



**Speech by Federal President Frank Walter Steinmeier
at a dinner on the occasion of his official visit to the
Republic of Latvia
in Riga, Latvia
on 23 August 2017**

I am delighted to be back in Riga, in this superb old Hanseatic town. Thank you for your warm welcome. In fact, I should say, thank you once again, as this is now my eighth visit to your beautiful country. I visited Latvia eight times as Foreign Minister of Germany – we counted up specially – and my wife and I also came here once for a weekend break on our own. This means I have got to know Latvia and its people a bit over the years, and also heard a little about people's hopes and fears.

However, some things are different during this visit. For the first time, I am here with you today in a new role, as Federal President. Naturally, this position involves many changes, including some very positive ones. For the first time, I have the opportunity to get to know your city better. For the first time, I was able to go on a tour of the city, to visit the Museum of Occupation and to learn about the history of the German Balts.

I am very pleased to be able to learn more about your country as Federal President, this time from a slightly different angle, one that gives me more time to speak with members of the public, business people and cultural professionals. Tomorrow I will speak with young Latvians about how they use social media – a topic that, as some of you know, is very close to my heart. It is good that Germans and Latvians are working closely together in order to improve the public's media literacy and to promote the diversity of independent media.

Today, on 23 August, my visit is also marked by our two countries' chequered past. In my speech in Tallinn this morning, I recalled the low point of our relations, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. But I also spoke about the Baltic path to freedom, precisely 50 years

later. At the time, the Singing Revolution encouraged countless people in East Germany to stand up and raise their voices, too.

As a West German, who was only able to follow this epochal moment on television, and still remembers these images vividly, I want to tell you today that I continue to admire the indefatigable desire for freedom demonstrated by the Latvians and their Baltic neighbours. And I am grateful to you for bringing your story of freedom into the European Union.

Today, we – Latvians and Germans – support peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and inalienable human rights in awareness of our history. But we also know that words alone are not enough. Solidarity is what counts!

You can count on our solidarity in Latvia. Along with its NATO partners, Germany is taking on responsibility for security in the Baltic Sea region. The German led battlegroup in Rukla, which I will visit tomorrow, is only one example of this. On the other hand, I am grateful for your country's solidarity and support in overcoming the crisis in Europe. This Europe is our common future.

Latvians and Germans are not only united by what was at times a painful past. This past is not something we merely remember. It also enjoins us to work with you and side by side with you for a shared European future in peace and freedom.

I would now like to ask you to join me in a toast. To President Vējonis and the Republic of Latvia, to German-Latvian friendship and to our future in a united Europe!