

Video podcast by the Federal Chancellor #19/11

28 May 2011

The interview was conducted by Christian Jekat. Jekat, 24, comes from Ronnenberg (Lower Saxony) and is studying politics in Berlin.

Christian Jekat:

Federal Chancellor, the day after tomorrow you are setting off for India and Singapore. The first stop on your trip is India. Why are you going there and what do you want to get from this trip?

Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel:

We all know that India is a huge and highly dynamic country with economic growth of 8.5 percent last year alone. We have maintained a strategic partnership with India since 2000, and during this trip we will be holding the first Indo-German intergovernmental consultations. In other words, I will be accompanied by five Federal Ministers as well as representatives of various Federal Ministries. We have also had 60 years of successful diplomatic relations between Germany and India. And we will be launching the Year of Germany in India with a concert. The theme of the Year – “Germany and India: Infinite Opportunities” – says it all, really. So there really are many reasons for travelling to India now.

A fellow student of mine, an Indian, recently said to me that the widespread poverty in India remains the country's biggest problem even today. What can Germany do to help India combat poverty?

It is certainly true that there are very, very large disparities within India. And I have talked about this on many occasions with Prime Minister Singh, who of course gradually wants to get more people out of poverty. Basically we take a two-pronged approach: on the one hand, we engage in good development cooperation, where we provide help for self-help. And on the other we have highly industrialized economic cooperation where we are even competitors on some markets. And the key – as the Prime Minister repeatedly tells me – is education. The more young people who complete some sort of training, the better. That's why Germany is so firmly committed in the field of vocational training in particular, as well as in scientific cooperation and the promotion of promising young students.

India, as an emerging economy, also crops up when it comes to global climate policy. What chance do you see of being able, following the disappointment of Copenhagen, to persuade India to enter into a binding commitment to cut greenhouse gases after all?

India has in the meantime decided to propose its own voluntary commitments. This is an important first step. India is one of the countries which still have very low CO2 emissions, but that will change in the future. Per-capita CO2 emissions in India are less than one tonne, while the level of per-capita emissions in China, for instance, is already much higher. Nonetheless, we need India to be on board, and it is very difficult to convince them to commit to binding objectives; the Indian parliament has decided that this is a voluntary matter. I fear that I still have a difficult task ahead of me and that I won't yet get the desired result this time round.

The second stop on your trip is Singapore, a country in which human rights are to some extent violated: freedom of speech and of assembly are restricted, for example. What can you do for the people there?

I've wanted to go to Singapore for a very long time. I had to cancel a trip there back in 2007. I believe it is very important always to keep up a dialogue, even if from our point of view there are certain deficits. Singapore is a key country in the Asian region. It has tremendous technological know-how. Needless to say, I will be talking to the Prime Minister about the things we believe we have to criticize. But the most important thing is always to keep up a dialogue.

Federal Chancellor, it's well known that you always have a very full schedule on foreign trips like this. Do you still have any time to get to know the people and cultures of the countries you're visiting, apart from at official receptions, dinners with heads of state and press conferences?

Not enough, I would say. Of course, every time I learn something, and I do see a lot. Often I also meet representatives of civil society, and then of course I hear a good deal and try to learn from them. But there's no doubt one could do more. My schedule is simply very full. One thing is definitely important: direct talks are always preferable to phone calls and reading about each other. So I am looking forward to the trip, and I think it can be a very successful one.