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Speech by Chancellor Schröder on the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising

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"The fact that I am able to express this hope here today, as the Chancellor of a different, a free and democratic Germany, is something we owe to all those who resisted Nazi barbarism, like the insurgents in the Warsaw Uprising."

- Translation of advance text -

Mr. President,
Mr. Prime Minister,
Mr. Mayor,
Honored participants in the Warsaw Uprising,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we pay our respects to the courage and pride of the men and women of the Polish Home Army. For 63 days the men and women of Warsaw heroically and fearlessly resisted the German occupying forces. They fought for the freedom and dignity of Poland. Their patriotism stands out as a shining example in the history of the Polish nation.

We bow our heads in shame at the crimes committed by Nazi troops. In 1939 they invaded Poland. After the uprising in 1944 they demolished the historical center of Warsaw. Countless men, women, and children were murdered or sent to concentration camps and used as slave laborers. In this place of Polish pride and German disgrace we hope for reconciliation and peace.

The fact that I am able to express this hope here today, as the Chancellor of a different, a free and democratic Germany, is something we owe to all those who resisted Nazi barbarism, like the insurgents in the Warsaw Uprising. For many decades their remembrance was suppressed by a foreign power. But in the hearts of the Poles these heroic freedom fighters were never forgotten. Despite our quest for

understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation we in Germany failed for a long time to remember them.

Thus, the insurgents of the Warsaw Uprising, who were left unassisted in 1944, were also abandoned in terms of remembrance. It was not until the Poles freed themselves in 1989 that it was possible to erect a memorial to the insurgents, to their courage and their sacrifice, on the edge of the historical center of Warsaw.

Ladies and gentlemen, no one can undo history. But today, in a free Europe, in which Poland and Germany are equal partners, history must not be re- or misinterpreted. Any attempts of this kind must continue to be strongly opposed.

Millions of people of different nationalities - including two million Poles - were driven from their homes during and after the Second World War. Remembrance of their enormous suffering must not separate us anew, it must bring us together. In order to safeguard our common future we need to remember well. We must never again allow such horrible crimes to occur. This is a mission that unifies the peoples of Europe.

We Germans are very much aware of who started the war and who its first victims were. As such, there can be no room for restitution claims from Germany that turn history on its head. Property questions connected with the Second World War are not an issue for either government in German-Polish relations. Neither the German government nor any other credible political forces in Germany support individual claims, to the extent that any are made. The German government will also take this position before international courts.

The German government also opposes plans to establish a national "center against expulsions" in Berlin. We support the efforts being undertaken to create a European network such as proposed by the Polish President and the German President.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has often been said - not only in Poland and not only about Poland - that as long as Poland is not free, Europe cannot be free. This statement was correct, and it is correct. Europe was torn down the middle by the Cold War. Now it is growing back together at this central interface.

No one can dispute that it was the Solidarnosc labor movement who built the first section of a bridge leading to a better future for all of Europe. With Poland's accession to NATO and the European Union the legacy of the Warsaw Uprising was fulfilled, a free and independent Poland that finds its security and sovereignty in alliances of equals. Poland has completed its journey into a free Europe.

For the first time in many centuries Poland's security is no longer under threat. On the contrary, it is stronger and more stable than ever before. We are bound together by much more than just a single market with open borders. We have the same values and the same constitution. And we have an obligation to assist one another in Europe and in the transatlantic alliance.

We could not have completed this project without Polish-German reconciliation. It is an honor to evoke the memory of Willy Brandt and those Poles and Germans who worked to promote the reconciliation process - particularly in the difficult years of the East-West conflict. It is of decisive importance for us Germans and for Europe as a whole, just as the process of reconciliation between France and Germany was.

In view of our common history, in the course of which Germans inflicted enormous suffering upon the Poles, this process of reconciliation still seems like a miracle. Whether in the past or the in present, this has never been a matter for our governments alone.

Numerous people in our two societies have built up a dense network of relations that binds us together today. Artists and scientists have contributed towards this, as have the churches, and, more than anything, our young people. The Krzyzowa-Kreisau Foundation, the Collegium Polonicum, Viadrina University, and other institutions are increasing our knowledge of one another and creating mutual confidence. We need examples like this that bring young people from Poland and Germany together. With this in mind, Germany is willing to expand Viadrina much more than in the past into a model of academic cooperation between our two countries.

We're banking on the young generation. The future belongs to them. Safeguarding it is our common task. It will be a future of free nations in a united Europe. A Europe that is based on the diversity and creativity of our national cultures and traditions. We finally have the opportunity - and the responsibility - to shape this future together.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are not just good neighbors and partners today. We are friends in a united Europe that is dependent on our close cooperation. Our common interests oblige us to engage in ever stronger cooperation - for more reasons than just to promote trade. We want to dedicate ourselves to the joint task of developing a European foreign and security policy, something Poland will play a key role in.

We can work together to develop ideas for a common policy in the enlarged Union - particularly with regard to our neighbors. And we must not slacken our efforts to continue to promote cultural exchange and a wide range of contacts between our civil societies - particularly among young people.

Poland and Germany are called upon to expand their partnership into a "pact for the future": for the good of the people in our two countries; for the benefit of a free and united Europe; and out of a sense of responsibility for all those people on this earth who are struggling to achieve a life in freedom and dignity. There is no greater tribute we can pay to the heroes and victims of the Warsaw Uprising.

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