



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the state banquet hosted by President Sauli Niinistö  
in Helsinki, Finland,  
on 17 September 2018**

On hienoa olla täällä tänään! My wife and I are greatly honoured to be here today. Unfortunately, this brings me almost to the end of my knowledge of Finnish, even though I had ample opportunity over the years to learn some more, for example, while sitting beside my Finnish colleague at the Council of the European Union. Or, my friend Sauli Niinistö, while we visited the opening of the Frankfurter Buchmesse – Frankfurt Book Fair four years ago when Finland was Guest of Honour which, incidentally, provided me with a lot of good books for my kamoos. And these are just two examples of the many fond memories I associate with your country.

Mr President, we go back a long way. It is wonderful to see you today so soon after the Arraiolos meeting in Riga last week. Since I took office as Federal President a year and a half ago, we have met and spoken on the telephone frequently. You were the first President to visit me in Schloss Bellevue in Berlin. And over the last four days, we have presumably been together more than we have been apart! My friend Sauli Niinistö, time and again I am impressed by your unassuming, reliable wisdom that makes you into such an invaluable, affable and convivial interlocutor and adviser. I can certainly well understand why not just I but indeed the vast majority of Finns are so impressed with you. So I would again like to take the opportunity here to congratulate you most warmly on your impressive re-election at the start of the year. Thank you for hosting us today!

The last state visit of a German Federal President to Finland took place on a dark day. It was 11 September 2001. A day whose images have been branded in our collective memory. Many of us know to this day exactly where we were and who we were talking to when we heard about the attacks.

Tarja Halonen and Johannes Rau were in Helsinki. In the afternoon, they ignored the strict protocol of the state visit to be briefed and make telephone calls. Indeed to comprehend what had happened in America. Yet, despite all that had happened, a reception was held in the evening in the Swedish Theatre. And the German Federal President uttered these words:

“[We] should promise one another this evening that we and our people ... stand together in friendship ... hatred destroys the world and hatred obliterates people. What we need to do ... is stand up to hatred and create space for the idea of loving your neighbour. Those who do not hate also say no to violence. Those who say no to violence are opening the way for the lives of our children”.

Perhaps there was something in the air in the Swedish Theatre that very evening which is expressed by one of the few other Finnish words I know, the word *sisu*. This term encapsulates the courage, the strength and the determination of Finns to persevere even in the most difficult of situations and to work towards a good conclusion. A great Finn once explained it to me like this: “*sisu* means courage – not the courage to climb a tree and jump down. That is stupid. But the courage to brake late on a narrow racetrack in the Finnish forest, take the corner tight and quickly put your foot down again.” You can guess which of your compatriots I am talking about. It was Mika Häkkinen. A Finn, incidentally, who back then often took corners far too quickly for the taste of his German rivals.

With my visit, I hope to express my gratitude for how close Finns and Germans are today. Our roots are deep, stretching back to Hanseatic times and the days of the Reformation. A century ago, the independent Finland and Germany established diplomatic relations and when Finland joined the EU we became even more closely connected. This friendship which has developed over such a long time is of great importance to both our nations and benefits both sides, for example in terms of business or close cultural exchange. Finnish literature was, for instance, a familiar concept to the Germans even before the Frankfurter Buchmesse – Frankfurt Book Fair in 2014. I am not just thinking here of the Nobel Laureate Frans Eemil Sillanpää – but also of “The Moomins” by Tove Jansson. What child in Germany hasn’t read it?

But our relations are also strong in dealings with other countries. If I may say so, Germany and Europe owe much to the *sisu* of Finnish foreign policy. I am thinking, for example, of your country’s mediators who are held in high esteem far beyond Finland’s borders, first and foremost of Martti Ahtisaari, who proved that you can soften and break the hard ice of international conflicts with determination, discrete diplomacy and courage. These examples are an inspiration to us and today it is impossible to imagine also German foreign policy without mediation. This reminds me of our impressive visit to the Polaris

icebreaker today. It seems to me only fitting that one of the other ships in the icebreaker fleet bears the name "sisu".

In the European Union, Finland and Germany agree on almost all key questions. From the Common Foreign and Security Policy to strengthening the internal market, from upholding free trade to addressing the major issues which will define our future, namely climate protection and migration. We know just how much is at stake for both our countries in Europe. I am grateful that Finland is playing an active role in the debates on the future of Europe. Europe needs your country's constructive voice. And Germany is grateful to know it has Finland at its side.

Finally, I am also pleased about the good cooperation on security in the Baltic Sea region. In recent years, we have seen challenges re-emerging that we believed to have been resolved. I think we agree that we need to find clear words and a clear stance in dealings with Russia which today unfortunately aspires to creating distance to Europe rather than cooperating with us. Germany therefore advocates resolutely deepening European Security and Defence Policy in which Finland plays an important role and engaging your country in the closest possible partnership with NATO. At the same time, we need to keep communication channels with our adamant neighbour Russia and time and again explore avenues for cooperation. Who would know more about this than the Finns? We have a great deal of respect for how you are succeeding.

Today, my wife and I have enjoyed a great deal of hospitality and Finnish warm-heartedness. This is not something to be taken for granted but expresses the outstanding relations between the people in our countries. Finns don't waste many words but have much to offer. Particularly when it comes to difficult issues. I am thinking of the questions which people in Germany are also busy contemplating: how to overcome rifts and divides in society, the gap between urban and rural areas, how to integrate migrants or secure opportunities for our children and grandchildren. When it comes to education and the digital transformation, your country is always one of the most important positive examples that are cited in the debate in Germany – and rightly so. In a nutshell, we Germans like coming to Finland – and we always come here to learn something. We sense the great affection and openness with which you and your compatriots approach Germans. We are very grateful to you and want to return the favour.

With this in mind, I would now ask you to raise your glass and join me in a toast to President Niinistö and Ms Jenni Haukio, to the well-being of the Finnish people and to the promise to stand together for a bright future for our countries and a good life for our children in a Europe rooted in freedom.