



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the lunch on the occasion of the informational and  
contact-building trip with the Diplomatic Corps and the  
heads of representations of international organisations  
on 2 May 2016  
in Völklingen**

Dining in palaces is nothing new for many ambassadors. But I doubt whether you have ever had lunch in surroundings like this. Those of us on this trip to the Saarland are undoubtedly delighted to be here in this location. Ms Kramp-Karrenbauer, this is a very special kind of monument.

This is, in fact, the first time since we began these annual visits in 1996 that a Federal President has come to the Saarland with the Diplomatic Corps. Most of our guests will already have realised that this year's destination was a wonderful choice, and anyone who still has to be convinced will surely have been won over once we have finished eating. I've been told that the Saarländer are a dab hand in the kitchen.

Not all Germans are aware that the Saarländer actually serve as role models in a number of fields. One of my predecessors, Richard von Weizsäcker, once said: "The Saarländer are the living proof of how one can be a good Saarländer, a good German, a good European and a good neighbour all at the same time."

And if I understand the quotation correctly, Federal President von Weizsäcker, by using the expression "living proof", intentionally places the emphasis on what the people in the Saarland understand somewhat better than those in other areas of Germany: living.

"Live and live well, live and let live", that is the way of life here in the Saarland as the writer Ludwig Harig explains. And he ought to know as he was born a mere 20 kilometres from here. The Saarländer, he goes on to say, are always crossing borders and those constantly crossing borders do not survive by defending entitlements; their lifeline is taking opportunities as they come. I suggest we follow suit.

Let us take the opportunity to get to know a region that was long contested, even fought over by France and Germany and that today has become in many respects a prime example of the friendship between the two nations. Here, it is fair to say, the French and the Germans have made their peace.

Allow me to share a personal memory at this point. I came here for the first time in 1955. I was a 15 year old schoolboy from eastern Germany, and that summer the Saarländer experienced something very significant. The Saarland was under French administration as a result of the war, francs were the valid currency, it had pro French parties and a Francophile Minister-President. That summer in 1955, when I was here during the holidays, legal German parties presented their agendas again for the first time. I came from Communist Germany and had no experience of open debate. I was fascinated by the developments here. And our French neighbours simply accepted and went along with the fact that for the second time in history the Saarländer had opted for Germany. I found that remarkable. After the war they could have said: "No, you have caused so much damage, the Saarland will stay French." This attitude impressed me as a young boy, and it still impresses me today, as President.

It was in the early 19th century that the ceramic manufacturers François Boch and Nicolas Villeroy realised that peace between competitors can be lucrative. Both families set up their businesses in Lorraine and so have French roots originally. Yet after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, they found themselves on Prussian soil. To hold their own in the face of the then dominant industry in England, the two decided to merge their companies. In 1842, the seal was set on their alliance with the marriage of Eugen Boch and Octavie Villeroy.

This world-famous company is a household name in Germany: Villeroy & Boch. We will find out more about it later. It was the merger that opened the way for the company's international success and at headquarters in Mettlach, here in the Saarland, they look back with pride at the company's Franco-German past and family heritage. "At heart we are a European business, that in legal terms is a German limited company," as the French owner Nicolas Luc Villeroy puts it today. His partner, Wendelin von Boch, is German.

Continuity like this is not something to be taken for granted in the Saarland. It is a region in flux. Hardly any Land in Germany has experienced such deep splits and fundamental change as the Saarland. Historically – in the long strife between Germany and France. And economically – through the coal and steel crisis in the mid 1970s. The place we have come to now, the former Völklingen Ironworks, is probably the most impressive example of the structural change that followed.

In 1873, the first furnaces were lit. In the blasting hall in which we now find ourselves, alongside the huge turbines, it is easy to imagine the machinery steaming and pounding. At times, more than 17,000 people were working here. The year 1975, the start of the global steel crisis, marks the start of the demise. In 1986, the machines fell silent. Today the Ironworks is a World Cultural Heritage Site and is seen as a historic testament to German industrial engineering. The first industrial monument in Germany to become a World Cultural Heritage Site.

Although we are now here in a museum, the Saarland is anything but a museum. Its economy is forward-looking, as we saw for ourselves this morning. We can today see the continuation of what was behind the success of businesses in the 18th and 19th centuries: research, innovation, investment in new technologies are all still relevant. We could say that the constant in the Saarland is its inventive genius. Where once the recipe for earthenware using limestone as an alternative to porcelain was penned, we today have research institutes working on artificial intelligence, testing procedures for industrial manufacturing, new pharmaceuticals or improving IT security. The Saarland has tackled structural change – and in many places tackled it with flying colours.

What was once problematic – the Saarland's position on the border – is today proving to be an asset. After all, the economic region we are talking about today is referred to by our bureaucrats as SaarLorLux. That is to say, in October 1980 the governments of the Federal Republic of Germany, France and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg agreed on cooperation between the Saarland, Lorraine and Luxembourg. Today, Belgian Wallonia and Germany's Rhineland-Palatinate are also on board. Their authorities and institutions work together to promote the economic, cultural, touristic and social development of this region. And their efforts are successful.

Looking around this region as we are doing today, you can quickly see the importance of cross-border cooperation in Europe. And you can immediately understand why close cooperation with its neighbours is so important to Germany. In fact, there are few places where you can sense so well the essence and the deep roots of German policy on Europe.

Not far from here across the border in Luxembourg is a place whose name we all know and which we have heard more and more often in recent months: Schengen. As you know, it is the name given to an agreement that changed Europe as it fundamentally improved the regulations governing freedom of movement. Those familiar with Europe's war-torn history and those studying the impact of this history using the example of the Saarland know how important this agreement was and remains for Europe. Almost 30 percent of EU citizens now live

in European border regions. Particularly in these regions, the dense network of cross-border cooperation makes the advantages of open borders in Europe tangible and perceptible to the citizens day in day out. And particularly in these days and weeks we want to make clear that we wish to retain this freedom of movement.

Yet, ladies and gentlemen, Germany is not an island, nor is Europe. With the refugee flows triggered by the war in Syria and other conflicts, Europe faces huge responsibility. The wars and conflicts are a stern reminder to us Europeans that we need to use our political and economic clout earlier and in a more targeted way to deal with global challenges.

Germany is aware of its international responsibility. It is palpable this year for example in Germany's Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co operation in Europe. With its monitoring mission in eastern Ukraine, the OSCE has taken on an important and difficult task, as you are all aware. After months of relative calm, we are now worried that the ceasefire has been violated more and more often recently. Whether within the OSCE or outside, Germany will not wane in its sterling efforts to bring about a solution to the conflict. Peaceful development in Ukraine is of enormous importance for Europe, for all of us.

Here in the Saarland, a place that has been no stranger to upheaval, let me say that a change towards peaceful and cooperative neighbourly relations is possible. Indeed, it is the job of diplomacy to shape such change.

Excellencies, I will now take an hour and a half to describe in detail this task of diplomacy. Having said that, maybe that isn't such a good idea. I don't want to jeopardise the good relations the Federal Republic of Germany enjoys with your countries and will conclude with just one sentence: You are warmly invited to enjoy what the chefs from the Saarland have prepared for us all.