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**Federal President Christian Wulff
marking the informational and contact-building visit
of the Diplomatic Corps
to Hambach Castle
on 24 May 2011**

What a pleasure it is to visit Hambach Castle together. The German people's striving for democracy and participation has deep roots in this place. The Hambach Festival, which took place here in late May 1832, laid a very important part of the foundations for what the German people eventually achieved with the Basic Law of the Federal Republic in 1949 and reunification in 1989/90: unity and law and freedom.

Twenty to thirty thousand people came to the ruined castle here for the speeches and songs of the Hambach Festival. They were demonstrating against the Congress of Vienna decisions of 1815, which were intended to suppress national, liberal and democratic tendencies. The Festival made Germany part of the unrest that had been sweeping through Europe since 1830, from the French to the Belgians, Poles and others.

In the Palatinate, the discontent among the populace gathered around Philipp Siebenpfeiffer and Johann Wirth, who campaigned through Fatherland Associations for freedom of the press. Their call to attend the Hambach Festival found resonance in all sections of the population. Women, too, were expressly included in the invitation, since it was "a mistake and a stain", as the invitation itself has it, for women "to be disregarded politically within the European order".

They wanted the Festival to provide a powerful expression of the political objective behind it: a unified Germany of free citizens enjoying equal rights within a united Europe, surrounded by self-determined peoples. It was a grass-roots demonstration of those same values

ADDRESS	Bundespräsidialamt 11010 Berlin
TEL / FAX	030 2000-2021/-1926
E-MAIL	presse@bpra.bund.de
INTERNET	www.bundespraesident.de

which have become part of our national identity and which we stand up for in Europe and around the world today, 179 years later. Germany therefore takes pride in the Hambach Festival. It was former Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker who rightly described it as the “first political popular assembly” in German history, “whose effects were felt across national frontiers”.

It is certainly true that the event was not one of merely national proportions. A large number of non-Germans, many of them French or Polish, joined the procession and supported its objectives. Hambach Castle can give encouragement to people all over the world who feel a duty to stand up for the freedom of the individual, civil rights and friendship among peoples. This place is symbolic of all those things, just like other focuses around the world, from the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia to Gdańsk Shipyard – or indeed, thanks to events this year, Tahrir Square in Cairo.

As the German people also know from experience, however, the road towards democracy and the rule of law can be strewn with difficulties and setbacks. Many of those who were politically active in the era of the Hambach Festival found themselves imprisoned. Others were forced to flee to safety in other countries – some to France and Switzerland, others to the United States, where many of these revolutionaries in exile would later leave their mark as “Forty-Eighters”, fighting for liberty and the abolition of slavery.

The 1848 revolution in Germany failed, not least because the authorities refused to recognize the people as sovereign. Nonetheless, the constitution drafted in the Frankfurt National Assembly at that time did help shape the way our country developed. With the Weimar Constitution of 1919, the ideals of Hambach then actually became anchored in national legislation – principles which were later to be most ignominiously betrayed by the Nazis.

After the Second World War, the authors of the Basic Law were able to lean on the democratic traditions and achievements of Hambach, Frankfurt and Weimar. A portion of the German people, like millions of other Europeans, were still deprived of fundamental rights and freedoms for some time – but thanks to the successful democratic revolution of 1989 and Europe’s increasing unity in freedom, all Germans now live under the ideals of Hambach. On the long and difficult road to freedom and democracy, we have learned to hold those values particularly dear.

Much has changed since 1832. But the unity and freedom that Hambach was all about are still on the agenda today.

What does national identity mean for a society increasingly characterized by ethnic, cultural and religious diversity? How can we bring about social cohesion in these circumstances?

The first half of the answer is that we must look back together and examine our history. This means not only looking at the distant events we are remembering today. We must also recall the successful developments in our more recent past. In the East, our people rose up against the GDR regime. Over the years, Germany has many times absorbed immigrants into its society – and the country was altered by this process. In recent times, we have seen the growth of a certain self-confidence, an openly acknowledged sense of belonging to our country, in which it is increasingly normal for people with roots in other countries to include themselves. An understanding of unity has developed in which people's inclusion does not depend on passports, family histories or religion. This is a good thing. After all, the future belongs to those nations, I am convinced, which are open to cultural diversity, new ideas and exchange with the unfamiliar.

The second half of the answer, as we seek social cohesion, is that we must look forwards together. Where people are from should be less important in the future; more important will be where they want to get to. For this, any society, particularly one characterized by immigration, needs sound foundations in shared values.

People's desire to determine their own democratic future as free citizens, the desire expressed at Hambach, is a strong and universal one. Throughout the world, champions of liberty have shown what can be achieved in times of curtailed freedom if people believe in their moral and political ideals – from Nelson Mandela to Mahatma Gandhi, from Pope John Paul II to Martin Luther King.

In these recent months, the Arab Spring has been demonstrating just how universal that desire for political and economic participation is. Freedom of the press, or of the media as we would say today, was one of the goals at Hambach and has proven in North Africa to be still highly pertinent today. A just, peaceful and innovative society can be most successfully established if states and governments respect and protect the free flow of information and communication.

People all over the world are claiming their civil rights. It goes without saying that these exalted objectives cannot be realized from one day to the next. We know, not least from German history, what a long process it often takes for democracy, freedom and justice to prevail.

The transition to an open, democratic society has often been accompanied by complications – but we must not allow that to discourage us. I am convinced that societies which are open, which cherish their diversity and yet know themselves bound together by their fundamental values, are far superior to closed systems.

With that in mind, the international community has an obligation to support the many people, most of them young, who are striving for

freedom and a better future. Their protests stand in stark contrast to the extremism and terrorism practised by radical Islamists. Anyone who stands up peacefully for the future of democracy within the framework of the rule of law deserves our support.

But how can we bolster the impressive courage to pursue change that is being demonstrated in the Arab world? This question is one which the European Union in particular must answer. What change do we actually want? And how can we convince the people of Europe that the big questions of the future will be best answered if we have the courage to uphold freedom and further unify Europe? Without forgetting that each country must ultimately choose its own path, we should all take the ideals promulgated at Hambach as a call to stand up for freedom and peace throughout the world.

We must do this by strengthening our international institutions. The United Nations needs bold reform if it is to continue playing its central role in the international community. Part of this is maintaining the legitimacy and authority of the Security Council as the centrepiece of the peaceful international order. Germany is prepared to shoulder greater responsibility for this order and for fair development – but after many years spent debating, it is time we finally agreed concrete reform measures.

Here too, courage is required to make changes. The proportion of problems that a nation can solve by itself is more limited than ever. Major challenges can only be met at international level. I am referring particularly to protecting our environment and climate, combating poverty, securing food supplies, managing the future of world trade, overcoming the severe financial and economic crisis and ensuring that all people have reliable access to clean and affordable energy.

Social cohesion, the future of democracy, the courage to change things – these are all topics of which Hambach Castle, like many other places worldwide, stands as a reminder. At the same time, they are concrete goals which we in the international community are directly called upon to work for. We are not going to find one simple answer to this challenge. What we can be confident of, however, is that we will together get closer and closer to our goals if we proceed in partnership and close cooperation.

The people at the Hambach Festival in 1832 heard something like 20 speeches – but that is not what we are aiming for today. For our visit, I am more interested in having a conversation with you – and that is exactly what I hope you will join me in doing, right now and during the rest of our time here in Rhineland-Palatinate.