



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
on the occasion of the Arraiolos Group meeting
at the Wartburg
on 21 September 2015**

Today is Malta's Independence Day. Allow us to offer you our warmest congratulations!

Welcome to the Wappensaal of the Wartburg hotel. The meetings of our group of non-executive presidents have always been most rewarding. This year, however, we sense that our meeting is taking place against the backdrop of a particular tension. We are meeting at a time of immense challenges. While I wouldn't like to say that this is making us nervous, our encounter is marked by a tense alertness. Today and tomorrow, we want, when we take stock of all the things that unite us culturally and consider our shared values, to ask ourselves the following: how can we stay together when there are considerable forces in our societies that are less interested in sticking together, but which rather propose renationalisation as the politically rational way forward?

We will, today and tomorrow, also be turning to the second big question that is currently occupying our European nations: how can we remain committed to the cause of solidarity if we are not in agreement about the type and scope of such solidarity? When looking for answers to these two questions, it may be helpful for us to not only consider the present, but also to look back to the past. What gave rise to our values? And how is European culture able to give us the feeling that we are not powerless, but can remain in control of our future? This is why today we have taken a look back at the great tradition of European culture, and also why we have discussed the tradition of Enlightenment and Reformation. And this is the reason, at the end of the day, for acquainting ourselves with this town, with this special site for German intellectual history, as well as with Protestantism and the Bible.

If we remind ourselves, esteemed guests and heads of state, just how strongly connected we are in our European cultural development and how strongly we are united by the values to which we have

pledged allegiance in Europe, then it can only be a heavy burden for us that we are not able, unanimously and with one voice, to define the solutions that we need in the face of the crisis that we are currently experiencing with regard to asylum seekers and refugees. This saddens me. And I know that it also saddens you.

And so we are reflecting now together on how the values to which we are committed in Europe and how our ancestors' experiences transformed Europe from a continent of wars and murder into a continent of peace and justice. And we are reflecting on how we can bring these experiences to bear on the challenges of the present. Our ancestors' experiences of building a united Europe and the experiences of those who carved out a space for democracy from a realm of dictatorship in Eastern Europe – all of this can encourage us not to tot up our weaknesses, but to bring together our strengths and ideas. This is one purpose of our meeting.

With this in mind, I would like in a moment to propose a toast. But before I do that, permit me to thank you, Minister-President Ramelow, Mayor Wolf, Mr Schuchardt. We are grateful to you for your hospitality. Allow me also to thank everyone who has helped to organise this meeting. We feel most welcome here in the heart of Germany. The sun has beamed on us today, and we are looking forward to tomorrow in your Thuringian capital of Erfurt. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to join me in a toast. To the health of the people whom we represent, to peace in Europe, and to the people meeting here who, while they do not have quick-fix solutions to offer, are nevertheless working tirelessly for the cause of greater humanity, greater peace and greater freedom and justice. Ladies and gentlemen, your health!