



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a dinner with Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili
in Tsinandali, Georgia, on 7 October 2019**

More for the sake of the Germans here with us this evening than for our generous Georgian hosts, I would like to start by telling a story I recall from earlier visits to Georgia. It goes something like this:

When God was dividing up the countries at a meeting of the world's peoples, the Georgians were celebrating as only they can. They sang, ate and drank to their hearts' content – and completely forgot that they had an appointment with their creator! However, God had just finished dividing up all the countries when he noticed the celebrating Georgians. But instead of becoming furious, he was so moved by their happiness and zest for life that he gave them the part of the world he had set aside for his retirement. And that was how the people of Georgia came to live in this wonderful country, which they named Sakartvelo, the land of the Kartvelians.

Even if I myself come from a small rural region in Germany, far from the big cities, I would like to take the liberty of adding that you were very fortunate because this is a truly beautiful country with wonderful people! And after our talks in Tbilisi today, which made a deep impression on me, I am delighted to be able to experience the beauty of Kakheti now.

Germans and Georgians have had close ties for many years. As far back as two centuries ago, Swabian settlers left their mark on your country. And their legacy can be seen to this day. Over the past three decades, our close ties have been shaped by the Georgians' unwavering desire for independence and a democracy based on the long-standing traditions of this proud people. The ties between us have grown stronger since the early 1990s, and we work closely together in the spheres of politics, business and civil society. Your country's impressive presence at the 2018 Frankfurt Book Fair lent new and powerful momentum to our cultural ties, which have always been of a special nature. Nino Haratischwili, a German-Georgian writer who

enjoys great success in my country, is just one example of the goodwill and great interest that many Germans feel for your country, so we are absolutely delighted that she is joining us on this visit to Georgia.

This mutual interest and the curiosity we feel about each other – the desire to learn how we are alike and different – create the fertile ground for agreements, treaties and contracts in politics and business. We want to continue doing our utmost to tend and cultivate this fertile ground.

Just under a year ago, you celebrated your inauguration to the highest office in the country here. It is thus a particular honour for my wife and me to mark the close friendship and partnership between our countries with you in the same place. I would like to thank you for accompanying us here. I have the greatest respect and recognition for your unwavering commitment to lobbying worldwide on behalf of Georgia and for your efforts to promote your country's interests and cultural and social assets, as you did recently at the United Nations.

In choosing this venue, you built a bridge between the eastern and western parts of your country at your inauguration. And at the same time, you yourself incorporate this connection between eastern and western Europe more than almost anyone else. I find your perseverance in promoting Georgia as a natural and necessary part of our common Europe impressive and persuasive, as geographical considerations are not the only thing that makes Georgia part of Europe. We truly have much more than that in common.

Your country has always been shaped by an exceptionally wide range of cultural influences from the East, West, North and South. It has always been both a hub and a bridge. And at the same time, it has always been closely interwoven in European culture and history. The Golden Fleece, the goal of the Argonauts in classical mythology, was found here, at the foot of the Caucasus.

Our countries are now united as democracies. This also includes constantly striving for freedom and the rule of law. We are searching together for the right balance between individual self-realisation and social cohesion. We are searching together for answers to the political and technological challenges of our time.

Madam President, I hope that you will find support and be successful in your efforts to counter the polarisation that threatens to divide so many of our societies. And I would like to thank you for the open and trustful discussion on the future of our democracies and on questions that are important to many people both in Germany and Georgia.

Georgia is an integral part of Europe, not only as regards culture and society, but also politically. Your hard work on the Council of Europe and in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

is a symbol of that, as are our ties in the European Union's Eastern Partnership and our cooperation in NATO. Georgian and German soldiers serve together in Afghanistan. Your Defence Minister and the Chief of Staff of the Federal Armed Forces will visit the contingent together in the near future. Another symbol is the work of the European Union's observer mission in your country, with German participation – a mission that is certainly not easy.

Allow me therefore to state clearly that we are aware of Georgia's hopes and expectations. Germany continues to fully support Georgia's territorial integrity. Germany supports Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and will continue to foster this cooperation with goodwill, concrete projects and perseverance in the future. Although some things may still seem a long way off today, we know what unites us. We know that we belong together.

May I ask you to raise your glasses to all of that, to Georgia as "an independent, strong, free, modern, tolerant and European country", to quote your inaugural speech, Madam President, and to your good health, the health of the Georgian people, the future of our democracies, and the current and future friendship between Georgia and Germany!

Gaumarjos!