

## **Opening Address to the German-North American Environmental Conference, 8th – 12th April 2003, Görlitz**

**Wednesday, 9th April 2003**

**by Bernd-Dietmar Kammerschen, CEO and Director of the Saxon State Foundation for Nature and the Environment**

Mr Secretary Kuhl,

Mr President Prof. Vogtmann,

Mr Director Prof. Xylander,

Dr von Bismarck,

dear colleagues and friends from Canada and the United States,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to our first German-North American Environmental Conference, which is hosted by Sächsische Landesstiftung Natur und Umwelt (Saxon State Foundation for Nature and the Environment) and Staatliches Naturkundemuseum Görlitz (State Museum for Natural History, Görlitz).

As you may remember, the Conference had been scheduled for August last year, just the time when the floods devastated large parts of Saxony. Even although the site of our Conference, the town of Görlitz, largely escaped the floods, we could not guarantee appropriate organisation of the Conference, as nearly all communications – telephone, mobile phone, railway lines etc. – had been disrupted.

I am well aware of the fact that this caused you considerable inconvenience, but I do hope you will understand our situation.

I am particularly pleased, therefore, to see that our guests from Canada and the United States have decided to take part in the conference despite considerably difficult travelling conditions due to a difficult time concerning world policies.

Please allow me to say some words to the present situation.

For fifty years, Europe and North America have been partners in shaping the international system towards security, economic growth, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Three generations of Americans, Canadians and Germans have joined hands to ensure that our countries may live in peace, freedom, prosperity and security. For the overwhelming majority of Germans, the relationship with the United States and Canada remains of vital importance. North America and Europe are linked by shared values, interests and ultimately visions of the world they want to see in this 21st century.

The transatlantic partnership is a key factor for stability and security throughout the world. Current differences of opinion between governments over the question of Iraq must not be allowed to sever that bond.

Our friends and guests from North America are coming to Germany to discuss an important issue with us: The rehabilitation of industrial wasteland and of post-mining landscapes.

Against the background of the world wide implementation of sustainable development, this subject is of considerable importance especially for the Free State of Saxony:

- Two of the Germany's four large-scale lignite opencast mining districts are located in Saxony: the western Saxon District south of the town of Leipzig, and the Lusatian District in eastern Saxony, north of the town of Görlitz. Thirteen thousand millions of mineable lignite are deposited in the region between the rivers Elbe and Neiße only. This is nearly one quarter of all German resources. The downward trend in the utilisation of lignite, largely caused by the political changes in 1989, allows for a clear strategy for the protection and conservation of nature and landscape, and the rehabilitation of devastated areas, respectively. The reduction of mining in 17 opencast mines (1989) to 5 (including southern Brandenburg) also provides the opportunity of running a more ecological economy.
- Due to the re-structuring of the industry, closely connected with lignite mining, enterprises equipped with state-of-the-art technology have come to determine the image of the economy in Saxony on the one hand, while on the other hand a large number of industrial sites have been given up, and some of the industrial wasteland has been left contaminated. This raises the important question of how to develop these areas in a way they will not pose a danger to man and the ecological capacity of the ecosystem. Even better, these areas should be used in a way that is best suited to their potential. This would range from the re-location of industry and trade to the utilisation for nature protection purposes.
- The former mining landscapes are the largest in area. Large parts of these so-called post-mining areas are dedicated especially to nature protection, leisure and tourism, as well as agriculture and forestry. The Sächsische Landesstiftung Natur und Umwelt, too, acquired some of these areas for nature protection purposes during the past few years. I hope that a fair amount of experience and know-how on the rehabilitation of ecological functions of these areas can be shared at this conference.
- Even although we have deliberately placed the focus of the conference on lignite mining and its consequences, I shall not deny the fact that considerable rehabilitation efforts were and still are required in other areas of mining and the industry, to overcome the heritage of the former East German economy. These include, above all, rehabilitation measures in the uranium ore-mining district of the former Wismut facilities in Saxony and Thuringia, as well as numerous smaller mines for the extraction of other metal ores.

The changes in the structure of industry and economy, as well as in the mining industry, in the Free State of Saxony since the peaceful revolution in 1989 have led to a considerable need for rehabilitation, but also to valuable experience. Today, differentiated approaches and strategies for the handling of mining and post-mining landscapes with regard to planning law, economy and ecology offer the opportunity to exchange experience, draw upon the tried and tested, and learn about comparable regions worldwide. Based upon

this, the natural goods in these regions can be returned to a state of equilibrium, which is the basis for an environment worth living in for man.

I wish the conference good success, many interesting discussions, valuable personal contacts and a pleasant atmosphere.

My sincere thanks go to the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (German Federal Foundation for the Environment) for granting considerable financial support to the Conference. I would also like to particularly thank the Canadian Embassy for their contribution in supporting the Conference. Likewise I would like to thank the American Council on Germany, as well as the Atlantik Brücke, for their co-operation.

Being a »Young Leader« of Atlantik Brücke since 1990 myself, I know very well the enormous impact of this organisation to German-North-American partnership.

Most sincere thanks go to all speakers of the Conference, to the organisers, and to the LMBV for providing substantial assistance in the excursion and the social programme.

I herewith open the Conference with the German miners' salutation »Glück auf!«