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**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a luncheon with President of the Slovak Republic,
Andrej Kiska,
at Schloss Bellevue
on 12 December 2016**

I am delighted to be able to welcome you to Schloss Bellevue once again. I fondly recall our personal meetings, your visit to Berlin two years ago, and particularly the most impressive events that brought us and our colleagues together to mark the 25th anniversary of the peaceful revolutions – including in Leipzig and Bratislava.

Our two countries share historical links that connect us at a personal level – despite our age difference.

Keep the Gate Closed, Little Brother was the title of a ballad that the Czech songwriter and poet Karel Kryl penned in 1968 as Soviet tanks rolled through the streets of Bratislava and Prague. The song features the line This night will not be short.

Well, the night lasted for another 21 years, and when it finally came to an end in 1989 with the start of the Velvet Revolution, you, Mr President, were the same age as I was when I witnessed the Prague Spring. Both of us are therefore eye-witnesses of the desire for freedom shared by the Slovaks, Czechs and Germans.

I am grateful that our countries enjoy close links today. A look at the past shows us what we have achieved in the last 27 years. Slovakia has become an important partner – a free, autonomous member of the European Union, the eurozone and the Schengen area, as well as NATO. That is an incredible success story, also when considered among the other successful stories of transformation.

Slovakia has continued to stand for an economically strong, modern and globally engaged Europe during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2016. The Bratislava agenda for security, growth and migration, which was adopted during the summit in September and which is to be

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implemented by March of next year – the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome – is a testament to this engagement.

Despite all of the setbacks and unknowns of the European integration process, we should remind ourselves that freedom was the precondition for this integration and also will be its enduring consequence. This helps us to see more clearly the path that lies behind us and the one that we still need to tread.

The fact that the Slovak Republic has a self-confident civil society and a stable democracy and is a successful location for business is also thanks to personalities such as yourself, Mr President, who combined their entrepreneurial success stories with social and, ultimately, political commitment. However, it is above all thanks to the Slovak people who achieved this transition and who were ready to make personal sacrifices in the process.

Mr President, Slovakia can be proud of what it has accomplished, and we can rejoice in this together. Allow me to offer you a warm welcome to Berlin once again. I am looking forward to the privilege of enjoying a cultural highlight with musicians from your country at the Berliner Dom together with you tonight.

I would like to raise my glass to a successful and blessed path for the Slovak Republic and to the friendship between our two countries.