



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the opening of the Federal Garden Show
(Bundesgartenschau – BUGA)
in Heilbronn on 17 April 2019**

There's a fabulous view from up here, I can tell you! The guests are happy and so are the gardeners, who didn't have to carry any watering cans today because enough water came from above. You shouldn't feel too put out about the rain, though. At the International Garden Show two years ago in Berlin, it started to rain just as I began my speech, whereas today it stopped just as I began speaking. That is a good sign! Thank you very much indeed for the marvellous welcome.

Firstly, I'd like to pay a huge compliment to the city of Heilbronn and to the entire BUGA team. All the plants growing and blooming here put us in the mood for the coming spring. You have all really got stuck in, and literally made the earth move, even creating two new lakes. You have planted thousands of trees and even more flowers, from the banks of the River Neckar to the roof-top garden. From today, guests from all over the Federal Republic of Germany and farther afield will have the opportunity to enjoy the result. The creators of the BUGA can be proud of their achievement. And we would like to thank you today for your hard work, both on the ground and with your partner organisations, for the sleepless nights and never-ending hope that the sun would shine. Thank you very much!

The painter Oskar Kokoschka once made the clever remark that "weeds are nature's opposition to the gardeners' government".

Unfortunately, Kokoschka didn't mention what role he would give the Federal President. In our garden at home my wife has given me, well, let's say the more down-to-earth jobs – usually mowing the lawn or lugging around sacks of leaves. But here at the Bundesgartenschau, the Federal President has a very special role. All my predecessors since Theodor Heuss have opened the event – and today, the task is mine. I am both honoured and absolutely delighted to do so.

Federal Garden Shows are often described as “the Olympic Games for Gardeners”. The Olympic principles apply here too, namely that the whole point is to take part. At a BUGA, anyone can join the “Academy of the Blossoming Arts” and learn something new to take back home with them.

Nevertheless, each BUGA is very special. This one even has its own hymn. The refrain says: “Here is blossoming life [...] – here we feel at home!” At home in Heilbronn – a city by the river, a city of the future.

And it’s true that the future has been created here by the river. For when it comes to the future of cities, no issue is as important as housing. That’s not something we have only been aware of since tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Berlin and other cities to demand affordable housing. That’s why I’m pleased that the BUGA focuses on this very issue, as well as on the blossoming arts.

We need to prevent our cities becoming a social battleground for housing. That means that we need to make housing affordable for all citizens and our cities good places for everyone to live. Here in Heilbronn we can see ways in which that can be achieved. A model district is developing where freight used to be unloaded. Three thousand five hundred people will find a new home here, surrounded by the River Neckar and the BUGA park. Residential space in nature and not in conflict with it – that, too, is what this Bundesgartenschau embodies.

Good architecture, modern materials and efficient energy technology have enabled something special to emerge – something special that can serve as a model, namely a well thought-out combination of rented and owned apartments, residential and working space, offices and cafés, childcare facilities and sheltered housing.

And what I consider especially important is that there are no sterile dormitories exclusively for high earners. No, cooperative and social housing is also incorporated here. And there is even a record to admire – the highest wooden apartment block in Germany. And what I particularly like about it is that the planners didn’t want to build penthouses on the top floors. Instead, the roof is open to all and sundry. The lift goes all the way to the top and everyone can enjoy the view.

I’m aware that not everything that has sprung up here by the River Neckar can be replicated exactly throughout the country. But my hope is that it will give many people food for thought and serve as an incentive, as rising rent costs are not only a problem in the big cities – in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich. No, in many other large and medium-sized cities, including here in Heilbronn, housing is also becoming more and more expensive. And for many people that means it is too

expensive! It is too expensive for single parents, pensioners, young families and particularly for those on a low income. One thing should be clear – policewomen, bus drivers, caregivers and nursery teachers, all the people who keep a city alive, need to be able to actually live there!

And it's not enough just to try to make the best of what we have. Where there are not enough apartments, they need to be built – and not just in the top price segment. There are ways and means to achieve this. One thing is clear – ideological turf wars will not create new apartments. Instead, we need committed municipalities, investors, developers and urban planners who are mindful of their social responsibility, make proper use of the opportunities that already exist, make land available and implement viable projects.

That worked here because land was sold not to those offering the highest prices, but to those with the best concept. The aim was not maximum profit in the short term, but maximum quality of life in the long term.

I would like to see more of that in our country, as housing is the existential question for every individual and for cohesion in our society. When living costs drive people to different corners of the city, people with differing income levels will rarely rub shoulders. And we can already see today that barriers between lifestyles become barriers in people's minds. I think that in a democracy we need to use a wrecking ball to break down these barriers!

However, we haven't come here today just to talk about concrete. We want to focus on the plants and flowers. After all, people do not live on bread alone. They need more than just streets and houses. People also need inspiration, culture and nature. To sum up, they need beauty!

And that is exactly what the residents here can find on their doorsteps. Everyone else may perhaps have to drive a bit further to the BUGA, but I can assure them that it's worth the effort! I wish you, the creators of the BUGA and the city of Heilbronn, a wonderful 173 days until 6 October, plenty of sunshine and enthusiastic visitors from near and far! I am looking forward now to the tour and would like to conclude with a sincere thank you once again to all those who have made this outstanding show possible.