

Dear Daniel Caspary, Thank you very much for the invitation to Karlsruhe.

I would like to welcome our Vice-President of the European Parliament Rainer Wieland, Andreas Schwab, our Mr. Internal Market in Europe, Norbert Lins, the strong voice in Europe for the concerns of farmers, and Christine Schneider has come from Rhineland-Palatinate, our parliamentary secretary in the European Parliament.

I am keeping my fingers crossed for our number 1 in Baden-Württemberg, dear Andrea Wechsler, on behalf of all our candidates. It's great to be with you in Karlsruhe!

Dear Members of the German Bundestag, Andreas Jung, and Nicolas Zippelius, Dear members of the Baden-Württemberg state parliament, Dear guests from the business world, from churches and associations and ladies and gentlemen! Thank you for this invitation!

It was important to me to come here to Baden-Württemberg right after the start of the election campaign. This election is about our coexistence in Europe. We are here a stone's throw – less than 20 kilometres – from France. Thousands of people cross the border every day, which is no longer a border. Franco-German friendship is lived here. Europe is lived here! That is why I am very pleased to be here today.

The dynamic state of Baden-Württemberg is a role model for many in Europe. Many companies here in the state are at home on the global markets. They have been aware for some time now how the signs are changing. That competition is becoming tougher. That they have to adapt to the new conditions.

And this applies to the whole of Europe. In order to survive the tough international competition, we have to become simpler, faster and cheaper. And at the same time, we also want to preserve the nature of our homeland.

Young people would never forgive us, and rightly so, if we shirk this task. They also want the splendour of the Black Forest, the Swabian Alb, of the sun-drenched Rhine Valley. The bright green of the vineyards in spring, the murmur of our streams and rivers – whether the Danube, Rhine or Neckar. We must preserve their homeland! And at the same time, we must preserve our inventiveness and our economic strength, so that we can achieve a turnaround.

We are experts in technological innovation. And we see technological innovation not as a problem but as a solution.

The good news is you have all the ingredients.

Almost all the ingredients! I know your saying: We can do everything except High German. That's true - I can judge this as I come from Hannover. But Baden-Württemberg is Germany's state number 1 for patents, investment in research, most universities of excellence, 57 Nobel Prize winners in Heidelberg alone, the highest life expectancy, best social partnership, most fruit trees and the most starred restaurants. You really can do everything except speak High German.

You are also strong in our key industries. It wasn't just the car that was invented in Baden-Württemberg. You are also already a pioneer in the mobility of tomorrow. Mercedes is a major player in electric cars. And Porsche is already planning to sell 50% of its new cars with electric motors next year. That's a good thing.

We like fair competition. What we don't like, is when China floods the market with massively subsidised e-cars. We are taking action against this. Competition yes, dumping no.

There are even more parade fields, here in the home of tinkerers and technicians. Over 115 innovative companies are active in the solar industry in Baden-Württemberg. That's great! In your region, lithium is filtered out of the thermal water. Without lithium, neither the digital transformation nor modern mobility can be mastered. Without lithium, there would be neither computer tablets nor batteries. The lithium that is extracted here is enough for an estimated 20,000 car batteries per year. Hats off!

And, third example, if I may mention it here on Baden soil: Without the laser technology from the Swabian town of Ditzingen, Apple would look pretty old.

Without this laser technology from Baden-Württemberg there would be no iPhones in the whole world! That, dear friends, tastes like the future.

And that is exactly what will be at stake in Europe in the coming years. What counts now, is a clear course and answers that work for people and our companies on a day-to-day basis. And in Germany as in Europe, these answers are delivered by the Christian Democrats.

We stand for neither ideology nor wishful thinking.
We stand for pragmatic solutions.
We believe in science.

We know that there is no competitive economy without climate protection.
But there is also no climate protection without competitive companies.

That is why we designed the European Green Deal from the outset designed as a growth strategy. The climate targets are clear, and they are right. But the way how we achieve the targets, depends on the expertise of the Union. Namely with a sense of proportion and in close cooperation with companies.

We want that they continue to lead the world markets in the future. From solar to cars to clean steel. Whether it's green hydrogen, critical raw materials or electric mobility. From the circular economy to laser technology. These are the growth drivers of tomorrow's economy. They should provide good jobs and prosperity here. And not at the other end of the Silk Road!

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear friends,

For this to succeed, we have to make it easier for our companies. More skilled workers. Lower energy costs. More digitalisation. And better access to capital. A

better integrated Capital Markets Union could generate up to 470 billion euros more investment.

The proposals are on the table. What matters now is that the European finance ministers pull together. And we need to dictate less to our companies and trust them more. So that they can concentrate on what they are good at – be innovative, competitive products and create good jobs.

This also means less bureaucracy, simpler procedures and faster decisions. SMEs belong at the centre of our attention. They are the backbone of our social market economy. We know what they can do. And we have great confidence in them! SMEs can count on our support.

Over 100 “hidden champions”, i.e. medium-sized world market leaders are at home here. And it is the European Union that gives these companies access to the global market. No region has more trade agreements around the world than Europe. We are the world's top address for foreign direct investment.

We know exactly how important openness is for our success. That is why we are working on new trade agreements with Asia and South America. I would like to take this opportunity to thank two colleagues in particular: Daniel Caspary and Andreas Schwab. You are drivers for an open and strong Europe.

Thank you for your tireless efforts!

Ladies and gentlemen, our farmers also face international competition. They get up at the first crow of the rooster. They work hard for the high-quality food that ends up on our tables. Their costs for seed, fertilizer and energy rise from year to year.

But the prices they receive for milk, meat and grain fluctuate. The big players in the food chain are exerting pressure.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The market is good. But it is unacceptable that farmers have to sell their food below production costs. That is neither acceptable nor is it sustainable.

Thank you, dear Norbert Lins, for doing so much for this important profession!

We need to put the system back on a solid footing. The hard work in agriculture must pay off! And the farmers themselves are the best ambassadors for the protection of our nature if they are adequately remunerated for their work. We have to get there!

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

My third point is about security and defence.

We all sense that our geopolitical environment is changing rapidly and radically. As a result, the risks for Europe are also increasing considerably. Russia's brutal war is

not only an attack against Ukraine but also an attack on the rules to which we have owed peaceful coexistence in Europe for 70 years.

International law must apply. Just like the borders of sovereign states. If Putin's cold calculation works in Ukraine, we will no longer be safe. No one wants lasting peace in their own country more than the Ukrainians. But anyone who talks and acts like Putin, does not want peace.

We can never match the courage and determination of the Ukrainians. But what we can do, is to stand firmly by their side today and in the future. Even if that requires effort, even if it costs, we must reinvest in freedom and peace. Because the price we would have to pay if Russia were to wipe out Ukraine, would be many times higher.

It was an enormously important signal this week, that the USA is continuing to provide Ukraine with massive support and thus also Europe's security. This is an incentive for us Europeans, to stand by Ukraine, be a strong partner in NATO and at the same time to do more for our own defence.

Europe must invest more money in defence.
We need to invest more wisely together.
And we must above all invest in the defence industry in Europe.

We want a Europe that can defend itself.
That is why we are in favour of a European defence union.
We want to make Europe strong to preserve peace on our continent.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear friends

When we talk about security, we also have to talk about migration. Hardly any other topic triggers such emotions. Hardly any other topic is more important.

This month, we in the European Parliament adopted the Pact on Migration and Asylum. With this pact, we are further strengthening Europe's external borders. We are ensuring faster and simpler procedures. But that alone is not enough.

Smugglers and traffickers make billions in business. They lie to people, rob them and put them on unseaworthy rubber dinghies. I was in Lampedusa and saw the misery with my own eyes. It is high time that we take tougher action against this organized crime. I want to be very clear: We have fulfilled our international obligations in the past, we are doing so today, and we will continue to do so in the future. But it is we, the Europeans, who decide who comes to Europe and under what circumstances. And not the organized crime of smugglers and human traffickers. That's why I travelled to Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt.

Next week, I will be traveling to Lebanon. I am looking for pragmatic agreements and concrete steps. With the countries of transit and origin we can develop common perspectives and interests. For example, on the issue of clean energy. On the topic of education. But of course, also on the issue of security and migration. On the one hand, this is about legal and safe routes for those who want to work here, to work for our companies, and who have prospects of staying.

But on the other hand, it's also about that people return, those who are not entitled to asylum. There is a huge problem here. That has to change. Not only because our local authorities are on the verge of being overwhelmed. But also, because democracy is only strong when it delivers solutions.

And that is what we stand for, the Christian Democrats, in this election.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear friends,

If we tackle the challenges and problems pragmatically, then people will not fall prey to those who focus on anger, hatred and dividing society. Who do everything to stir up fears. Our task is to counter the agents of fear with arguments. And on the other hand, we would do well to gage the moods.

The pace of digitalization, global warming and the increasing number of wars and crises are challenging people. That's why we have to show every day that democracy provides the better answers. We can do that too.

Just think of the pandemic. It certainly wasn't the torchlight processions, barriers and tinfoil hats, that defeated the virus. It was solidarity and great medical achievements a continent with 450 million people successfully through this difficult time.

We have overcome the energy crisis together.

And together we are standing up to Russian aggression and Putin's contempt for all democratic values.

Putin and the dividers in our societies have one thing in common: Democracy is in their way.

They contribute nothing, and have no interest in doing so, solving the real challenges of our time - No answer to digitalization. No answer to climate change, No answer to competitiveness. I am not surprised, that the Czech secret service is currently investigating two candidates leading the AfD list for the European elections. They have been agitating against the European Union for a long time. And they have never made a secret of their admiration for the democracy despiser in the Kremlin.

They have carried his propaganda into our societies. Whether they took bribes from Russia for it or not.... Their behaviour is destructive and oblivious to history. And they want that Germany turns its back on Europe.

The AfD is bringing a DEXIT into play. Have they ever thought about what a step backwards that would mean for Germany? According to IW Cologne, this could cost Germany around 10% of its economic output. They haven't understood anything! The opposite is true! No member state benefits more from the European single market than Germany. The European single market makes Germany 132 billion euros richer - every year! 55% of German SMEs' exports go to Europe. The DEXIT, which the AfD wants, would mean a loss of prosperity of 400 to

500 billion euros a year for Germany. In Germany as an exporting country, an AfD DEXIT would around 2.2 million jobs would be lost. What madness!

This week, a close associate of the AfD's lead candidate for the European elections the handcuffs clicked.

The public prosecutor's office is convinced that the man from within the European Parliament spying for China.

The AfD leadership announced today that it is covering up for the top candidate.

Dear friends,
Let me summarize.

Propaganda for Putin. Espionage for China. Germany's withdrawal from the EU.

These AfD candidates may stand for all of this. But what they certainly do not represent is the good of Europe, the interests of Germany, and decency in democracy. Sure, our European Union is not perfect.

When 27 countries and 450 million people work together, there are always things that don't work right away. Then we have to work on them. But that should never obscure the view of what our Europe achieves. Our EU is one of the most prosperous and socially progressive regions in the world.

Whether peace, freedom and democracy, climate change or digitalisation, no matter how big the challenges are...! As a community of 450 million people, we have the better answers to offer. Because we can only solve these challenges together.

Europe has been a guarantor of democracy, protection and prosperity for 70 years. And we want to preserve this Europe for future generations.

That is exactly what we are standing for in this election.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am more convinced than ever that democracy itself is our greatest locational advantage. When people in June go to the ballot box in 27 member states, this is a moment when we renew the democratic foundations of our Union. A moment, in which we reflect again on what is really important to us.

You can do business anywhere in the world.

But where do people want to settle and raise their children?

Where the roads are safe.
Where they have prospects.

Where everyone has access to good education and culture
- regardless of how much money they have.

Where everyone has access to healthcare.

Where there is lasting peace.

Where they can move freely, study, work,
across borders,
that no longer exist.

Where they can build something that stays theirs.

Where the rule of law wins and not arbitrariness.

That is what our European Union stands for.

That is what the European People's Party stands for.

That is what the CDU stands for.

And that is what I stand for.

Let's fight together for a strong Europe!

Long live Europe!