Chairman Fitschen,
Excellency Dr. Surin,
Minister Gabriel,
Excellencies,
Ambassadors from the Asia-Pacific region,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are experiencing very stormy weather these days and the storm is everywhere. We’re seeing the economic downturn in every part of the world – even in Asia, the region that has become so used to growth! We’ve never seen anything like this before. Some observers go as far as to write off Asia entirely. But they are mistaken. As Asia experts, you will agree with me, I’m sure.

Talking of storms, they have a wonderful saying in China. Though I’ve already cited it once here in Hamburg, it is so suitable in the current situation that I’d like to repeat it once more:

“When the winds of change blow, some people build barriers; others build windmills.”

The message is clear: barriers won’t get us anywhere! Protectionism is not the solution, no matter how tempting it might be for politicians and others here and there. What will help us in this situation is to sit down together and think of ways to put the winds of change to effective use.

We are currently experiencing the downside of economic interdependence in a globalized world: because American consumers aren’t buying, factories in Asia have come to a standstill and German engineering companies have no orders coming in. Anyone who thinks the clock on globalization can be turned back is mistaken. The international division of labor is irreversible.

And once the global recession has been overcome, globalization will bring prosperity to even more people all over the world. What’s more, none of the challenges facing
us can be solved on a regional scale: not environmental and climate protection, and not the further development of world trade and global financial systems.

In times of crisis, one thing is more obvious than ever: we depend on each other. New solutions will come only through trust and cooperation. And indeed, international cooperation is a term we’re hearing a lot these days.

The times when we talked about an Atlantic, a Pacific, an American or an Asian century are gone! We are living in a world that is increasingly multipolar. The future lies in cooperation between all regions – America, Asia, Europe, and let’s not forget the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Europe will and must play a constructive part here. This can happen only if we stop thinking in terms of nation states.

All these issues will seem very familiar to you, Excellency Mr. Surin, I’m sure. It’s not only up to Europe to make a constructive contribution. It applies equally to the Association of South-East Asian Nations, ASEAN. With a population of about 500 million people, ASEAN certainly has the potential to assume a major role in a multipolar world, if the 10 members work together with each other and ASEAN cooperates with all the other global players as a strong pole in Asia. Today less than a quarter of South-East Asia’s total foreign trade is among the ten ASEAN member states. That’s not enough: intra-ASEAN trade could be a much bigger growth-engine and would make ASEAN even more attractive for foreign investments.

On the occasion of the ASEAN summit in Thailand just a few days ago the ten countries confirmed their ambition to tear down national barriers (at least most of them did).
I am very much looking forward to finding out more about it from you today.

I am naturally also thinking ahead to our Asia-Pacific conference of German industry which takes place in Singapore from May 13 to 15, 2010. We hope to think further along the lines of regional cooperation at that conference. And we will engage in discussion, not only with the host country, Singapore, but will seek dialogue with representatives of all the ASEAN member states. The APA is delighted that these
plans are receiving an additional boost as a result of your presence at OAV and the opportunity for talks.

Naturally, talking about cooperation is not enough. On the contrary; inflationary use can wear out the true meaning of the word. The German word for “cooperation” is “Zusammenarbeit” which directly means “working together”.
I believe we need to start taking the “working” part very seriously indeed.

In times of global insecurity, we have to steer a difficult course with no clear signals to map out the future. But we nevertheless need to develop solutions that tackle problems head-on – solutions that work.

And that applies not only to the different world regions, but also to the different social players – management and labor, for instance – and business people and politicians, of course.
A short aside: cooperation generally works best when each player contributes what they do best – politicians make policies; businesses are run by businesspeople. I think we all should bear this in mind these days.

At this point, Minister Gabriel, I would like to extend my most sincere thanks to you as APA chairman. You travel to the Asia-Pacific region on a regular basis. In June you will be in Shenyang, China to open up the “China and Germany - moving together” weeks. Your major topics are
- resource management
- environmental protection and
- climate change in particular
which altogether cannot be solved by unilateral European action. We need to discuss common solutions and find ways of working together with that half of the world population that lives in Asia. The Asia-Pacific committee/APA (and hence, German business) is closely involved in all the Asian activities of your ministry in terms of content and organization.

German industry is most innovative in the area of environmental technology, for example, energy-efficient processes and products. It will maintain its innovative
strength by investing in research and development – now more than ever. This is what will keep us attractive as partners for Asian countries. Despite all the financial problems facing us at this time, the most urgent long-term challenges are to ensure food supplies for a growing world population and to protect the environment.

We at APA, have incorporated these aims into our basic guidelines of

- Partnership
- innovation
- and sustainability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

German business believes we can achieve these goals only if we commit to competition with new technologies and commit ultimately to consumer demand. Consumer demand has changed significantly in recent years. Though effective measures can definitely influence consumer demand toward more sustainability, government-ordered ecological lifestyle regulation however is a guaranteed dead end. Distorting competition by

- hurry ahead regulations
- instruments of control
- interventions in investment cycles
- and rampant bureaucracy

all harm the international competitiveness of businesses.

Without competitive businesses and a level playing field, there can be no sustainability. A society is strong and successful only when all three factors come together: economic success, an environment that allows quality of life, and a balanced, intact social structure.

Strong companies, whatever their size, realize that and are doing what they can for more sustainability on all three levels. With the involvement of strong German companies, Europe is a strong partner for Asia. And strong partners are the kind of partners you seek for cooperation.

I hope and trust for all of us that we will continue to follow this good path into the future together.