



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a discussion at the ASAN Institute for Policy Studies
in Seoul, Republic of Korea,
on 9 February 2018**

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today, at one of the world's most renowned think tanks for foreign and security policy issues.

My visit to Korea is taking place at a very special time. The XXIII Winter Olympic Games will be opened in Pyeongchang this evening. In keeping with the ancient Greek tradition, the Games have always been linked with the idea of the Olympic Truce. This idea is particularly pertinent here on the Korean Peninsula, which is facing very real threats, and it is particularly pertinent these days, following a very tense year for the entire East Asian region. Even if it does not significantly change the immediate situation, the Olympic spirit will enable us to see things from another perspective, at least for a few weeks. And perhaps it will even leave behind a new legacy of hope.

The Olympic Truce is not a new experience for the Republic of Korea. Your country hosted the world's athletes at the Summer Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988. At that time, Solidarity in Poland and glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, which still existed back then, were big topics in my still divided country. In East Germany in particular, people were profoundly moved by these ideas, which gave them courage and fuelled their hopes for reform and change. In my part of the country, in what was then the West, hardly anyone suspected that the division of Germany would soon come to an end.

Here in Korea, the Olympic Truce of Seoul in 1988 swept across a country that had undergone dramatic development in just a few decades, rising from the devastation of the war and an authoritarian form of government to an incredible level of freedom and prosperity. Your country established democratic rule under its own steam. To this day, it is one of the world's leading industrialised countries, although the older generation still has vivid memories of hunger and

displacement. South Korea's success story is a textbook example of thriving democratic development. Your country can rightfully be proud of these great achievements and I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate you on them.

My country underwent an historic transformation far sooner than most people had expected. While two German teams competed in the Olympic Games in Seoul and Calgary in 1988, it was once more united German teams which travelled to Barcelona and Albertville in 1992. Between these two years, the people of East Germany had demanded in a peaceful revolution what some today may regard as a matter of course, namely their inalienable right to freedom, democracy and opportunities for prosperity.

And they achieved this. Following unrelenting pressure from protests, the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989 – peacefully and without bloodshed. Just 11 months later, German reunification had become a political reality, in part because the former Allied Powers of the Second World War put new faith in my country. Berlin, the German capital, no longer symbolised the divided Europe, but instead became a shining beacon of our continent's peaceful unification.

The deadly Wall that bisected Berlin stood for over 28 years, more precisely for 10,316 days. These more than 10,000 days tore families apart and seared deep into people's lives on both sides. It was difficult to imagine our country without this Wall, without the death strips and automatic weapons systems. For those who grew up with all of this, it had become part of normal life.

But since then, another 28 years have passed. For four days now, since 5 February, the Wall has been gone for longer than it divided our country. The fall of the Wall was followed by days of joy and relief for us Germans. However, we soon saw that years of hard work lay ahead of us as we strove to establish cohesion in our country. For many East Germans, this period went hand in hand with profound and abrupt changes. Certainly, they gained new freedoms, but they also experienced losses and disappointments – especially the loss of jobs. Reunification did not spell the end of history for Germany at any rate, but rather the start of a new, exciting and, for most Germans, very successful chapter in our history.

In speaking to you today about these two periods of 10,000 days, my main aim is to tell you that nothing is set in stone. And that is why it is worth remaining hopeful.

It is not naive or unrealistic to feel hope. On the contrary, hope is where one finds the will to change reality. At least, that is what my East German compatriots stand for – the people who proved their courage to bring about change both before and after the fall of the Wall.

Naturally, I am aware that the situation in Korea is very different. Our shared experience of division should not cause us to lose sight of another fundamentally different dimension of the challenges facing Korea today, particularly you here in the South. This other dimension is characterised by two factors. Firstly, the fact that you have already been divided for over 70 years and, secondly, that the military, and now also nuclear threat, is not abstract but immediate and omnipresent.

I firmly believe that maintaining political and economic pressure is vital. I firmly believe that this pressure is necessary to create a genuine readiness to engage in dialogue. That is what I learned from the negotiations with Iran, in which I was involved for eight years. But we must also remember that dialogue is the only possible way to achieve *détente*, and ultimately peace and unity. Those who are serious about finding solutions in this dialogue must, on the one hand, maintain the political pressure, but also constantly suggest ideas and make proposals for a better future. They must want to overcome the status quo. In short, they always need both – hope and courage.

The situation in East Asia is both tenuous and more complex than almost ever before. Old certainties are being called into question – we in Germany and you in Korea only need to look at the new discussion with the US on the future of free trade. At the same time, rising powers such as China and Russia are promising prosperity and security – but without freedom and without democratic self-determination. China in particular is taking an increasingly self-confident stance and confronting the international community – especially the Republic of Korea – with fundamental questions on regional security structure. Nor have relations between the democratic neighbouring countries of South Korea and Japan been free from discord and conflicts in recent years, as we have observed from Germany, irrespective of the fundamental common ground that certainly exists between these two countries. And, indeed, I hope that the intensive efforts to find and cultivate this common ground will continue. Above all, nuclear armament in North Korea makes any thought of reunification or even merely meaningful and sustained dialogue seem like a flight of fancy at the moment.

But that is precisely why I am reminding you today that, in principle, nothing is written in stone. That is why I am talking about the willingness to draw up a blueprint for a better future. If this willingness does not exist here in Korea, then it is even less prevalent in other parts of the world. I know that any scenario for a peaceful and reunited Korea only has a hope of succeeding if it safeguards the region's foreign policy stability. That is why I set up an advisory group during my visit in 2014 which focuses on these foreign policy aspects of reunification. And if I may convey just one message here today, then it is that the Koreans themselves will always have the greatest

and most sincere interest in peaceful reunification. Particularly here, hope must be nurtured.

I would be happy to discuss these topics with you. I cannot think of any better time for these discussions than today – the day when Korean athletes will enter the stadium under one flag during the opening of the Olympic Games.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to our discussion.