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**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the dinner hosted by Dalia Grybauskaitė,
President of the Republic of Lithuania,
at the Presidential Palace
in Vilnius on 24 August 2017**

I have been in the Baltic states for a few days now, and time and again the focus has been on singing. Naturally, that is no surprise in countries famous around the world for their choral tradition and the Singing Revolution. As a guest you do feel prompted at some point to enter into the spirit of things.

But before you start fearing the worst, I can reassure you that I come from Westphalia, a region in western Germany whose inhabitants are renowned for not singing. And I am quite determined to live up to this stereotype. So you can all sit back and relax.

I am delighted to be here in Vilnius once more – this time in a new role. This is a visit to good friends and I would like to thank you for your warm welcome.

My trip is taking place against the backdrop of the chequered history which our countries share. It comes at a time when we see that our Europe, united in peace and freedom, cannot be taken for granted.

Tomas Venclova, your country's great author, once wrote:

"The creation of our continent and our civilization has always been a duty, an uncertainty, and a risk. I don't know of any place in Europe that better lives up to this risk than Vilnius."

Here, in this European city, we are especially aware of the openness of history. It brings home to us that it is up to us to shape the future of the European Union – through joint, responsible action, as you, Madam President, stated many years ago in your acceptance speech for the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen.

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Lithuania can rely on Germany's solidarity. Along with our NATO partners, we are shouldering responsibility for security in the Baltic Sea region. Our military engagement in Rukla, where we will be visiting the German-led battlegroup tomorrow, is one example of this.

On the other hand, however, it has to be said that our readiness to defend does not mean that we are not willing to engage in dialogue with Russia. It is good that our joint policy in NATO is based on both pillars.

In awareness of our history, today we – Germans and Lithuanians – stand united for peace and security, freedom and democracy, for the rule of law and inalienable human rights. Let us work together even more closely today and stand up together for our European values.

On that note, I would now like to invite you to join me in a toast. To President Grybauskaitė and the Republic of Lithuania, to German-Lithuanian friendship and to our future in a united Europe!