



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the presentation of the Adalbert Prize  
to former Minister Dr Imre Kónya  
at Schloss Bellevue  
on 8 December 2017**

His contemporaries would probably not have used the term, but Adalbert of Prague was what we now call a "committed European". One thousand years ago, he did what seems more or less normal to us today: he travelled, he lived in other countries, he enjoyed exchanges and friendships in various languages. He was way ahead of his time and a truly outstanding historical figure. The Duke of Bohemia, Boleslav II, also known as "The Pious", appointed him Bishop of Prague in 982, not least because he had such excellent contacts in other countries.

Adalbert – the patron saint of the foundation whose prize is being awarded to you today, Mr Kónya – thus stands for what unites us in Central Europe. He stands for what unites us Germans with Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians. I am therefore delighted to have the privilege of welcoming you to Schloss Bellevue for this ceremony. For the things that connect us in this room, across all of the eventful and also the dark chapters of our shared history of over one thousand years, are particularly dear to my heart. Allow me to offer you all a warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue!

One thing in particular has often been said in Germany, namely that we will never forget what the people of Central and Eastern Europe did to help open the Iron Curtain – thereby paving the way to the historic stroke of fortune that was German reunification in peace and freedom. This realisation has – generally speaking – not been taken for granted. And yet this contribution by Central and Eastern Europe – the passion for freedom and democracy, the foresight and, above all, the great courage of those who acted and wrote history at that time – has often taken far too much of a back seat in some debates today. That is not good, and is not something that we should get used to. I am therefore delighted that, since June of this year, a

memorial close to the Berlin Wall Memorial in Bernauer Strasse has paid tribute to this special contribution – thanks to the Adalbert Stiftung. Recalling the desire for freedom expressed by Hungarians and their neighbours is not only a question of expressing political and personal gratitude, but is also the basis for the Europe in which we live today. It is the point of departure for our debates about what should be important to us today. And it is therefore a very special pleasure for me to welcome you, Imre Kónya, as prize winner and for me to pay personal tribute to you today!

You are among those who assumed responsibility and personal risk at that time – in 1988. You sought and found new paths. Your courage, your skill and your wisdom in the Independent Lawyers' Forum, and then at the Hungarian Round Table Talks, played an absolutely key role in ensuring that Hungary generated momentum whose effects were felt far beyond the borders of your country; momentum that helped to bring about a breakthrough for freedom and democracy in Europe and which changed the face of our continent.

Mr Kónya, as today's prize winner, you are following in the footsteps of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Václav Havel, Helmut Kohl, Władysław Bartoszewski and Ján Čarnogurský, to name but a few of the previous winners. What they all had in common was that they not only worked, sometimes even argued, for this united Europe, but above all that they also believed in it – in the deep roots of that which connects us.

In this day and age, when talk about Europe is often overly despondent, we would do well to remember how far from inevitable – indeed how profoundly improbable – all of what you helped set in motion at that time must have appeared to you, Mr Kónya, at your Round Table in Budapest. We have come to realise that European integration is not after all something that can be taken for granted. And perhaps we are seeing, in these last couple of years, that it is also not irreversible. The future of Europe is open and is urgently awaiting courageous people willing to shape it, just like you and others were.

Nor do I wish to make any secret of the fact that we are concerned, even upset, by some of the things that we hear from Hungary these days. But let me tell you, Mr Kónya, these things upset us precisely because of the closeness and the bond that we feel. We want to and we must work to overcome these divides, and this work must be done on both sides. We do not have to share the same opinion on everything in order to do this. However, we must manage to agree once again on a foundation of shared convictions and on a common goal. For despite all the different positions and opinions that may divide us in daily politics, we are still important to each other! The Europe that we want necessarily includes Hungary, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia.

Mr Kónya, I bow in respect for your lifetime's achievements. I thank you for all that you have done for freedom and democracy in Europe and for our country. Warmest congratulations on being awarded the 2017 Adalbert Prize!

Thank you.