law, and public health during their two-week trips. Since 1983, Atlantik-Brücke has also sponsored two- to three-week study tours in Germany for American journalists, editors, and editorial writers. As of the last trip in 2006, well over 200 journalists have participated in this program, designed to facilitate more intensive reporting on German events in the American press. Upon completing their trips to Germany, the journalists and teachers join the network of Atlantik-Brücke Fellows and are subsequently kept up to date with the latest news from Atlantik-Brücke.

Atlantik-Brücke has a longstanding and strong tradition of working closely with the American military. One of Atlantik-Brücke's oldest initiatives is its seminar series for American military officers. Since the early 1960s, over 10,000 American officers stationed in Germany have benefited from these one-week seminars meant to familiarize them with "These Strange German Ways" (Atlantik-Brücke's most popular publication, now in its 21<sup>st</sup> edition with over 570,000 copies sold). Another indication of Atlantik-Brücke's strong relationship with the American military is the annual meeting with the CDRUSEUCOM and the U.S. Component Commanders, held since 1991. This seminar, co-chaired by the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and the Chief of the Defense Staff of the German Armed Forces, is attended by leading American and German military officers, diplomats, and business and media representatives and provides an essential forum for the confidential exchange of ideas between Germans and Americans.

A lingering source of potential political tensions between Germany and the United States is the inadequate understanding of the two countries' economic relationship. In an effort to address this issue and heighten awareness among parliamentary representatives in the two countries, Atlantik-Brücke began organizing meetings in the United States bringing together members of the Deutscher Bundestag and the U.S. Congress from districts with heavy economic representation by German corporations. Since 1997, Atlantik-Brücke delegations of German legislators have come to the United States on two-week "Investment Bridge" trips to meet with U.S. Senators and Congressmen, state legislators, and business leaders at German company sites. Congressmen are given an opportunity to meet with their German parliamentary counterparts on a personal basis and gain a deeper appreciation of the extent to which German investment has created jobs in their districts. Atlantik-Brücke extended the "Investment Bridge" program to Canada in 2003 and, responding to concerns raised by globalization and the country's economic rise, to China in 2005. Beginning in 2007, Atlantik-Brücke also began organizing membership trips to the East Coast of the United States. The participating members of Atlantik-Brücke, over 60 prominent representatives from business circles, politics, and the media, visited New York and Washington, DC, attending the annual Vernon A. Walters Award Gala and meeting with a broad range of important guest speakers.

In addition to promoting exchange between Germany and America, Atlantik-Brücke also facilitates discussion in Germany about the United States. The "Study Group on the United States" consists of distinguished public figures in Germany and provides its members with a forum for expert, high-level, non-partisan, and confidential dialogue. The group meets three times a year to review foreign and domestic policy issues that impact German-American relations. The debate that takes

place in these meetings has stimulated dialogue in the upper ranks of German companies and political institutions and has served to identify topics for the bilateral German-American expert meetings that Atlantik-Brücke has organized over the years with institutions in the United States, such as the American Council on Germany (New York), the Council on Foreign Relations (New York), the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Washington, DC), the American Jewish Committee (New York), the Southern Center for International Studies (Atlanta, GA), and the Pacific Council (Los Angeles, CA). In 2007, Atlantik-Brücke held the first meeting of the "Discussion Group China-Germany-USA," bringing together interested parties from the three countries to discuss common global and regional threats.

Atlantik-Brücke supplements its conferences, seminars, study groups, and roundtable discussions with lectures throughout the year. One lecture, held in honor of the former U.S. Ambassador to Germany and former Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Dr. Arthur F. Burns, was inaugurated by Bundesbank President Karl Otto Pöhl in New York in 1987 and is held in Frankfurt every fall. The Karl Heinz Beckurts Memorial Lecture pays homage to the former Atlantik-Brücke board member and former member of the Executive Board responsible for research and technology at Siemens, who was murdered by terrorists. Initially delivered by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger in 1988, this lecture takes place during the Hannover Industrial Fair each year. The "Freiberg Talks" are organized with the Technical University of Freiberg, Saxony, to generate interest for German-American relations in the former East Germany. In addition to these regular lecture series, Atlantik-Brücke also invites prominent German and American public figures to speak at ad hoc events over the course of the year.

Atlantik-Brücke introduced the Eric M. Warburg Award, the organization's highest honor, in 1988. This award is presented to a public figure in Germany or the United States who has made an outstanding contribution to the German-American partnership. The prize was named in honor of its first recipient and one of Atlantik-Brücke's founders, Eric M. Warburg, a member of one of Hamburg's oldest and most venerable families who fled persecution under the Nazis to the United States only to return at the end of the war as a member of the U.S. Air Force. Throughout his life, Eric M. Warburg worked tirelessly for a free and democratic Germany based upon a close German-American friendship. In addition to its namesake, the prize has been awarded to such distinguished figures as Ambassador Paul H. Nitze, advisor to nine American Presidents and a chief architect of U.S. foreign policy over several decades; Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of State; Dr. Manfred Wörner, former Secretary-General of NATO; Dr. Helmut Kohl, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany; and in 2002, on the occasion of Atlantik-Brücke's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, to former President of the United States George H.W. Bush. Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Berlin Air Lift, the 1998 Eric M. Warburg Prize was awarded to the veterans of the Allied Air Forces, who ensured West Berlin's freedom for almost a year in 1948-1949. In 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was honored with the award in recognition of her important contributions to German unification.

Another part of Atlantik-Brücke's multifaceted effort to foster German-American understanding and friendship is with student exchange. Directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, members of Atlantik-Brücke's Executive Board established the Youth for Understanding Foundation to help students from the former East Germany spend an exchange year living with host families and attending high schools in the United States. In 1995, the program began extending scholarships for an exchange year at high schools in Germany to American minority high school students. To date, over 3,800 students from the new German states and over 1,200 African-American, Hispanic-

American, Native-American, and Asian-American students have benefited from this exchange. The Youth for Understanding Foundation scholarships provide recipients who would not otherwise have the opportunity to travel abroad with their first glimpse into a foreign culture and language and play an important role in carrying the rich tradition the German-American friendship and cooperation into the next generation. This program is financed by donations contributed at the "Enchanted Holiday Evening," a fundraising gala held every December in New York City.

Atlantik-Brücke also periodically responds to significant world events. In 1993, the Atlantik-Brücke Scholarship Fund was established to help children of military families who lost a parent in Operation Desert Storm and who had resided in Germany prior to deployment. The scholarships were financed through donations received during Atlantik-Brücke's "Appeal for Solidarity," when the allied forces were fighting in the Gulf War in 1991, and are awarded annually for up to four years of undergraduate or vocational study. Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Atlantik-Brücke organized a benefit concert in Berlin to raise funds for the long-term support of children who had lost a parent in the attacks. It cooperates closely with the Children's Aid Society of New York and the Princess Kira of Prussia Foundation in this project. A few years later, on February 16, 2003, Atlantik-Brücke published a one-page advertisement in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* entitled "A Message from Germany." Signed by over 600 well-known Germans, the ad pledged Germany's solidarity with America during the Iraq conflict regardless of differences between the administrations and highlighted the essential role the United States had played in rebuilding post-war Germany and was subsequently published in all major German newspapers.

Most recently, Atlantik-Brücke organized the "Bridge of Hope" relief program for the victims of the flooding of New Orleans from hurricane "Katrina" in August 2005. This program consisted of three parts. The first component, carried out in cooperation with the State of North Dakota, organized the resettlement of some 50 families left homeless by the hurricane to Bismarck, North Dakota. The second part of the "Bridge of Hope" extended much-needed aid to families that had stayed in the Gulf area. Finally, Atlantik-Brücke donated 1.1\$ million to the well-regarded Lusher Charter School in New Orleans to support the renovation and transformation of the school's gymnasium into a community center. Officially opened on June 9, 2007, the Atlantik-Brücke Community Resource Center is the first integrated community center in New Orleans, bringing together individuals from all races and religions for a broad range of activities, from chess to sports.

Founded in 1952, Atlantik-Brücke was created out of the rubble of the Second World War with the mission of nurturing the then-fragile German-American partnership by promoting close personal relationships between representatives of the two countries. In the decades since its inception, Atlantik-Brücke has developed an array of programs aimed at deepening this relationship while also expanding its vision to other parts of the world, such as Canada, China, and the rest of Europe. As it looks to a future marked by new possibilities and challenges, by a growing need for new and innovative approaches to international problem-solving, Atlantik-Brücke does not lose sight of its historic mandate. In the coming years, extending and broadening the bridge over the Atlantic will be vitally important not only for Germany and the United States but for the entire world.

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