

Big data: privacy is a must

On its 40th birthday, the Aspen Institute Germany wanted to give something away: for the first time, the German branch of the organization handed out its Shepard Stone Award for Outstanding Transatlantic Leadership. The prize is named after the founding director of the Aspen Institute Germany. It was awarded to Matthias Döpfner (51, below), the chairman of the media group Axel Springer, publisher of the German daily Die Welt and the popular tabloid Bild.

At a ceremony in the atrium of the Deutsche Bank in Berlin on Oct. 9, former US Ambassador to Germany Philip Murphy paid tribute to Döpfner. In his speech before 150 invited guests from politics, culture and commerce, he called the Springer boss "my hero," saying he actively promotes the transatlantic alliance, steadfast support of the state of Israel, the further unification of Europe, and the embrace of the principles of a free, social market economy. Below is an excerpt from Döpfner's acceptance speech:

"Big Data is one of the very few examples where Europe may be ahead of America when it comes to the sensitivity about the use and misuse of data. When it comes to the whole discussion about total transparency.

"It has to be understood that the Americans have been influenced by the iconic trauma of 9/11 whereas the Europeans have been influenced by the iconic traumas of the Stasi and even more importantly by the trauma of the Nazis and the Holocaust. And the Holocaust for example was a system that was based on the idea of total transparency. Because of total control and transparency, the Nazis knew who was a Jew, the Nazis knew where Jews were living, the Nazis knew at what time they could pick up the Jews and put them in the con-



centration camps. This was a system based on total transparency and of the total use and misuse of data. And I think this trauma explains why there is more German and European sensitivity about it.

"We cherish and applaud all advantages of a digitization of society that is based on data, but we have to have this discussion about the limits as well. And I take a bet today that in five to seven years there will be a totally different discussion in the United States as well.

"I cannot imagine that a country and a people that to me are much like the lighthouse of freedom, a society that is based and founded on the idea of freedom and individualism, will and can accept in the long run that there is no privacy because everything is shared with everybody. And I think the principle and the assumption that if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear, is one of the worst and most terrible principles. That is a principle of a totalitarian system.

"It definitely is of strategic importance that America and Germany stick together because we are facing common challenges. China is a superpower that is basically trying to change the world based on the principle of a non-democratic system. Russia is a force that is in a way trying to re-establish its former geostrategic zone of influence, a power policy that is deeply rooted in the 19th century. And then of course the whole Middle-East: Syria, Libya, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ISIS shows that we are subject to a common threat: Islamist terrorism. And that we have to stick together in order to prevail with our ideas of freedom and democracy.

"It is very simple: The idea of the Free West, of democracy, of freedom and human rights is simply the better concept. In that spirit, we should be proud and simply acknowledge that we are the good guys. In that spirit we should work together because we need a strong transatlantic alliance." ■