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## Opportunities for Korean-German Cooperation

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**Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Korea**

On March 14, 2018, Angela Merkel was re-elected Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. This will be her fourth term in office and her third round leading the so-called “Grand Coalition” of the Christian-Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD).

With several new and younger ministers and state secretaries at the top of the administration, the new government has started with a fresh drive to take up the current challenges facing domestic society as well as the international community while preserving the successes of the past years in financial stability and economic progress.

The German government will continue to pursue policies central to the prosperity and social cohesion of Europe. The European Union is the cornerstone of the agreement recently signed by the partners of the new coalition government: the document starts with a chapter on Europe as the coalition parties agree that Germany can only thrive within a successfully integrated Europe. We will continue to build on our cherished values of an open democracy, the rule of law, strictly implemented human rights, and multilateralism. The importance of free markets will be upheld as well as social justice. We will further promote our partnerships around the world.

However, this kind of continuity will not mean stagnation, but rather taking advantage of the dynamics in an ever-faster changing world.

We need new, sustainable answers to the most urgent challenges that our societies are facing: climate and demographic change; digitalization and urbanization; the rise of protectionism and the surge of populism; the defiance of universal values by other governments; and the defense of important institutions and mechanisms of a reliable, rules-based international world order. Solutions to these challenges need to be worked out together with our close partners around the globe.

Within Asia, the Republic of Korea is one of our closest partners. South Korea is explicitly mentioned in the German coalition agreement as a country that maintains a long-standing, close friendship and partnership of values with Germany that should be nurtured and further developed. We share the same values of democracy, rule of law, human rights and a socially-balanced market economy. Of course, we also share the unfortunate experience of our nations being divided. While my country was offered the unexpected opportunity for reunification in 1989/1990, our Korean friends are still waiting for that moment. We Germans can empathize with the Koreans, and we all very much hope that Korea will be reunited again one day in peace and freedom.

These principal similarities constitute a strong bond not only on the political level, but also between the Korean and German people. This human bond is strong and deeply rooted

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in our bilateral history – from the German national who became Korean vice foreign minister under King Gojong, Paul Georg von Möllendorff, to the Korean nurses and miners who came to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s in order to help build up the economies of both countries, and the outstanding classical musicians and football players of today who build bridges between our two countries.

The main challenges of our time offer many opportunities to deepen our bilateral Korean-German cooperation, of which I would like to mention just three.

Firstly, effective multilateralism is at the heart of crisis management, conflict resolution and tackling global challenges. As middle-sized powers, both Korea and Germany are particularly reliant on international institutions, rules, and mechanisms to preserve and protect respect for international law, including international humanitarian law. We need institutions such as the United Nations, regional bodies such as the EU and ASEAN, and economic and financial organizations such as the WTO and the IMF to ensure a level playing field between nations, be they big or small. It is in our core interest to strengthen these institutions in their role of defending and improving a rules-based international world order at a time when they are being defied and challenged by unilateral initiatives and nationalistic interests. We need to coordinate closely and join forces, for instance when it comes to respecting and implementing UN Security Council resolutions on the North Korean nuclear program.

Secondly, the prosperity of both our countries largely depends on the free exchange of goods. As the value-added chain becomes increasingly international, our companies have become extremely connected and intertwined

with other partners from around the world. Therefore, we must defend free and rules-based bilateral and global trade. The Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement constitutes a strong asset that allows for increased exchange and cooperation between our companies. In times of rising protectionism, the deepening of our Free Trade Agreement and the abolition of non-tariff trade barriers would send a very strong message of support for free trade. Indeed, direct bilateral cooperation between German and Korean companies can help them remain competitive as they strive for innovation and work to maintain their technological lead.

Thirdly, climate change and the need to secure a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy supply is another field where enhanced cooperation could be very beneficial to both of our countries. Germany has been at the forefront when it comes to the transformation of our conventional fossil fuel-based energy systems to a CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral system through the development of renewable energies. As we phase out nuclear energy, we have also begun to reduce the use of fossil fuels for energy production. This has not been easy, but as renewable energies become more and more competitive, the German energy transition, or so-called “Energiewende,” is becoming a success story.

Moreover, an important, yet often overlooked aspect of the German “Energiewende” is that – with the decentralized build-up of renewable – about 370,000 new jobs have been created over the last several years, many more than we have ever created in the fields of nuclear and coal energy. We are also a net exporter of energy to our neighboring countries. Against this background, President Moon’s bold decisions towards transforming the Korean energy system is opening new avenues for Korean-German cooperation, especially with

a view to increasing renewable energies and energy efficiency as well as a step-by-step phase out of nuclear energy.

All of these examples make a clear case for enhanced cooperation between Korea and Germany on all levels. The new German government is particularly interested in further deepening its relations with Korea. Let us join forces to find innovative and sustainable solutions to the current challenges together! ■

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— *Stephan Auer* is currently serving as the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Korea.