The US and Germany have much in common. They are committed to a liberal-democratic order and believe citizens of different worldviews can live together under a public reason framework. They regard international coordination as key to peace and prosperity, and believe the market often is the best way of achieving that. And they hold that individuals have basic rights that governments must protect. In much of the country’s vast interior Americans of German origin are the largest group.

But there are important differences as well. Germans are committed to an extensive welfare state, and believe such a state has resulted from a successful takeover of governmental power by the common people. In spite of their bad experiences with excessive state power it is hard to understand for many Germans that generally the state would be the problem rather than the solution. Germany tends to be reserved in foreign policy, having learned painful lessons from the past, whereas the US continues to act as a global hegemon as it moves towards an uncertain future in its relations to China. The country still wrestles with its racist past and its manifestations in day-to-day life. And unlike Germany, the US largely refuses to play any role in sheltering the millions who have recently fled violent conflict and abusive governments. At the time of this writing Donald Trump is vying to run for the presidency. His success to date seems to be as hard to understand for Germans as the election of George W. Bush once was.

Over the years McCloys have come into key positions in the public and private sector as well as in the flourishing NGO scene. Each year this program enables about a dozen Germans or students with a German degree to be at Harvard. By now the program has around 230 alumni. They operate with an in-depth understanding of the US, whatever their professional niche may be. Merely listing those differences reveals why it is so important to have key people in these various sectors who have a profound understanding of the US.

When the McCloy program was founded it was placed specifically in the Kennedy School, rather than the university at large. The program seeks to help improve the work done for the public good. McCloys are coming to the US to learn about ways of making the world a better place, one location at a time. For the many alumni HKS became the place where they acquired knowledge, tools and a network of like-minded spirits to pursue their goals. After more than 30 years, the program has come of age, and yet it has barely begun to flourish. The potential remains enormous. For the Kennedy School in turn the McCloy program once was one of its early efforts at becoming an international and by now global presence. Our treasured organizational partner in Germany is the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes. The Haniel Foundation too has been a most valuable partner in these efforts. We are therefore writing this preface with much gratitude and in anticipation of many more years of cooperation and friendship.

Sincerely yours

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