

Magnus-Haus Am Kupfergraben 7 D-10117 Berlin-Mitte

ATLANTIK-BRÜCKE E.V.

Farewell Dinner for Ambassador Marie Gervais-Vidricaire Speech by Friedrich Merz

Berlin, April 24, 2017

Dear Ambassador Gervais-Vidricaire, chère Marie,
dear Marc Vidricaire,
dear Excellencies,
dear Members of Bundestag,
dear Members and Guests of Atlantik-Brücke,

Bonsoir et bienvenue chez Atlantik-Brücke encore une fois!

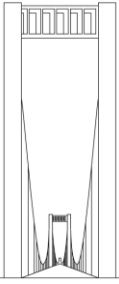
Tonight, it is my great honor and pleasure to welcome you to Atlantik-Brücke's Farewell Dinner for the Canadian Ambassador Marie Gervais-Vidricaire. Let me put it this way right at the beginning: We all, our members and friends, and the entire Atlantik-Brücke community will miss you in person and your great commitment to our close German-Canadian partnership.

But we have to accept: This week, your time as Ambassador will come to an end. So, please allow me to reflect on some of the highlights of your time in Germany since assuming the post here in Berlin in September 2013.

Above all, Ambassador Gervais-Vidricaire has tirelessly underlined the values, interests and experiences of the excellent German-Canadian relations. Atlantik-Brücke itself seeks to foster these ties not just as a mandate within our statute but with the strong conviction that vital transatlantic relations always include Canada.

Our German Ambassador to Canada, Werner Wnendt, likes to say that German-Canadian relations have not involved any problems at all for a long time. This circumstance, Wnendt concludes, can become a real challenge if you neglect to continuously cultivate the deep relationship that you sometimes tend to take for granted.

Let me confess that we ourselves from time to time undervalue how important the Canadian part of our transatlantic cooperation is and must be. But Ambassador Gervais-Vidricaire has shown and reminded us again and again that our countries are cooperating effectively, confidentially and reliably in terms of trade and investment as well as in foreign and security policy issues as partners. This is true within NATO and generally in the whole range of international organizations that address the world's most difficult challenges on all kinds of policy fields. Responsible politicians, diplomats and dedicated citizens know that finding complex solutions on a strong multilateral foundation is the only resilient way to handle the implications of digitization and automatization for our labor markets, to cope with the interdependencies of climate change and financial market stability or – unfortunately needed to be mentioned – to deal with aggressors and dictators in the world.



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Chère Marie, it is high time to thank you for all your hard work in building and maintaining the vibrant bridge linking our nations. I know that I may say this not just on behalf of Atlantik-Brücke and its members, but also on behalf of many representatives of our country, who had the opportunity to work with you and to share with you the same ideal: Today more than ever, liberal democracies with embedded market economies are the most important safeguards for defending and strengthening a rules-based international order. Germany and Canada act as close international partners at eye level – and we actually look with some concerns at the United States of America as the so-called big brother of our western alliance. It remains true and inevitable: Strong human rights, civil liberties and functional checks and balances are at the core of our community of shared values.

The best example of this approach is the ratification of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU. Whereas the European Union and the United States of America have – so far – remarkably failed to reach an agreement with TTIP, I am not exaggerating when I say: CETA is the most progressive and ambitious free trade agreement that Europe has ever achieved with one of our important trade partners in the world.

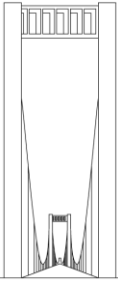
Agreements like CETA do not appear from nowhere. It needs negotiators who are committed to success. And it needs supporters who are bold to campaign. This is why we are here tonight and why we are so grateful with Ambassador Gervais-Vidricaire. While the official CETA negotiations were taking place in Brussels and Ottawa, Ambassador Gervais-Vidricaire did a marvelous job in the diplomatic arena and in the public arena in Germany and beyond to explain the advantages of this treaty to a wider public: Not just tariffs and other barriers to trade will be reduced or removed. Canada and the EU will mutually approve and recognize their industrial and technological standards so that especially small and medium-sized enterprises will benefit from investments in research and development on both sides of the Atlantic. These are the encouraging transatlantic messages in these days that will create further wealth, more security and lasting peace.

It is worthwhile to have a closer look on the facts and figures on CETA. The agreement will remove around 99 percent of all existing tariffs between Canada and the EU. According to the European Commission, this removal could result in cost saving of 470 million Euro each year. The EU's gross domestic product could be increased by 5,8 billion Euro. And CETA will open Canadian public procurement markets to European companies worth 112 billion Canadian Dollar each year.

However, there is still a lot of political work ahead of us to bring CETA to full strength. Since the agreement is one with mixed responsibilities on different federal levels, all national parliaments in Europe and all Canadian provinces have to ratify CETA. We should focus on achieving this goal in our common trade policy after the European Parliament has ratified the agreement this February.

CETA shows to all the critics that Canada and Europe are cooperating successfully in further setting the rules and creating a fair globalization. In this period of history in which the western model itself is at stake regrettably on both sides of the Atlantic, this is a strong political signal of strategic partnership in the 21st century.

The completion of CETA also symbolizes the potential of making compromises between partners. When the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took office in November 2015, he and his then-Minister of



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International Trade, Chrystia Freeland, were confronted with the demand of several European countries, including Germany, to change the system of Investor State Dispute Settlements (ISDS) into an investment court system (ICS). As you probably know, I don't agree and with me many others with this special German position because every ISDS case in the history of free trade agreements has led to clear and fair results.

However, the Canadian government agreed to renegotiate this part of the treaty so that the EU and Canada could come to a final arrangement. CETA's success would not have been possible if Prime Minister Trudeau and his cabinet had rejected additional talks with their European counterparts. And we can definitely not imagine that this attitude could have become true without the hard persuasive work and power of the Canadian diplomats in Europe. With that it was Justin Trudeau who demonstrated his great skill at publicly commenting on difficult political issues such as this occurrence. As the final agreement was reached, he said: "The fact that people were asking tough questions on a deal that will have a significant impact on our economies, giving us the opportunity to demonstrate that that impact will be positive, is a good thing."

Ambassador Gervais-Vidricaire, last but not least I would like to cordially thank you for your enormous support in various activities of Atlantik-Brücke during the years of your service. You played an absolutely vital role in our annual German-Canadian Conferences. You celebrated at the Atlantik Ball with us and always were a reliable partner of our work.

Not only in your professional career but also throughout your whole life you have demonstrated your genuine interest in Germany. After enrolling at the Université Laval in Quebec you immediately started to study German philology. You also speak German very well. And you have traveled through our country plenty of times to really get to know its people and its culture. Your close personal relationship to Germany reflects your outstanding diplomatic approach.

Chère Marie, now we hear that you and Marc are planning to stay in Berlin. What an excellent choice! We want you to really feel at home in our capital. Atlantik-Brücke wishes you and your family all the best for your personal future. And please keep in mind – this is not political rhetoric but serious – that our doors will always be open for you and your ideas for the very best of German-Canadian future.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup!

Let me present you with our gift, a bouquet of flowers and the Berliner bear from the traditional Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur (KPM). The Berliner bear is included in the city emblem already since the year 1280. Supposedly, this heraldic animal stems from Albrecht I. who was called "The bear". He conquered and founded the Mark of Brandenburg. So maybe, this symbol inspires you to further endeavors in this region of Germany.

And now, chère Marie, the floor is yours.