



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a dinner hosted by Mark Rutte, Prime Minister
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
The Hague, the Netherlands
15 May 2018**

For me personally, events have come full circle today. A few minutes ago, we exchanged the instruments of ratification for the Ems-Dollart Treaty. This marks a small milestone in relations between our countries. I remember well the day in October 2014 when, on board the vessel *Neuwerk*, my then Dutch counterpart Foreign Minister Bert Koenders and I both signed the treaty in the middle of the Ems river. Our countries managed to find a compromise on an issue that was sensitive and complex for both sides.

To my mind, this treaty is exemplary for the close political partnership between our two countries. It is often a common interest, or a similar approach to tackling new challenges, that unites us. Even when we have different points of departure, we manage to find viable solutions, thanks to a practical and reasonable attitude and a willingness to compromise.

This ability to reconcile points of view is at the core of our democracies. In a day and age when many claim to possess the so-called absolute truth, when they reduce the spectrum of nuances to just black and white and only differentiate between friend and foe, the ability to achieve well-considered compromises has become all the more important and valuable. It is because of the Netherlands' common sense and wisdom, together with your country's liberal-minded character, that the Netherlands' view carries weight in debates in Berlin, Brussels and around the world.

Our countries are founding members of the European Communities. As such, we were and remain convinced that European integration makes sense and adds value. Brexit, which is being negotiated these months and which our two countries did not want, affects us in much the same way. That said, it has sparked very

different debates in the Netherlands and in Germany; debates about where our countries stand in Europe today, and about the role we will play in Europe tomorrow.

These debates are important, and I am grateful for the open spirit in which our discussions take place. It is also important, however, that we come to decisions quickly, thus ensuring that the European Union is united and capable of action. What is more, we must not give our national interests absolute priority in this decision process. Instead we should also allow our policies to be guided by the interests of the Union as a whole.

So let us endeavour to maintain and strengthen our common bonds. Allow me now, Prime Minister, to raise my glass and propose a toast to the German-Dutch friendship, in full confidence that we will also find good answers to the challenges of tomorrow!