



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
on the occasion of the first official visit of Kersti Kaljulaid,
President of the Republic of Estonia
in Schloss Bellevue
on 11 November 2016**

Welcome once again to Schloss Bellevue. I am delighted that you have come to visit Germany so soon after taking office. We all know that close, amicable relations, like those enjoyed by our two countries, are indispensable, particularly in turbulent times. They are indispensable on two counts – as a guarantee of stability and as a motor of change. Stability and change go hand in hand. Madam President, we – Estonians and Germans – as well as all the other countries of Europe, need both stability and change in order to master the multifarious challenges facing us. And we need both stability and change to shape the transatlantic partnership.

Estonia has impressed us particularly with its symbiosis between constancy and adaptability. Our relations as a whole are indeed characterised by this kind of symbiosis. The history of the Hanseatic League, for example, is still visible and tangible, and the German language continues to be nurtured in Estonia. The centuries-old traditions connecting Germany and Estonia across the Baltic Sea survived the depredations of Nazi rule and outlived the Soviet regime. Historical ties form an important foundation for our current modern and forward-looking partnership. Today, a diverse and vibrant web of bilateral links permeates politics and business, science and culture.

A few months ago, the Estonians celebrated the 25th anniversary of their renewed independence. Their pursuit of liberty and their desire for political, economic and cultural growth are applaudable. The Estonians have every reason to be proud of what they have achieved, of all they have obtained by undergoing painful transformations. Their will to shape their destiny should serve to spur Europe on. In Germany and in the European Union, we are still in the process of mapping out our path in the digitised world. Estonia is a pioneer in this regard and a partner for modernisation, from whom many others could learn.

Digitisation is of course not the only issue we are concerned with when we think about the future. We are far more concerned with focusing on the defence of our shared values and not neglecting our security problems and security issues. We should stand firm against wars and conflicts, and Russia's hegemonic ambitions, together in the Alliance with all our partners. For only by standing together in this way we can succeed. Germany stands firmly at Estonia's side, also when it comes to guaranteeing the security of the Baltic region. Acting credibly is one of the pillars of our partnership with Estonia.

A readiness to act with solidarity is also a key feature of partnership as understood by Estonia. Our two countries are both convinced that European solidarity and European cohesion are accomplishments that should be nurtured and protected. There is no better way to safeguard peace, freedom and prosperity in Europe.

Madam President, honoured colleague,

You are familiar with the European Union and its institutions – having worked in one of them. You combine your experience with the awareness that, now more than ever, a distance exists between political leaders on the one hand and the people on the other. I welcome the fact that in your new role you intend to work to overcome these differences. It is our constant task to foster trust in the forces of a free society. Building confidence is one of the key collective tasks for Europe, and therefore also for Estonia and Germany. I am convinced that we can and will get there.

In this spirit, I would like to ask you, ladies and gentlemen, to raise your glasses and drink a toast to Her Excellency President Kaljulaid, and to the continued growth and consolidation of the friendship between Estonia and Germany. Zum Wohl!