

**Speech by the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Michael Müller,  
for the 66th anniversary of the end of the Berlin Blockade  
on 12 May 2016**

Excellencies,  
Speaker Wieland,  
Distinguished Veterans of the Airlift,  
Members of the Bundestag and the Berlin House of Representatives,  
Students from the Europäisches Gymnasium Bertha-von-Suttner  
and the Gail-S.-Halvorsen-Schule,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would especially like to welcome the veterans of the Airlift. There are just a few of you left. But we will never forget the humanitarian service you rendered. You risked your lives to ensure West Berlin's freedom and supply its people. Our city is especially pleased to see you here today.

The Soviet Union's blockade of West Berlin ended sixty-seven years ago. The number of people who personally experienced these dramatic events is dwindling, making it all the more important that we pass this memory on to the younger generation. I am therefore very pleased to have students from the Europäisches Gymnasium Bertha-von-Suttner in Reinickendorf taking part in and even contributing to this memorial event today. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the students from the Gail-S.-Halvorsen-Schule in Steglitz, who, as the name of their school indicates, feel a special commitment to remembering the Airlift.

My thanks also go to the German Armed Forces for their support for this memorial event, to military dean Bernd Schaller, and to the Brandenburg Police Orchestra, which is performing here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, three years after the end of World War II, the blockade plunged West Berlin into crisis. The cityscape was still dominated by rubble and war damage. Food was strictly rationed, while the black market flourished. There was nothing resembling a functioning infrastructure. Under these circumstances, being cut off overnight from the rest of the world meant disaster. The lights went out in West Berlin in the early morning hours of 24 June 1948. The Zschornewitz power plant, which had provided Berlin's electricity for decades, shut down service to the Western sectors, and West Berlin's own power plants were unable to make up the difference. In the morning of 24 June 1948, the transportation of all supplies to West Berlin came to a standstill. For the 2.2 million people living in Berlin – many of whom were refugees from the former German territories to the east – it was a matter of basic survival.

They couldn't be sure that anyone would come to their aid. Since the end of the war, the Western Allies had done a lot to improve the supply situation and to enable the people in the western half of the city to live in freedom and safety. However, the Allies were by no means unified on the question of keeping West Berlin and defending it against the Soviets, and the people of the city sensed that. Ernst Reuter, West Berlin's mayor at the time, got to the heart of the matter when he spoke to a crowd of 300,000 before the ruins of the Reichstag building on 9 September 1948 and appealed to the world to look upon the city and not abandon "this city and this people."

In this desperate situation, the advocates of maintaining the Allied presence in West Berlin, headed by the military governor of the American zone, General Lucius D. Clay, managed to prevail. The challenge was enormous: they had to circumvent the blockade without starting a war.

Supplying a ruined city with a population of more than 2 million by air was an unprecedented logistical and humanitarian achievement. It deserves our respect and admiration even today.

By blockading West Berlin, the Soviet Union threw down the gauntlet to the West. And when they responded with the Airlift, the Western Allies made it clear that they would never surrender West Berlin. From now on, West Berlin was part of the West and would be defended with might and main. That was the message the Allies sent to Moscow. As a result, the Iron Curtain ran right through the heart of Berlin for four decades.

You, today's high school students, have grown up in a unified Berlin, in a unified, peaceful, and free Europe. You never personally experienced the time when this city was divided by a wall and East Germany was under the repressive rule of a dictatorship. Some of you may have parents or other family members who took to the streets in East Berlin or in other GDR cities in the fall of 1989 to demonstrate for basic freedoms.

Your generation was lucky enough to inherit this freedom and the many opportunities it brings. But European freedom and unity can't be taken for granted. They were never a matter of course. Achieving these has always been a struggle; until 1945, wars in Europe were almost routine.

Over the last few weeks and months, we've seen more and more people moving away from the idea of a unified Europe. That means it is time for your generation and mine to rise to this enormous challenge and do everything we can to ensure that peace and freedom are not forfeited and that European unity survives. The alternative is not a return to the "good old days" of nation-states divided by borders, as the populists claim, since that time never existed. The alternative to a free, peaceful, and unified Europe based on Western values is either a hot or a

cold war, with borders, confrontation, dictatorship, and repression. A look into the past shows us that, and the Berlin Blockade is a particularly striking example of what can happen.

We should keep that in mind when we look at today's Europe.

A quarter century after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Europe is deeply divided over the financial crisis and the refugee issue. The populist movements campaigning against a unified Europe are reaping the benefits of this division.

The solidarity and the humanitarian spirit that prevailed in Europe and the West over the Berlin Blockade 67 years ago must not be edged out by the national egotism of the past.

As an example, the Berlin Airlift shows that humanitarian involvement and the solidarity of the West with people in dire straits pays off politically. That's how it turned out in 1948/1949, when the protecting powers' unqualified support for West Berlin ensured that the city and its people stayed free. Although the Berlin Blockade deepened the division between the two power blocs, West Berlin became a beacon of hope for people in the eastern half of the city who dreamed of a life lived in freedom and self-determination. And this longing was stronger than dictatorship and repression in Central and Eastern Europe, too. The events of 1989 were vivid proof of that.

Without the firm response of the Allies in Berlin, this dream would probably never have come true. Whereas the blockade signaled division, the airlift was an extraordinary symbol of the power of reconciliation, of freedom and of solidarity.

We remember with deep gratitude the men and women of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia who risked their lives for Berlin's freedom and security.

And we remember the 78 people who lost their lives in this great mission.

We bow to the victims of the Airlift. Their death is a reminder that we must work for tolerance and international understanding in peace and freedom. Even today, their example teaches us what can be achieved if we stand together in solidarity, trust each other, and make a combined effort to achieve our goals.