



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at a state banquet hosted by Governor-General Dame  
Patsy Reddy  
in Wellington, New Zealand  
on 6 November 2017**

Dear friends!

This form of address epitomises what has defined relations between Germany and New Zealand for many years. Geographically, our countries are extremely far apart. We are separated by 18,000 kilometres – almost half of the world. But despite this distance, we are very close in many ways. We can rely and count on each other in a way one more often finds between neighbouring countries. I am delighted to be a guest among friends here in the South Pacific!

There is a Maori saying, which I will hopefully pronounce correctly now. “He tāngata” – people are the most important thing. Our relations thrive on our direct personal contact and straightforward exchange in a very wide range of fields. New Zealand enjoys more affection and interest in Germany than almost any other country in the Asia-Pacific region. Young Germans in particular come here to learn about your culture and daily life. Many take part in the working holiday scheme and stay longer. And the beauty of your landscape – or, as we Germans, natural-born enemies of the “th” would say, “za nature” – attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. I will refrain from mentioning “Lord of the Rings”, as I am sure you have heard more than enough about it by now.

But even if our two cultures are similar, misunderstandings can of course arise in day-to-day life, so it is a good thing that we have “Lifeswap”, a cartoon by the Goethe-Institut here in Wellington, which explains what is “typical New Zealand” and what is “so German”. The two heroes, Duncan and Jörg, teach us that you New Zealanders are amazingly resistant to the cold. “Lifeswap” tells us that you like to beat around the bush instead of getting to the point. Could that explain your resistance to the cold? The series also teaches its viewers that we

Germans like to wear Hausschuhe at home, love to eat Fleischsalat and are crazy about Christmas – and of course, Glühwein.

Using gentle humour, the episodes show us how close we are and prove that New Zealanders and Germans can laugh together and also laugh about themselves. I think we should not underestimate the power of humour and empathy in international relations. The trust that we so urgently need in politics can only develop if we are open-minded, curious and interested in one another. New Zealand's politics have become so interesting and exciting in recent times that many people all over the world, including many Germans, have become curious. This curiosity and interest is an opportunity for politics, and not only in New Zealand!

We are living in an era when power is shifting globally, including here in the Asia-Pacific region. We are witnessing the growth of national egoism in some countries and the glorification of withdrawal and isolation as a magic bullet. But we know that in a world where our ties are ever closer, we can only meet the challenges by working together, be it on climate protection, on the de-escalation of conflicts, or on our security. And so what we urgently need – perhaps now more than ever – are friends and partners.

At this time, New Zealand and Germany should remember the many things they have in common. Our countries stand for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Both are willing to take on responsibility in order to protect and strengthen these fragile achievements. And let us not forget that we also work closely together in a spirit of mutual trust in multilateral institutions. A German diplomat recently told me that when you deal with New Zealand, you feel like you have found the West in the East.

Of course, our countries are also united by common interests. As trading nations whose economies are interwoven with the world, we need security and prosperity in our regions, but equally we need our partner countries to thrive and trading routes to remain open and grow. That is another reason why I hope that the talks on a free trade agreement between the European Union and New Zealand can start soon.

We also know that research and innovation are the driving forces behind our prosperity. This afternoon, we celebrated our scientific and technical collaboration, whose foundations were laid 40 years ago. I learned about many impressive projects, ranging from biotechnology to sustainable urban development. New Zealand and Germany stand for cutting-edge research, critical reasoning and respect for science. Let us speak up as one whenever and wherever the freedom of science is challenged!

One thing is absolutely clear – your country is an increasingly important partner in the Asia-Pacific region for Germany and Europe, so I am pleased that you want to expand your relations with us and the European Union. We are happy to accept your offer to work more closely together. Thank you for this!

Internally, our countries are also facing similar challenges, particularly as regards migration and integration, which currently affect both New Zealanders and Germans. For decades, your country has stood for tolerance and for equality and coexistence between different cultures. We can learn a great deal from you. However, the recent migration movements have also led to very similar debates in our societies on how we can manage migration in a better way and strengthen cohesion. I am pleased that we can discuss our experiences, particularly because populist calls for isolation are no solution.

And there is another thing that New Zealanders and Germans have in common – we both enjoy winning world cups. The All Blacks are of course a legend, including in Germany, where rugby is becoming more and more popular. And we Germans want to defend our title in the FIFA World Cup next year. Who knows? Perhaps we will play against the current Oceania champions in Russia next year! I am sure that many German New Zealand fans will keep their fingers crossed for the All Whites in the play-off.

“So far and yet so close” is how I would describe the history of relations between Germany and New Zealand. Let us build even more bridges in the future on the firm foundation of our shared values.