



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at a luncheon on the occasion of a visit by the  
President of the Republic of Bulgaria  
at Schloss Bellevue  
on 6 February 2017**

Germany, as the destination of one of your first bilateral visits, is delighted that you are here, and I would also like to offer you a very warm welcome. I worked very closely and in a spirit of trust with your predecessor President Plevneliev in the past years. And it is important to me, on the occasion of your first official visit today, to continue this dialogue that has developed in such a positive direction. While I am not in a position to speak for the Federal Government, I know that it sets great store by reaffirming this friendship with Bulgaria.

My trips to Bulgaria, to Sofia and Plovdiv in the past year, introduced me to your country's political landscape, and also to its beauty and culture. Daniela Schadt and I are most grateful that we had the opportunity to become acquainted with this wealth of Bulgarian culture. I need only mention our visit to the Rila Monastery. I was equally impressed by my encounters with your country's people, and especially with the young generation of Bulgarians. Moreover, I was moved to see that a great number of your fellow Bulgarians are aware of the fact that freedom and fundamental rights are not something to be taken for granted and that many therefore continue to advocate close ties to Europe with enthusiasm.

I will refrain at this juncture from paying tribute to our diverse historical relations as that would keep us from enjoying our luncheon for too long. But allow me to say how delighted I am that so many Bulgarians are learning German. This is not something that is reciprocated by us Germans, whose relationship with Bulgaria is rather informed by tourism. Language is also an important aspect when we consider economic relations between our countries. More than 5000 German companies are doing business in Bulgaria. On our visit, we saw for ourselves how important this cooperation is, and I wish you every success in your efforts to strengthen these ties.

Mr President, there are easier times to take office as President, both domestically and in terms of foreign policy. Challenging times lie ahead for you. You have worked to defend and promote your country's security in senior positions throughout your career. And I suspect that security policy questions will also play an important role during your presidency. At a time when, on the one hand, norms of international law are being disregarded in Eastern Europe and, on the other, a President was elected in the United States whose agenda is giving us some cause for concern, it is important for Europeans to understand that we must do more to support our common defence and to strengthen NATO. I consider you to be a partner in these endeavours, Mr President.

I have also seen, Mr President, that you have, time and again, called for reform in your country, for example in the judiciary. And I know that improving measures to fight corruption is important for you. And especially because Germany is not only a country blessed by the economic miracle, but is also a country that is a democratic miracle and a miracle of the rule of law – this is something that I came up with just now and is not a term that I have used before – we are, for this reason in particular, not only an economic partner, but also an important partner for you at the level of further democratisation and efforts to safeguard the law.

When I ask myself what else will be important during your presidency, then it occurs to me that this year marks the tenth anniversary of your country's accession to the European Union. And Bulgaria will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2018. Europe and the future of the European Union will therefore be important topics during your time in office.

This comes at a time when Europe is navigating choppy waters, at a time when we need a great deal of energy and also belief in the future of Europe, a belief that we must stay together in the face of the world's crises. You said just now, Mr President, that we can only shape and get to grips with matters such as displacement and migration, and also domestic and foreign security, business and employment, especially youth employment, and make progress, by working together. And especially when there are so many eurosceptics, we will come to realise that we can only fight for this rules-based global order by working together in the European Union. While taken individually, we are too weak to do this, we intend to play an active role when it comes to safeguarding this rules-based global order.

A great deal will therefore be at stake for us and for Europe in the coming years. I am delighted that Bulgaria has a President who has the capacity to tackle problems rather than run away from them.

Let me invite you now to join me in a toast to you, President Radev, and to you, Mrs Radeva, as well as to the growing and flourishing Bulgarian-German friendship!