



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
to mark the Day of German Unity
Stuttgart, 3 October 2013**

Twenty-three years ago I stood on the steps in front of the Reichstag building in Berlin, and to this very day I remember the Freedom Bell tolling as the flag of unity was hoisted at midnight. It marked the close of a stirring period from the peaceful revolution in autumn 1989 to the day of unification. For me, this was the happiest time of my life.

The yearning for freedom of the oppressed really had deprived the oppressors of their power – in Gdansk and Prague, in Budapest and Leipzig. The downtrodden stood up. And what had been torn apart, grew together. Germany became one again. Europe overcame the division between East and West.

I also recall the months leading up to unification, and several of the members of the first freely elected People's Chamber of the GDR are with us today. How much readiness to assume responsibility was needed at that time to unite Germany, how much courage to make decisions, how much talent for improvisation. There was so much to deal with: diplomatic and alliance issues, fundamental decisions on mapping out the course ahead, vital but sometimes also trivial details. Everyone involved at that time was learning, sometimes they made mistakes – but they were always helping to shape the future! 3 October therefore not only reminds us of the feeling of powerlessness that had been overcome. It also bears witness to the will to shape freedom, in freedom.

All of this resonates today, on the Day of German Unity.

Today we look back on what we were able to do – thankful for the trust which others placed in us; and proud of what we have achieved since then: East Germans, West Germans, new Germans – everyone in this country, together with friends and partners in Europe and the entire world. Today united Germany is an economic

powerhouse which is respected worldwide and is called upon to play its part in the world. It is open, diverse and has confidence in the future. Our democracy is vibrant and stable. Germany has developed a social model which has prompted citizens to identify strongly with their country. For many countries in the world we have even become a model – something which is almost inconceivable for people of my generation. All of this is cause for joy – joy which, above all, should spur us on.

Our country is once more about to begin a fresh start – just like every four years. We had a choice. In our recent election, 44,289,652 Germans cast their votes to determine which citizens will play a role in future in dealing with matters affecting public life. Members of the Bundestag, I wish you drive, ambition and mindfulness as you tackle the tasks facing you and indeed all of us.

Much is challenging us today to develop freedom, in freedom. I would like to look more closely today at three major challenges. Developments which are not discernible all the time or to everybody in day-to-day life because they have a long-term effect. Developments, moreover, which can no longer be solely managed within national borders.

Firstly, in a world full of crises and upheaval Germany has to take on new responsibilities. How will we shoulder them? Secondly, the digital revolution has brought about changes which are as radical as the invention of the printing press or the steam engine. How will we deal with the consequences? However, I would like to begin with the third challenge, demographic change. Our population is ageing and shrinking in an unprecedented manner. How will we preserve live chances and cohesion?

Indeed, there will be ever fewer young people to look after ever more old people. That will create a difficult situation which will possibly place considerable limitations on our children and grandchildren. On the other hand, the pressure building up will kick-start some things which are right and overdue anyway. Employers have long since been recruiting immigrants. Older people have new opportunities on the labour market and are using the years they have gained to engage in civil society. Ever more women are striving to enter the world of work and to achieve senior positions. The rigid role perceptions are continuing to break down. New arrangements between men and women, new ways of combining family and work are becoming possible.

If the society of the fewer is not to become a society of less, it is vital that no skills are unused. For we know that many could do more if they received more help and more was demanded of them. I am talking here about those with few formal qualifications who have to be given a helping hand and included in society. I am talking about

children and young people from homes in which parental aspirations for their children's education are simply low or in which there are no books.

Every individual is born with their own unique talents – in Thuringia or Calabria, in Bavaria or Anatolia. These aptitudes have to be discovered and developed, and people have to be helped to overcome even a severe lack of opportunities. Education as a means of fostering powers of judgement, social responsibility and personality, as a foundation for a self-determined and fulfilled life – to me that is a civil right and an indispensable element of democracy.

Our goal has to be to ensure that no-one is left behind, neither at the start nor towards the end of a long life. If we accept and seek to shape demographic change it will make our society fairer and more rooted in solidarity, more diverse and mobile, and thus prepared for the challenges of the future.

Creating the conditions for this is, above all, a task for policymakers. Although they have made a start they are still not progressing fast enough. For how long have we been struggling now to put early childcare provisions in place? Or to improve our care systems for the sick and elderly? Or to modernise our immigration policy and nationality law?

I should be touching on many more domestic challenges, for example the Energiewende, the transformation of the German energy system, which is still to be successfully completed. And I should also be looking at national debt or the low investment ratio, which is not high enough to maintain what previous generations have built up. And I should also talk about the fact that we have not yet had a frank discussion about the gap between what is desirable and what is feasible.

Many can do many things even better in the coming years to ensure that future decades are good. Just as we are benefiting today because we finally managed to carry out reforms a decade ago, it can be useful the day after tomorrow if we – Members of the Bundestag! – again have the courage to carry out far-sighted reforms. For we want to show, and indeed experience, that every change in a free society can provide new opportunities for individuals and for the many.

Opportunities! How many have we gained during the last few years thanks to the Internet and mobile communications. This technological revolution has consequences we have neither completely grasped nor have under our control. We find ourselves in the midst of a transformation. Similar to how the industrial revolution once changed our society, today the digital revolution is radically transforming the way we live and work, citizens' relationship with the state, the image

of ourselves and of others. Yes, we can say that our image of the human being will change.

Never before have so many people had access to so much information. Never before has it been so simple to make contact with like-minded people around the world. Never before has it been so easy to use technology to organise resistance to authoritarian regimes. Sometimes I think: if only we had had an opportunity back then in Central and Eastern Europe to network with each other in such a way!

The digital technologies are platforms for joint action, they drive innovation and prosperity, foster democracy and freedom and – not least – they make our everyday lives so much easier. They guide us to our destination, serve as dictionaries, playgrounds and chat rooms and they replace both the visit to the bank and the journey to work.

Until now we, as simple “users”, have given little thought to where this profound technical change will lead us. Only when reports of data collection practised by friendly intelligence services emerged were we forced to confront a reality which we had previously deemed unimaginable. It was only then that most people became aware of the danger posed to our privacy.

Thirty years ago German citizens demonstrated spirited opposition to a national census and in the end the right to determine what information you do or do not provide prevailed. Our Federal Constitutional Court ensured this. And today? Today with every click on the Internet people voluntarily or thoughtlessly offer up their personal data and the younger amongst us lay bare their whole lives on social networks.

Whether we are being intruded upon or are simply exposing ourselves is now practically one and the same. All forms of privacy which our forefathers once used to fight for against the state, and which in totalitarian regimes helped us to shield ourselves from being coerced, or having our political views pried into, are fading away. Rather than posing a threat, publicity now seems to offer the hope of appreciation and recognition.

Many do not realise, or simply do not want to know that they are complicit in the creation of the virtual twin to their real life self – their alter ego who reveals, or could reveal, both their strengths and weaknesses, who could disclose their failures or deficiencies, or who could even divulge sensitive information about illnesses. Who makes the individual more transparent, readily analysed and easily manipulated by agencies, politics, commerce and the labour market.

That the digital revolution is double faced is particularly evident in the workplace. Many employees embrace new technology because it enables them to work from home or in a cafe, and to freely choose their own working hours. At the same time the line between work and

free time is blurring, which can mean constant availability – around the clock.

Historically speaking, spurts of development are nothing new. When we first experience them we are perplexed, maybe even powerless. Naturally laws, conventions and social norms trailing cannot keep up with technological developments. As with every innovation the time has come for us to act as informed and empowered citizens. Thus data protection should become to the preservation of privacy what environmental protection is to the conservation of natural resources. We want to make use of the advantages of the digital world whilst protecting ourselves as best we can from its disadvantages.

What we must do now is find solutions on the political, societal, ethical and quite practical levels. What is a liberal state allowed, or indeed obliged to do in secret in order for intelligence services to protect its citizens? What however, is it not allowed to do in order to avoid freedom falling victim to security? What kind of a labour market do we need, to ensure that the ever available employee does not become akin to a slave to the digital world? How can family links and friendships co exist with virtual relationships? How can children and young people use the Internet without falling prey to it?

We therefore need laws, conventions and social agreements which take account of this groundbreaking change.

In democracies in particular, policymakers must react as soon as a problem appears on the horizon and constantly realign as it takes shape. In fact this is one of the strengths of democracy.

We must draw upon this very strength to face another challenge of our times – European integration. Without a doubt the Europe we see in crisis is not the Europe it was before the crisis. Rifts have appeared.

The crisis has changed attitudes and institutions, has shifted power and majorities. Support for more communitarisation is waning. Rather than European institutions, national governments are the ones largely setting the agenda. Moreover, in countries where the recession has made harsh demands, old distorted images of a dominant Germany are surfacing.

All of this begs to be discussed and carefully considered. The good news is that Europe is held together by a strong bond of mentality, culture and history. However our absolute determination to shape the future together will be decisive. Europe's community is not bound to one single form or one political organisational structure. It is our task to debate and discuss the best form of cooperation, but not to question the very cohesion of Europe! We must convey our conclusions in such a way that the people of Europe can accept and support the

solutions. It remains the task of politicians – and as Federal President I am no exception – to strengthen the bonds that hold Europe together.

So what is Germany's duty in Europe and in the world? Some neighbouring countries fear Germany taking on a strong role, others desire it. Even we ourselves fluctuate – assuming less responsibility is no longer an option, rather we must now adjust to taking on more responsibility.

Five years after the end of the Second World War, the political theorist Hannah Arendt wrote: "It looks as if, having been denied world domination, the Germans have fallen in love with powerlessness". Germany had reduced Europe to ruins and destroyed millions of human lives. What Arendt described as powerlessness had a political dimension to it. A defeated Germany had to earn new trust and regain its sovereignty.

On a visit to France a few weeks ago, I was confronted with the question: do we Germans remember our past so actively because we seek an excuse not to deal with the world's contemporary problems and conflicts? Are we letting others foot the bill for our insurance policies?

Of course we have grounds to contradict this view. The Bundeswehr is helping to keep the peace in Afghanistan and Kosovo. Germany is supporting the International Criminal Court, is promoting a global climate agreement and is actively engaged in development cooperation. Germany's contributions and guarantees are helping to stabilise the eurozone.

Nevertheless both in our country and elsewhere voices calling for more German engagement in international politics are growing louder. The calls come from a Polish Foreign Minister as well as professors from Oxford or Princeton. They view Germany as a sleepwalking giant or a spectator of global affairs. One of my predecessors, Richard von Weizsäcker, encourages Germany to more strongly advocate a European foreign and security policy.

This begs the question – is our engagement on a par with the weight that our country carries? Germany is populous, lies at the heart of the continent and is the world's fourth largest economy. The strength of our country lies in the fact that we have made friends of all of our neighbours and become a reliable partner in international alliances. Integrated and accepted as such, Germany was able to secure freedom, peace and prosperity. Maintaining this political and military stability in uncertain times and ensuring its future viability is our most important concern.

Therefore it is right if, along with others, we ask ourselves – is Germany fully living up to its responsibility with regard to our neighbours in the East, the Middle East and the southern

Mediterranean? What is Germany doing to help aspiring emerging countries become partners on the international stage?

And if we seek to secure a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council – what role are we prepared to play in crises in far flung regions of the world?

Our country is not an island. We should not cherish the illusion that we will be spared from political and economic, environmental and military conflicts if we do not contribute to solving them.

I do not like the idea that Germany plays itself up to impose its will on others. Yet neither do I like the idea that Germany plays itself down to eschew risks or solidarity. A country which views itself as part of a whole in this way should encounter neither rejection amongst us Germans, nor mistrust among our neighbours.

Now, I have spoken to you a great deal about Germany's role in the world, about the digital revolution and about demographic change on this Day of German Unity. But what course are we on? I consider our country to be a nation which is saying "yes" to itself. A nation that does so with all that it can do and has been empowered to do in solidarity both at home and abroad. A nation which looks into the future and, in the place of threats, sees opportunities and promise.

We had a choice, and we still do! 3 October shows that we are not powerless. We are not only capable of acting when we know where a development will lead. We are ready to act when we accept responsibility and use our knowledge and ability to step in with a guiding hand.

United and unique, on this anniversary we are taking stock. We see what we have achieved in difficult times. What we have been promised has become reality – we must believe in all of our achievements, as then we will achieve all that we believe in.