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ATLANTIK-BRÜCKE E.V.

## **Atlantik-Brücke's Young Leaders Program**

In June 1973, 20 Americans and 20 Germans gathered in Hamburg. They were young people, leaders in their fields who had come at the invitation of Atlantik-Brücke, Germany's leading private, nonprofit, and nonpartisan organization promoting transatlantic relations, to discuss topics of mutual interest to both sides. The conference, carried out in cooperation with the American Council on Germany, in New York, was a new path for Atlantik-Brücke, which had long worked to bring together established decision makers. The shift to a more long-term approach, based on forming bonds between future leaders on both sides of the Atlantic, was an experiment, but it was one launched in the spirit of the organization's founder, Eric M. Warburg. The prominent Hamburg banker had always looked to the younger generation as a new hope for Germany and for reconciliation with America. The first German-American Young Leaders Conference was a great success, and in the years since, the Young Leaders program has become a centerpiece of Atlantik-Brücke's activities.

Atlantik-Brücke's Young Leaders program lays the groundwork for the future strength of transatlantic relations by offering promising young people between the ages of 28 and 35 opportunities to meet and interact with each other and with prominent business and political leaders from the United States and Germany. In working groups and plenary sessions, participants discuss a range of topics, from the state of transatlantic relations to general economic or political questions to topical global issues. They leave these meetings with deepened knowledge, broadened perspectives, and close friendships that shape their later personal and professional lives.

Beyond this core approach, however, Atlantik-Brücke has made every effort to ensure the Young Leaders program evolves to meet changing circumstances. The popularity of the German-American Young Leaders conferences prompted Atlantik-Brücke to begin holding the once-biennial conference on a yearly basis in 1988, and since 2004, the American Council on Germany and Atlantik-Brücke have held separate conferences to double the number of young leaders welcomed into the network each year. The increasing number of applicants means that the conferences have become more selective, and the caliber of the discussions has risen accordingly. Whereas early conferences were marked by great interest but occasional timidity, participants now actively defend their ideas. The level of engagement is facilitated by another innovation, the distribution of conference tasks. Whether chairing working groups, introducing topics, or reporting on group discussions during plenary sessions, every participant now has a personal stake in the conference's outcome.

Conceived as a meeting ground for future leaders from Germany and the United States, the program has evolved to meet global challenges. The concurrent processes of globalization and European integration mean that strong transatlantic relations increasingly depend upon communication and cooperation within Europe. Atlantik-Brücke inaugurated its European Young Leaders Conference series in 2001 to provide future leaders from across Europe, both inside and outside the EU, with urgently needed opportunities for networking and dialogue. The presence of American observers adds to the diversity of perspectives. The X European Young Leaders Conference, held in Pristina, Kosovo, in June 2010, brought together over 50 promising young people from 26 European countries. In the fall of 2010, the Atlantik Forum was founded under the roof of Atlantik-Brücke in order to coordinate and strengthen the European Young Leaders Program and the Young Leaders alumni activities.

The thriving network of alumni is one of the greatest strengths of Atlantik-Brücke’s Young Leaders program. Former Young Leaders, now occupying some of the highest positions in government, business, the media, and academia on both sides of the Atlantic, remain in contact long after the conferences have finished. A brief listing of some of Atlantik-Brücke’s Young Leaders Alumni illustrates how successful the organizers of the conferences have been as “talent scouts”:

<u>Some Prominent Young Leaders Alumni</u>	
Christian Wulff	Federal President of Germany (XIV)
Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg	Federal Minister of Defense (XXV)
Thomas de Maizière	Federal Minister of Interior (XI)
Jürgen Großmann	Chairman of the Board of RWE (VI)
Thomas Enders	President and CEO of Airbus Industries (XI)
Gerd Häusler	Chairman of the Board of Bayerische Landesbank (VIII)
Paul-Bernhard Kallen	Chairman of the Board of Hubert Burda Media Holding (XIII)
Hans-Gert Pöttering	Former President of the European Parliament (I)
Charles Schumer	Senior U.S. Senator from New York (II)
Cem Özdemir	Chairman of Alliance 90/The Greens (XXIII)
Edelgard Bulmahn	Member of the <u>Deutscher Bundestag</u> ; Former Federal Minister of Education and Research (X)
Michael Vassiliadis	Chairman of the Board of IG BCE - Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union (XXII)
Wolfgang Ischinger	Former German Ambassador to the United States (IV)
Richard Burt	Former United States Ambassador to Germany (IV)
Silvana Koch-Mehrin	Vice President of the European Parliament (XXV)
Craig Kennedy	President of the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. (IX)
Kai Diekmann	Editor-in-Chief of BILD Zeitung (XVII)
Katja Gloger	Editor-at-large, STERN Magazin (XIV)
Joshua Bolten	Former White House Chief of Staff to President George W. Bush (X)

The "Atlantik-Gespräche" (Atlantic Talks), held monthly in Berlin and several times a year in major German, European, and American cities, bring together former conference participants for further discussion and networking possibilities. Atlantik-Brücke also administers the Online Young Leaders Directory, a database of former participants accessible by all Young Leaders Alumni. Atlantik-Brücke draws upon former Young Leaders for its membership, guaranteeing its continued vitality. Former conference participants remain committed to the program as well, continuing to nominate talented young individuals for conferences and financing the biennial Young Leaders Alumni Conferences, inaugurated in 2002 on the occasion of Atlantik-Brücke's fiftieth anniversary. The breadth and depth of the network is a hallmark of Atlantik-Brücke's Young Leaders program, prompting one notable alumnus, a former U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, to note, "Once a Young Leader, always a Young Leader."

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