



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at a state banquet hosted by the  
President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella,  
in Rome, Italy  
on 19 September 2019**

“Napule è mille culure  
Napule è mille paure  
Napule è nu sole amaro  
Napule è addore `e mare.”

“Naples is a thousand colours  
Naples is a thousand fears  
Naples is a bitter sun  
Naples is the scent of the sea.”

No, unfortunately I have not learned any Neapolitan yet. However, I am delighted to be travelling to Pino Daniele’s city for the very first time tomorrow – and I am honoured that you, President Mattarella, will be accompanying me.

No-one has ever sung about their love for their home city with greater intensity or emotion than the great Pino Daniele. His words express a longing which we Germans know only too well. The strange mixture of attraction and puzzlement which characterises our affinity not only with Naples but with Italy as a whole. A longing that has led us time and again during the last few centuries to head across the Alps towards the south. A longing which – as I know from my own experience – cannot be appeased.

Despite the bitter sun, much good has come of this longing. We have become neighbours, mutually trusting partners and close friends – not only on paper but in everyday life. The number of German tourists in Italy continues to grow unabated. Cars and car parts, machinery, chemical products, food and much more are traded in both directions across the Alps by the ton every day. Renzo Piano and Franco Stella have helped shape modern Berlin’s cityscape. The Uffizi, at present at least, has a German director. And following in the steps of the four million Italian labour migrants – they were known as guest workers back then – who came to us in the 1960s and 70s and who

worked, often under difficult conditions, to help bring about the German economic miracle, many Italians are coming once more to Germany to seek their fortune.

Thanks to this exchange, to these close ties, my country – Germany – has become more open, more European and more amiable. Although we still do not have the scent of the Mediterranean, it goes without saying that nowadays we Germans sit quite happily in a street café drinking an Aperol Spritz and reading Elena Ferrante or Roberto Saviano while waiting for our pasta all’amatriciana. And I am sure that we will even learn that it is not the done thing to drink cappuccino after a meal. Non si fa!

Yes, there have been a lot of positive developments. Above all, our close ties during the last few decades have borne fruit in political terms: through our joint efforts for a united Europe.

Sergio Mattarella, my esteemed friend, in Fivizzano on 25 August we jointly remembered the appalling crimes committed by Germans there 75 years ago. The memory of those crimes lives on in every family in that region. For us, too, the horror is still on our minds to this very day. And yet the residents welcomed us in a spirit of reconciliation, with warmth and kindness. That moved me very deeply.

Mr President, you warned that day that we should not be lulled into a false sense of security. You quoted Primo Levi: “It happened, therefore it can happen again”. We, those alive today, have a responsibility to ensure that it does not happen again. That is why united Europe is based on a promise: never again should there be war, never again unbridled nationalism, never again racism, hatemongering and violence.

For 70 years we have honoured this promise – Germany and Italy together with the other founding states and all the partners who have joined us over the years. Altiero Spinelli’s dream of a liberal and open Europe has brought us many decades of peace and prosperity.

When today, 75 years after the end of the Second World War, nationalists and populists disparage this Europe, when the poison of nationalism seeps into our debates and our democracy is challenged, Germany and Italy in particular must take a decisive stand – and just as decisively set the course for Europe’s future: in quite concrete terms, for example, on the issue of migration and the peaceful settlement of the crisis in Libya. I am therefore glad that Italy is back on the European field of play. Europe needs a strong and active Italy – just as it needs a strong and active Germany. That does not mean calling the shots but, rather, making possible joint solutions. That requires the readiness to listen and to understand each other. Our European policy should be marked by a sympathetic ear rather than an admonishing finger.

You, Sergio Mattarella, are a guarantor of your country's pro-European orientation. For that I am very grateful. Germans admire the clarity of your positions and the perseverance with which you are seeking to maintain peace within and beyond your country. You epitomise adherence to principles and decency, moderation and respect. During the last few months, you have impressively demonstrated time and again the power that reason and fairness can acquire in times of crisis.

And I am indebted to you personally that we are able to continue our amicable exchange based on mutual trust. Each time, I find it rewarding and – in turbulent times such as these – also heartening. Once again, thank you very much indeed for inviting me for this state visit. Particularly because our countries are connected in so many ways, we can always learn from each other. That is why I am here, and why I will be travelling to Naples tomorrow with so much curiosity. I want to see first-hand the difficulties as well as the enormous energy and creativity of the south.

Naples is a thousand colours, Naples is a thousand fears. We are living in times in which diversity and openness, ambivalences and contradictions challenge us and require that we overcome prejudices and divides. Let us, Germany and Italy, work together to build such bridges – over the divides that exist in Europe today.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us now raise our glasses to your good health, President Mattarella, and to the friendship between our two countries.

Viva l'amicizia tra Italia e Germania. Salute e grazie mille!