



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the lunch on the occasion of the informational and
contact-building trip to Land Schleswig-Holstein with the
Diplomatic Corps
on 21 May 2015
in Travemünde**

We have flown today to the north of Germany, to Schleswig-Holstein, which calls itself the Land between the seas. Land Schleswig-Holstein connects the North Sea with the Baltic via the Kiel Canal. The canal has been there for some time now, construction began back in 1887. In fact, sometimes we forget that the canal is the most-travelled artificial waterway for sea-going vessels in the world. Schleswig-Holstein is a meeting point and hub for the entire Baltic Sea region. As the centre of the Hanseatic League, the city of Lübeck played a special role in history. In its heyday from the 13th to the mid-15th century, the Hanseatic League comprised some 200 cities. Lübeck and other Hanseatic towns continue to celebrate this spirit of cooperation with the International Hanseatic Days of New Time festival. Last year I had the privilege and pleasure of attending and opening the Hanseatic Days against the backdrop of Lübeck's beautiful Holstentor, along with many guests.

This is a region which has long been globally-minded, even if to be honest it must be said that the city of Hamburg has somewhat overtaken Lübeck in terms of its international standing. The people of Lübeck are unfazed by this, proud of their tradition and their lively, thriving city.

Allow me now to mention Lübeck's beautiful neighbourhood of Travemünde, our host today.

In the 19th century, people from far and wide were already meeting here, amongst them well-known poets, composers and artists. They came for their summer holidays, known in German as "Sommerfrische" meaning summer freshness, an old German word that some still know, and included Fyodor Dostoevsky, Richard Wagner and Edvard Munch – to name but a few. The place had a cosmopolitan

flair. The hotel we are in now contributed to the special atmosphere. It was constructed to serve as a kind of house of conversation; that was what the people of Lübeck originally had in mind. Yet when construction began in 1914, it was billed as an entertainment hall, and a casino took up residence here after the Second World War. During what is considered to be the golden age, even Hollywood stars came to gamble by the Baltic Sea from time to time.

In 1955, before the Wall was erected, I was in secondary school. At that time, East Germans could still easily go on holiday in the West, so a friend and I went on a bike trip and explored this area of the north-western part of Germany. I was from Rostock and Rostock is on the Baltic Sea, too. In Travemünde, however, everything looked different to me. In 1955 the aftermath of the war could sometimes still be felt in the West, yet here in Travemünde there was barely a trace. On the other hand, I came from a place which took a long time to recover from the destruction and impact of the war. Many years passed before I returned – the Wall was built in 1961. Then I took my small children for walks in Warnemünde on the Baltic Sea. We stood on the jetty and watched the big white ships leave port, ferries heading for Denmark. The small boys holding our hands said: "Oh we want to go too!" And we parents said: "You can't. We can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Only West Germans are allowed to do that. The ship is travelling to Denmark, we're not allowed to go there." And how does a pre-school child respond to that? With: "Why not? That's stupid." And what do you say, as a father or a mother? You try to reassure your children, to somehow come to terms with the unnatural situation.

I'm telling these stories because the Baltic Sea has a very different meaning for East and West Germans. Many of my East German compatriots drowned in the Baltic Sea as they attempted to flee to freedom. Some of them set off on a surfboard or a small boat. But the National People's Army patrolled every day with its ships, catching people trying to escape. I could continue talking about this for a long time now. But, dear guests, I would like to remind you of such trips to show that things were not always as they are now, that Germany has been reunified. Instead, my generation felt that they would never see Germany, Europe, reunited. And yet here we are together, meeting from all corners of the world. And I'm particularly pleased to see those of you who have come across the Baltic Sea and have the feeling that today, in a united Europe, we have to explain to our children what a border even is.

I'm also telling you this because this year we are commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Recently I paid tribute to the fate of the prisoners of war from the Soviet Union in Schloß Holte-Stukenbrock. I'm grateful, Excellencies from the former

countries of the Soviet Union, that you accompanied me to this place of historical horror which holds such terrible memories for you.

If today we are able to celebrate the beauty of our country, if we think of the economic, political and cultural success of our country as a part of Europe, then we do so against the background of weighty, at times evil and lethal perils. Even if we're here together on this excursion today, there's no harm in remembering the dark times this continent has experienced. At times, Excellencies, doing so is just as much a part of your work as it is a task of the German Government and German President.

We all have problems with the fact that Europe's security architecture and the world is not as we imagined it would be when the Wall came down 25 years ago. Back then, many of us thought that the main problems were behind us. There's no doubt that many difficulties have been overcome, but new ones have arisen. There is fresh uncertainty with regard to international law, and there are new threats of terrorism. Be it in eastern or southern Europe, wherever we look, we see different security challenges: the tectonic plates of world order are grinding.

Today, happily, the country which you work in, Germany, is not the cause of big crises and monstrous, deliberate strategies of destruction. We want to serve as an anchor of stability and to work together with your countries to bring about peace and security. That is why I'm pleased that we've been able to combine diplomatic activities and personal meetings on this visit. I would like to take this opportunity to stress that I can't imagine being the President of any Germany other than this one, which strives to be a guarantor of peace, freedom, human rights and security. I hope that you will act as messengers of Germany's desire to embrace peace in your respective countries. Together with you, we want to help ensure that should we meet, again in ten years' time, we no longer hear the tectonic plates of world order grinding so clearly, but rather that we have achieved some kind of success together.

So I'm finishing my speech by talking about solidarity and cooperation. We in Germany want both, and we do a great deal to reach compromises in places where there is no better solution on the table.

Allow me to conclude by thanking all of our hosts today. I would like to thank the representatives of Land Schleswig-Holstein. This evening we'll also meet the Minister President. I thank the Mayor and Chairman of the municipal council, I'm grateful that you're speaking to us here today. Minister Sporendonk, thank you very much for accompanying us throughout the day.

Ambassadors, I look forward to meeting you individually and to hearing what is on your minds.