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**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at a dinner hosted by King Willem-Alexander
of the Netherlands
on 6 February 2017 in The Hague**

I am most grateful, Your Majesty, for your kind invitation. Our meeting today is a very significant one for me. With this visit to the Netherlands, I have now come full circle. One of my first trips abroad as Federal President took me to Breda on 5 May 2012, where I was able to experience how contemplatively and cheerfully the Dutch celebrate Liberation Day.

The fact that the Netherlands and the Dutch, along with many other people and countries that suffered such horrors under the German occupation during the Second World War, discovered the power of reconciliation with the Germans still seems to me to be something of a miracle today and fills me with immense gratitude. It moved me greatly to be able to attend Liberation Day in the Netherlands, and even to speak on that occasion. I would like to thank you, Your Majesty, most sincerely for this great gesture. Peoples and nations that were once enemies now enjoy friendly relations as founding nations of the European Union – this shows how closely interwoven the history of our countries is.

“Dit is wat we delen” – “this is what we share” – was therefore a fitting slogan for your country’s successful appearance, together with Flanders, at the Frankfurt Book Fair last year. Indeed, we share so much – not only a varied political, but also a rich cultural history. We share a border region that has long since become a place of vibrant coexistence. This is particularly apparent in the Euregios, where citizens experience Europe on a daily basis.

We are united not only by a common foundation of shared values, but also by the insight that democratic coexistence is not something that can be taken for granted, but must be reaffirmed time and again. We are therefore united not least by our efforts to defend our open societies against the attacks of a populism that feeds on hatred and prejudice, as well as on frustration and disappointment, and to make sure we can continue to live together peacefully in justice and freedom. It is for this reason especially that the multifaceted exchange and dialogue between our nations, for instance with people studying or working in the respective other country, is so important. I am looking forward to meeting some of them in Maastricht tomorrow.

Laten we het glas heffen op het Koningspaar, op Hare Koninklijke Hoogheid Prinses Beatrix, op de Nederlands-Duitse vriendschap en op de vrijheid van onze landen in een verenigd en sterk Europa!¹

¹ Let me invite you now to join me in a toast to their Majesties the King and Queen of the Netherlands, Her Royal Highness, Princess Beatrix, and the German-Dutch friendship, as well as to the freedom of our nations in a united and strong Europe!