

## Rede von Europastaatsminister Michael Roth zum Thema 'Solidarität in Europa' am 9. Dezember 2014 im Europa-Haus in Riga

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es gilt das gesprochene Wort  
It is great to be here in Riga at this wonderful event, which has been organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in cooperation with the Latvian Institute of International Affairs. This is already my third visit to Riga, which reflects Germany's excellent relationship with Latvia and the other Baltic partners in the EU. As a matter of fact, I first visited Riga roughly one year ago - a few days after taking office as German Minister for Europe. I am always happy to come back to the wonderful city of Riga. Let me begin with a short story: Most of you will know that we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9th. One of the highlights during the celebrations in Berlin was a fantastic art project called "light border": More than 8.000 glowing balloons marked the line where the wall used to stand in Berlin. At night all balloons were released into the sky - and the "light border" vanished into thin air like the real wall of stone and barbed wire did 25 years ago. And believe it or not: Two weeks after the celebrations, one of those balloons was found on a beach near Riga. That was a very long journey of almost 850 kilometers from Berlin to Riga. For me, this balloon is a wonderful symbol! It shows that the fall of the Berlin Wall, which divided our continent for almost three decades, has brought Germany and Latvia closer to each other. Our joint history binds us together: 25 years ago, the division of Europe ended when courageous citizens revolted successfully against their communist regimes. This is true for Germany, but also for the Baltic States. The "Baltic Chain" in August 1989 spanning across all three Baltic States was an amazing symbol for the force of civil society! The "Baltic Chain" and the fall of the Berlin Wall were impressive examples of European values at work. I am particularly glad to be here today as Latvia will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2015. In times of economic and social crisis, it is good to know that the Latvian Presidency will focus on growth and jobs while, at the same time, the European Commission has presented ambitious ideas for more investment in Europe. Germany will support the Presidency of Latvia in implementing its ambitious agenda. We know: Europe can only be successful as a team! This brings me to the main topic of my short intervention, "Solidarity in Europe - how do we get the EU back on track?" I would like to share with you some of my ideas on what solidarity in Europe means and why it has come under pressure in times of crisis, which measures we can take in order to strengthen solidarity and social cohesion and what specific contribution might be expected from Latvia. >1. What does solidarity mean? Let me begin with the question what solidarity means. One thing is clear: Solidarity is a driving force of European integration and has a legal basis in the EU treaties. But increasingly, we are seeing uncertainty in Europe about how much we can still rely on each another. We realize that there are different expectations with respect to solidarity in Europe - depending on individual problems, experiences and challenges of a country. Let me give you a few examples: States like Greece, Portugal or Cyprus are suffering from insufficient growth and high unemployment rates. They justly expect European support in order to overcome their social crises. In contrast, member states in Central and Eastern Europe, like the Baltic States, worry about their security and about their energy supplies after Russia's aggression on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They expect European solidarity in security and energy issues. Other countries like Italy or Spain have to deal with floods of refugees from the Middle East and from Africa trying to escape civil wars, hunger and poverty at home. Those countries expect assistance in order to cope with the challenges of migration. One last example: Many people in Germany wonder why the EU permits certain member states to gain an unfair competitive edge by means of fiscal and social dumping. It is hard to bear when companies like Google and Apple establish themselves in certain member states and pay hardly any taxes in Europe! This is not compatible with our idea of European solidarity. All these examples show: No single EU member state - not even Germany - is able to master the challenges of globalisation alone. Only joint European action will do the trick. In other words: All EU member states live in mutual dependence. At some time or other, certain member states will need more assistance than others. Let me be very clear: Solidarity is not a theoretical construct - it must be lived in very concrete terms. At the moment many Europeans are asking themselves: Has Europe lost its sense of solidarity in the face of the crisis? The prevailing impression in Germany is that we are paying the bills, while many people in the southern member states feel ignored and patronised. We have to counter this impression. We must overcome debates about who is paying for the crisis. Instead, we should revive a positive narrative that is based on the principle of solidarity. The economic and financial crisis can be seen as a proving ground to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity between member states. There is no doubt that we need a competitive Europe if we want to survive in a globalized world and preserve our prosperity. But if all principles of the social market economy are thrown overboard, economic success will not be possible in the long run. Only a socially well-balanced and stable Europe can preserve our common currency. It is obvious that the Economic and Monetary Union also has a social dimension. This social dimension is necessary in two senses: In economic terms, a strong economic recovery with lower levels of unemployment is needed to bring about a reduction in national debt. In political terms, the majority of people will not support reforms if social stability is not fostered at the same time. What matters in politics is to make a positive difference to peoples lives. Hence our response to the crisis has to be more than just austerity measures or the liberalisation of markets. Lets leave the ideologically charged consolidation-versus-growth debate behind us. We need structural reforms and sound finances, but we also need investment and the protection of the welfare state - these elements must not be played off against one another. They do need to be rebalanced, though. >2. How to strengthen solidarity and social cohesion? This brings me to my second point: Which concrete measures can we take in order to strengthen solidarity and social cohesion in Europe? If you ask me: Most urgently, we need to kick start new investment in the EU. In this context, the European Commissions recent proposal for a 315 billion euro investment package - including the creation of a European Fund for strategic investments - is a very good starting point. We should support it wholeheartedly. In this context, three issues are of crucial importance now: We have to make sure that investments flow into those areas that really pave the way for the next generation - such as education, IT, research and development, and life sciences. Investing in people means investing in our future. At the same time, we have to make sure that funds are channeled into those member states that need them most. And finally we have to work hard at taking the necessary decisions as quickly as possible in order to set up the investment fund and establish the right conditions for more investments in Europe. The time for action is now! To reduce the dramatic levels of youth unemployment, implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative remains a top priority. We cannot afford to leave a whole generation behind, a generation which sees the EU not as part of the solution but as part of the problem. We managed to increase absorption of funds. But we have to achieve much more. We still lack innovative ideas in many member states. I also believe that the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy provides a good opportunity to take a fresh look at the results of our social policies and to see if and where there is room for further improvement. One example: By 2020, EU member states are to achieve an employment rate of 75 percent for both women and men. This surely is an ambitious goal. But I think the Europe 2020 Strategy should also aim at improving peoples daily lives. To begin with, we need sustainable jobs which enable decent living. Furthermore, everyone should have unrestricted access to education, child care, social security systems, as well as public infrastructure. I am not talking about legal harmonization. What we need are minimum standards for retirement and health care provisions, as a starting point. In Germany we know how difficult it is to implement structural reforms. Ten years after the so-called Hartz Reforms we still have important homework to do. In terms of equal opportunities for education, we are not a role model for others. Increasing domestic demand and meeting our public investment requirements is still a challenge for us. Integration of migrants, too, is a big problem. We still have to establish a culture of welcoming, having confidence in all citizens. Integration is an investment. Only inclusive societies can protect democracy against any form of extremism. This is true for Germany and for any other European country! We should never forget: European integration is a team sport. Germany surely has an important role to play, but we are the most successful when working in a team. Germany has always been an advocate for the smaller member states. For me, it is not the size of a country that matters in the EU. What really matters are ideas, creativity and a pro-European commitment. In this respect Baltic countries have a lot to offer! >3. Latvias contribution This brings me to my final question: Which role can Latvia play in the European team? My suggestion is: You can encourage us in Europe and be a role-model for others. Today Latvia is in a position to invest in social stability. This is the kind of good news that so many citizens in other EU member states are longing for. Latvia has made enormous sacrifices in order to overcome the financial and economic crisis. These sacrifices have been painful for Latvias

population. But you have survived the storms of the crisis. Now your country is again seeing impressive growth rates and has ambitious plans to strengthen social cohesion. When it comes to solidarity and internal cohesion, Europe and its member states will clearly have to deliver more. In this sense, Germany stands ready to support Latvia in its Presidency of the Council from 1 January 2015. We should not forget that the Latvian Presidency comes at a very decisive point of time: These days the EU has seen a major change in its top positions. With Donald Tusk as President of the European Council, Federica Mogherini as High Representative and Jean-Claude Juncker as President of the European Commission, we have the strong team that we urgently need for a more successful EU. After all, the European Union is about so much more than just economics and finance. It is a union of values. It is our life insurance in the stormy times of globalization. This is the very essence of solidarity in Europe. I am convinced that today the EU is able to strengthen social cohesion and solidarity instead of tearing societies apart. A genuine "solidarity union", one that gives a fresh kick start to investment and jobs, can lend Europe new appeal - both within the Union and throughout the world. Thank you very much.

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