

07.02.2013 Ausstellungseröffnung Elysée-Vertrag

Cher collègue, friends, liebe Gäste,

With great pleasure I welcome you all here at the German House et je suis ravi d'accueillir très chaleureusement nos amis et co-célébrants françaises et français. This year France and Germany celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Élysée Treaty and I am happy that we can do that together here tonight with the opening of an exhibition commemorating this important event and with a few delicacies for which we enjoy a certain reputation.

This Treaty marked a historic step of unprecedented significance. Over centuries our two countries knew what used to be called "Erbfeindschaft" or hereditary enmity. Longstanding cultural ties notwithstanding, the struggle for preeminence in Central Europe had been a typical feature of our common history. This meant to my own family, for instance, that my grandfather fought the French in the war 1870/71, my father in the First and in the Second World War, his brother fell in France and is buried there.

All the more ground-breaking was the decision of General de Gaulle and Chancellor Adenauer to embark on a new era, an era of friendship and close cooperation. The so-called Élysée Treaty, the French-German Friendship Pact, opened the way not only to healing and reconciliation but to a partnership that has become a cornerstone of the European Union. In the world of politics, 50 years is a long period of time. And in European history, 50 years of peaceful cooperation is almost without precedent. Our partnership has been compared to a long-lasting marriage. There is some truth in it, as even the best marriages experience ups and downs. But what is quite striking in our relationship is our firm conviction that there is absolutely no way back to the times of outright confrontation. We often come from different ends and we discuss at length and with vigour - but we know that, eventually, too much depends on a constructive outcome and we compromise. This is something we had to learn but we learned our lesson.

Without reconciliation between France and Germany European integration would never have had a chance. Quite to the contrary: This process has immensely benefitted of the dynamics coming from French-German initiatives and much will depend on them in future.

But it is not only the political dimension that counts, it is very much the emotional one as well. Even though French and Germans live so close together we do not know too much about each other. Therefore, a core element of the Élysée Treaty was the youth exchange that has brought together up to now 8 million of young French and Germans. Likewise about 2000 city partnerships have been established as well as many other exchanges on all levels of society. Business and academic networks grow.

Tradition has it that General de Gaulle said to Chancellor Adenauer, who was known for his love for roses: Notre traité n'est pas une rose ni même un rosier, mais une roseraie ! Les roses ne durent que l'espace d'un matin. Mais une roseraie dure très

longtemps quand on le veut ! *Our treaty is not a rose, nor even a rose bush, but a rose garden. A single rose soon wilts – but a rose garden, if tended well, can last forever!*

In this spirit, I trust the French-German Friendship will last and flourish.