

**Celebratory speech
by the Chairman of the German Near and
Middle East Association (NUMOV),
Martin Bay,
on the occasion of the appointment of
Dr. Gerhard Schröder as Honorary Chairman
of the German Near and Middle East Association**

on May 29, 2006 in the Federal Foreign Office, Berlin

Federal Chancellor,
Foreign Minister Dr. Steinmeier,
Your Highness, Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan,
Ambassadors, Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Members of the German Near and Middle East Association,

We consider it a great honour and particular joy to name Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder as our new honorary chairman. We are proud that in Gerhard Schröder, the German Near and Middle East Association has been able to win an honorary chairman whose political activities have consistently shaped and developed Germany's dialog with the region. And who knows how best to represent the interests of German business in this highly interesting but strongly contested market.

Between 1998 and 2005, the honorary chairman was Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, a passionate politician, who, because of his close connection to the region and in recognition of his great services there, was respectfully known as "Ben Wisch". When Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski passed away last year at the age of 82, farewells were not only made in Germany to this outstanding politician who was valued above and beyond political boundaries, but also in the Arab world.

At that time, Mr Schröder, you expressed your deep regret, not just at the death of an honoured statesman, but also at the loss of a personal friend and adviser. You paid him respects as a "bridge builder with the Arab world".

Today, as we come together in celebration to welcome you as the new honorary chairman of the Near and Middle East Association, this image of bridge building presents itself once again, since as German Federal Chancellor, Mr Schröder, you reached important milestones in the development of the relationship between Germany and the Middle East. Countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – which have a special importance politically and economically as long-term partners of Germany in the region, were the destinations of your extensive trip to the Middle East in 2003. Your stay in Abu Dhabi and Dubai at that time was the first visit of a German Federal Chancellor since Helmut Schmidt in 1981. Furthermore, your talks with the now late President and Founder of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and his sons Sheikh Hamdan and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan were the starting point of the strategic partnership which you announced together with Vice Prime Minister Sheikh Hamdan in April 2004 during his visit to Germany.

The United Arab Emirates are Germany's most important country of importation in the Arab world, even ahead of Saudi Arabia, and enjoy great respect internationally for the impressive modernisation which they have been able to achieve in only a few decades. The strategic

partnership which you founded made manifest the desire of both states to intensify their economic relationship beyond the significant trade which already occurred and politically to act together in many different issues.

It is for good reason, Mr Schröder, that you have gained great standing in the Arab states. Our Arab partners value your political courage and determination to act on your convictions. During the first visit of a German Chancellor to Libya, after the lifting of EU sanctions against the North African state in October 2004, you signalled that the West knew how to value the start of the political and economic opening up of the country and that Germany was ready to support Libya on this path. An honoured guest of the German delegation, which accompanied you to Libya and Algeria at that time, was once again Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski. For him, the recommencement of relations with Libya and the deepened cooperation with Algeria were an affirmation of his tireless efforts to develop an understanding with these countries. Both Mediterranean countries – Libya and Algeria – play an important role in stabilisation efforts for the region, which you have supported along with the other European governments.

There is still a long way to go before all nations in the Middle East enjoy economic prosperity in peaceful circumstances and with secure borders. The attaining of these goals is a distant prospect if the courage to take the first steps is lacking. Throughout your long political career, Mr Schröder, you have proven time and again your readiness to take such a path despite the risks associated with it. The risk is always the possible failure of the first step and the political criticism of those who fear change. In this way, your understanding of social and political responsibility corresponds with that of our late honorary chairman “Ben Wisch”, who, disregarding all difficulties and the political Zeitgeist at that time, promoted the Christian-Islamic dialog and exemplified the policy of understanding, long before the “*dialogue of cultures*” became a familiar quotation. After your Libya and Algeria trip, your extensive visit to the Gulf region in March 2005 represented a milestone in German-Arab relations. It was the first time for a German Federal Chancellor to visit all seven countries of the Arab Peninsular – an unprecedented gesture that won special respect for Germany in these countries and strengthened ties with the region politically, economically and culturally.

In our personal conversation, which was published in our last edition of the *WirtschaftsForum Nah- und Mittelost*, you referred once again to a particularly important aspect of relations with the nations of the Middle East: “Only when trust grows and remains steady,” were your words, “will economic relations be as lasting as they should be between friends”. A clear indicator that your efforts for the region have resulted in lasting and friendly relations is the presence here today of Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Al Nahyan.

In close connection to the *long lasting nature of relationships*, there exists a second point, which you particularly highlighted as a guarantee for the long-term success of German business. You emphasized: “Whoever wants to have a permanent presence in a market must be ready to engage in technology transfer and to export knowledge”.

From experience, we know that the expectations for knowledge and technology transfer continue to increase and that this readiness represents an important prerequisite for long term success in foreign markets. In the German Near and Middle East Association, you can find both globally

active international firms and successful medium-sized businesses who have built up a strong market position in the region according to this concept.

At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that still greater efforts are necessary to establish the legal and administrative frameworks which would guarantee fair conditions for the transfer of this know-how in individual countries of the region. The pursuit of this goal from an economic and political perspective is a particular concern of the German Near and Middle East Association.

However, to successfully develop a market *and*, more importantly, to maintain it, a modest weighing up of risks and opportunities is not sufficient. Just as you yourself said, Mr Schröder, mutual trust is also essential. In line with your readiness to visit our partners in these countries once and again, to relate responsively, to listen and to learn from them, you were particularly concerned to consolidate our cooperation through common projects. This also applies for the German-Turkish relations and your attitude to Turkey's negotiations regarding entry to the EU – a question of great strategic importance which continues to be discussed in Germany with significant controversy. Your clear position favouring a long-term entrance never contradicted the clear European expectations of democratic developments in Turkey, and maintained at the same time all mutual respect.

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We are all aware of the economic potential of the countries of the Middle East. Despite this, it is more often our close neighbours in Eastern Europe or dynamic economies in Asia that are the focus of public interest. Certainly, the legal uncertainties we have mentioned and the daily news reports from well known crisis centres in the Middle East contribute significantly to this state of affairs.

However, the Middle East region shares this imponderableness with other regions of the world. Without a doubt, there are also provisos that have more to do with ignorance or partisanship in the German public opinion. This means it was all the more important for you, Mr Schröder, to have promoted the partnership with the region during your time as Federal Chancellor. The same degree of recognition that was won through your visits to the countries of the Middle East was given by the whole region for the tireless efforts of your government to achieve a peaceful solution in Iraq and peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Right from the start of your time in office, you elucidated the importance of promoting the involvement of German firms in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. All parties in the conflict agree that achieving an end to the continued violence is also dependent on establishing an appropriate economic framework.

You assured the former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres already in 1999 that efforts would not only be made in Germany, but also on a European level, to achieve this strategic task. Your trip to the Middle East in the following year led you to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories – countries that are all Mediterranean neighbours of Europe. These countries do not only share geographical proximity with us, but rather there is also an intense economic and political exchange. A partnership with these countries based on deep trust lies in the long term interests of Germany and Europe.

However, the desire for peace and stability in the Middle East is not only clouded by the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. A real tragedy for the region is the present situation in Iraq, which after decades of dictatorship is still characterised by almost daily attacks and thus by violence against the population. In view of the formation of democratic structures in Iraq, it was only natural for you to provide practical assistance for the development of security forces, which are henceforth bound to the rule of law. Together with the United Arab Emirates, you therefore created a successful, long term training program for Iraqi security forces. Cooperation in the form

of a partnership of this kind will continue to gain political and economic importance in the future as in our ever shrinking world we are more dependent on each other than ever before. From a European perspective, this is truer of the Middle East region, as our direct neighbour, than it is of any other region in the world.

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We are very happy that following your term of office as Federal Chancellor, you have chosen to preserve a special connection to the region of the Middle East. Your friendships with political leaders in the region, which have developed over many years, are just as much a sign of your personal interest as is your willingness to take on the role of honorary chairman of the German Near and Middle East Association.

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The German Near and Middle East Association has been active in Germany for more than 70 years, making it *the* oldest organisation for relations to the region and *the* contact for firms looking to establish or expand their business relations in the Near and Middle East region. We know that taking care of the bilateral economic relations with the countries of the region – from North Africa to the Arab Peninsular to Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan – is an important motor for the dialogue with the Arab and Islamic world. This applies to much more than just the economic topics which are naturally important to us as *the* German economic organisation for the region. We want to continue to strengthen the traditionally good relationships to the countries of the region and, as the German Near and Middle East Association, to make our just contribution. We are exceedingly pleased, Mr Schröder, that you have chosen to assist and accompany us on this path.

May I ask you, Mr Schröder, to speak a few words to our guests and members? You are speaking to friends, Mr Schröder, who welcome you warmly into the German Near and Middle East Association.