



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
on the occasion of the informational and contact-building  
visit to Land Saxony-Anhalt with the Diplomatic Corps  
in Oranienbaum-Wörlitz  
on 13 September 2017**

Allow me to offer you a warm welcome to Land Saxony-Anhalt. I am most delighted to have the opportunity to show you a particularly beautiful part of Germany today.

The "Gartenreich" or "Garden Kingdom" of Dessau-Wörlitz is, to my mind – and I hope that you were also able to get a taste of this yourselves – one of the most important creations of the German mind, in cultural, scenic, and also political terms. If Germany had always presented itself in such a way as this unique "Gartenreich" in the centuries during which it bore the epithet "Reich", then my country would not have given anyone cause for concern or have inspired dread. On the contrary, it would have been an inviting and inspiring place for all people of good will.

A garden, and especially a Garden Kingdom such as this, is a descriptive, namely a philosophically and culturally descriptive, matter and is certainly not politically neutral. The way in which we perceive Beauty always has a great deal to do with how we perceive humankind's relationship with Nature, how we perceive humankind's relationship with the Infinite and how we perceive the relationship among humans themselves – that is to say how we should live together and how we should be ruled.

In the age of Absolutism and Rationalism, gardens and parks sprung up all across Europe, taking their cue, Ambassador Descôtes, from the strict model that was Versailles. They were dominated by central perspectives. Nature was trimmed and clipped in every possible way and set at right angles. It was subordinated to the human will to design, becoming a perfect reflection of the Baroque state, which sought to be rational throughout and organised in perfect hierarchical

order. You can still admire the clarity of these gardens not only in Versailles, but also in Potsdam and here in Oranienbaum.

Then the Enlightenment came to dominate European thought. The shift in the philosophical and political perspective on the world gave rise, almost naturally, to changes in the realm of horticulture in Europe, first, Ambassador Wood, in England, and then in Wörlitz, and not before long elsewhere. No longer only one, but many perspectives presented themselves. An extravagant abundance of potential views and horizons of experience opened up to a decentral vantage point. Promenading is the art that was invented for these types of gardens, that is to say the art of conquering the widest range of viewpoints, of choosing your paths and perspectives in an unguided and autonomous manner. Indeed, herein lies the political and philosophical programme of the Enlightenment. Incidentally, the aim in Wörlitz was from the outset to allow everyone to share in this experience. The park was – and this was a new departure – publicly accessible to people of any station.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and today? This beautiful place symbolises that wonderful moment, the historical watershed when the values of the Enlightenment set root in the minds of secular rulers and unleashed their transformative power – in horticulture and far beyond, in all areas of society. Of course, the path that Enlightenment ideas took as they permeated social and political reality was never a linear one – there were constant setbacks – and no one knows this better than we Germans.

However, it appears today as if the values of the Enlightenment have fallen by the wayside once again in the minds of a number of leaders. This is my concern at any rate when in a worrying number of regions of the world the cornerstones of human rights, of tolerance and democracy are challenged even by the highest political level. When the torch-bearers of the Enlightenment – journalists, writers, intellectuals – are locked away in prisons. When reason as the currency of political discourse is devalued in digital echo chambers, in raving Twitter wars or in targeted misinformation campaigns. When, on the international stage, rules and instruments for achieving understanding and the peaceful balance of interests increasingly yield to aggressive and immensely dangerous power games – the situation in North Korea is a case in point. And, esteemed ambassadors from the European Union, when the political achievements of the Enlightenment – the rule of law and the separation of powers – are no longer unequivocally valid, even within our Union.

This is not a good diagnosis, ladies and gentlemen. However – and this is my message to you – this is far from a watershed at which the wave of the Enlightenment goes into retreat to be followed by a deluge of irrationality of whatever kind. No, I firmly believe, and this is

why I invited you here today, that it is up to us to preserve the values of the Enlightenment and its political achievements. A profoundly Enlightened idea is at the root even of this. The future is not set in stone; it is wide open and it is up to us to breathe life into it.

In the 21st century, more people in more regions around the world can play a part in shaping the future. You, Excellencies, will always find a strong partner in Germany for this work – a partner that wants to build a peaceful and rules-based international order with you. We did so in 2016, for example, during what was a new and tense situation between East and West, when we took on the Chairmanship of the OSCE; we are doing so this year under equally difficult circumstances in our Presidency of the G20; and most importantly, we do so in our work with the United Nations. And while I am on the subject, allow me to voice a gentle reminder of our candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2019/2020 term. Our chefs have promised a particularly large portion of dessert for those who cast their vote before the main course!

Immanuel Kant expressed the maxim of the Enlightenment in the famous sentence, "have the courage to use your own understanding". An English garden like this one here in Wörlitz expresses that sentence something like this: have the courage to take your own paths; look around you; cast your eyes from the foreground to the middle distance and from there to the horizon and the infinity beyond.

You, the ambassadors in our country, play a vital role in this change of perspective. Not only are you tasked with ensuring that the day-to-day working relations between our governments are peaceful and in our mutual interest, but you also play an important role as bridge-builders and translators who facilitate this change of perspective and understanding between our societies.

As diplomats, you thus take paths like those in the Garden Kingdom of Wörlitz. However, I do not mean that ambassadors have plenty of time to go for walks, but rather that in your day-to-day diplomatic work you experience how one's own viewpoint is only one of many possible ways of seeing things. And this constant change of perspective, awareness of other people's viewpoints and mediation between different ways of seeing things are the basis for peaceful international coexistence.

As ambassadors in Berlin, your main role is to translate and explain our country, the Federal Republic of Germany. And I am well aware that people outside Germany do not always find it easy to understand our positions and peculiarities, many of which result from our chequered history. But at the same time, interest in our positions is growing in your countries, as there has been a great deal of discussion on my country's role and increasing responsibility in a changing world. This debate is important and it is certainly far from

complete, but I see one thing as a given – the united Europe is, and will remain, the first and most important framework for Germany's foreign policy activities. In other words, Germany will only take on responsibility in and through Europe. And that is why Germany will play its part in ensuring that Jean-Claude Juncker is proved right when he declared in his State of the Union address in Strasbourg today that "Europe is sailing with the wind this year". Let us make sure that his assessment turns out to be correct.

I hope that this day, our tours in Land Saxony-Anhalt and the Garden Kingdom of Wörlitz, and in particular, our conversations, will enable you to see further points of view and to learn more about my country. However, there is one prediction I cannot make today, although it might well be the most interesting topic for your next telegram – the Federal President will not make any predictions on the outcome of the general election and possible coalitions.

Instead, I would like to conclude my speech by reminding you of another and indeed an historic turning point. This, too, ultimately involves a viewpoint and a simple change of perspective – one that changed the entire world! That was Europe's experience in the Reformation, when suddenly the questioning individual became the focus of theological thinking, gradually transforming all sorts of relations – relations between people and their god, between the faithful and their church, between the church and state, and so on. As you know, 2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation – a watershed event of global importance that resulted from a change of perspective. I am delighted that we will round off the day by visiting the cradle of this seminal event this afternoon – Lutherstadt Wittenberg.

I would like to thank Land Saxony-Anhalt for its wonderful hospitality today and to bid you a very warm welcome once again, Excellencies. Thank you.