



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a panel discussion to mark the thirtieth anniversary of
the signing of the Treaty between the Federal Republic of
Germany and the Republic of Poland on Good
Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation
in Warsaw/Poland
on 17 June 2021**

Mr President, dear Andrzej, thank you very much not just for your invitation, but also for your words just now, which moved me deeply.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, I would like to welcome the old hands, if I may call you that, who have long played an active role in German-Polish relations, dedicating their time and energy and taking on responsibility. But you will also forgive me if I extend a particular welcome to the younger members of our audience. Those who look to this German-Polish bond with hopes and expectations, because it will have a determining influence on their own future. And so an especially warm welcome to the young people from Germany and Poland who are joining us here today.

I am delighted, dear Andrzej, that we are able to meet here in Warsaw on this very special and very significant day. Special, because we are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Poland on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation. A treaty which underpins the close, ever-growing relations that have been forged between our two countries since the peaceful revolution in Poland and subsequently in Germany. Significant, meanwhile, because these close ties, these good neighbourly relations of the last few decades are, given the difficult context of our history, a true gift. A gift for which we are grateful. And yet a gift which we must carefully preserve, together.

History looms large in German-Polish relations. In 2018, first of all, we came together in Berlin to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the reclamation of Polish independence, the founding of the Second Polish Republic. One year later you invited me to join you in Wieluń.

Where, eighty years before, the terrible German invasion of Poland began. In January 2020, we and many others took part in a commemoration of the liberation of the German concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz.

Once again – history looms large in German-Polish relations. As we continue to commemorate it together, we do so not only for the sake of the past; we do so to underline our determination to work for a better future, for better neighbourly relations. Not everything we hoped for in 1989 has come to fruition, not by far. The longed-for triumph of democracy and a freedom-based order has in many places given way to new conflicts and confrontations, including, sadly, in Europe. Overall, the world has become at the least more complex and confusing. But there is no doubt that the neighbourly relations between Germany and Poland, rooted in the treaty which we are celebrating today, are among the truly great success stories of the last thirty years in Europe. A success story which was anything but a certainty and which we have never taken for granted and never will.

Our partnership – in economic, political, societal and cultural terms – has truly thrived in the last thirty years. As part of strong alliances, of the European Union and NATO, we have opened up an entirely new dimension to our cooperation, one which still holds such great potential for a shared future between Germany and Poland. Poland is now one of Germany's most important trading partners. The German-Polish institutions which were created by the alliance of our countries or emerged in its wake – the German-Polish Youth Office, the Foundation for German-Polish Cooperation, the Intergovernmental Commission for Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation – all of these institutions have, over the last thirty years, fostered a great deal of mutual trust and understanding. Over 50,000 school pupils and teachers have taken part in exchange programmes. A great number. These two presidents would have no objection to seeing that great number become greater yet in the coming years.

Good neighbourly relations depend on attentive neighbours who keep an eye out for one another and are always ready with a listening ear. There are still points within the treaty which we have not been able to address satisfactorily on both sides, that is true. But we are working on this and we will find solutions for the outstanding issues.

The past, meanwhile, is never truly past. Instead, it persists as a reminder of our responsibility today. And so it is good to see the concerted efforts being made, in close cooperation between Germany and Poland, to realise the German Bundestag's resolution to create a site of remembrance in Berlin for the Polish victims of National Socialism. And not just anywhere in Berlin, but in the heart of Berlin, for every Berliner to see; a site that will be easily found by Polish visitors and by visitors from around the world. A site that will allow today's generations

in Germany to comprehend the scale of the suffering and the unfathomable destruction that were inflicted on Poland. A site that should at the same time be historical and forward-looking, both German-Polish and European. A memorial, and at the same time a meeting place.

Germany and Poland concluded the Treaty on Good Neighbourliness having in mind their shared interests, as the treaty states, and their shared responsibility for building a new, free Europe united by human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This united Europe is the framework within which our friendship as neighbours has grown so dynamically, all the more so since Poland joined the European Union in 2004.

The success of this partnership now naturally gives rise to a shared responsibility. The European Union's NextGenerationEU package, for example, is not just a response to the pandemic; it is not just a plan for recovery, but it should also be a plan for a new era. It will provide a powerful impetus to all of the European Union's member states, including Germany and Poland, on the path to a digital, a more sustainable and above all a strengthened Europe. A Europe that shows unwavering solidarity internally. And that will only be possible with close cooperation between Germany and Poland. I cannot conceive of a strong Europe without this cooperation.

Germans and Poles work with this Europe, work for this Europe. Young people have hopes and expectations pinned to this Europe and to those of us who work for it. This applies very particularly to the younger generation, as every opinion poll shows. And so I am looking forward to listening to and speaking with our young guests here today. I would certainly like to learn more about the concerns of young people, both German and Polish. What image do they have of their neighbour across this now so permeable border? What aspect of their exchanges and other encounters has made the deepest impression on them, what has astonished them the most? Does their country's neighbour perhaps even play a part in their own personal or professional prospects and opportunities? And where do young people in Poland and Germany stand on the major challenges that weigh on us today and will weigh yet more heavily in the future, particularly the fight against climate change? Where do they stand, and what political responses do they want to see?

I am very keen to hear their answers. And allow me to say that, if we want to give responses that will be understood and that will be seen by young people, too, as a step forwards, then the most valuable asset between Germany and Poland is, firstly, trust – I believe that we have built up trust in recent years – and, secondly, curiosity. The important thing is that we never lose our curiosity about one another, that we keep listening to and hearing one another. Why is curiosity so important to me? Because only by remaining curious will we continue to strive to understand one another. That is what we need. We are neighbours, but

this does not mean we are the same. We have a different view of our own past and future. And to be able to show one another understanding, we must be curious about one another.

It helps when we are able to meet, to share in laughter, in celebration. Thankfully, this too is now possible once again after the pandemic – we missed it for a long time; after a pandemic that forced all of us – not just politicians, but above all young people – to keep our distance for so long, far too long. It is time for us to draw closer once again. And so this day of encounters is a good day for coming closer.