



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a concert in Berlin on 23 October 2018
with the President of the Republic of Poland
to mark the centenary of the restoration of Polish
sovereignty**

This is indeed a proud event that we are celebrating, namely the restoration of Polish statehood and sovereignty 100 years ago. And we are celebrating it with music. That is always a good idea, and as you will soon hear, a particularly beautiful one.

The first piece we will hear takes us back to an age when politicians composed string quartets and composers were passionate about politics. Ludwig van Beethoven, for example, who dedicated his Name Day Overture to Polish Prince Antoni Henryk Radziwiłł, was, as most people know, an exceptionally political individual.

The prince, who moved effortlessly between different worlds, was both a politician and a musician, a renowned composer, and an accomplished singer and cellist, as shown incidentally by a piano trio dedicated to him by Frédéric Chopin.

Radziwiłł was equally at home in Warsaw and here in Berlin. For almost 40 years, he was married to Princess Louise of Prussia, a sister of Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia. And it is said that their was an exceptionally happy union. Radziwiłł might have wished for similarly happy relations between his homeland of Poland and the Kingdom of Prussia. However, there was little enthusiasm for a personal union among Poles.

And that should not come as a surprise to anyone. Poland did not only want to free itself from foreign rule and become independent – the Poles wanted, and want, to remain free and independent! After centuries of war, occupation, division and foreign rule, they – the Poles – recognise and appreciate more than almost any other nation the value of this sovereignty, which they achieved and defended several times and at great cost.

Poland was, and remains, an essential voice in and for Europe. We know that the first Polish constitution of 1791 showed Europe a path for the future. It was the first constitution to enshrine the principle of the separation of powers, to recognise general equality before the law and to guarantee freedom of religion.

The fact that the Germans were not trustworthy neighbours for the Poles on several occasions in the past is a cause of profound shame for us. How can we commemorate the foundation of the Second Polish Republic without simultaneously thinking of its end, the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany?

Esteemed guests from Poland, we have not forgotten the trail of devastation that the Germans left behind in this Second Republic. Germany will not forget the responsibility that arises for it from this past.

The fact that we, both Poles and Germans, are celebrating the foundation of the Second Polish Republic together here in this concert hall today is by no means a matter of course when one thinks of this past. It is a fortunate development of European history – a development we owe to courageous men and women who worked to promote reconciliation, reached out their own hands, and took the hands extended to them.

Mr President, I am absolutely delighted about this development. And I am grateful for the opportunities that our countries now offer one another after such a chequered history. Our wish is for a free, democratic and self-confident Poland as a partner in shaping the future of Europe together. I hope we will all have an enjoyable evening of music.