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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a state banquet hosted by
President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj
on 15 October 2015
in Ulan Bator, Mongolia**

I expect that almost all Central Europeans who speak about Mongolia talk about the vast open spaces, where the unpractised eye finds no point of reference. To quote Fritz Mühlenweg, who travelled through Mongolia more than half a century ago: "Anyone coming to Central Asia must discard their familiar standards. They should enter the country as if on the first day of Creation." That certainly also applies to today's Mongolia.

Mongolia is more than four times as large as the Federal Republic of Germany. And yet this huge country is home to only three million people, half of whom live in the capital. Many Germans find this sparsely populated landscape incredibly fascinating. It is the polar opposite to our densely populated homeland. And when we Germans are then told that 30,000 of these three million Mongolians speak German, and that German courses are very popular, our captivation is complete. For we know that people who speak a foreign language are also interested in the country where it is native. To put it a different way, foreign language learning is a good indicator of the quality of relations between two countries.

German-Mongolian relations were established when the GDR and the Mongolian People's Republic were both fellow socialist states. But as early as 1974, Mongolia also established diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. Our present friendship is thus based on firm foundations.

Germany has for years been very interested in Mongolia's culture and heritage. We have successfully worked together on joint archaeological projects, such as the excavations in Genghis Khan's ancient capital, and will continue with this work. I am particularly looking forward to visiting Karakorum tomorrow.

ADDRESS Bundespräsidialamt
11010 Berlin
TEL / FAX +49 30 2000-2021/-1926
E-MAIL presse@bpra.bund.de
WEBSITE www.bundespraesident.de

There has been a Goethe Institute in Ulan Bator since 2008. And since 2010, a jointly funded government scholarship programme has given Mongolian students the opportunity to study at German universities. Taking such cooperation a step further, the German-Mongolian Institute for Resources and Technology was established in Nalaikh in 2013. I had the privilege of visiting that institution this afternoon, and seeing for myself how large numbers of young, highly-motivated Mongolians are receiving training with German support. This institution could become something like the centrepiece of the raw materials partnership which our governments launched in 2011. Our interest has not waned – as demonstrated by the presence of the business delegation which is accompanying me today.

Mr President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The legacy of the Communist regimes can still be felt in the societies they once controlled. This common experience forms another bond between our two countries. In contrast to their large neighbours, the Mongolians decided after a peaceful revolution 25 years ago – like the East Germans – to transform their country into a democracy and a market economy. Not so long ago you, Mr President, described your country's particular situation, geographically and politically, as that of a "pony between two elephants".

Mr President,

You have worked with great insistence to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and have fought corruption. And you are still doing so today, as evinced most recently by your speech to the United Nations in New York. These efforts are deserving of our respect and esteem, because we know that if this commitment were to waver, everything that has been achieved so far would be put in question. Germany would like to support Mongolia on this path, even if conditions are difficult. By doing what we can in partnership, we would like to contribute to the continued positive development of Mongolian society.

It is a particular pleasure for me to be here also for a somewhat personal reason: President Elbegdorj was the very first state guest whom I had the honour of welcoming to Berlin after taking office in March 2012.

My request now is thus all the more heartfelt. Please join me in drinking a toast: To the health of President Elbegdorj and his wife, to the Mongolian people and to the friendship between our two countries.