



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the opening of a German-Moldovan business conference  
in Chisinau/Moldova  
on 29 September 2021**

In Germany, every child is familiar with the Brothers Grimm, whose legacy includes a significant collection of folk tales. The two brothers handed down a popular fable about a hare and a hedgehog. The story goes like this: a hedgehog challenges a hare to a race. When the contest on the field gets under way, the hedgehog runs only a few paces, but has stationed his wife at the finishing line, who is the spitting image of him. On the finishing straight, the hare believes victory to be at hand, which is when the hedgehog's wife stands up and calls out: "I'm already here!"

I sometimes have this story in mind when I meet representatives of the German business community abroad. Wherever in the world I travel to as Federal President, for the most part German businesspeople are waiting for me who have long been based there, who are creating jobs and fostering good and close relations between our countries. And they call out to me: "How nice of you to come! We're already here!"

The last time I visited Moldova was in 2016, back when I was Foreign Minister. This visit today is the first to Moldova by any Federal President ever, and I am most delighted, Maia Sandu, to be here today. However, like in the fable, I was not the first to get here as Federal President, but am encountering an established and well networked German business community here in Chisinau. This is very much in keeping with the "we're already here" line.

Business contacts are important for the relations between our countries. We want to expand these existing ties and breathe new life also into the political contacts between our two countries in these times of social new dawn and political renewal in Moldova. Thank you very much for inviting me here today.

I have travelled a great deal in Germany's eastern neighbourhood within and outside the EU in the second half of this year. I have been to

Poland, Slovenia, Czechia and Slovakia. I will travel to Romania and Ukraine next month. I am doing this most deliberately. After all, political stability and economic development in this region are mutually interdependent and mutually beneficial. They are both in the best interests of my country and in the interests of a united Europe. And this is why Germany intends to do its utmost to support this development – and not only with words. Madam President, your region, your country, your success is important for Germany.

My visit is therefore both: it pays tribute to your political new dawn and offers most tangible support. I have brought with me today a pledge by the German Government to contribute funds for development cooperation totalling almost 10 million euro. In so doing, Germany wants to inject additional impetus into the reforms triggered by you, Madam President.

Political reforms, tackling corruption and a functioning administration are all fundamental pillars of a successful community. They are also a precondition for your gradual move towards the EU, towards the prospect of accession. This path is long and arduous and – unlike in the fable I mentioned at the beginning – there are no shortcuts. But I am certain that the path that you have set out on here in Moldova points in the right direction. It can guide your country towards a better future. Permit me to pledge my country's full support in this regard, Madam President.

But we also know that change is not only something that comes from above. Change also needs the support of a vibrant civil society. And change must be supported by a strong business community that creates good jobs in which people perceive prospects for themselves, as well as a brighter future for themselves and their children. When German companies create jobs here, then this also helps to keep skilled workers in your country.

This is the motivation behind today's business conference. Germany and Moldova are close trading partners today. Germany is Moldova's fourth-biggest export market and its fifth-largest import partner. German direct investments total around 275 million euro. German companies have created almost 9000 jobs here, in the automotive supply industry, in mechanical engineering, in the food industry, and in many other sectors besides. And this is why my business delegation also includes representatives from the agricultural, IT and electronics sectors, as well as from the automotive supply and construction materials industry.

The numbers here are impressive. However, in view of the spirit of political renewal, in view of the new era here in Moldova that we are sensing right now, I see great potential for stepping up efforts considerably. We want to support German businesspeople in their activities in Moldova and their trade with Moldova. And we want to point

to prospects for new economic cooperative partnerships – in both directions.

In times of increasing protectionism, it is especially important to me to emphasise that fair free trade is not a zero-sum game. Both sides stand to benefit – economically and politically. My wish for today is therefore this: let us expand our economic cooperation – for Moldova, for Germany!

When we talk about business, money is not far from our minds. The currency in Moldova is the leu. Leu means lion. I don't have to tell you any fables when I say that lions are proud, strong animals.

Moldova is a proud country, and it has met many preconditions for becoming an economically strong country. It is a country that, in geographical terms, is situated on the fringes of Europe, but with its new dawn, with its dynamism and determination, which you, Madam President, embody, deserves our attention and support – and which offers opportunities. The future of Moldova is close to my heart. And I hope that – when I come here again – even more German businesspeople will call out to me: "I'm already here."

Allow me to wish you all a successful conference. Thank you very much.