



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the official ceremony in memory of former
Federal President Roman Herzog
in Berlin
on 24 January 2017**

We mourn the death of Federal President Roman Herzog and have gathered here at the Berliner Dom to bid him farewell. While he rendered great services to our country in all of the public offices he held, most of us remember him for his work as Federal President. He did not only achieve recognition and respect in this office – the people of our country also extended great support, indeed affection, to him the longer he performed this role.

It was good for us Germans that he was a Federal President for whom any kind of pomp, exuberance, or obedient subservience to the state and authority was so demonstrably foreign. Roman Herzog proved that this office loses none of its dignity and aura when you approach it with calmness, distance and an occasional helping of self irony.

Indeed, Roman Herzog possessed the ability, in a way that is difficult to describe, to make one forget that he was guided by clear values and had a steady political and ethical compass. His regional identity was certainly unambiguous. He never made a secret of his Bavarian roots, but rather his unmistakable accent won him, or so he himself put it, warm affection even before he had lifted a finger. "I only have to open my mouth and people think that they're on holiday."

Perhaps each Bavarian contains a decent helping of Karl Valentin – Roman Herzog indisputably did. The fact that his unadulterated humour, to which he himself openly admitted, was never targeted at weak or dependent people, would seem to support this. However, he could not help but burst the bubble of anything or anyone that was overly pompous. This is the sort of standpoint that can only be held by someone who is able to differentiate precisely between what is genuinely valuable and important and what is not – which is another reason why his presidency was so good for us.

With the death of Roman Herzog, I now have, after the deaths of Richard von Weizsäcker and Walter Scheel, the sad duty to bid farewell to a predecessor of mine for the third time since taking office. In a way, these farewells also seem to be our way of finally taking our leave from the old Federal Republic.

Roman Herzog was very much a President of transition. While he was elected in the reunified Germany, the relocation of the nation's capital to Berlin only took place during his time in office. He performed the lion's share of his official duties at Villa Hammerschmidt in Bonn.

However, even before the Federal President and the Office of the Federal President finally embarked on their move, Federal President Herzog wanted to raise awareness of Berlin as the capital and of Schloss Bellevue among the public. Many events, which were also broadcast on television, such as *Bei Roman Herzog im Bellevue*, in which he held discussions with his guests, sought to demonstrate that German unity was now becoming a tangible reality, including at the new main residence of the Federal President.

Schloss Bellevue was also where First Lady Christiane Herzog produced her broadcasts entitled *Zu Gast bei Christiane Herzog*. This also helped to raise Schloss Bellevue's public profile – and the people of Germany became acquainted with a President's wife who taught her celebrity guests how to cook with great determination. It was with this very same determination that she devoted herself to the most diverse range of charitable positions, and she was especially passionate about people suffering from cystic fibrosis, a disease that is incurable to this day, and which most of us had never heard of prior to Christiane Herzog's commitment in this area. The foundation that she set up continues to do much to help young people suffering from this condition. Christiane Herzog supported and complemented her husband – without her, his strongly people oriented tenure would have been inconceivable. When she died in 2000, the people in our country were sad, but also grateful for her work. I know, Alexandra von Berlichingen, that you were previously a great friend of the Herzog couple and that your grief was also profound at that time.

Then you entered his life not only as a friend of the family, but also as his new partner. You married, thereby bestowing upon him a new haven, hearth and home. All who were close to him were delighted by the news of this marriage. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Alexandra von Berlichingen, for the many years that you shared with Roman Herzog. These were years in which he continued to perform many more public duties, above all in the service of the European Union. Throughout this time, you were a reliable pillar of support for him, and so you can rest assured that not only the people here today, but also those throughout our nation, wish to stand shoulder to shoulder with you in your grief and pain.

Federal President Roman Herzog set great store by encouraging us all to tread new paths. He was a tireless advocate of innovative reforms where he considered them to be necessary. In his speeches, he constantly opened doors to new modes of thought. In so doing, he had a gift for being extremely explicit and chose unusually clear words to express himself.

"Truth and clarity" were the guiding principles of his time in office from the very outset – and it can be said that he remained true to this watchword over his five years as Federal President. Of course, what all of us most vividly recall is how, in his famous "Berlin Address", he called on practically all of the country's political and social groups to rethink the all too familiar paths they were treading and, wherever it was useful or possible, to embark on new and unfamiliar terrain. The "jolt" through our country, which he demanded of everyone, has become proverbial.

However, Roman Herzog not only talked the talk and issued appeals, but also spearheaded a number of initiatives that, long after his time in office, continue to this day. One such example – very much in keeping with his reform discourse – was his idea to institute the Deutscher Zukunftspreis, the Federal President's Award for Innovation and Technology. Forward looking inventions and technologies are brought into the public eye and supported year after year thanks to this award. He knew how important success is for a country and wanted to show us that we can become a country of success. And, what is more, the fact that his residence was opened to talks and discussion forums of all kind, thereby transforming Schloss Bellevue into an intellectual workshop for the future of the country, is a tradition that his successors have also continued and made their own ever since.

However, Roman Herzog was, of course, very much aware of the fact that you can only win the future and shape it in a humane way if you know where you come from and what history is an ineluctable precondition of our present.

He also engaged with history in keeping with this mantra of "truth and clarity". He avoided no topic, and therefore expressed what he thought was important to say in a manner that was clear for all to understand.

This was apparent from his first trip abroad, which took him to Warsaw, where he used plain and unambiguous language to acknowledge Germany's guilt in Poland and to ask for forgiveness. Most observers agreed that this visit was the most important political act for a good and workable Polish German relationship since Willy Brandt went down on his knees.

Among the speeches on remembrance days that, fifty years after the events they commemorate, sought to thematise the German burden of guilt and German suffering, those that he gave in Dresden and Bergen Belsen stand out in particular. In Dresden, he gave expression above all to the fact that guilt and suffering could not be weighed up against one another. And in Bergen Belsen, he stated plainly that such acts of remembrance must not only look to the past, but that lessons must be drawn for the present and the future and that you must nip things in the bud if the horrors that we are commemorating are never to occur again.

He reached people's hearts and minds particularly with his level headed manner. We must bear in mind nowadays that, at remembrance days around twenty years ago, many were still alive who were once victims or perpetrators themselves, for whom guilt on one side and suffering on the other – or the two inextricably mixed up with one other – were a vivid experience and a personal memory.

The extent to which his intellectually incorruptible and at the same time morally just way of thinking and speaking contributed to processes of reflection and understanding was demonstrated by the two speeches that he gave in the Bundestag to mark 27 January. The "Future of Remembrance" was particularly important to him, that is, above all, remembrance that will have to make do without living eyewitnesses. The fact that we have, for over twenty years, commemorated the day on which Auschwitz was liberated as the day of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism can be traced back to a suggestion made by Roman Herzog.

This is not the only example of what Roman Herzog meant by the word "unreserved" in his brief address following his election as Federal President. What a great deal of uproar that provoked! Some quarters immediately accused him of wanting to clean up German history. However, Herzog had actually not said "unburdened" and, as it very quickly became apparent in Warsaw and on many other occasions, he had not meant it either.

What he actually meant by this was rather the sense of inner calm that characterised him, the almost fearless freedom to entertain his own thoughts about people and the world and not to subjugate his expressions to the rules of language, and, if in doubt, also to use a play on words that hit the nail on the head even if it was not one hundred per cent correct.

The courage to use your own reason, as Kant had once put it, also led him to articulate political opinions that were still new at the time, and whose truth is becoming genuinely apparent to us only today.

For example, he spoke of the urgent need for a national and international intercultural dialogue at a time when hardly anyone knew what this concept meant. He was the first Federal President to invite representatives of Muslim organisations to Schloss Bellevue.

What is more, almost twenty years ago, he called on the media to adopt a self critical distance from its own coverage as he believed that this was the only way for it to safeguard its intrinsic independence and credibility. Such great foresight.

And, finally, he also warned against a phenomenon that is manifesting itself far more clearly than anyone could have foreseen at the time: "We are being paralysed by firmly realms of opinion that cut themselves off from others." What is more, he called for, as he put it, the "courage to ask genuine questions and to be patient if answers are not immediately forthcoming" in order to counter a "culture of unshakeable opinions and know it alls". He said that "where no questions are asked, nothing new can emerge; this is where social relationships are frozen in place".

Perhaps the sober Christian belief, which informed Roman Herzog's life, is a source of such unreserved inner calm. He did not make a great fuss of this and was a complete stranger to religiosity. However, the fact that he had firm foundations here was apparent from the way in which he acted and spoke – and from his courage to remain true to himself and to his convictions and influences. Roman Herzog thus became a role model for so very many people.

We pay humble tribute to a Federal President whose legacy in word and deed is a treasure for our country; he himself was a gift for our country. We pay humble tribute to Roman Herzog in profound gratitude and deep affection.