



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at Singapore Management University
on 2 November 2017**

Thank you very much for the warm welcome!

It's a great honor to deliver the Ho Rih Hwa Lecture, on my first visit as Federal President of Germany to your country, to Singapore.

I can tell you: it's a wonderful view from this podium! I see into the faces of young and bright people – students of Singapore Management University and other universities in Singapore. And as the excellent reputation of this university reaches far beyond the borders of Singapore, I also see students, researchers and guests from all over the world in this room, including many from Germany. Auch meinen Landsleuten also ein herzliches Willkommen heute Abend!

I would like to welcome especially former President Tony Tan – thank you for being with us today. My special thanks also to Ho Kwon Ping, the founding chairman of this university and our host tonight. Mr Ho, with the rise of Singapore Management University, you have helped to educate a generation of future leaders who are keen and able to shape the path of this country and – something that has been especially important to you – not just for their own personal benefit, but for the common good.

The great Lee Kuan Yew once said: "Singapore has to continually reconstruct itself and keep its relevance to the world."

Well, my dear students, one day, that is going to be your task – and it is no small task. In my country, a young generation faces a similar task, as our European Union is struggling to define its role in this fast-changing world. So tonight, we will certainly have a lot to talk about.

First of all, I would like to tell you about a picture I recently saw on the cover of a magazine. It shows a busy sidewalk in a big city – it could be Singapore, it could be Berlin. You see figures rushing past, typing on their smartphones, drinking from their paper coffee cups,

walking their dog. Only one person in the background is not moving – a beggar, sitting on the sidewalk.

Now, this is what strikes you: All the passing figures are robots. Only the beggar is a human being.

And one of the passing robots is throwing the human beggar a few pieces of loose change.

What a grim vision! But I think it is emblematic of what many people in my country, Europe and the United States – where the magazine is from – feel when they look towards the future. They are fascinated, on the one hand – but at the same time, they feel fear. Even though many of us are doing well, even though we live in the most prosperous era this world has ever seen, there is fear that things are going to get worse.

This fear, my friends, must not take hold of us! And for that reason, it is important to look closely at where it comes from. I believe there are many sources of fear:

Technology is one of them. The digital revolution, the rapid spread of data technology, automation and robotics – all that is what the picture plays on.

Another source comes from the enormous tectonic shifts on the global political stage: the rise of China, the uncertain role of the United States, the erosion of a rules-based international order and the re-emergence of protectionism and barriers to trade. The credibility of the West as a normative project and a beacon of freedom, the rule of law and democracy is in question. That is what I hope to discuss on this visit to Singapore, and later in Australia and New Zealand. I am trying to identify the elements of international order that we can hope to build together. So even though from Germany's point of view, I am travelling East, I am seeking the future of the West.

Finally, and in connection with these tectonic political shifts, we are witnessing a new wave of crisis and conflict across the world – terrorism, civil war, ethnic strife, displacement and mass migration. Even the threat of nuclear disaster has returned to this very region.

In a world as interconnected as ours, none of these sources of fear is abstract or faraway. Be it migration, climate change, growing inequality or political polarisation – in the end, it's about our societies! It's about the question: How will we live together in the future? That is what makes the picture in the magazine so striking. The question is: What will the sidewalks of our cities look like?

But, tonight, I want to encourage you to ask a different question. Not: how will we live together in 10, 20 or 30 years? But rather: how do we want to live together in 10, 20 or 30 years?!

That is the privilege you have as students and researchers at a prestigious university like this one. You can take the long view! I saw that this year, six universities in Singapore are co-organising a lecture series called "Imagining the Next 50 Years". I think that's a bold approach – and it's something that we in Germany should do more often. We should look through a telescope into the future, rather than just looking at the very next day, the next annual balance sheet or the next election.

So I want to ask you the following question. What future do you want your own country to have? Where do you see us in Europe heading? And most importantly, where do our visions overlap? What can we work on together?

Firstly, I believe that our countries share a firm belief in the benefits of an open and interconnected world. Your former Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, once said: "Singapore cannot afford to have an inward, barricaded, small-island mentality." I can assure you that this is 100 percent true for Germany, too! So let us defend the free and fair exchange of ideas, innovations, goods and services. And let us challenge those who say the opposite. I am convinced that in most cases, putting up walls and barriers will neither keep external problems outside nor create prosperity for those within.

Secondly, an open world can only survive on the basis of international law and rules that apply to everyone. Our nations believe that peace depends on the strength of the law – not the law of the strong. So let us join forces in defending the rules – for example, in the interest of all concerned, we must work together for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

Thirdly, we do not only believe in common rules, but also in common institutions. We believe in the value of constructive multilateralism – or to put it more bluntly, in getting things done together! There are many policy areas in which we already work successfully together, such as trade policy, climate change and cyber security. But when I think of the cooperation between ASEAN and the European Union, much potential remains to be tapped.

Fourthly, we share another important principle. Our countries' success – and this applies both to the past and future – depends on our ability to innovate. It depends on technological leadership, research and a highly skilled workforce. On this visit, I am happy to learn about the collaboration between our universities, research institutes and businesses, such as Siemens' digital hub, the Technical University of Munich's TUMCREATE Institute and Asia's first Fraunhofer institute – all of which are here in Singapore!

I believe we can be leaders in the digital revolution and Industrie 4.0. But I also believe that we need to steer this revolution not for the profit of a few, but for the benefit of society as a whole.

So if you ask me what I want the sidewalks of our cities to look like in the future, I can tell you this much: I don't mind the robots – but I do mind the beggar!

I want technology not to increase inequality – but reduce it!

Not to exclude people – but enable them to participate!

Not to create poverty and disease – but eradicate them!

As I speak here today, I must not forget to say “happy birthday”. This year, you are celebrating ASEAN's fiftieth anniversary. ASEAN has been a great success story in fostering peace and cooperation in this region. And despite all the differences between this region and Europe, let me just say that as a German, I believe there is nothing more valuable in our recent history than the peace and friendship with our neighbours built through the European Union. So I very much hope that we will do even more to share our experiences and expand our partnership between ASEAN and the EU!

Now, sometimes when people from the ASEAN region ask me about the European Union, they assume that it was intended from the outset to become the global economic power that it is today. Let me tell you that this is by no means the case. The original intention was to bring peace to a continent ravaged by centuries of war. On this basis, the European Union grew closer and closer together. I grew up in the belief that the path of the European Union knows only one direction, namely further integration. This belief has been shattered in recent years. The forces of disintegration and anti-European resentment have grown stronger – especially with the UK's decision to leave the EU, but also in many other recent elections across Europe.

Again and again, we have learned that partnership and cohesion cannot be imposed by institutions or decrees from above, but must grow from below as people meet, build ties, debunk prejudices about each other and form friendships. I believe we must do more to strengthen the ties among people, especially among the young, both in Europe and here in Asia. That is why Singapore was right to make people-to-people contacts a key priority as it assumes the Chairmanship of ASEAN.

For us in Europe, one of the most successful programmes in this regard is called Erasmus. For the past 30 years, it has brought millions of young Europeans as exchange students to other European countries. Many of them have had the most formative experiences of their lives as Erasmus students – from starting businesses to falling in love... Perhaps an exchange programme for students from ASEAN countries, similar to our Erasmus programme, could be a great addition to

Singapore's strategy. I am sure that members of the European Union would be willing to share their experiences and even to look for opportunities for exchanges between ASEAN and EU students. Isn't that a great vision for future sidewalks: crowded with curious exchange students exploring each other's hometowns?

How do we want to live together in 10, 20 or 30 years?

It's a big question and we will find common answers – some of which I have mentioned- but we will also give different answers.

Of course, there are profound differences in how we in Germany and you in Singapore organise our societies.

I am no fan of preaching to other countries about how to live – but I am a fan of lively debate! I believe in discussing and defending the merits of what we do and why we do it!

These debates are important because people don't automatically trust everything that authority or tradition tells them.

In Germany, we have a story about an older man – maybe one with white hair – who has a terrible pain in one of his legs. So he goes to the doctor. The doctor looks at him and says: "Oh, it's just old age. There is nothing I can do about it."

"Impossible!" the old man says. "You don't know what you are doing."

The doctor says: "How dare you say that? I am a doctor! I am telling you that it's old age!"

The man says: "Well, that can't be! My other leg is fine, and it's exactly the same age!"

So people don't automatically believe and accept what the authorities say – and I think that's a good thing! It is good to look left and right, and to look at other corners of the world. It is good to ask: Do things really have to be as they are? Can't they be better?

I seek out these debates back home in my country, but also here with you today, because I know that the ideal of Western liberal democracy is by no means uncontested.

These days, many people look at the European Union or the United States and say: "Well, this doesn't look very harmonious." And many people look at China and see stability and economic growth – without a movement towards greater political freedom. So China poses a challenge to the West – not only an economic and geopolitical challenge, but also an ideological challenge.

I recently invited a young intellectual named Parag Khanna to my official residence in Berlin. He suggested that we learn from your country to value the output of government over the inputs, to value technocratic solutions over democratic elections and to compromise.

I would like to continue this debate with you here. How would you balance the inputs and outputs of government? This involves many pressing policy questions.

In the face of terrorist threats, for example, how do we reconcile the demands of security and freedom?

Or in times of increasing ethnic diversity, how do we balance the need for social stability with the rights and freedoms of different ethnic and religious groups?

How can we prevent radicalisation?

How can we ensure that everyone learns a common language?

All these questions are especially pressing in my country, as we have taken in more than a million refugees over the past two years. So on this trip, I am interested in learning more, especially from my colleague, your new President, about Singapore's long-standing experience in integrating different ethnicities.

And not least I want to ask how one reconciles the desire for social harmony with freedom of conscience and expression. If you ask my opinion, I think there is no inherent contradiction between democratic input and output. On the contrary, I think there is a positive link between the two. I think the broader political and economic participation one has, the more successful a society becomes in the long term.

In my experience, better results will be achieved by letting the arts, sciences and civil society flourish freely rather than trying to direct their every move.

In my experience, it is more convincing for the general public if one engages in debates with one's political opponents rather than excluding them.

And in my experience, you are more likely to find out what's wrong in your society when you allow dissenting voices and the scrutiny of a free press rather than silencing them.

I know it might sound almost paradoxical, but I think democracy's greatest strength is its ability to discover and correct its own weakness. Democracy has a unique power to self-correct!

I look forward to debating these issues with you in more detail because in the end, there is only one answer to the question of how we will live together in the future, and that is you, the young people.

Allow me to conclude my speech with one last story. When a wise man was asked by a young woman what the future would be like, he said: "The future is like the battle between two wolves. One is evil – it is violence, lies and fear. The other one is good – it is peace, truth and

justice." So the young woman asked: "Which wolf will win?" And the wise man answered: "The one you feed."

So, you see, the future is uncertain – but it is up to you to shape it! Thank you for listening. I look forward to your questions.