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Berlin, 12/09/2017  
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**Speech by Federal President Frank Walter Steinmeier  
at a lunch on the occasion of his first official visit to the  
Czech Republic  
on 12 September 2017  
in Prague, Czech Republic**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Prague in my new role as Federal President. And it is certainly no coincidence that I am visiting the "Golden City" not even six months into my term.

2017 is a special year in German Czech relations. We are celebrating the 25th anniversary of our Treaty on Good Neighbourliness. And 20 years have passed since the ground breaking German Czech Declaration.

Those who remember the intense and, on both sides, emotionally charged debates on the joint declaration will be in no doubt about the quantum leap we have taken since then. We have managed to focus our relations firmly on the future without losing sight of the lessons of our chequered past. Mr President, I am pleased that you recently paid tribute once again in public to the importance of the Declaration.

We are important to each other. That seems like a given, especially as we are neighbours. However, it is certainly not something we can take for granted in view of the upheavals in our history. Our relations now have a firm foundation. And they have dedicated supporters, who breathe life into the day to day work. I am pleased that some of you are able to be here with us today. I am extremely grateful to you all. Wise policies may clear obstacles and create new scope. The fact that we have achieved this so impressively between the Czech Republic and Germany in recent years is primarily thanks to the lively dialogue between the people of our countries and the intense exchange in the spheres of business, academia and culture. In short, it is thanks to you and many others.

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We are also important to each other in the European Union. I know that some people in your country are sceptical about the Union. But I firmly believe that when we look to tomorrow's world, in which Europe will only be able to make its interests and values heard if it stands united, we have far more common ground than differences. I am also here today because I am aware of the importance of the internal cohesion that the European Union currently needs and because I want to advocate maintaining the mutual respect and solidarity that makes our Europe an incomparably better place to live than it was in the darker chapters of our history. It will not be easy to meet our peoples' expectations in the complex issues of security, economic growth, refugees and migration. However, I am confident that we will be able to find joint solutions if we do not fear the future, but instead meet it with open arms. It is up to us to shape it, as we did 20 and 25 years ago.

If you would care to raise your glasses, let me propose a toast to the good neighbourly relations between Germany and the Czech Republic in a peaceful, united and strong European Union.