



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the central ceremony to mark the end of black coal
mining in Germany
in Bottrop on 21 December 2018**

To open with the traditional miners' greeting:

Glückauf!

Consolidation and Friedlicher Nachbar,

Wolfsbank, Concordia and Minister Stein,

Friedrich Ernestine and Gottesseggen and Fröhliche Morgensonne,

Graf Bismarck, Nordstern, Auguste Victoria.

Who, outside the Ruhr District, could say what these words, some of them beautiful, some a bit strange, have in common?

All of you here know exactly what it is. These are all names of collieries or pits where coal was mined here in the Ruhr District for two hundred years. Some of them have been forgotten, some are still very much alive in our memory. Back in May 2010, everyone here was able to see again just how many mines there were when the "SchachtZeichen" event marked the sites of former mineshafts with 311 yellow helium balloons. Thousands of people in the Ruhr District gave up some of their time to inflate the balloons and, overnight, secure them in place. What a wonderful image. What a fantastic demonstration of historical awareness, of ties to one's home, of self-confident identity.

That would have been a perfect occasion for the two words which all of you here have heard and said so often over the past few weeks. The words that are printed on the Borussia Dortmund players' shirts for tonight's last match of the year, and the words I want to say to you at the outset today:

"Danke Kumpel!" Thanks, mate!

Here at Prosper-Haniel colliery today, we are witnessing a historic moment. The last shift has been worked and the last piece of black

coal mined in Germany. Here it is. This is not just a matter for the Ruhr District. And it is not just a matter for the other districts where black coal used to be mined.

No, it is a matter for everyone in Germany. Because this is the end of a chapter of German history. An important and fundamental chapter of German history. A chapter of history which impacted on each and every individual here in the Ruhr District. But also one without which our entire country and its development over the past two hundred years would have been inconceivable.

That is why, as Federal President, I am here today, and that is why, on this historic day, I say to you on behalf of everyone in our country,

“Glückauf” and “Danke Kumpel”.

Today we do not as yet know precisely what the future will bring. “Not till you dig do you know what you’ll hit”, as the miner says. In other words, we cannot know what the next blow, the next day, the next year will bring until we have actually started to work. Not till you dig do you know what you’ll hit.

However, I know, and I am very pleased, that the Ruhr District in particular is brimming over with hard-working, active people and clever ideas. I know and am pleased that you are resolutely looking to the future. Pioneering individuals are doing so, neighbourhoods are doing so, as are clubs and associations, companies, start-ups and church congregations. So are people who have long had their roots here, and so are migrants – and this is especially important – and very often they are quite deliberately doing so all together.

No, melancholy and sentimentality do not hold sway here. What you find, rather – and to my mind this has always been characteristic of the Ruhr – is a large dollop of courage, a great deal of determination and skill, and even more ideas, not least for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. And in my view the motto you have thought up together absolutely hits the nail on the head. It is so simple, yet it brilliantly captures both your traditions and your determination to look ahead: “Glückauf Zukunft!” Good luck to the future! May that which is ending today sow the seeds for something new, for a prosperous future for the generations to come.

“Glückauf Zukunft!” Good luck to the future!

We must look to the future, and we are looking to the future. But no-one can blame us for giving way to a few memories just at the moment either. Grateful memories of happy and successful years and decades. But also memories of hard times, of a hard life and day-to-day burdens which many people nowadays can scarce imagine.

What I am saying about the Ruhr District naturally applies also, more or less, to the other mining districts. But, when it comes down to it, this used to be the biggest coal mining area on the continent. Here, more than almost anywhere else, people's lives have been determined by coal. They still feel themselves to have been "born on coal", long the slogan on the Schalke 04 football fans' scarves. And today, here in the Ruhr District, we are bidding farewell to an entire era.

So let's take some time to look back. Before mining and coal brought such rapid change to the world, the area we now call the Ruhr District was a collection of modest little towns and villages. The Ruhr, Emscher and Lippe rivers flowed through idyllic green countryside to the Rhine. The people worked on the land and also in trade: Europe's major west-east artery, the Westphalian Hellweg, which for centuries had linked Bruges with Novgorod, went right through here. Part of it is now the A40 motorway.

Essen was still ruled, as it had been for a thousand years, by Princess-Abbesses. For a thousand years, women had the say in one small corner of this region. Ancient establishments like Werden Abbey or Essen Cathedral bear witness to a long history. Probably never before had their treasures been seen in a more beautiful setting than in the 2008 "Schwarz vor Gold" (Gold in Black) exhibition in the former coal-washing plant of the Zollverein, an exhibition many of you here today will doubtless remember.

No, the region's history did not start in the 19th century. Not in Essen, but also not in Duisburg, or in Bottrop, or in Bochum. Gelsenkirchen, too, existed long before it became known as "the city of a thousand fires". For a while, that was forgotten. Because then the coal came, radically changing an entire region and revolutionising the world.

However, the coal did not just appear by itself. This underground treasure, buried for millions of years, had to be brought to the surface through human toil, by people for whom no work was too hard, people driven on by the dream of a better life. They came from all across Germany, which had not existed as a single country until 1871. However, the "Zollverein", or customs union, the first step towards Germany's economic unification, had been in place since 1834, and is commemorated to this day by the pit bearing its name, now a UNESCO World Industrial Heritage site.

People, including many Poles, came from Prussia's eastern provinces, from Masuria and Silesia; others came from Bavaria, Hesse and other parts of Germany; still others came from further afield – from Italy, Belgium, Britain, later from all across southern Europe, from Turkey, North Africa and, as some of you here will know, from Korea.

And they stayed here. They started to work, and they became "Kumpel", mates.

Does any other trade have such a wonderful word? A word which originally meant your workmates in your independent team underground, men on whom you had to be able to rely completely, for better or for worse, in situations of life and death. Men on whom you could rely.

And that is why "Kumpel" has been taken up in everyday language: someone I can rely on one hundred percent is my "Kumpel", my mate. Today that applies everywhere: on the pitch and in the lab, on the playground and on the building site, at university and in the club. Down the mine, the word acquired this special value. Down the mine, strangers became mates. Down the mine, unconditional solidarity was the main currency. Everything else was secondary: the good wages, success, pride at what you had worked hard to produce.

Over decades, that kind of thing shapes the mentality of an entire region. You cannot shake it off, even if, like today, you are pulling off your overalls for the last time.

No, that kind of thing goes more than just skin deep. Everyone in the Ruhr District knows what a "Kumpel" is. Above ground as well as below.

Because something like this rubs off on everyone else too, here in the far west of our country, including those who did not work underground: those who planned and thought above ground, who brought up the children, who built houses, who made music and acted in the theatres, who organised trade unions, worked in politics and produced newspapers, who passionately played exciting football.

All this goes to make up the special atmosphere of this mining district. And everyone played their part to help ensure that this is somewhere where you can not only work hard, but where you want to live and and can live well.

And if we think again about the miners, that band of mates, then we must not forget their wives. Anyone who talks about the miners and the hard work they do also has to talk about the equally hard work of the wives. For most miners' wives over the past two hundred years, it was a constant effort, day in, day out, to keep their home, their windows and the family's clothes clean amid the ever-present black dust and soot. Or the yellow dirt of a zinc mine. Right up till as late as the early 1970s, the miners were responsible for their own work clothes and for keeping them clean – and that was generally a job for the wives. Unsung heroines whom we remember today with gratitude.

Men and women became and stayed mates here. That has not changed. And it is precisely for this reason that I have no fear for the future of the Ruhr District. The ability to stick together, the main

prerequisite for making a success of things in the future, for doing something the world can and will be amazed at, is something that you already have in spades here. And of that you can all be proud.

Mining has shaped the mentality of this entire region. You could and can still see this in areas you might least expect. The first "Ruhr Bishop", the unforgotten Franz Hengsbach, had a piece of coal in his episcopal ring. He did not ordain as a priest any young man who had not been below ground at least once. And at the first Mass in the cathedral celebrating the new bishopric, the new Bishop said: "Let us embark on the first shift in God's name." Mining found its way right into the language of the pulpit!

I dare say Bishop Hengsbach would have been pleased that the bells of many Roman Catholic and Protestant churches tolled yesterday evening to bid the mining industry farewell. And Saint Barbara, patron saint of miners, probably said a quiet "Glückauf" up in heaven, too.

It is not only the fact that it has its own patron saint that reminds us of the particular danger associated with this industry from start to finish. Mothers, wives, children could never be sure that their sons, husbands, fathers would return from their shift safe and sound.

Remembering mining also means remembering the constant fear of accidents. It means remembering the many injured and mining invalids the mine doctors "wrote off", as the brief and drastic phrase has it. It means remembering the major mining disasters, but also the many individual deaths underground, men being robbed of life in the midst of their labour.

I think I was about seven, if that, when I sat with my parents, listening to coverage of the dramatic rescue efforts following the accident in Lengede. Every day, for many days.

Mining accidents are not the stuff of history. Only a few days ago, a young man was killed during dismantling works in Ibbenbüren. We mourn him and extend our sympathies to his family, friends and colleagues. We also send condolences to the families of the Polish and Czech miners who died today in an explosion in a mine in Karviná. We remember them also.

Till the very last moment, it is true that everyone who goes underground risks his health and even his life. This constant danger has always been the reality of life down the mines. But it may also have accounted for part of the myth. When, in the film "Der lange Abschied von der Kohle" (The long goodbye to coal), a foreman is asked what is the most important thing about his job, he replies: "It's that all my lads come back up safe at the end of the shift." This is the expression of the existential responsibility typical of a mining foreman. A responsibility not widespread in working life. Today we also want to

give thanks that there were and are still people who assume this existential responsibility.

At the same time, we must not forget the continuous joint efforts of miners, foremen, engineers, trade unions and management to make work underground ever safer. Not only has extraction technology become ever more refined and modern. Mining can now be described as a truly high-tech industry, with high-end machinery and processes. Who in the early days would have believed it? This know-how, these inventions and technologies, will continue to be highly sought-after throughout the world. Something else you should not be afraid to note with pride today.

A miner's pride: not only pride in the work he has done himself, or the work done by his team, or the pit as a whole. No, for a great many miners, it is pride in the achievements of the entire mining industry, and in its importance for our country's history. Germany as a major economic power from the end of the 19th century onwards? Utterly inconceivable without coal, without miners. Even the European Community has its roots in coal, with the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community.

However, here in our country we must not forget that the economic boom in Europe was preceded by death and destruction, by a war unleashed on the whole of Europe by Germany, with a war machine driven by coal and steel. Eventually this war brought destruction to our own country. The Ruhr District keeps alive the memory of the terrible bombings, deliberately designed to strike at the heart of German industry and thus also to hit its working-class districts, claiming thousands of lives. Often, in some Ruhr cities, the bombs erased the last remaining fragments of beauty.

After the Second World War came coal's golden age. More than half a million miners worked day and night to produce the foundations of post-war prosperity, a prosperity on the basis of which we are still living, not only here in the Ruhr. Every city around here was "the city that never sleeps". Coal was needed more than ever. Coal was the driving force for reconstruction. Coal was now really and truly black gold. And the beating heart of the so-called economic miracle was right here in the Ruhr District.

One could quote lots of statistics, figures and tables to prove it. But Herbert Grönemeyer said it all in a short sentence about his home city, Bochum: "Dein Grubengold hat uns wieder hochgeholt" (Your black gold got us back on our feet again). Everyone throughout Germany knows that line. And rightly so. Because no-one should forget it, or the importance of the Ruhr District for reconstruction in the whole of Germany.

Grönemeyer wrote that song a quarter of a century ago. At the time, the long goodbye to coal had long since begun. Today, now that it is the final farewell, we can say this: everyone has coped well with the long goodbye.

Thanks to strong trade unions, thanks to responsible company managers, it has been possible to find common interests within the framework of co-determination. Finally, with the industry working together with government in a spirit of partnership, it has been possible to close down the coalmines in a peaceful and socially compatible way. A glance at other regions of Europe shows that this approach has saved us a great deal of turmoil and suffering, a great deal of anger and deprivation.

In other words, the solidarity has persisted right to the end of a long history. No-one has been forced into the abyss. This is a tremendous, a historic, achievement. Admittedly, it has cost a lot, and we have all paid for it. But do not the billions in tax actually express the fatherland's gratitude to those who risked life and limb 1000 metres underground, in the heat and dirt, with that ever-present danger? I think that, on a day like today, we can allow ourselves a slight bout of pathos.

And solidarity and partnership will again be required when it comes to the debate on Germany's definitive departure from mining, including lignite mining. Here, too, the survival of entire regions is at stake. Here, too, the priority is to give the people prospects for the future. First prospects, then the date – that is what the Coal Commission is debating just now. The way the process was handled here in the Ruhr District can serve as an example of good practice.

On a day like today, we remember historic achievements. But we also look to the future, with high hopes and expectations. There are tasks ahead which derive from the troublesome legacy of the coal itself. Many a poet might have been tempted to use the phrase "eternal relics". But we are not talking poetry here. We are talking hard facts: as long as rain falls on the ground and as long as people want to live here, then the pumps will have to go on pumping. But I have been astonished at how much creativity and how much knowledge that can be of value in other areas have sprung from the new field of research that is post-mining. To make creative use of a difficult legacy – that is certainly a positive approach. Passion and ability – that is the secret. Or, as Stoppok sings: „Beweg dein Herz zum Hirn, schick beide auf die Reise.“ Move your heart to your brain, and send both on a journey.

All around here, there are indeed positive approaches to new things: a dense network of higher education, from Dortmund to Duisburg – universities, universities of applied sciences and research institutions which are among the best in Germany and which produce lots of entrepreneurs. The "Gründerallianz" start-up network helps

them to turn their ideas into products, jobs and commercial opportunities, linking them up with established companies in the region. And thanks to the Data Hub Ruhr initiative, they have access to data sets to develop and implement data-driven solutions – a key prerequisite for successful business today.

The end of black coal mining by no means marks the end of the Ruhr's role in the energy industry. The companies in the energy sector have changed, but they are staying, and so is the knowledge that has been gathered over generations. A new research and business complex is being established at the old Zollverein coal mine, an integrated research campus for the future of the energy supply. Here, the aim is to come up with options for a stable, sustainable energy policy for the future which aims to further decarbonise the energy supply.

Like many things here in the Ruhr District, this major project was kick-started by someone who is passionately committed to the region, Werner Müller. Werner, you have no idea how happy we are to have you here with us today.

Back in 1997, at the time of the steel crisis and the big demonstrations, when the fans at the football derbys chanted not only their club's name, but also "Ruhrpott! Ruhrpott!", it was a sign that a common feeling of home and belonging had developed in this region.

And, if I am not mistaken, it has grown even stronger since then. Whereas being from the coalmining towns was once often seen as a badge of shame, now it is a source of pride.

In 1958, in the preface to the famous book of photos of the Ruhr District, Heinrich Böll wrote: "The Ruhr District has not been discovered yet." That is no longer true. It has been discovered. Above all, at long last, by its own inhabitants. The people here have discovered themselves – their worth, their humour, their differences and their similarities, their energy, their abilities, their identity. That is perhaps the biggest miracle of these past decades.

Culture, both "high" and "low", has played a vital part: the wonderful theatres and opera houses from Duisburg to Dortmund; the Lehmbruck and Folkwang Museums and the Quadrat here in Bottrop; Schloss Oberhausen; the colliery choirs; the "Cranger Kirmes" fair; Adolf Winkelmann's films and Max von der Grün's books; Herbert Knebel and Helge Schneider; the Missfits, Fritz Eckenga and Doktor Stratmann; the Lichtburg, Galerie and other cinemas; the Gruga and Revierpark Vonderort parks; Stiepel Prioory; and so very much more. Particularly the initiatives launched to save the unique industrial culture here, such as the grassroots campaign to preserve the workers' housing and the industrial buildings, or the Klartext publishing house, the Ruhrtriennale festival of the arts, and many more.

All these have, over the years, helped to build up something that is taken for granted in other parts of the world: a love of one's region. I know that this love of the region often takes a form whose great warmth is not at all understood in the rest of Germany. I am thinking of Frank Goosen's legendary phrase "Woanders is' auch ...", well, you know. "Elsewhere it's ..." Self-confident understatement is perhaps the biggest strength hereabouts. "Mir san mir", "we're us and we're special," they say elsewhere. Perhaps you think that here, too, but you don't say it out loud.

A feeling of home, yes: a love of your region, an identity of your own. These are all vital if you are to embark into a new era with hope. Particularly when it comes to integration. Integration is the key for tackling the future. That is true throughout our country. But it is something you here in the Ruhr have always known. Here you know that it is not so important where people come from. What is important is how they are welcomed locally and how they act and prove themselves once here. But this awareness is something that has to be put into practice again each difficult day.

There are many factors here which promise a bright future. The most important is the people, people who do not let themselves be discouraged. People who are used to taking responsibility for their own lives, and who regard each departure as a new beginning.

For two hundred years, you moved mountains here. Literally. Why shouldn't you succeed in doing so in the future? Let us embark upon a new shift together.

"Danke Kumpel!" Thanks, mate! And "Glückauf!"

"Glückauf Zukunft!"