



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a banquet on the occasion of his visit to Singapore
on 2 November 2017
in Singapore**

Around 10,000 kilometres lie between our two countries. That equates to a good 12 hours by plane, so please excuse us if some members of the German delegation at your table look rather tired. I am sure that interesting conversations and the delights of the Singaporean cuisine will soon revive them!

Despite these 10,000 kilometres, I have felt nothing but warmth since I arrived. And that is not just because of the tropical temperatures! I think it is also because people in our two countries have a great deal in common despite the geographical distance between them. During my visit to Singapore Management University today, I had a chance to discuss many aspects of this common ground, including collaboration in research and academia, foreign policy, regional cooperation between the EU and ASEAN, and the lively exchange between our countries' civil societies. And just before our banquet, I met some representatives of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which brings over 3,000 Asians and Europeans together every year. The people I met stand for the many contacts between our countries.

In the final analysis, our partnership is not based on political agreements or financial investments, but rather on people. In 1953, the German Consul General reported that he had invited all of the Germans living in Singapore to an event. How many do you think there were? Well, a good 30 Germans lived here at the time. Most of them were in business. Over 60 years later, their numbers have swelled somewhat. It is estimated that over 8,000 Germans now live in Singapore.

Naturally, our close business relations are still what brings most of these people here to this hub of international trade. Singapore is home to 1,600 German companies. Our annual trade volume in goods

comes to 12 billion euros. Singapore has been Germany's most important trade partner in ASEAN for years. Your neighbouring country, Malaysia, just managed to overtake you in 2016. But once we conclude the free trade agreement between the European Union and Singapore – which I hope will be soon – it will be hard to catch up with Singapore.

The close relations between our countries date back to the very beginning. Singapore declared its independence on 9 August 1965. The very same day, a German diplomat wrote as follows to the Foreign Minister: "It seems appropriate to recognise Singapore as an independent country and to transform the German Consulate General into an Embassy." [...]

A bit later on in his report, one finds the following diplomatic manoeuvre: "It might be expedient if we [...] allowed the United States to recognise Singapore before we do." So you see, ladies and gentlemen, "America first" existed long before the current US President.

Since then, Singapore's progress has been impressive. Using reason and systematic foresight, your country has achieved great political and economic success. We want to continue working closely with Singapore, hopefully along with other western partners, on this basis of political reason and foresight.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our hosts most sincerely for their kind invitation to Singapore. Madam President, the fact that I am visiting you at the very start of your term in office underlines how close and important these relations are. We Germans are increasingly focusing our interest and energy on Asia. In this context, it is of key importance to us to expand our relations with Singapore and to work together on a rules-based international and regional order.

Madam President, I congratulate you on your new office. At our meeting this afternoon, I was privileged to learn about the course your life has taken – about the hardship of your early years and the strength you subsequently gathered from this. You have made justice, social cohesion and integration the priorities of your political work. And in our talks, I sensed that you have ambitious plans for your country.

Integrating different ethnic groups and living together as a free and diverse society are crucial goals for Singapore and Germany, and we are committed to achieving them. Allow me to propose a toast to you, Madam President, to the Republic of Singapore and to the partnership and friendship between our countries!