



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
on the occasion of his first official visit
to the Slovak Republic in Bratislava
on 17 November 2017**

Two years ago, when I was still Germany's Foreign Minister, I read an impressive interview in one of our daily newspapers. A man, in his mid-fifties, an electrical engineer from Slovakia, talked about his failed attempt to settle in the United States in the early 1990s. He had applied to hundreds of companies, but to no avail. He had kept his head above water with casual labour, shared a tiny apartment with fellow countrymen suffering a similar fate, and had used up his savings. In the end, he gave up. "No one wanted an electrical engineer from the former Eastern bloc", he surmised. He returned to his home country.

The story might well end here. However, then we discover, almost in passing, that while he may have been penniless, he returned from the US with the desire to set up shop as an entrepreneur. Mr President, the last sentence of this short biography is – in your own words – as follows: "Back home, I was very successful. Later on, I devoted my energy to charitable projects and now I'm President. A curious career."

Mr President, Andrej Kiska, I would say that this career, your career, is, above all, a great lifetime achievement. It neither has a simple plot nor is it the umpteenth variation on a theme of rags to riches.

Your career combines professional and entrepreneurial success with civic spirit – with the desire to create something, not only for oneself, but for others and for your country. And you have enjoyed impressive success in these endeavours.

Your Presidency has proven itself to be a stroke of good fortune for the relations between our countries and for the role played by the Slovak Republic in the European Union. We are grateful for your personal commitment to German-Slovak relations and for the example

that the Slovak Republic is setting under your Presidency. We are delighted to have such a reliable partner and a good neighbour. And, last but not least, Germany and Europe have good cause to be grateful for your stance and for your support with respect to hosting refugees.

Entrepreneur, philanthropist, politician – while this combination may have existed before in the past, we can be thankful for having such a friend, a President who knows what it means to be a stranger in a strange land and a statesman whose philanthropic stance is rooted in his own personal experience.

And thankful we are. Mr President, thank you very much for inviting me here today.