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Berlin, 19/05/2015
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Speech

**by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the reception hosted by
President Toomas Hendrik Ilves of the Republic of Estonia
in the Great Hall of the Berlin Konzerthaus
on 19 May 2015**

There's a real art to giving gifts – an art, Mr President, in which you and your country are well versed. You are giving us a true musical delight in bringing us this special concert tonight. And it gets better: not only are we about to have the pleasure of hearing pieces by the great Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, but we are also honoured to have Arvo Pärt here in person. A very warm welcome to you, Mr Pärt!

Estonia and Germany have enjoyed close cultural ties for centuries. A great variety of people have played their part in that – clergymen, authors, philosophers and German Baltic nobility who fostered and sponsored the arts and sciences. After the destructive events of our history that drove such a wedge between our nations, we were able to go back to and build on the links that those people had forged. The injustice and suffering that Estonia was subjected to at the hands of the Nazis could not wipe out our shared history. Nor could the Soviet regime sever the cultural roots that connect us. Your nation was determined in maintaining and protecting our German-Baltic heritage as part of its history and identity.

After regaining their independence, your countrymen were once again able to indulge another Estonian trait, namely their creative openness to new things. Your country can be proud of the diversity and quality of its cultural output – music, literature, theatre and cinema scenes that enrich the whole of Europe.

Estonia and Germany have developed their historical relations further in a large number of fields. We need only look at the very full

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programme for your visit, President Ilves. I'm pleased to note that you will be spending the next two days visiting Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg, to take a look at, among other things, our cooperation on business and research.

Recently, visitors to the "German Spring" in Tallinn were granted a glimpse of how broad and lively the exchange between our two countries is. The German Embassy in Tallinn and numerous participants presented readings, conferences, competitions for school kids, exhibitions and concerts... which brings me back to the subject of music.

Estonia without music, without folk music? Unthinkable! I am told that the anthology of Estonian folk songs has more than 1.4 million pages. Thousands of singers come together for Estonia's song festivals that are so steeped in tradition. These are impressive statistics that can be traced to one simple fact: music brings people together. And it strengthens them. Estonia's culture of folk songs stands for the fight for identity and independence. I was of course particularly moved by the Singing Revolution. When those huge crowds gathered in Estonia and the other Baltic countries to sing in protest against the Soviet regime and call for independence, it was a wake up call that we in East Germany heard as well. And when, many years later, I had the privilege of visiting Estonia as President, we not only talked with one another but sang together too.

Music brings people together – and there can be no doubt that this applies to your work too, Mr Pärt. You are often quoted as saying that "it suffices for a single note to be played beautifully". In discovering that, you have brought enchantment to people all over the world. I am delighted that we have the opportunity to experience that magic here in Berlin tonight.