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## **Toast**

**by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
on the occasion of the State Banquet  
hosted by President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca,  
on 29 April 2015  
at the Grandmaster's Palace in Valletta, Malta**

Let me begin by looking back: on 16 February 1965, the first German Ambassador presented his letter of credence here in the capital of the young Repubblika ta' Malta. I am delighted to have this opportunity to visit Malta now, five decades later, and to remember this day.

The fifty years of diplomatic relations between Malta and Germany have been a success story. For our ties have always been marked by mutual trust. They benefit from close political exchange, especially within the European Union, and ever more intensive economic integration.

However, the good relations between our peoples go back much further than half a century. During its rich and vibrant history, Malta was exposed to a wide range of influences: the Greeks and Phoenicians, the Romans and Byzantines, the Arabs and Normans, the Knights of the Order of St. John and the British – to name just a few. Malta can thus boast of a unique cultural heritage. Our two countries are linked by elements of this heritage, especially the Roman influence and the Order of St. John, which is widely known and respected in Germany.

However, nor do I want to forget that only a lifetime ago there was war in Europe – a war started by Germans. The Maltese people suffered as a result of the blockade and bombardment by Germany and its allies. I am therefore all the more grateful for the friendship between Malta and Germany today.

For seven decades after the war ended, Malta and Germany are closely linked in Europe. Our states take the same view of the key issues of European policy – especially when it comes to the major tasks: how can we help stabilise the eurozone? How can we ensure

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more growth and jobs on a durable basis in Europe? At present we are faced above all with this question: how can we better live up to our shared European responsibility towards those seeking refuge from persecution and suffering who are crossing the Mediterranean to Europe?

One thing is certain: membership of the European Union is a boon for both Malta and Germany, also in economic terms. Today, Germany is a key trading partner for Malta. Your country enjoys a good reputation as a location for investment among German companies. For some enterprises, it is a tried and trusted manufacturing location. A lovely symbol of Maltese German relations can be found in many children's bedrooms in Europe – in the form of popular plastic figures. The German toy manufacturer Playmobil has had a production site in Malta for forty years and is a major employer in this country.

For German employers, vocational training is key to securing their future. I am aware of Malta's interest in the dual system of vocational training – which some of these companies have already put into practice here in Malta – and I am pleased about that. For good vocational training – especially one which allows trainees to get a very concrete insight into day to day work early on – prepares young people for their professional future, thus providing them with life chances. In return, companies gain talented young workers. Germany is very happy to share its experience in this field. Such an exchange can bring our countries even closer together. In this connection, I expressly welcome Malta's future contribution towards promoting the learning of the German language.

With its beautiful scenery, its sandy beaches and cliffs, as well as its rich cultural heritage, Malta is a popular and attractive destination for many Germans. I have already spoken of the traces of Malta's long history, which is particularly evident in this city's wonderful architecture. The palaces constructed by the Grandmasters of the Order of St. John, such as this one with its precious works of art, are inextricably linked to Gerolamo Cassar and all the other great architects of Malta. I am delighted to have an opportunity during my visit to see some of these treasures.

One of Malta's special features are the typical fishing boats in the harbours – the Luzzus. The eyes painted on their bows seem to be looking ahead towards the horizon. Today, I would also like to look ahead with you and invite you to join me in a toast to the future of the Maltese German partnership!