



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
following the swearing-in ceremony
in the German Bundestag
on 23 March 2012
in Berlin**

Mr President of the German Bundestag,
ladies and gentlemen,
my fellow citizens from Germany and abroad,

firstly, I would like to thank you, Mr President, most sincerely for chairing this session in your usual inimitable way and for showing everyone in our country so clearly that politics can be fun. Mr President of the Bundesrat, your words have made a deep and lasting impression on me and I expect also on Federal President Wulff. Thank you.

My fellow citizens, let me ask you this: what should it be like, this country of ours, this country our children and grandchildren are to call "our country"? Will the trend towards isolation continue? Will the gap between rich and poor grow even wider? Will globalization swallow us up? Will people feel like losers if they get pushed to the margins of society? Will ethnic or religious minorities in voluntary or involuntary solipsism create counter-cultures? Is the European ideal sustainable? Is there a risk of a new war in the Middle East? Can a criminal fanaticism in Germany or other parts of the world continue to threaten, intimidate and murder peaceful people?

Every day, every media report, gives rise to a host of new fears and worries. Faced with these fears and worries, some people devise ways to escape, mistrust the future, fear the present. Many wonder what kind of life this is, what kind of freedom. For these people, my life's focus, freedom, brings not a promise of better things, but only uncertainty. I understand this reaction, but I don't want to encourage it. Fears - as I have learnt over the course of a long life - break down both our courage and our self-confidence, sometimes so utterly that we might lose them both completely, until we reach a point where we

believe cowardice to be a virtue and escape to be a legitimate position in the political sphere.

And so - because I do not want that - I intend to derive energy from my memories, to use them as a source of strength enabling me to teach and motivate myself and us. And so what I wish for is a lively recollection not least of all the success stories in our country following the crimes of the National Socialist dictatorship and the terrors of the War. In the west of Germany, the first of these success stories was the economic miracle. Germany got itself back on its feet again. The displaced, even those who had been bombed out, were given somewhere to live. After years of deprivation, ordinary citizens got a share of the country's growing prosperity - mind you, not all to the same degree.

To my mind, however, the miracle of that decade wasn't about the cars, fridges and all the other shiny new paraphernalia of the new prosperity. No, I regard my country above all as a "democratic miracle". Contrary to what the Allies had feared in the immediate aftermath of the War, revanchism never gained the upper hand in post-war Germany. There were remnants of the National Socialist ideas, true, but these never really crystallized into a formative power. What emerged instead was a stable, democratic order. The western part of Germany became part of the free western world.

However, the country did not make enough of an attempt at that time to try to come to grips with its history. The contemporary zeitgeist was characterized by the suppression of guilt and the lack of empathy with the victims of the Nazi regime. Not until the 1968 generation was there any great change in this. Then, my generation was confronted with the pitch-black hole of German history, when our parents' generation in their hubris murdered and waged war against our neighbours within and without. The great achievement of the 1968 generation was and still is the hard-won blessing of being able to remember differently and more profoundly. Notwithstanding all the mistakes of the 1968 rebellion, it pushed the historical guilt into the collective consciousness.

Not only did this approach to confronting the past, a fact-based, value-oriented approach, point the way for us in East Germany after 1989. It is also regarded as a model for many societies which have thrown off the shackles of totalitarianism or despotism and don't know how to deal with the burdens of the past.

The West Germans' resounding "yes" to Europe is another treasure of German post-war history, a recollection which ought to remain important to us. Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the country which had been first shaped then ruined by nationalism, became one of the founding fathers of a process of forward-looking European integration. A cause for gratitude and joy!

As is this next treasure in our memory bank, 1989. Then the East Germans pulled off a peaceful revolution, a peaceful revolution for freedom. We were the people, and we became one people. And never forget: before the fall of the Wall, those many people had to empower themselves. Only when the people rise up and say "We are the people" will they be able to say "We are one people"; only then will walls fall.

The East-West confrontation that persisted through the Cold War was ended in a bloodless revolution, and the legacy of that confrontation, the danger of war, was overcome and removed.

My reason for saying all this is that I don't want just to talk about life's dark side, about guilt and failure. Rather, we must not forget the other part of our history either, the part which includes the establishment of a new political culture of freedom, a sense of responsibility lived out in a very practical way, the ability to live in peace, the solidarity of our people. This is not a paradigm shift in the culture of memory. It is an extension of the paradigm. It is intended to encourage us to do what has been done successfully several times in the past: to take up all the challenges of the day and do our utmost to meet them - even if we don't immediately do it perfectly. That is a tremendous encouragement for us in the future too.

So what should it be like, this country of ours, this country our children and grandchildren will call "our country"? It should be "our country" because "our country" combines social justice, participation and opportunities for improvement. The route which takes us there is not one of paternalistic care, but of a welfare state which makes provisions and empowers. We must not tolerate a situation where children cannot develop their talents because there is no equality of opportunity. We must not tolerate a situation where people have the impression that there is no longer any point in putting in any effort because they won't progress even if they work hard. We must not tolerate a situation where people have the impression that they are not part of our society because they are poor or old or disabled.

Freedom is a necessary prerequisite for justice. Because the meaning of justice - including social justice - and what we have to do to get closer to it cannot be decreed from above, it has to be sorted out in intensive democratic discussion and debate. Vice versa, endeavours for justice are indispensable for preserving freedom. If there is an increase in the number of people who have the impression that their state is not serious about its commitment to an equitable order in society, then confidence in democracy weakens. So "our country" needs to be a country which combines both: freedom as a prerequisite for justice and justice as the prerequisite for true freedom and tangible possibilities for self-fulfilment.

Everyone who lives in "our country" should also be able to feel at home here. We are living today in a state in which the German-

speaking Christian tradition which has long been part of our heritage has been joined by other religions, like Islam, and by other languages, traditions and cultures. We are living in a state which can be defined less and less by the nationality of its citizens, but rather by their adherence to a community of political and ethical values in which it is not only the shared destiny which has grown up over a long time which determines the community, but more and more the striving of different people for what they have in common: this, our state in Europe. And what we have in common in our state in Europe is our desire to live together in peace, freedom and solidarity.

We would be ill-advised, however, to close our eyes to real problems out of ignorance or misguided correctness. Federal President Johannes Rau voiced this very emphatically and clearly in his Berlin Address twelve years ago. But when it comes to living together, we must not let ourselves be guided by fears, resentments or negative projections. During his term in office, Federal President Christian Wulff provided strong, lasting impetus for an inviting, open society. Federal President Wulff, this issue, which was a matter very close to your heart, will also be a priority for me.

Our constitution, ladies and gentlemen, invests all people with the same dignity, no matter where they come from, what they believe or what language they speak. It does so not as a reward for successful integration; nor does it withdraw the right to dignity as a punishment for a refusal to integrate. Our constitution and our humanity behave us to see ourselves in others, our brothers and sisters, as talented and as entitled to participation as we are.

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer was of the opinion that, following the tremors of history, we in Europe especially would face a "true school" of living together in narrow confines. Living with the other, living as the other's other - that was how he viewed Europe's ethical and political task. The aim now must be to preserve this "yes" to Europe. The tendency to seek refuge to nation-state level is particularly marked in times of crisis. But European togetherness is impossible without the lifebreath of solidarity.

So, especially during this time of crisis, our motto must be: we want to dare more Europe.

I am pleased to see that the majority of Germans think this European idea again and still has a future.

For my generation, Europe was a promise - building on Western traditions, the Graeco-Roman heritage of a common legal order, the Christian and Jewish heritage. For my grandchildren, Europe has long been a reality in their lives, with cross-border freedom and the opportunities and cares of an open society. Not only for my grandchildren is this reality a wonderful benefit.

What else should it be like, this country of ours, this country our children and grandchildren are to call "our country"? Not only here in Germany, but also in Europe and beyond, representative democracy is the only system capable of balancing peer group interests and the interests of the common weal.

What's special about this system is not that it's perfect, but that it is a system capable of learning.

Alongside the political parties and other democratic institutions, however, there is a second pillar of our democracy: active civil society. Through their commitment, but also through their protests, civic initiatives, ad hoc movements and parts of the digital community complement parliamentary democracy and compensate shortcomings. And, unlike the Weimar democracy, our country has enough democrats to ward off the demon in the shape of fanatics, terrorists and killers. As all these democrats, for different political or religious reasons, will attest: we will not let our democracy be taken away; we will stand up for this country.

We are committed to this country not because it is so perfect, but because it has never been better.

In particular to the right-wing extremists who despise our democracy we say this, in all clarity: your hatred spurs us on. We will not let our country down.

Nor will we make you a gift of our fear. You will be consigned to the past and our democracy will live on.

We will be equally resolute in our dealings with extremists from other political wings. And we will also stop those who import fanaticism and terrorism into our country under the mantle of religion and who are not as far as the European Enlightenment. To you we say this: the peoples are moving towards freedom. You may perhaps slow down the movement, but you definitely cannot stop it completely.

I am, however, scared by how distant many citizens are from the democratic institutions, as indicated by low turnouts for elections, the poor opinion of or even contempt for political engagement, for politics and politicians. "What?" we often hear, "You're going to a local club meeting?" "What? You're active in a trade union?" Some people find that uncool. Sometimes I ask myself : where would our society be without activities like these?

None of us gain anything from this feeling of distance between the governing and the governed. My request to both sides, the governing and the governed, is this: please don't just put up with this increasing distance.

For the politically active this means: speak openly and plainly, so that lost confidence can be regained.

And the governed, our citizens, must be reminded of this: you are not merely consumers. You are citizens, in other words you can shape things, help to shape things. Anyone for whom participation is possible and who rejects it unnecessarily is giving away one of the best and greatest possibilities of human existence: to exercise responsibility.

Allow me to conclude by asking you all for a present, for confidence. I ask you to place your confidence in me. But in the first instance, I ask you to place your confidence in those who hold positions of responsibility in our country, just as I ask them to have confidence in all the inhabitants of this reunited, mature country. But even before that, I ask you all to be courageous and to start by having confidence in yourselves. In Gandhi's words, a person can make progress and achieve success only with self-confidence. This applies to a person as well as to a nation, Gandhi said.

We have no idea whether we will leave the children and grandchildren of this country money or property. However, that it is possible not to give in to our fears but to choose courage is something we have not only dreamt about, but also experienced and proved. Thank God and the people: this is one legacy our children and grandchildren can expect.