

German Ambassador Behr: "No reason why Germans should not want to come to St. Maarten"

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St. Maarten – Tourism and renewable energy are two areas where Germany and St. Maarten could work together. The German ambassador to the Netherlands, Heinz-Peter Behr said this last night in a lecture in the Royal Pavilion at the Sonesta Maho Beach Resort.

"Germans travel a lot to far destinations. They do not just go to Mallorca, but they also go to exotic places. There is no reason why they should not want to go to St. Maarten," Behr said.

The ambassador also mentioned renewable energy as a potential field of cooperation. In Germany, 20 percent of the grid already runs on renewable energy and the sector has created 400, 000 jobs in the country.

Ambassador Behr paid a working visit to the Caribbean on the occasion of attorney Karel Frielink's appointment as Germany's honorary consul for Curacao and St. Maarten. Frielink accompanied Behr on his trip.

Originally the ambassador was scheduled to speak about good governance practices, but for unclear reasons this was later changed to a lecture about the European and German economy.

Other plans changed at the last moment too; the idea to eat lunch at the German restaurant Bavaria in Simpson Bay was dropped, after several cab drivers advised Behr and Frielink against it. Instead they went to Temptations at the Atlantis Casino in Cupecoy.

Behr said that the German economy will grow by 0.7 percent this year, and that there is a positive development in the country's labor market. Unemployment overall has dropped to 6.9 percent and youth unemployment is 5.9 percent.

"That's still high, but it means that 41 million people have a job; that is about half the German population," Behr said.

For the first time in fifteen years, Germany will import more than it exports. For its export, the country does not rely as heavily on the euro zone as other member states.

"Sixty percent of our export goes outside the euro zone, mainly to China and the United States," Behr said.

There are different opinions about what the European Union should be, the ambassador said. "We have to oppose populist parties that want to turn it into Fortress Europe. That is not the right way to go. I am moderately optimistic about Europe's future."

The lecture was organized by the Chamber of Commerce. Among the audience were Governor Drs. Eugene Holiday, Prime Minister Sarah Wescot-Williams, Public Health and Labor Minister Cornelius de Weever, parliament President

Gracita Arrindell, Minister Plenipotentiary Mathias Voges, Council of State member Dennis Richardson, independent MP Frans Richardson and National Alliance MP George Pantophlet.

Chamber of Commerce President Arthur Bute said in a brief welcome speech that the Chamber intends to establish a public private partnership bureau "that will provide a whole range of services to government, the business community and the population."

Ambassador Behr said at the beginning of his lecture that he was touched by two details: the display of the German flag on the podium, and the playing of the German national anthem

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