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**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
on the occasion of a discussion at the Foreign
Correspondents' Club of Japan
in Tokyo
on 7 February 2018**

Ever since 1945, the Foreign Correspondents' Club has been a home away from home for the many foreign journalists in Tokyo and Japan who report back to their newsrooms all over the world. Throughout those years, the FCCJ has done a great service to journalism and to freedom of the press in Japan. It is impressive how the FCCJ has successfully promoted and shaped reporting both on this country and on the wider East Asian region in the past – and continues to do so today. So let me congratulate you wholeheartedly on this achievement – it is a pleasure to be here today!

This is my first visit to East Asia as President of my country. Later today, I will be travelling to South Korea, where the 23rd Winter Olympics are about to begin. And I believe there couldn't be a more fitting occasion for our discussion today. We want to debate the question of regional stability and security in the East Asian region, and we are doing so two days before an Olympic Opening Ceremony where – in a period of extreme tensions – the North and South Korean teams plan to walk into the stadium under one joint flag.

That might be a small positive sign – especially in light of these past few years. However, I am convinced that we should not fall prey to unrealistic illusions. You know this better than most: tensions have been rising considerably, with ever stronger threats coming from Pyongyang and corresponding, unusually strong rhetoric from other capitals. Threats that were underscored by Kim Jong-un through an unexpectedly quick and seemingly successful advance in military capabilities, through a series of tests of both nuclear weapons and long range ballistic missiles – conducted in spite of all international sanctions, and in direct violation of Security Council resolutions. The regime's message is clear: it means to leave no doubt that North Korea is both able and willing to use its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent – and

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as a way of striking terror in the hearts of everybody living in East Asia and beyond. Mr Kim's reasons for acting along this dangerous line, as well as his potential objectives, have caused much debate. The US Secretary of State Tillerson recently outlined a "policy of the four no's", indicating an open door for negotiations. On all this, I would very much like to hear your opinions later on.

Germany, along with a number of other countries, has gained some experience of negotiating on nuclear proliferation issues as part of the E3+3 process with Iran. I have been personally involved in these negotiations over a period of almost 10 years. And I am acutely aware of the many differences that exist between Iran and North Korea. The road to an agreement with Iran was long and arduous, and it is certainly not a recipe that can be directly applied to an altogether different scenario. However, we did learn one important lesson: controlling nuclear proliferation and co-operating with regimes that violate international rules can only work if the international community stands united. Without the buy-in from powers such as Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union, we would have been unlikely to achieve the Iran agreement. And I doubt that we can make any meaningful progress towards a denuclearised Korean Peninsula without such a consensus – which has to include both Korean states.

And this is where, in my experience, the need for realism and pragmatism becomes obvious: when we look around the region, we see actors that are far from united – neither with regard to the Korean question nor with regard to wider security issues in the region.

The rise of China over the past 20 years has set an unprecedented pace of economic development and led to a parallel shift in the regional balance of power. By now, it is very clear that China is seeking to project its growing influence across East Asia, establishing itself firmly in a position of regional hegemony. From the Chinese point of view, the Korean question is one element in a larger calculation – and China's influence in North Korea is apparently still an asset, not a liability to Beijing. One thing is certain, however: it will be all but impossible to make any measurable progress toward regional security and prosperity without having China on board. This can be seen when we look at the renewed efforts to enforce the sanctions regime and the conflicts around military defense systems put in place by the United States, Japan and South Korea. It is therefore unsurprising that Japan's stance toward Beijing is often at the forefront of the debate here in Tokyo, and that relations with Beijing also take centre stage in the debate in South Korea.

In Europe, too, we have experienced rising tensions and new conflicts on our doorstep. In our negotiations with Russia, we made it very clear that we will not accept the violation of territorial integrity and unilateral changes to international borders. At the same time,

however, we remain committed to continued dialogue and to de-escalating the violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Russian interests remain an important factor in the calculus of German and European foreign policy – and I believe the same is true for East Asia, not least for the conflict with North Korea.

However, challenges to the liberal international order are posed not only by powers such as China and Russia, but also within Western countries, in the United States and in parts of Europe. In America, the past year has been dominated by protectionist and isolationist rhetoric. I believe that now, more than ever, it is necessary for those who cherish a rules-based international system to join forces and to speak up. To defend international institutions, to engage in meaningful co-operation, to continue building on the many achievements of the past – from climate change and international development to conflict prevention and free and fair trade. Japan and Germany will continue to stand side by side to advance these values, and I'm confident that most of our American friends will do so as well. In this context, I was happy to hear that the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement has been salvaged. It is wise to keep the door open, should the winds of Washington begin to change.

So – as you can see, we have a lot to discuss. I suggest we now get the debate started!

Again, many thanks to the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan for hosting this event. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and questions.

Thank you.