

Speech for the 22 September 2022 celebration at the German Embassy
in Beijing to mark the Day of German Unity

Minister Deng,

Excellencies,

Honoured guests,

My husband and I bid you all a very warm welcome to Germany's national holiday, the Day of German Unity. It commemorates 3 October 1990, when the Germans of East and West, after four decades of separation, brought a peaceful end to the division of Germany.

3 October 1990 is one of the happiest days in Germany's chequered history. This year, however, I also want to use the Day of German Unity celebrations to remember the man without whom that German reunification – peaceful, in freedom, carried by the will of the people in both parts of the country – is practically inconceivable:

Mikhael Gorbachev, who, as you know, died a few weeks ago at the age of 91.

It was he who, with his reforms in what was then the Soviet Union, *glasnost* and *perestroika* – openness and restructuring – paved the way for the peaceful revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe and thus also for German reunification.

Gorbachev is seen very critically in today's Russia, especially by those who think in old categories of territorial might, who measure power and significance in terms of dominion over as many people and as much land as possible, and who see the loss of such power as a tragedy.

In the united Germany of 1990, embedded in the peace order of the European Union that was built after the Second World War, we did believe and hope that such thinking had been consigned to the past.

Such naivety has been **irrevocably left without all foundation by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine**. Russia had guaranteed the sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. The attempt in 2022 to subjugate its historically and culturally close neighbour, in breach of that assurance and against the will of the population, brought the dream of a lasting peaceful order in Europe to an end for now. As we now know, peace and freedom in Europe need always to be won and defended anew – and that task, too, we shall master.

Peaceful **German reunification** could succeed in 1989/90 because it occurred at a **propitious moment in history**.

- It succeeded because Mikhail Gorbachev cleared the way for the Berlin Wall to come down, for the self-determination of the peoples and states of the former Eastern bloc, and because the people were determined to secure their freedom and the chance to live in a social order of their choosing by peaceful means.

- It succeeded because it was carried by the will of the people in both parts, in East Germany and in West Germany.
- It succeeded because, in the end, those in power in East Germany did not try in the crucial days and weeks to stop the march of history by violence and bloodshed.
- And, not least, German reunification only succeeded because it had the explicit consent not only of all four of the victorious powers from the Second World War but of Germany's neighbours too. Some were sceptical about a reunited Germany at first, but they accepted it.

For that reason, we Germans to this day feel very grateful to our neighbours, with whom we live in peace within unanimously recognised borders. As a result of reconciliation and friendship with the countries around us and within the framework of the European Union, our borders have in fact become so permeable that you hardly notice them any more. Stroll along beside the Baltic Sea on the island of Usedom, and you will at some point find yourself in Poland – without a frontier fence or a checkpoint getting in your way.

There is another historic event that I wish to commemorate today.

Fifty years ago, on 11 October 1972, the Federal Republic of Germany and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations.

Germany and China likewise benefited from exchange and cooperation in many fields: trade, business and science, but also culture, education, and protection of the climate and environment. More than 5,000 German companies have a presence in China today. Economically, our two countries are closely intertwined.

Looking back on a 50-year success story should inspire us to seek the best ways in which to take our relations forwards to our mutual gain in the coming decades – recognising and respecting the differences and discrepancies between our societies. Success always has many wellsprings in all areas and at all levels, including the highest political level.

Personal contact is crucial to that process. I hope that we in Europe, in Germany, and in China too, will find a way as soon as may be to conquer the **COVID-19 pandemic**, so that in-person meetings, dialogue and exchange, visits and travel can take place easily and regularly, as they used to.

As you may know, the German Government is currently working for the first time on a **China strategy** for Germany. This shows how important China is to us – and how vital we consider China's cooperation and contribution in dealing with global problems.

Above all others, I want to mention **climate change** in this context. The news this summer made it dramatically clear yet again: climate change is a reality, and its effects are becoming ever more tangible for all people across the globe. That applies to Germany, where we had to deal with forest fires on an unprecedented scale, and shipping on the river Rhine was almost brought to a standstill for lack of water. And it applies just the same, as you know, to China, with droughts and energy scarcity in Sichuan and elsewhere.

Without China on side – the world's largest emitter of CO₂ – the fight against climate change cannot be won. But nor can it be won without the EU and Germany, also major emitters and energy consumers. We are ready to invest together in a green future, in e-mobility, renewable energy, environment-friendly agriculture, clean oceans – in short, in implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Peace and security are in jeopardy today, in Europe, in Asia, worldwide. China has special responsibility here as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Around the world, Germany will stand by its commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and its dedication to crisis prevention.

We are looking back today – on 50 years of German-Chinese relations and on 32 years of German unity.

And we are looking forwards – to the common challenges that face us.

This evening presents a good and pleasant opportunity for interpersonal dialogue. Therefore and without further ado, let me bid you all, once again, very warmly welcome. Do enjoy the evening!