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**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the Viceregal Lodge of Delhi University  
on 23 March 2018  
in New Delhi, India**

What a wonderful, what an impressive place! I can see why some call this building the crown of Delhi University, this esteemed place of learning now approaching its 100th anniversary. A place of learning with 200,000 students, one of India's most prestigious universities. A place of learning with global connections, not least – as I hope some of you have been able to experience at first hand – to our German universities in the cities of Potsdam, Würzburg, and Heidelberg. What a pleasure to be here!

This is certainly a highlight of my first visit to India as President of Germany. And let me say thanks to the Vice Chancellor and everyone in this room today. It is a great honour to speak to you. Thank you for having me!

Since my arrival in India, I have been to Varanasi, to the Ganga River, in Sarnath, and to the Jama Masjid here in Delhi. Seeing these highly symbolic places has reminded me of this country's many historical and cultural layers. India truly is a treasure trove of impressions and inspirations. To my German eyes, every visit to India so far has been a remarkable experience.

Take this Viceregal Lodge, for example, a colonial building. Many of you may know this story: in the basement, just a few metres from here, there once was a prison cell. A cell for a man, a Sikh, called Bhagat Singh. In 1931, aged only 23, Bhagat Singh was executed as a criminal for his violent resistance to British rule. Today, his statue can be seen in the Sansad Bhawan, the Parliament House here in Delhi. How extraordinary: a man, once labelled a criminal, now a national hero. An underground room, once a prison cell, now at the heart of a place of debate and research. What I want to say: Coming to India, I have learned to look twice.

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I have also learned to broaden my own perspective, to question my own assumptions, and to be respectful of what I see. In many ways, I am deeply impressed whenever I'm here. Impressed by India's cultural heritage and its incredible diversity in daily life – but impressed also by your country's complex, vibrant and resilient democracy. I have the greatest respect for India's unique path.

I know that this path has not always been easy, with conflict and strife along the way. Who would know better about the recurring frustrations of pluralism than the exceptionally diverse people of India? Who would know better about the painful imperfections of democratic governance than those who live in the largest democracy on Earth? I am acutely aware of the suffering caused by conflicts past and present, of the many rifts, scars and divisions that run deep in Indian society to this day. And I understand that in many ways, India's democracy is different from the one we know in Germany.

But India's choices matter in today's world. They will carry even more weight tomorrow. If our two countries succeed in pooling our strengths, in realising our common potential, we will have much to learn from each other and much to give each other. That is why I have come to India: to encourage and to challenge all of us – Indians and Germans alike – to take a fresh look at each other. And I hope that our discussion today will be one of many occasions to do just that.

A few weeks ago, I saw a cartoon in a magazine. Imagine the lobby of a tall building, perhaps an office block. There are three elevators, side by side. Normally, these elevator doors all look the same. Not in this case, where each elevator had a different sign. One door said "For People Who Like Music". The second door said "For People Who Prefer Silence". And finally, the third door had a sign saying "For People Who Want To Talk". But unfortunately, only one person was waiting in that particular line. There was nobody he could talk to.

My worry is that there are more and more people in the world who do not want to talk, who want to ride their own private little elevators. Looking out from both Berlin and Delhi, we can see many recent examples of countries behaving this way and turning their backs on multilateral co-operation. We see countries that question the value of rules and agreements, that seek strength and prosperity in isolation and confrontation.

On the one hand, there are those who claim that nations can simply do better by themselves, who say that nothing gets done in multilateral systems. We can see this when the country that brought Germany back into the free world, back to openness and democracy in 1945, is now withdrawing from established international institutions and has started imposing new tariffs on steel and aluminium. We can also see it when the European Union, the most successful project of

peace and prosperity my continent has ever seen, loses one of its largest member states.

But there are also those who reap without sowing, those who destroy without building, and those who intimidate and violate with no thought for the cost to others. For example, we see powers violating the territorial integrity of their immediate neighbours. We see an arc of violence in the Middle East, or in West Asia, as it is called here, – with a terrible civil war that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives, and a deadlocked international community unable to put an end to the suffering.

These are tough challenges indeed. It would be easy to raise barriers and to look only to our own well-being. But what do you think would happen if every country, if India and Germany started acting that way? What would happen if we all retreated to our own private little elevators, with no one to talk to? What would happen to commerce, to innovation, to culture, to global stability, and to our own security, if everyone were to fight only for themselves? Would we continue to prosper, to live in peace, to develop our potential, and to shape the future of humankind in the same way we have over these remarkable past decades? ... No, I think not. Without a doubt, we would all fare much worse than before.

On the European continent, we have experienced centuries of conflict and bloodshed. We saw what happens when it's a game of all against all, of pure power politics. Over the past 70 years, however, Europeans have learned to live with their diversity in an unparalleled period of peace and prosperity. Stronger together than alone, and peaceful only when bound by common rules – these are the lessons we've learned the hard way. European integration is Germany's convincing and successful response to our history and to our geographical position. That's why we need the hard work and heartfelt devotion of ever new generations of young Europeans – but I am optimistic, not least because the new German Government has put European integration at the heart of its political agenda. Germany will do everything in its power to make sure that Europe continues to prosper and to shape the world of the 21st century as part of a rules-based international order, together with India as one of our strong and close partners.

My friends, Indias neighbourhood is certainly not the easiest place for international cooperation. Over the past few years, there have been many– perhaps too many – setbacks for those who believe in an open and co-operative world. Co-operation requires dedication and a lot of stamina. Common solutions hardly ever come in the shape of simple answers. But that's no reason to stop working together – on the contrary!

Take one example that is important to both India and Germany: the freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean. Through the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Tribunal in Hamburg, we have built a solid foundation to protect our international waters. But we could make this legal framework even stronger – and it is encouraging to see how the idea of undisturbed navigation has recently gained additional traction especially in this region. The proposal for a Code of Conduct for the Indian Ocean, built on the foundation of the UN Convention, is an encouraging sign that deserves further consideration. Germany is offering both its legal expertise and its political support, not least because this region's stability is important to our own prosperity and stability

Especially in times of setbacks, I believe that we should emphasise such examples and continue sending our message of co-operation and openness! Both India and Germany are defenders of co-operation, of joint solutions to common problems. India in particular has a long and proud tradition of multilateralism. In an increasingly multi-polar world, we both understand that no single nation will be able to manage global and regional challenges alone. And especially in a new climate marked by a resurgence of international competition, we understand that it is important to emphasise what unites us rather than focusing on our disagreements.

This is the foundation of the strategic partnership that Germany and India launched 18 years ago, providing an agenda for common action. But we must grow even closer. We should build a better understanding of what we can achieve together – because our interests are linked. From investment and technology transfer to trade in goods and services, and from infrastructure to vocational training, Germany has much to offer in areas that are important to India's development. We are also strongly engaged in cultural exchange, with a vibrant community of Max Müller Bhavans in six Indian cities, in the tradition of this great German researcher of ancient Indian scriptures. Last but not least, Germany is India's most important trading partner in the European Union – and together with our friends from France, we can be India's new strategic anchor on the European continent and in the European Single Market.

At the same time, Germany would like to build on India's growing role and responsibility in the international system – as a like-minded partner for constructive and multilateral co-operation, and as a champion of stability in the wider Indo-Pacific region. We should set ourselves the task of finding joint answers to the new challenges of globalisation – challenges that both our countries face:

For example, India and Germany both depend on international trade and investment. Free and fair trade cannot guarantee peace and prosperity, but it can bring people together across borders, drive

economic development and – at the same time – make us understand how much we need each other. Since the year 2000, German companies have invested almost 10 billion US dollars in India and have contributed to the creation of around 400,000 jobs. More than 1,800 German companies are currently active in this country – and Indian investments in Germany are also increasing every day. We should continue to reduce barriers to trade, thereby increasing bilateral commerce and investments. And the European Union and India should work hard and fast to conclude their negotiations on a free trade agreement. I am certain that such an agreement can lend new momentum to bilateral economic relations. Of course, trade often causes disruption: it drives rapid change and creates pressure to adapt. We all know this is a very fine balance, so we may indeed require new answers for the trade agreements of tomorrow. But ultimately, both our countries want to trade more with each other, not less. That's why we should work together to prevent an erosion of the existing global trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its core – an erosion with negative effects for all sides.

A second challenge that unites India and Germany is the need to innovate constantly, and to stay on top in research and development, in science and technology. For you, the younger generation, Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, and robotics will be the norm. India will be – at the same time! – a rural country and a 21st century data-driven economy. Your world will be vastly different from the one your parents inherited. ... And international competition will fuel the innovation agendas in many countries around the world. In some ways, this is a very pragmatic challenge: because the answer is - we need to invest in research and we need to create conditions for ground-breaking innovation. The Indian-German science and research partnership is now 60 years old and very much alive, covering fields ranging from basic research and scientific infrastructures to co-operation between our research organisations and universities – with more than 430 bilateral agreements so far. The German House for Research and Innovation in Delhi is the focal point for many of these partnerships.

But beyond such pragmatic answers, the challenge of innovation also leads to more fundamental questions – questions on our future prosperity. It's not just about technology itself, but also about its effects on our economies and societies.

For example, if innovation radically changes the way we produce and consume, what will happen to our jobs and to our labour markets? Will traditional occupations in agriculture and industry still exist in 20, 30, 40, 50 years' time? And will our economies be able to ensure employment for future generations?

We may also ask: Are our education and training systems equipped to keep up with technology? And what will happen to health

care, to taxation, or to consumer protection– in other words, to an entire system that was designed for a very different economy?

Let me add one last question: what about economic development? Are traditional approaches still valid in a digital age? To me, it seems plausible that we need new answers and new strategies. Perhaps less developed regions can indeed leapfrog traditional industrialisation and jump straight into the digital age, as some regions in Africa are showing us.

These are difficult questions. But we need to find convincing answers if we want our societies to prosper and if we want to aim for a “happy and harmonious human existence”, as Prime Minister Modi put it in his recent Davos speech. I am confident that India’s and Germany’s strong democratic systems will rise to this task – because they are built to adapt to changing conditions. Democracy’s greatest strength, to my mind, is its ability to uncover and to correct its own weaknesses. Democracy has a unique power to self-correct and to deal with new challenges!

I believe it’s worth our hard work to preserve that power, to maintain this freedom and openness. We need these qualities to overcome the challenges of our time.

For example, we should strengthen our universities, defend the freedom of research, and make sure that the arts and sciences can continue flourishing freely – rather than restricting the space for debate and politicising these institutions to our narrow advantage. When academic freedom is constrained by ideology, when students and researchers are threatened and harassed on the basis of their political beliefs, then soon democracy will dry out.

We should also continue to defend the free and critical press, and the freedom of speech – rather than discrediting uncomfortable truths as “fake news” and blurring the boundaries between facts and opinion. When reporters in many countries around the world refrain from reporting for fear of reprisals, when public debate is discouraged to the extent that criticism becomes dangerous, then it’s time to speak up.

And we should continue to engage in rigorous but respectful debates, in political parties and with our political opponents. We should defend the autonomy of women and the rights of minorities. We should stand up for religious tolerance – rather than excluding those we perceive as different. We are all entitled to our own opinions and our religious beliefs. That’s why religious communities deserve special protection. I know these issues from our debates back home in Germany, where public discourse has become rougher and where old certainties are increasingly being called into question. I have made it my objective as President to encourage all those who work for the

cause of democracy. That's why I'm here today: I want to listen to your views, and I want to embolden you to think about the future!

Because, my friends, the future is not set in stone – we all need to shape it. As students and researchers, you have the great privilege to take the long view. Dare to look far ahead, with an open mind and with an open heart! We need you in the political debates of our time, as a strong voice for an open and peaceful world, and for the future of our democracies.

My own wish for the future would be: let's continue to ride in the same elevator, let's keep talking to each other – and let's all go up, together!

So, that's it, my friends. Now, it's your turn. I am very much looking forward to hearing your thoughts. Thank you for listening!