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**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the State Banquet on the occasion of the State Visit by  
President Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania  
Schloss Bellevue  
20 April 2016**

I bid you all a very warm welcome to Berlin and to Schloss Bellevue. I am glad to have you here as my guests. I still have clear and fond memories of our most recent encounters, when you, Madam President, visited us in October 2014, and I also recall particularly well our talks during my last state visit to your beautiful capital Vilnius and the Curonian Spit, where we saw Thomas Mann's old house and many other beautiful places.

Sometimes my thoughts return to your homeland, as they do when I turn to one of my pleasures – reading the words of Johannes Bobrowski. The poet Johannes Bobrowski was at home in Germany, but his youth by the Memel remained an intrinsic part of him, or, we should perhaps better say, it infused his spirit his whole life long. He always recalled the Memel, "on whose banks Poles, Lithuanians, Russians and Germans have lived together for centuries, and among them all the Jews." Johannes Bobrowski viewed this long period of cohabitation as a time of misfortune and culpability, but did not want to abandon hope of a better shared future.

He was to be proven right. Following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, peaceful coexistence was again possible in the Baltic, as a common European area of culture and trade. It was indeed the people of the Baltic States themselves who contributed greatly to this change by insisting on their right to free, democratic, national self determination. This freedom was the prerequisite for the close and amicable relations that our countries now maintain to their mutual benefit.

Economic links, in particular, have become far closer. Lithuania is at present one of the six eurozone countries with the strongest growth. This fact has not been lost on German entrepreneurs. Many are

ADDRESS Bundespräsidialamt  
11010 Berlin  
TEL / FAX +49 30 2000-2021/-1926  
E-MAIL [presse@bpra.bund.de](mailto:presse@bpra.bund.de)  
WEBSITE [www.bundespraesident.de](http://www.bundespraesident.de)

investing in Lithuania. They are glad to do so, and they would – so say the experts – do so time and again.

We are aware that the Lithuanians had to pay a high price for their independence. Earlier this year, they commemorated the events of 25 years ago, when Soviet tanks violently put down peaceful protests in Vilnius. And this was by no means the first attempt to deprive Lithuania of its sovereignty. We Germans have no wish to forget, and will not forget, that German ambitions were partly responsible for the fall of Lithuania's First Republic.

Nowadays, Lithuania's security and sovereignty are guaranteed through its alliance with its European and transatlantic partners. This protection remains particularly important given the common security challenges we face in the neighbourhood of the European Union, a fact that nobody emphasises more than you, Madam President.

The European Union, to which both our countries belong, was created with the intention of forming a strong community and defending its members' common values. The present challenges demonstrate more clearly than ever that the decision to create the EU was a wise one. For it is only together that we can respond properly to the breach of international law in Crimea, the consequences of the economic crisis and the effects of the refugee crisis triggered by civil war and terrorism.

"Joint action makes Europe strong" – that was a core message in the speech you gave, Madam President, upon receiving the Charlemagne Prize in 2013. It is a principle you have always followed yourself, as Lithuanian Finance Minister, then as EU Commissioner, and then as your country's President.

And I am glad that Lithuanian policy makers keep on putting your maxim into practice. I am likewise glad that you are also seeking to convince your fellow countrymen and women of the benefits of joint European action. You may rest assured that we will not ignore the special challenges faced by Lithuania in this context.

27 years ago, two million people joined hands to form a human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius, via Riga. This event has been described by the former President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, as one of the moments that healed Europe. It is our joint responsibility to preserve this same Europe.

With this in mind, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to raise your glasses and drink with me to President Grybauskaite, to the people of Lithuania, to the Independence of their nation and to the future of a united Europe!