



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the state banquet on the occasion of the visit by
President Toomas Hendrik Ilves of Estonia
Schloss Bellevue
18 May 2015**

Let me say how delighted I am to welcome you to Berlin today! It's very good to see you here again. Our summer meeting at Schloss Bellevue – back in 2012, Mr President – was only a few months after I took office. We have been engaged in intensive dialogue ever since; we appreciate one another, and that only goes to show how much friendships are built on personal meetings.

I am grateful for the historic opportunity our nations were granted a quarter century ago to tread a common European road. In 1991, we were able to pick up and build on German-Baltic traditions that had been integral to our cultural history for hundreds of years. That didn't go without saying, considering the guilt that Germany had heaped on itself during the Nazi dictatorship, in Estonia as elsewhere. Today, our two countries share close cultural, economic and political ties, plus of course ties between scientists and academics. We intend to keep tending those friendly relations.

We are united in the firm belief that human rights, freedom, democracy and the rule of law are necessary foundations of prosperity, security and peace. In short, we are bound together by shared values – which is why we have allied ourselves within the European Union and NATO.

Two years ago, Mr President, Daniela Schadt and I had the good fortune and the honour to visit your country. Next to the warmth of the welcome we were shown, what struck me most was the way Estonians combine an awareness of history and values with openness to new things. Twenty years after independence, in the middle of the economic and financial crisis, Estonia succeeded in joining the euro area. As a young euro country, Estonia has taught us that economic growth and austerity are not mutually exclusive. The transformation was tough and laborious for your country, but the Estonian economy

recovered particularly quickly from the shock of the crisis, and its rate of growth afterwards was above average. Estonia is valued and admired today as a modern, dynamic member of our Union.

Your country was early in recognising the potential of information technology. And you, Mr President, played a decisive role in those processes. Estonia is a pioneer for digitisation within the European Union. Your country was also among the first to respond to the dangers inherent in the new technology. Cyber crime, cyber terrorism, cyber attacks – we can learn a lot from Estonia and its experience in these matters.

We have been made painfully aware this past year just how quickly peace, self determination and international law can be brought into jeopardy. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in eastern Ukraine confront us with a way of thinking that we thought we'd overcome. It's important for the countries of the European Union to be standing united at this time. It's good that NATO responded with the Wales Summit decisions. And it's also good that Germany is supporting Estonia – for instance, helping with the surveillance of Baltic air space. That's how things should be among friends, among allies!

When I was a guest in your beautiful summer residence at Ärna two years back, you did me the honour of having me plant a linden tree. I am told that it is flourishing. We can say the same about the German-Estonian friendship.

I would therefore like you to join me, ladies and gentlemen, in raising your glasses to President Ilves, to the Estonian people, to a bright future for Estonia and Germany in this united Europe!