

Future of Europe

Minda de Gunzburg
Center for European Studies Harvard



Sigmar Gabriel

Keynote Address by Sigmar Gabriel, Vice Chancellor of Germany (2013-2018) and John F. Kennedy Memorial Policy Fellow, CES, Harvard University

By: Philipp Erbentraut, John F. Kennedy Memorial Fellow (2018-2019), CES, Harvard University

The highlight of the Summit on the Future of Europe was the keynote address by Sigmar Gabriel. Speaking to a large audience at the Harvard Faculty Club, the former German Vice Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs presented his ideas on the future role of the European Union in the age of what he called the “new world order 3.0.” “Little is moving me as much as the future of Europe,” Gabriel began his remarks. Gabriel, who served as a John F. Kennedy Memorial Policy Fellow at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies (CES) at Harvard this fall, noted that Europe’s impotence at facing big challenges, such as high youth unemployment in Southern Europe, an unwieldy bureaucracy in Brussels and effective solutions to the migration question, are fuelling the rise of populists and anti-Europeanists. “It’s not about more Europe, but a better Europe,” said Gabriel. “Europe is more than a common market. Europe should always put itself first in the shoes of the weakest member of the

Union.” According to Gabriel, Europe can only survive if its member states want it. The European Union was likely to fall apart as long as it was only an elitist project. In the global competition between liberal democracies and the authoritarian alternative, there was a need to build not only a free but also a fair world economy.

In this context, the former leader of Germany’s Social Democratic Party called for a more active role for his own country. The German government should show more initiative when it comes to the future of Europe, “because Germany is too big and too centrally located in Europe and economically and politically too important to deal only with itself.” Gabriel emphasized that Europe, in general, and Germany, specifically, could not follow the model of Switzerland to be economically potent but politically abstinent: “We are the last vegetarians in a world full of carnivores. I don’t want to be a carnivore again, but a flexitarian,” he said about Germany’s foreign and defense policy. Against this backdrop Europe should not only debate about values. “We are world champions in debating values,” he said, and argued that Europe should aim to define and debate its interests.

Gabriel also commented on the transatlantic relationship and the role of the United States: “We cannot live with

Donald Trump, but we cannot live without the United States," he remarked. International relations should not be considered a zero-sum game, where the winner takes all: "Bowling alone is not only a very unpleasant life in private terms, but also in international terms," he said. Instead, Gabriel proposed that Europe come to terms with the United States regarding NATO expenditures. In the case of Germany, Gabriel suggested that his country consider distributing a higher defense budget by investing, for example, 1.5 percent of its GDP in the German army and 0.5 percent into a common European defence alliance, especially in favor of Eastern Europe.

In a lively discussion, moderated by **Grzegorz Ekiert**, Laurence A. Tisch Professor of Government at Harvard and CES Director, Gabriel was asked about the role of Russia in this new world order. Questioned about Europe's dependency on Russian gas supplies, Gabriel defended the liberalization of the gas market to be in Europe's economic interest. He emphasized that it is not Europe that is dependent on Russia but that "Russia is dependent on us buying their gas." Gabriel also addressed environmental questions and stated that Europe's mission in the 21st century was to find ways to have both economic success and a sustainable climate policy. Given all these challenges, Gabriel concluded that during the next decade Europe's development will most likely be shaped by the governments of EU member states and not the European Parliament: "It will be an



Stefanie Roskopf

Summit on the Future of Europe



Grzegorz Ekiert (left) and Sigmar Gabriel (right)