

Speech on the occasion of the official signing of the sister city certificates between the cities of Lynchburg and Glauchau on April 30th 2007 in Lynchburg

Dear Mayor, Mrs Foster,
Dear Mr President of the Sister City Board, Mr Malec,
Dear Mr Freeman,
Dear representatives of business, administration and associations,
Dear citizens of Lynchburg,
Distinguished guests,

Let me start by thanking you warmly – on behalf of the citizens of Glauchau – for the invitation to come here to Lynchburg. We are very glad that we can be your guests these days and enjoy your hospitality as well as the impressive program you have prepared for us.

The Lord Mayor of Glauchau, Karl Otto Stetter would like to give his kindest regards. Due to a bereavement in his family he was unfortunately forced to cancel his coming at short notice. He nevertheless lets you know that he is looking forward to your return visit to our "cute, little" town of Glauchau, for which he officially extends his invitation on this way.

Ladies and gentlemen,

"Honorary ambassadors" is how the former German foreign secretary Genscher has once termed citizens who are involved in sister city partnerships. If you ask me, a suitable term – as has been proven over and over again. Since, on the one hand, do these citizens, who make a partnership their own matter, give out a message. And on the other hand, do they make a very personal commitment bringing about a consultation process and fostering exchanges.

Many such ambassadors have been active in the run-up to this day, paving the road for this partnership. They have forged and intensified the links between our cities. I want to thank all citizen volunteers and participants as the inclusion of the people is the most decisive point.

The attitudes and characteristics of different people are not self-explainable or recognizable. They are only comprehensible in the context of their culture and tradition. Differences might still exist, although there are more global influences and developments than some decades ago. Therefore it is getting more and more important to be curious and open for the unknown and uncommon. One's own, individual experiences are the foundation for mutual understanding.

Sister city affiliations prosper from the fact that the people of both cities become acquaintances, reliable partners and - best of all – good friends. Such friendly bonds have already been established between citizens of Lynchburg and Glauchau in recent years. Encounters have taken place such as between students and club members.

These previous visits have all helped to get to know more about everyday life from a very close range. The existing contacts are an excellent basis for the future relationship of both our cities.

We cannot but furthermore enable our citizens and - most of all – our youths to get to know as much as possible from each other. Such contacts are highly appreciated by all participants. They are fun, they lead to further visits and may be the base for some steady and ever-lasting friendships.

The world comes closer together when we become acquainted with its people. That is why the city of Glauchau has built a whole network of sister city affiliations in recent years. So we are twinned now with cities in Poland, France and Rumania. Lynchburg will be the first sister city outside Europe. This is a development which greatly pleases us and also makes us very proud, as this is not just a connection between two cities and two countries – but what is far more – between two continents.

International understanding – does not only work between the governments – but first and foremost between the people. Sister city projects are therefore – in my opinion – an expression of democracy in action. This is where also smaller communities can forge worldwide links, where each and every individual can become an ambassador of their country.

And both partners can gain a lot this way. As we look to the future of this alliance, we envision a growing awareness and appreciation of each other's culture and people. Thus our message here and today is – we have so much to tell each other and we are looking forward to our common, cooperative future.

This very day is an important date in the history of both our cities, as we "only" officially accomplish what has been so successfully started.

I would like to use this opportunity again to thank you heartily for your overwhelming kindness and hospitality, but also for your trust and involvement.

Please, let me affirm my invitation for the official return visit to Glauchau – as soon as possible.

At the end of my speech, I wish all of us – and our affiliation in particular – all the best and the well-deserved success.

Thank you (for your attention).