

Welcome address to the German-North American Environmental Conference, 8th – 12th April 2003, Görlitz

Wednesday, 9th April 2003

by Prof. Rolf Karbaum, Mayor of the City of Görlitz

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased that you are giving us and our city this honour and welcome you to the city hall here in Görlitz.

In the summer of last year, the flood of the century caused the conference to be cancelled on short notice. We regretted that very much, since Görlitz fortunately didn't suffer much damage. However, it probably seemed from afar that all of Saxony stood under water.

How nice it is that we succeeded in carrying out a second attempt of this conference, despite the difficult geopolitical situation!

I believe that the political developments in the past few months have made clear how important international cooperation is, regardless of discipline. We only have one Earth, and we are forced to cooperate under all circumstances. We cannot and must not be indifferent to the relationship that neighbouring countries have to the environment. Technical progress, ever decreasing resources and increasing economic integration make us dependent to a degree upon each other, so that we must simply work together on an international level and learn a great deal from one another.

I think that natural scientists in particular most clearly recognise these interrelationships, and for this reason, ladies and gentlemen, you will want to predominantly use this conference as an opportunity for scientific exchange. You will also be engaged in the recultivation of our region's countryside, which is suffering from the effects of open pit mining, and the way in which an energy-conscious city is dealing with this problem.

I do hope, however, that you will also find the opportunity to get to know this city, the region and its people.

I see that the invitation from the Saxon Trust for Nature and the Environment has met a great response, and the participants themselves have not avoided a long journey of thousands of kilometres in order to travel to the easternmost city in Germany.

I hope that at the end of the week, you will be able to say: »This was worthwhile, and it was so interesting that I'd like to come again, maybe also as a tourist, so I can show my family and friends a city that has continued developing throughout the centuries.«

We cannot complain about a lack of interest in our city. Even if we are able to greet a growing amount of tourists from year to year, we still need more recognition, not only in Germany. It is not yet known everywhere that our city has many attractions. Tourism is one of our most important economic factors, and we are extensively planning for further development.

I have already mentioned that Görlitz is the easternmost city in Germany. Here you will find a city that originated at the intersection of two major European trading highways 932 years ago, a location that was the city's source of growth and prosperity for centuries.

As a result of World War Two, the division of the city created a painful part of its history: since 1945, the easternmost part has belonged to Poland and constitutes the city of Zgorzelec.

Allow me to mention a few further noteworthy facts:

- The 15th meridian runs through our city, which is a defining point for Middle European Time. Together with our partner city, Zgorzelec, we therefore not only provide the correct time for Oslo, Stockholm, Paris, Madrid and Rome, but also for our four additional partner cities: Amiens in France, Molfetta in Italy, Nový Jičín in the Czech Republic and our West German partner city Wiesbaden.
- Görlitz, together with its Polish neighbouring city, Zgorzelec, forms the European city Görlitz/Zgorzelec. We gave ourselves this name in May 1998 during a joint city council meeting, and this name reflects our conviction that this twin city in the heart of Europe must play a crucial role in the process of European unification.

We want to meet this responsibility beyond our country's borders. Together with my colleague from Zgorzelec, Mirosław Fiedorowicz, I take every opportunity to present our European city. We have done this together in Brussels, Maastricht and Berlin.

We meet each other not only on trips but also on many occasions in our cities. A coordinating committee of the two cities meets once a month to discuss matters that present themselves on a daily basis concerning citizens on either side of the Neiße.

There are contacts in all areas of urban life, even among the smallest: they are cared for in our German-Polish kindergarten and thus learn the others' language through play as well.

The media's interest in this collaboration has rapidly increased, especially over the last few months, and we are able to observe that Poland's imminent entry into the EU allows our twin cities to appear more and more as a model for cooperation across the EU's outer borders.

- Now for the next superlative: experts refer to Görlitz as the most beautiful city in Germany. In this context, I would especially like to quote the chairman of the German Trust for Monument Conservation, Professor Gottfried Kiesow. Originating from our partner city Wiesbaden, he very quickly recognised after the fall of the communist regime in the GDR what a treasure was hiding behind the crumbling facades: »A city unscathed, which with its more than 4000 monuments representing styles from all eras from Gothic to Renaissance, Baroque, Historism and Art Nouveau, remains unique in all of Germany.«
- Görlitz, city of towers, home town of the great German philosopher Jakob Böhme, city of significant architectural monuments, city with the world's best preserved and most accurate copy of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, two-time diocese, the city of the world renowned sugar-candy Liebesperlen (that means »pearls of love«) and of Landskron beer, with Germany's most beautiful department store, with hotels and shops of all sizes, cozy restaurants, an architecturally striking town hall, a famous university for ecclesiastical music, city of railed vehicle and turbine production, and a cultural city with an excellent theatre which turns 152 years old this year.

- Görlitz, also a city of astronomical research in the Middle Ages, a city that spawned the Upper Lusatian Society of Science, in which the city's and region's scholars became united. This society, which was banned after the Second World War, could only be re-established in our country in 1990 after the fall of the Wall. The Society for Natural Research in Görlitz was founded in 1811 and is the predecessor of the current State Museum for Natural History, which is one of our city's most significant scientific establishments and is internationally recognised, a fact that is also reflected by the existence of your conference.
- Today the city has made a name for itself as a university city. The new internationally active University of Applied Sciences Zittau/Görlitz is developing more and more into an institution which not only attracts young people from all over Germany with its practically-oriented degrees, but also has established a tri-national educational programme with Neisse University in close cooperation with Poland and the Czech Republic.
- Görlitz, on the other hand, is also a city with a high unemployment rate, which currently stands around 25 per cent, fighting many problems due to structural change and geographical location. A city which lies in a region with »special developmental needs«, to graciously rephrase this structural shortcoming.
- Last but not least, Görlitz is a city with down-to-earth people who love their city and are increasingly proud of it.

The potential of the city and its region has also led us to apply for Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010. In that year, a German city is able to apply through the European Union. We are aware that we are facing heavy competition from all over Germany, but we recognise that we stand a chance to win the fight between David and Goliath. Not only is our city's function as a link in an ever growing Europe a powerful argument, but also a cultural growth lasting centuries in a region which has always been open to various European influences.

Now that I have told you several facts about Görlitz, I hope I have aroused your interest.

I wish you a successful conference with impulses for your future endeavours as well as many positive encounters and experiences in our city.

Use your stay as a chance to exchange scientific ideas and to lead discussion, but also enjoy what our city has to offer you in the way of art, culture and meeting people.

I would like to thank the Saxon Trust for Nature and the Environment as well as the director of the State Museum for Natural History in Görlitz, Professor Xylander, and his colleagues for their dedication in the preparation of this conference, shaping yet another chapter in the history of conferences held here in Görlitz.

I hope that your stay in our city leaves a lasting impression, that you can give others enthusiastic reports about Görlitz, and that you will come again. You will always be welcome here.