



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
on the occasion of the State Banquet in honour of  
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II  
in Schloss Bellevue  
on 24 June 2015**

It is with the greatest gratitude and pleasure that I bid you a warm welcome to Germany. Your Majesty, we are honoured that you are visiting our country so shortly after your official birthday celebrations. The citizens of Germany are delighted to have you in our country, for they have the greatest respect for you and the deepest admiration for your lifelong service. I am very pleased that, although this is not your first time in Germany, you are attending a state banquet here in Schloss Bellevue for the first time. For directly behind our Schloss Bellevue Park lies a symbol of the close ties between Britain and Germany: the English Garden. It was intended to commemorate the joint efforts of Britons and Germans in 1948 to ward off the threat to West Berlin's freedom. The British Royal Family made a donation to the garden at that time. As the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, attended the opening, it became known to Berliners as the "Garden of Eden". And for many people, it still is.

Your Majesty, you know this garden, as you planted a young oak tree there in 1965. What a lovely token of the long-standing and deeply rooted friendship between our countries!

Your first visit was a landmark, indeed an inspiring event in the young Federal Republic. You showed the German people that you had trust in them and gave them confidence in the future. At that time, 50 years ago, you drove along the Berlin Wall which, as part of the Iron Curtain, not only divided Berlin and Germany, but also split the continent of Europe. Today the Brandenburg Gate is open to you. It is open to you, to all of us, to everyone who goes there. What epitomises better the fundamental transformation that both Germany and Europe have undergone – a transformation that we have to safeguard and defend now and in the future?

Seventy years ago, British soldiers came to Germany, not to exact vengeance here but to liberate our country. The soldiers' commitment to human dignity served as their moral compass. And we Germans are so impressed to this very day by the conduct of these troops that a booklet, "Instructions for British Servicemen in Germany", became a bestseller here last year.

After the war, Britain helped to establish democracy and the rule of law in western Germany. Your country also guaranteed the freedom of the Federal Republic and West Berlin and supported us during the most wonderful event in our most recent history – German reunification. For that we remain grateful.

None of this would have been possible without British-German reconciliation. That foes have become friends is partly thanks to Your Majesty. You experienced the terrors of the war – the bombing of London and Buckingham Palace by the Germans. Nevertheless, you and your fellow Britons made a gesture of reconciliation, aptly in Dresden, the city where the war begun by Germany left especially deep wounds. Through the Dresden Trust, many British donors – under Royal patronage – helped to ensure that the Frauenkirche could be rebuilt. Before arriving at the banks of the River Elbe, the tower cross funded by donations was exhibited in various British cities. It now crowns the Frauenkirche – another symbol of the friendship between our countries, visible to people from around the world.

And now, Your Majesty, you are honouring Germany with your fifth state visit. The appeal of the British Royal Family, with its long history, which includes the era of the House of Welf in London and Hanover, is undiminished in Germany.

Especially here in Berlin, the British have left their mark to this very day: Lord Foster designed a landmark for the city, indeed for the entire country, with the glass Reichstag dome. Sir Simon Rattle opened up and revived the Philharmonie. Neil MacGregor is to head the Humboldt-Forum. By the same token, I am delighted by the great interest shown in the recent exhibition on Germany in London and in the works by Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter displayed there.

Your Majesty,

You have also witnessed the advance of European integration. A quarter of a century after the division of our continent ended, our European Union is facing major challenges. We know that we need an effective European Union based on a stable foundation of shared values. A constructive dialogue on the reforms Britain wants to see is therefore essential. As a good partner, Germany will support this dialogue. For Britain is a part of Europe. The European Union needs Britain. A united Europe, a strong European Union, represent stability, peace and freedom – for us all.

There is a saying in the nautical world: "There is but a plank between a sailor and eternity." Yes, some planks in the European ship could indeed be improved. But to be frank, we in Germany would rather strengthen the planks than tear them out.

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness,

With sincere thanks for your visit – which I regard as proof and consolidation of British-German friendship – and with the fervent desire that it will remain vibrant and strong, I would like to propose a toast to the health of Your Majesty and of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh and to a blessed and prosperous future for Britain!