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**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a luncheon to mark the centenary of the
German-Uruguayan Chamber of Industry and Commerce
Montevideo, Uruguay,
16 July 2016**

There is something to celebrate. And such a major anniversary at that. The German-Uruguayan Chamber of Commerce was founded by German merchants here in Montevideo on 19 July 1916. The founders deserve our respect. They were pioneers, because the Chamber they established is one of the oldest German Chambers of Commerce abroad. Today it is the most important Chamber of Commerce in Uruguay, with the largest membership. Many congratulations on your centenary!

Everywhere I have gone since arriving in Uruguay, I have heard and sensed how close and trusting relations between our countries are. This good, long-standing partnership is based not least on the many links established by the business community and entrepreneurs, both Uruguayan and German, and enthusiastically supported by this Chamber.

You not only promote trade in goods and services and the transfer of technology and know how, but also foster understanding. For success on a foreign market is dependent on familiarity with the country and its people. This Chamber's long history of success testifies both to its business sense and its awareness of the needs of the people on the ground. Part of this is your determination to help advance forward-looking developments – nowadays, that primarily means digital connectivity. The Industry 4.0 agreement between your Chamber and the Uruguayan Ministry of Industry, Energy and Mining marks an important stage in cooperation between our two countries in this important field. The agreement is also an indication of the fruitful relations you maintain with the Uruguayan Government.

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Foreign trade is of great importance to Uruguay, as it is to Germany. Germany is Uruguay's main market in the European Union and its leading source of imports from Europe. Our two countries share the fundamental belief that free trade on the basis of fair and sensible rules sustainably increases prosperity and improves the quality of life. A successful conclusion of negotiations on a trade agreement between the EU and MERCOSUR would therefore also be advantageous for the further development of economic relations between Uruguay and Germany.

I am pleased that German companies in Uruguay have made substantial investments in renewable energies, a sector of great importance for the future. Our countries are linked by their desire to increase growth and prosperity in a resource-efficient, environmentally-friendly and climate-compatible way. Uruguay, like Germany, has embarked on a shift to green energy – with impressive results. Almost 95 percent of electricity consumed last year came from renewable energy sources. A considerable number of wind farms have sprung up, thanks in part to help from German companies and financial partners. These projects help tackle climate change and also create jobs, often in structurally weak areas.

Highly trained workers will be needed for the further development of renewable energies and for a modern, efficient economy. So I hope that the two Uruguayan-German pilot projects to train electricians for photovoltaic systems and mechatronics engineers can get underway this year. With these very promising initiatives, this Chamber is keeping up its commitment to establishing the dual system of vocational training in Uruguay. I would like to thank all those involved very much indeed for thus helping to improve young people's prospects.

This morning I had the opportunity to have a look at the *Ánima* training project in which your Chamber is also involved. Good vocational training is crucial, particularly for young people from difficult social backgrounds. Training and the opportunity for advancement are basic preconditions for broad based ownership of economic success. This also requires viable jobs. I am happy that German companies here in Uruguay are helping to combine highly productive employment with socially and ecologically responsible corporate practices.

Germany certainly does take note of Uruguay's economic success. It is good that it has been possible for many years – thanks not least to various reforms – to combine high growth with stability and increased ownership of economic success. That is why I am confident that Uruguay will find promising responses to the current phase of weakened growth and that the number of German companies interested in Uruguay will continue to rise.

Our two countries know from experience that dialogue between employers and employees on how to shape labour relations is a prerequisite for economic progress. In Germany we are currently in a fortunate position: we are seeing new record levels of employment. There are many reasons for this. Cooperation between the social partners is one of them. Both sides generally display flexibility and a sense of proportion.

Over the past hundred years, this Chamber and the companies supporting it have built many bridges between Uruguay and Germany. What I would say to you on your centenary is this: keep on building! Keep on building in the interest of a competitive, socially responsible economy, in the spirit of the good partnership between our countries, and for the benefit of the people of Uruguay and Germany.

Thank you.