



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at a state banquet hosted by Klaus Iohannis,  
President of Romania  
in Bucharest/Romania  
on 24 May 2023**

“There was a longing for something that had been lost, a longing for something that had failed to fulfil its promise, a longing to find something, and at times to lose something.”

These words come from Iris Wolff’s wonderful novel “Die Unschärfe der Welt”, or “The Blurriness of the World”. The world she describes is that of four generations of a family between the Carpathians and the Banat. A world of many languages that stretches as far as Germany. These are stories of love and longing, of oppression and escape, of the lifting of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of socialism. Iris Wolff, reading the stories moved me greatly. I am very glad that you have joined me on this visit to Romania, the country in which you were born and where you lived until your parents moved with you to Germany. Your book describes in a very poetic manner and in a unique language how closely our two countries are linked. And your biography, echoing that of many others, does the same.

Esteemed guests, it is only a year since I was here in Bucharest, and I am delighted to be your guest once again. This time on a state visit, no less. President Iohannis, thank you very much indeed for inviting me. It is a visit to friends with whom we Germans have for decades felt very close ties. Last year, we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Treaty on Friendly Cooperation. This document was the foundation for the close relations that exist between our countries today in all fields – commerce, politics, culture – all of which are represented here this evening. And I am convinced that our friendship can and will grow even deeper. That is one reason why I am here.

This friendship already extends far beyond the words on the page of a treaty. It is based on mutual trust, on respect, on our shared belief in our common European values. Klaus Iohannis, we have known one

another for many years, and I have fond memories of my visit in 2007, back when I was Foreign Minister, and you were Mayor of Sibiu. On that occasion we were celebrating the fact that your home city had become European Capital of Culture and your country had acceded to the European Union. We have met many times since then, and our conversations have always been marked by great trust and profound respect. That has been my experience again today. I know that in you I have a convinced European by my side, and for that I personally am grateful, as are we Germans. In just a few days' time, you will be receiving the Franz Werfel Human Rights Award in Frankfurt in recognition of your fight for human and minority rights. Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate you most warmly!

In talking about friendship, I am also referring to the ties between the people in our two countries. In Sibiu in 2015, I had the honour of opening an exhibition on the history and present of the German minority in Romania. That, too, is a fond memory. And I am proud to have been an honorary citizen of that beautiful city ever since. What has repeatedly impressed me, Klaus Iohannis, is how you, having German roots yourself, are committed to nurturing German culture and German traditions. You have always worked to protect the rights of minorities, and you thus stand as a shining example. I am also aware that to this very day, the German minority plays a very important role in cultural and political life here in Romania. So I am delighted to be visiting Sibiu again tomorrow and Timișoara, this year's fascinating European Capital of Culture, the day after.

You all know that many young Romanians come to live and work in Germany. Today they already make up the second-largest group of other Europeans in my country! Both groups – the German minority here in Romania and the Romanians in Germany – breathe life into the friendship between our countries; they nurture the close ties that reach back centuries.

In 1992, when our two countries signed the Treaty on Friendly Cooperation, the world was a very different place. The countries of Eastern Europe were in upheaval, turning towards a democratic future. Everywhere people were taking to the streets to fight for freedom and democracy. All across Europe, people were looking to the future with great optimism – including in my country, which had just had the good fortune to be reunified after decades of division. That day last year, 24 February 2022, the start of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, shattered many of the hopes we had held since that time. This war, which is bringing so much suffering and destruction to the people of Ukraine, is also causing you here in Romania to fear for your security.

However, one of Vladimir Putin's calculations has not come to fruition. In the face of his criminal war, we Europeans are acting together, united, and that gives us new strength and a new sense of

unity. We Germans are providing Ukraine with humanitarian, political and military support – and our support will not falter. And, because I know that this war is making you fearful for your own security, as President of the Federal Republic of Germany, I would like to say this to you and to the people in your country: we stand firmly by your side. Your security is our security. We also stand shoulder to shoulder with the Republic of Moldova. We are grateful to have in you, in Romania, such a reliable partner – in NATO and in the European Union. And not least because we are seeing once again just how important European unity is, we will support you in your efforts to join the Schengen area in full before the end of this year.

I am also aware that your country is making a fantastic contribution in taking in refugees from Ukraine. For that I thank you most sincerely. Last year, I was profoundly moved by my visit to the Mihai Viteazul National College here in Bucharest, which had taken in traumatised Ukrainian children and where teachers who had themselves fled from Ukraine were doing their utmost to ensure that these children could be taught in special Ukrainian classes. This time I will be visiting a support centre in Timișoara, and I am very keen to see what kind of help refugees from Ukraine are receiving there.

I am very much looking forward to the next two days in Sibiu and Timișoara and to my encounters with people there. I am curious to learn what concerns they have, what hopes and longings – to take us back to Iris Wolff. Thank you, also on behalf of my delegation, for extending to us such a warm and friendly welcome to your country. Klaus Iohannis, allow me to propose a toast to your health and to the friendship between our two countries.