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**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the Conference on the Future of Europe of the Friedrich
Naumann Foundation for Freedom
in Berlin
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Many thanks for your kind invitation. When I accepted it last May, that is, only seven months ago, the situation here in Europe was a little different. Admittedly, we saw some clouds on the horizon. But, with the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, further insecurity – with roots that run very deep – has been added to these worries.

Moreover, after the sobering outcome of the referendum, few Europeans dared imagine that, after the US election took a surprising turn, even the transatlantic partnership would be entering a new phase that is currently difficult to predict. At any rate, we must be realistic, accept the world as it is, and rise to meet the new challenges that we now face.

It is not only in a foreign and European policy context that we sense how the world we knew has changed, to the extent that we are right to wonder whether our familiar tools of orientation will still be suitable for navigating this new reality.

The great liberal philosopher and politician Ralf Dahrendorf examined this question nearly 20 years ago. His answers are contained in a truly prophetic text from 1997 that examines globalisation and its social consequences. Dahrendorf dares to make an incredibly level-headed analysis of the costs and benefits of globalisation. He comes to what I find is the surprising conclusion that the social consequences and follow-on effects of globalisation will be “the next challenge that a policy of freedom will face”. On the one hand, he sees new livelihoods and fresh hope for millions. He sees that the big, unified world holds great opportunity for many. However, as the economic area increases, he also believes spaces will be created that political regulations cannot reach, and he predicts that globalisation will “tend to promote authoritative rather than democratic systems.” Moreover, he believes it

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may "create problems that will be difficult to solve with normal, democratic methods".

This is amazingly prescient. Although written in November of 1997, his essay describes the upcoming effects of globalisation as if he were analysing our state of global affairs in November of 2016. He predicts the rise of a new regionalism that seeks to retreat into ever more constrained environments, out of fear of an increasingly complex global economic space and habitat. A mass retreat that seeks salvation in nation states, regions and religious communities. Moreover, he considers this restorative counter-movement to be more than the last rumbling of a vanished juggernaut. Dahrendorf suspects that the anti-modernist impulse and the quest for restored integrity, for violently sweeping aside all contradictions, may mercilessly blaze a trail in much the same way that the powers of globalisation unfold. The danger he sees is that democracy and the rule of law may eventually be crushed by these uncontrollable forces.

Incidentally, anyone who reads this text and others by the former President of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and who is receptive to the analysis and far-sightedness of great liberal thinkers will lower his or her risk of being surprised by political and social developments.

I wish I had read this text earlier. If I had, I would much sooner have been aware of the steady rise of restorative counter-movements, which are a form of political escapism, and I would have been able to better prepare myself for facing this development. Some of you may feel the same.

What is being offered by the new authoritarian movements that are cropping up in many parts of the world is tempting for some, because these groups promise quick-fix solutions for a complicated day and age. To many, this is more attractive than pursuing the tedious work of reconciling interests among democrats. Critics believe these efforts yield only piecemeal results, rather than add up to real political progress. They demand a grand, one-size-fits-all solution – which does not exist. In democratic debate, we must not shy away from conflicts that arise due to such views. Conflict is innate to the relationship between those who rationally pursue policy-making and those who communicate their emotional reaction to this policy. We must accept that this conflict exists. We must – in keeping with Dahrendorf – recognise its creative potential: "Conflict is a basic fact of social life – just as conflict may even be an essential part of life itself," Dahrendorf said. The point of an open society is that it permits many paths to be taken, he says, and adds to this the warning that we must not view globalisation as a one-way street, but rather as a challenge to find new paths and solutions, and that we must remain steadfast in our efforts to open up the largest number of opportunities for the greatest number of people.

Europe and the European Union are facing a host of challenges. The greatest one will be to view this long list of tasks as a common responsibility. Closer cooperation and a deepening of the union of European states are not intended to eliminate national identities or national cultures. The European Union also offers a home to, and has room for, these different cultures, experiences and traditions. Even a globalised political and economic world remains highly diverse, as Dahrendorf writes. And this diversity necessarily includes your own identity and uniqueness.

We must explain this to others. We must try to alleviate their fear of freedom, their fear of an open society and of globalisation. If we make the point that respecting diversity does not require severing cultural roots, then diversity will not only be tolerated, but also fostered. It is through diversity that answers will be found to the challenges of our times. We need a wealth of experiences in order to search for new paths in a complex day and age. I repeat: The new paths on which we embark need not separate us from the familiar, from our national identity, or from our uniqueness and culture.

It is precisely by knowing our cultural identity that we can view the broadening of our horizons as an enrichment. Where self-confidence is lacking, diversity is viewed as a threat. Communicating this knowledge and way of life will be at the core of our joint political task. And if we take a little closer look at this task, then we will realise it is nothing less than the essence of liberalism.

I sincerely thank the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom for its tireless efforts in the service of freedom.