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**Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the state banquet on the occasion of the visit  
by President Truong Tan Sang of Viet Nam  
on 25 November 2015  
in Schloss Bellevue**

May I first bid you all a very warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue!

This is the first time that a head of state from Viet Nam has been on an official visit here in the Federal Republic of Germany. I welcome this historic event and our meeting today.

Your visit, Mr President, is also a special occasion as it marks the climax of a jubilee year. Viet Nam and the Federal Republic of Germany established diplomatic relations forty years ago, and the numerous events marking this anniversary are an impressive testimony to the intensity of relations between our countries.

We are connected by strong bonds founded on mutual interests, including stability and security, economic growth and cooperation in our globalised world. Pursuing these interests increasingly requires a coordinated approach across a broad spectrum. We will gain additional room for manoeuvre by working together to strengthen the cooperation between the European Union and ASEAN.

Globalisation requires us to free up rigid structures. Your country has responded to this challenge with an ambitious programme of reform. Market economy liberalisation, incentives for foreign investments and reforms in education and science – all of these are important steps on the path to becoming a modern industrialised nation. I hold the Vietnamese people in particularly high regard for achieving an economic upswing with tremendous hard work, stamina and creativity.

Germany is supporting your country's efforts to achieve further modernisation in a variety of different ways. The strategic partnership that we entered into in 2011 offers us great opportunities to further strengthen our ties. And we want to take advantage of these

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opportunities. This will continue to require substantial efforts on both sides.

I welcome your country's determination to promote free trade. This includes the conclusion of a groundbreaking free trade agreement with the European Union – a groundbreaking development as it would not only improve market access considerably, but also safeguard the rights of employees and protect the environment. As Viet Nam's biggest EU trading partner, we have a vested interest in strengthening our economic relations to the benefit of all with this agreement. German companies are increasingly discovering the opportunities offered by the Vietnamese market. Projects such as the construction of the German House in Ho Chi Minh City and plans to establish a German-Vietnamese chamber of commerce are proof of the great interest in your country on the part of German business.

Economic relations require a reliable framework, however. In our Joint Declaration of Hanoi, Germany and Viet Nam attributed a "special importance" to the dialogue on the rule of law including the enforcement of human rights as a whole. I see great potential here for achieving tangible progress in this area and for mobilising the creative power of Vietnamese society in the service of this process of transformation.

We must not forget that our citizens are our most important bridge builders as we move together towards the future. Young people, in particular, are key players in this regard. I am thinking, for example, of the students at the Vietnamese-German University in Ho Chi Minh City or the many young Vietnamese studying in Germany, a considerable number of whom are continuing a family tradition. More than 120,000 Vietnamese live here in Germany – that is a most impressive statistic. But it is even more impressive how your countrymen are enriching our nation with their hard work and commitment. I'm thinking here not only of the multifaceted Vietnamese culture steeped in tradition, which I would like to play an even more prominent role in everyday German life. I am also thinking of the many hard working merchants and businesspeople of Vietnamese origin and the Vietnamese will to learn and be educated that constitutes such an important bridge for the future. And I am also thinking of the harmony that characterises the co existence of Vietnamese and German citizens in general. This is a further important, and sometimes underestimated, building block of our partnership.

In these unsettled times, we intend to do our utmost to continue to stabilise and intensify the excellent relations between our two countries. And with this in mind, I would like to invite you to join me in a toast to the health of President Sang and his wife and to the friendship between Viet Nam and Germany.