



BUNDESPRÄSIDENTIALAMT

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**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the State Banquet in honour of King Carl XVI Gustaf
and Queen Silvia of Sweden
at Schloss Bellevue
on 5 October 2016**

It is a great delight for me to welcome you to your first state visit to Germany for 23 years and your first visit to Schloss Bellevue. The very fact that you are here today is a wonderful expression of the Swedish-German friendship. Both of you have deep and also personal ties with Germany. During your visit, you will no doubt see the great respect in which you and your country are held by German citizens.

I myself have always felt close to Sweden, not just since my first state visit to Stockholm as Federal President in 2012. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, your country was a country of my dreams – as it was for many East Germans. In the years of Europe's division, countless people stood at the Baltic Sea coast in Mecklenburg and Pomerania, at the place where we East Germans could go no further. We looked out to the horizon. Somewhere on the other side of the sea, there had to be Sweden, the country which had what we could only dream of: freedom, democracy and real social justice. Today, we can say that Sweden and the happily reunified Germany share the conviction that free societies work better if they aspire to create opportunities and participation for all. This is a thought that inspires people not just in our two countries, but around the world.

For many Germans, Sweden has remained a country for which we yearn, a country that fascinates and inspires. Many years ago, Kurt Tucholsky noted that "there is no normal German brain that has anything but pleasant, friendly and positive thoughts when it thinks about Sweden." Today, we perhaps think of Nobel Prizes, children's books and thrillers, pop music and design, but also of major innovative businesses, of prosperity, tolerance and a culture based on consensus.

Another Swedish quality that we find particularly attractive is the tireless work of Swedish politics and civil society alike for the respect of human rights worldwide and the support of human rights defenders.

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Not to forget, of course, that your country has experienced uninterrupted peace for two centuries. What an achievement that is in a Europe that has been plagued by so much war! Swedish institutions, I am thinking here of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI, are helping us to understand crises and conflicts better and resolve them faster. What is more, your country has been a safe haven for refugees from all over the world, also for many Germans in the time of the National Socialist dictatorship – something that I recall with special gratitude.

But, perhaps I may also mention that Germany has had an impact on Sweden as well. Next year, we will be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in both Germany and Sweden. The Petri brothers brought the Reformation to Sweden, thus changing their country forever. And therefore our shared Protestant heritage also forms a stable bridge across the Baltic Sea.

We are living in turbulent times today. Against the backdrop of international crises, close relations built on trust are indispensable. Only together can we successfully tackle the challenges currently facing us in Europe and in the world.

In terms of foreign policy thinking and action, Sweden and Germany have an essential bond: trust in international cooperation and in multilateralism. Together, we want to maintain global structures, strengthen the United Nations Security Council and uphold the cohesion of the European Union. This spirit also shapes our regional cooperation, for example as close partners in the Council of the Baltic Sea States. Sweden can rely on Germany's support when it assumes the Presidency in mid 2017.

When it comes to global engagement for human rights and development, we see Sweden as a close partner that shares our views as to what must be done for people in need. I am therefore especially delighted that Sweden's candidacy for the United Nations Security Council was successful.

The refugee crisis showed us how urgently we need greater international cooperation. After all, in this crisis, Sweden and Germany have been shouldering the main burden with only a few partners. In 2015, Sweden took in the most refugees per capita of all European countries. Our people and our Governments know that Sweden and Germany are not going to be able to manage in the long term unless burdens are shared and migration is steered. For this reason, a long term solution is only possible at European level.

The key domestic challenge for our countries is to integrate all the new arrivals. I am convinced we can learn a lot from you and from each other particularly in this area. The Berlin integration initiative set up by two Swedes that you, Your Majesties, will visit is an excellent

example. By visiting refugee accommodation and by showing social engagement, you have time and again helped ensure that people in need are given attention and assistance.

Our commitment to democracy based on freedom and to a fair deal for all, our common cultural heritage and the values we share – these are the cornerstones of our relations. This is what we want to build on in the future so that we can perform the tasks that lie before us.

Let me invite you now to raise your glasses to Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and Queen Silvia, to the Swedish people and to Swedish-German cooperation and friendship.