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**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe
in Tokyo, Japan,
on 6 February 2018**

Of the many attributes that the Japanese and Germans have in common, one stands out for me in particular, namely our enthusiasm for European classical music. This is probably true first and foremost of Ludwig van Beethoven's 9th Symphony, which is a symbol of the joy we take in music. Many are aware of the fact that this wonderful work is the anthem of the European Union. However, what many people do not know is that it also tells a story of Japanese-German history.

In 2018, we are marking the 100th anniversary of the Japanese premiere of the 9th Symphony. And it was a most unusual first performance as it was a concert given by German prisoners of war at the Bando POW camp during the First World War. In 1918, the soldiers wanted to return to the roots of their native culture and civilisation, which had a deep impact here in Japan. I consider this to be a special anniversary. At the end of this 9th Symphony we hear the "Ode to Joy", and I must admit that joy is what I feel today – the joy that it is to be back in Tokyo once more today. While I have often been to Japan, this is my first visit as Federal President, and it is always a pleasure to be here. At any rate, allow me to thank you very much indeed for this warm welcome!

Right after my arrival, we saw the gardens of the former Edo Castle. What a wonderful sight, also in winter! I recalled the fact that Japan is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration this year – an upheaval that catapulted your country into modernity and was also the foundation for Japanese-German relations.

Prime Minister,

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Our joint commitment to democracy and freedom, to the rule of law and to strong global governance – all of this is more important than ever today. Our countries are united by common values and, what is more, Japan and Germany are among the biggest and most innovative economies worldwide. This is another reason why both of our nations simply depend on a stable and rules-based international order – an order that is anything but assured or to be taken for granted today.

Japan and Germany are aware of the responsibility that this entails with regard to foreign policy. Together, we are working to address global challenges such as climate change. We are also cooperating closely in the area of United Nations reform. I would therefore be most delighted if we were able to extend our cooperation to further areas – to include development issues in Africa, for example.

As you know, my continent, Europe, is currently facing its own set of challenges. In recent years, our Union has had to contend with the impact of the financial market and sovereign debt crisis, with the withdrawal of an important EU member state, and with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees. However, in recent months I have felt, especially in conversations with many members of the public, that Europe has the power to overcome its crisis and to breathe new life into its democratic values. The Franco-German friendship will play an important role in all of this – at the latest when the formation of a government in Germany has reached a successful conclusion.

North Korea's nuclear and missile tests have taken your region to the brink of military confrontation. A nuclear North Korea is also a threat to Germany – and totally unacceptable not only for this reason. We believe that the dialogue with North Korea can only achieve its objective if it remains bound up with the greatest possible pressure through sanctions. Japan and Germany agree on this matter. We must continue to work to ensure that all of the major powers and the entire international community stand united on this issue.

Despite all of the challenges we face, we should be optimistic as we look to the future. We are living at a time when people around the world are asking fundamental systemic questions once again – questions about the best model for development and society. And this critical discourse does not make an exception even for democracy itself. However, I believe that our two countries can enter these debates with self-confidence. After all, freedom and democracy as well as economic and social rights belong together in our eyes. This is another reason why I am delighted about the close and constructive relations that Japan and Germany enjoy.

With great appreciation for your country, I would now like to ask you to raise your glasses and join me in a toast to the Japanese people and to Japanese-German cooperation and friendship.