

Speech by Michael Gahler, MEP on occasion of 20 years of official
representation of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Namibia
Kalahari Sands Hotel Windhoek, 27 October 2009

To hold the “keyhole” speech after the starters makes the speaker more powerful and the audience more peaceful

Honourable Mr Speaker, honourable Chief Justice
honourable colleagues of the Parliament of Namibia,
distinguished representatives of government and other public institutions of
Namibia,

verehrte EU Delegierte Frau Pape

Herr Botschafter Kochanke,

lieber Toni Boesl,

dear friends of the Adenauer foundation

ladies and gentlemen,

yesterday in the Panafrican Parliament I learned a useful phrase: “All protocol observed”

which apparently means that anybody who was forgotten to be mentioned can consider him- and herself duly mentioned at his and her rightful place.

Allow me first of all to express my sincere thanks and appreciation that I was given the honour to speak here to commemorate 20 years of official representation of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Namibia. It is good to see some of those who were present 20 years ago. In the row of predecessors of Dr. Toni Boesl, there are two, Dr. Martin Schneider and Dr. Burkard Dobjey who have joined us today. They are not only present, for them the

verse of the famous song has come true: Quote " and once our sun has burnt into your heart, that's when you can never again leave from here" unquote. I admit that the original German version goes down more smoothly.

My special welcome to you and my thanks for the good cooperation with you both, and since then with Wolfgang Maier, who is not here today and Toni Boesl. As member of the European Parliament, but also before during various stays I profited from your expertise and contacts in the country.

As someone who visited this country for the first time in 1981 and regularly ever since, I think I have some insight in Namibia's development and also in the activities of the KAS here. What you have achieved, your contributions to the development of the country is reason for cordial congratulation.

As a committed supporter of the originally German concept of political foundations, I keep saying: if the Adenauer Foundation did not exist yet, it should be invented. Why that and what for ?

On the banner besides me you can identify the areas of activities in Namibia. All of them are essential for a politically, socially and economically stable, democratic, prosperous and open society, that focuses on the one hand on those who need to catch up and overcome previous injustices and on the other hand to enable those who are stronger to deliver on their strengths in order to be able to contribute to the society as a whole.

In this regard a focus on good governance, human rights, the rule of law and the consolidation of democratic values and institutions is by no means a coincidence in Africa– having a certain overview of the political situation throughout Africa as member for ten years now in the Joint Parliamentary Assembly ACP-EU and as Chairman of the European Parliament's delegation for the relations with the Pan African Parliament, I can confirm that this is the right approach.

With regard to Namibia, I think there is a lot of good reason to congratulate Namibia shortly ahead of its 20th birthday: if all African countries were in a situation like Namibia today, Africa and the world could rejoice. Don't applaud too early yet.

You should therefore celebrate next year and commemorate independence day proudly and in a genuine Namibian way. There is no reason to imitate North Korea with its totalitarian architecture that reminds me of everything but Namibia or Africa. Independence belongs to the entire nation and it is genuine African tradition to discuss important issues, and this country has the potential to discuss in public with all relevant stakeholders from Parliament to City Council to architects and interested groups and individuals on such an important and necessary memorial and Namibia has its own creative people to design and to build it. Lonely decision making should therefore be reconnected with society to avoid harm on either side.

Germany by the way is just at the other extreme: so many projects for a memorial to commemorate 20 years of reunification in October next year have been handed in and all have been refused by the competent jury, that Germany will next year celebrate its 20th anniversary of reunification without any memorial

When KAS started its engagement here, it was by no means certain that there would be a smooth transition to independence and a stable development later, because the world had seen negative events both in neighbouring and more distant parts of Africa.

The Apartheid regime by its very nature had not provided for a democratic culture of Rule of Law, tolerance, compromise and mutual understanding. On the other side an armed liberation struggle was also not the ideal framework to train a culture of debate and compromise and discuss the relevance of the Rule of Law for the time after the struggle. So where to get the democrats for a democracy? Every country has to recur to the human resources it has got. And as Namibia was not the first country to experience a complete shift of references, a cut with the past, the Adenauer foundation and others could offer advice and refer to lessons learnt elsewhere.

The global political change was also conducive for a peaceful transition both in Namibia and South Africa.

To put it bluntly: Those who might earlier have feared certain Soviet style slogans could be sure that they would neither end up in an African edition of an East European system nor have to pack their belongings and move elsewhere. On the other hand, those who might have feared that at some stage South Africa or the West might not have accepted a certain outcome of the elections could relax and rest assured that the liberation struggle would end successfully at the ballot box.

It is my conviction that the work of the Adenauer Foundation is an essential ingredient of the overall policies that are pursued with regard to Namibia and Africa both from the European Union and its member states. Europeans and Africans have agreed in Lisbon in December 2007 on a new common strategy for future cooperation. Now as the instruments are in place, it is time to make the “people centred partnership” a reality for the people.

As a parliamentarian I consider it extremely important to strengthen parliaments in the institutional setup of democratic states or regional organisations. We as European Parliament support the PAP as the institution that represents the peoples of Africa within the African Union.

In the same way I want the European Commission delegations through their country strategies to strengthen the respective national parliaments. Accordingly I expect coordinated efforts between the EU delegation and likeminded member states. Ideal instrument to implement such policies are the political foundations. I am glad that Adenauer and probably others cooperate with the Namibian Parliament and individual parliamentarians.

A vibrant civil society besides a functioning multiparty democracy is another prerequisite for a country to prosper. A country with so many small and dispersed local communities needs active citizens on the ground. That is why I am very grateful, that the Foundation has engaged in many projects in this regard. With Adenauer, the above mentioned “people centred partnership” has become reality. Today a conference of “Women’s Action for Development” took place here, an organisation supported by KAS. Women in Africa bear the bulk of organising their small family enterprise and their organisations need everybody’s support.

“Providing leadership training for politicians” is necessary everywhere in the world and one of the features of Adenauer here. None of us can claim to be perfect. Leadership in complex societies cannot mean that one orders and the rest follows suit. Coming from a continent that has not only inflicted colonialism on others but also suffered many European Civil wars, that is one European nation against another, we have drawn the consequence that we need leadership for a better understanding, leadership to find common ground and solutions through compromise.

That is our European way to a common future, that could be Africa’s way to cooperate better amongst themselves and that should be a way that the people of Namibia should sort out their problems and ambitions. And if the Adenauer Foundation can modestly contribute thereto I would be happy.

All the best for next 20 years.