



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at a luncheon, hosted by King Willem-Alexander and  
Queen Máxima of the Netherlands on the occasion of the  
visit to the Kingdom of the Netherlands  
in The Hague, the Netherlands,  
on 15 May 2018**

My wife and I are delighted to be with you again today. It is especially nice seeing you so soon after we met on the margins of the Olympic Games in South Korea. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to get to know many different facets of your beautiful country. Already as a student, I explored the Netherlands by bicycle, spending several of my holidays criss crossing your country in all kinds of weather, visiting various cities and provinces. What impressed me most back then was not so much the strong and constant headwind I had to ride into at practically all times everywhere in the Low Countries. Rather, it was the openness of the Dutch and the friendly way they invited us to pitch our tents on their farms that made a deep impression.

Since then, I've always enjoyed my visits to your country, both as a private citizen and in an official capacity. Today, I am here for the first time as Federal President – and I, along with my wife, am happy to have this new opportunity to acquaint myself with the Netherlands from a slightly different perspective. Thank you very much for the hospitality that you have shown to us and to my entire delegation.

It is not only for me and my wife, both of us being from North Rhine Westphalia, that a trip to the Netherlands feels like visiting close relatives. Many of my fellow Germans feel a certain familiarity and trust when it comes to the Netherlands. This feeling is at the heart of the close bond of partnership between Germany and the Netherlands, and one finds it not only at the level of state institutions. Also in the worlds of business and culture, as well as in our societies, the Dutch and the Germans have a deep understanding of one another.

We are grateful for this trust, and we have not forgotten that, especially against the background of the dark chapters in our history, it must not be taken for granted. Indeed, this trust is precious – it has grown over decades, and we want to preserve and nurture it.

Today, our economies are closely intertwined. More and more Netherlanders are settling down in Germany, just as many Germans are moving to the Netherlands. Some 22,000 young Germans are enrolled at universities in the Netherlands. I am also pleased that the number of those learning Dutch in my country is steadily increasing – so that now, not only can the Dutch understand the Germans, but more and more Germans can also understand the Dutch.

The fact that many Germans find the Netherlands so appealing is thanks in no small part to Your Majesties. Many people in my country are proud that you regularly spend your holidays in Germany and also visit German Länder in an official capacity. We are also pleased that your compatriots are following your example. Germany is meanwhile the most popular holiday destination of the Dutch. Of course, half the population of the Ruhr region spends the summer holidays on the Dutch North Sea coast – that was and remains the case.

History and geography have shaped us in different ways. But I have the impression that, in recent years, we have become even better acquainted with one another, and that our mutual trust has grown as well. The Netherlands' view carries weight in debates in Germany, whether these be about the future of Europe or the future of democracy. As we venture into uncharted territory, it is good to know that we have a liberal minded partner like the Netherlands at our side, whose actions are imbued with reason and a sense of responsibility.

Permit me, Your Majesties, to propose a toast to this, and to your health and happiness.