



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a state banquet in honour of King Charles III and Queen
Consort Camilla of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland
at Schloss Bellevue
on 29 March 2023**

"[...] how things change and how you can get right inside the change" – these are the words penned by Ian McEwan in his latest novel *Lessons*. It tells the story of Roland Baines, a man whose life is inextricably linked to dramatic events as contemporary history unfolds. We travel with Roland Baines through the decades always searching for the answer to the big question: how do we deal with the changes which are beyond our control and yet shape our lives?

Esteemed guests, let me bid you a very warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue! It is both a great pleasure and a great honour for me to welcome Your Majesties King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla to Germany today on their first state visit as the royal couple.

And just as Ian McEwan let his protagonist journey through the decades, I would like to talk to you this evening about the fundamental questions of German-British relations: about continuity in the face of change, about upheaval and starting anew.

Today is 29 March. It is six years to the day since the British Government submitted its letter notifying the European Union of its intention to withdraw. Let me say in all honesty that, for me personally, this was a sad day. And plenty of people in Germany felt the same. Back then many feared that Brexit could make the Germans and the British drift apart. However, this did not happen. Too strong are the ties between our countries, too close the friendships between our people, too precious the reconciliation efforts after two World Wars.

Our partnership has grown throughout the centuries. The progressive thinking behind the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, the influence of great thinkers such as David Hume and Thomas Hobbes, the music of Georg Friedrich Handel or the Beatles. From time immemorial,

our relations have been defined by close interpersonal ties, by us inspiring one another. Even football was an English invention that the Germans were all too keen to take on. And although not all our games are friendlies, it is good that these days German and British rivalries are only ever played out on the football pitch.

"Today our countries stand together as indispensable partners in almost every field of endeavour imaginable, conscious of our past but confident about our future." This is how you put it, Your Majesty, when addressing the German Bundestag during your last visit to Berlin just over two years ago.

Nothing shows this connection as clearly, as splendidly, as your visit to Germany, Your Majesty, on this your very first foreign trip as King. With this highly symbolic visit, you are making a tremendous personal gesture for which I and everyone here in this Hall would like to express our heartfelt thanks.

29 March 2017 marked the start of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Today, exactly six years later, we are opening a new chapter! Our situation is different as we look to the future, yet we are doing so together. No matter what lies ahead, I know that our German-British friendship will remain significant, it will remain firm. (In English:) Our friendship is important and it is strong!

Particularly in these times, we can sense the depth of our connection. The Russian attack on Ukraine, the first war of aggression against a neighbouring country in Europe since World War Two, has stirred up memories of the darkest days on our continent. But Putin's brutal calculation did not come to fruition. He was not able to drive a wedge between Europe's democracies. We, the NATO allies, the United Kingdom and the EU stand closer than ever before! We are helping those who have been attacked as they fight for their freedom and independence. Tomorrow we will visit an arrival centre for Ukrainian refugees in Tegel, as a sign of our solidarity – and also as a sign of gratitude for the tremendous willingness to help and the empathy people in our countries are showing.

Today, Germany and the United Kingdom are the two largest supporters of Ukraine in Europe, also in military terms. Tomorrow we will meet the German-British Battalion in Brandenburg and just a few days ago I met German and British soldiers in Estonia who are working from there to guard the airspace of NATO territory. Together, they are protecting the eastern flank, together they are protecting our Alliance territory, side by side, or perhaps rather, wing by wing.

Particularly after the terrible suffering that Germans unleashed on the continent in two World Wars, none of this can be taken for granted. I remember how moved I was in 2018 when I, the first German Federal President to do so, was allowed to take part in the official British

commemorations in London marking the centenary of the end of World War One, and was even allowed to read at the memorial service in Westminster Abbey. And it meant so much to me, Your Majesty, when you were the first member of the British royal family to attend the ceremony marking the Day of National Mourning in the German Bundestag in November 2020 and took the floor. The day after tomorrow, on Friday, we will stand together in Hamburg as we remember the bombing of the city in 1943. Eighty years after the dreadful bombing campaigns by German aircraft that devastated British cities. What a wonderful gesture of reconciliation! One-time enemies have become close friends.

Your Majesty, it is also you and your family we need to thank for the reconciliation efforts, for the deep friendship between our peoples. The House of Windsor, your parents, first and foremost your mother, Queen Elizabeth II, whom we all profoundly admired and highly honoured, did not ever allow the special ties with our country to come asunder but constantly nurtured these ties. Just as you are doing today. Your family is the embodiment of continuity, of stability. Particularly in these times of change and starting anew.

Your Majesty, you assisted your mother on countless occasions serving as an ambassador for reconciliation, for the friendship between our nations. You yourself have a close relationship with Germany. It was to visit family that you first came here in 1962. At the tender age of 13, you came to Germany – with no official welcome, no press, no photographers. And yet there is a captivating photo, a snapshot of you together with your father, Prince Philip, as you arrive at Frankfurt airport back then. A young journalist, at that stage a mere trainee, took the photo on the tarmac. It gives me great pleasure to present you with this photo in just a second to remember this special moment, 61 years on, as a sign of your long-standing close bond with our country.

I did not do the counting myself, Your Majesty, but you have since visited our country more than forty times – as Prince Charles. And now we bid you a warm welcome once more on your first state visit as King Charles!

The day of your coronation, 6 May, marks a new start – one paired with continuity. For you, it marks new and even greater responsibility. For the British people, it marks a new era in their monarchy. For us, however, and for relations between our countries, it marks great continuity. We are building on our centuries-old partnership, on the friendship between the Germans and the British. And, Your Majesty, on your personal commitment to the relations between our two countries.

Your trip to Germany with your wife, Queen Consort Camilla, prior to your coronation is also a strong European gesture. It means a great deal to me and to us Germans. You were able to see for yourself just how much it means at the Brandenburg Gate this afternoon: enthusiastic

Berliners, many guests from all across Germany, who know just how important your visit is. Your coronation day will be another good day for German-British relations!

Ladies and gentlemen, we are not what happens to us, but what we make of it. That is the greatest lesson contained in Ian McEwan's *Lessons*. No matter how rapid changes may be, there is no need to feel powerless. When we stand together, every fresh start will succeed.

That is why I would once more like to express my deep and sincere gratitude for your visit, Your Majesties. Particularly for the message it gives that we stand together. I am very much looking forward to the days to come and to the many opportunities we will have for dialogue during the three days of your state visit.

May I now ask you to raise your glasses and join me in toasting to the health of Your Majesties King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla. To your good health, too, honoured guests, to the friendship between our two countries!