

Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you on this beautiful Beirut evening to the Day of German Unity 2017. On this day, we are looking back at the moment, when what had begun with the fall of the Berlin Wall, culminated in the formal unification of our country. We therefore celebrate today our 27th birthday, and we do indeed consider this a happy and joyful occasion. This year, however, we cannot celebrate without paying tribute to the late father of German unity, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who passed away on June 16th of this year. Helmut Kohl was a German patriot and a true European, and for him, in his own words, "German unity and European unification are two sides of the same medal!"

And it is in this spirit precisely, that Germany – as a European member state – has taken on more and more international responsibility in recent years. For Germans today, it is not enough to only express concern when crises and conflicts arise. Germany today commits itself internationally in many fields and many regions, including in the Middle East, and, of course, in Lebanon.

10 days ago, Germany elected a new Bundestag. The electoral results acknowledge both: the continuity and success of our Federal Government and the good work of Chancellor Angela Merkel. However, a new right-wing party has entered our parliament in strong numbers – and that worries both Germans and Non-Germans.

We are, indeed, worried – surprised we are not: For many years, Europe has observed the phenomenon of populist right wing rhetorics, and that trend has now apparently reached Germany. Certainly, parliamentary proceedings will become more exhausting; there will be sharp or even shrill tones, and this will be noticed abroad. However, I am confident that our democratic system and our society are strong and mature enough to cope with these challenges.

اصدقائي الاحباء، حضرة الضيوف الاعزاء،

في هذه المناسبة كما في العديد من اللقاءات السابقة، لن تفوتني الفرصة لأعرب عن محبتي لبلدكم. مع اقامتي الاولى، أمضيت وعائلتي أكثر من 6 سنوات في لبنان. خلال هذه الفترة لم نقع في حب هذا البلد فحسب، بل أصبح لبنان جزءاً لا يتجزأ من حياتنا. دعوني أعتنم هذه الفرصة لأعبر لكم عن تقديرنا للثقافة، والصدقة، والاهتمام، ولأشكركم على الضيافة التي تستقبلوننا بها دوماً! لكننا نعلم ايضاً أن السنوات الماضية لم تكن سهلة على الشعب اللبناني، وانني أتفهم همومكم وتوقعاتكم. فكم يسعدني اليوم بالأخص أن أقول من هذا المنبر: لقد حقق لبنان الكثير في العام الماضي!

في 31 تشرين الاول 2016، انتُخب العماد ميشال عون رئيساً للجمهورية، مما أنهى فترة فراغ سياسي طويلة. تمكن رئيس الوزراء سعد الحريري من تشكيل حكومة الوحدة الوطنية في كانون الأول، وساهم بذلك في احياء السياسة والاقتصاد في لبنان.

منذ ذلك الوقت، والحكومة تعمل بجهد لسد الثغرات ودعم الاقتصاد من خلال تحسين شروط العمل للمستثمرين في القطاع الخاص، وتحديد الاسس القانونية لتداخل الاستثمارين العام والخاص، كما تم تسجيل حركة ناشطة في مجال تأمين الطاقة. وبأشرت الحكومة بمعالجة أزمة النفايات فتم توكيل هذه المهمة للجهات المختصة، كما وُضعت خطة عمل لإدراج نظام فرز النفايات في مدينة بيروت في غضون خمسة أشهر. سوف ينعكس كل ذلك بشكل ايجابي على البلد وعلى الشعب!

وقد حان الاوان لذلك! فالعديد من المهام انتظرت للأسف طويلاً تاريخ انجازها، ولا تزال هنالك تحديات كثيرة بانتظاركم. امامكم الانتخابات النيابية المقرر اجراءها في أيار 2018 – وان قرار مجلس الوزراء مؤخراً بتشكيل لجنة انتخابية هو أمر ايجابي. وأؤكد ايضاً على جهوزية ألمانيا والاتحاد الأوروبي لدعم لبنان في إجراء الانتخابات. وللقيادة السياسيين، اوجه طلب عدم تأجيلها!

Chers amis,

Aujourd'hui, nous ne pouvons nier que le Liban est comme aucun autre pays voisin, otage d'une guerre qui accable sa politique, son économie et sa société, et nous sommes tous reconnaissants pour ses accomplissements.

Nous savons tous qu'un séjour permanent des réfugiés au Liban n'est aucunement une option. D'ailleurs les réfugiés eux-memes souhaitent revenir chez eux plus que tout.

En attendant, la communauté internationale et notamment l'Allemagne continueront à vous aider et à soutenir votre pays. Nos sommes et nous serons à vos cotes !

L'Allemagne tient ses promesses de la conférence de Bruxelles et pour la première fois depuis des années, l'Allemagne coopère avec un gouvernement actif et réactif.

Parmi les différents défis, L'éducation est la principale priorité à l'ordre du jour ! Sachez que nous ne visons non seulement l'éducation des jeunes syriens mais aussi celle des jeunes libanais défavorisés. En effet, pour l'année scolaire qui vient de débiter, l'Allemagne offre de nouveau une contribution record à l'Etat libanais.

Aussi important que soit le soutien international, les attentes envers votre pays restent élevées : le Liban, comme l'Allemagne ou des autres pays, est jugé à la façon dont il traite les personnes les plus faibles et les plus démunies de la société. Celui qui offense une personne en besoin, blasphème son créateur. Par cela, je vise spécialement les personnes qui ont besoin de protection ou les réfugiés.

Sans aucun doute, les exigences sont élevées et la barre est haute, mais ceci n'est qu'une preuve de plus du prestige spécial et de l'importance mondiale du Liban.

Dear friends,

The importance that Germany attributes to Lebanon is also expressed by our commitment to UNIFIL:

Please allow me to warmly welcome the representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and of UNIFIL, especially the German UNIFIL soldiers – we are honoured by your presence.

Based on Security Council Resolution 1701, Germany has been part of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force (MTF) in troops and deeds for 11 years. And on land, our soldiers work side by side with their Lebanese comrades.

Just a few weeks ago the mandate for UNIFIL was extended after some debate, and enabled the mission to better face current challenges. Fulfilling UNIFIL's mandate remains crucial, and an even more active cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces would further promote that objective.

The Lebanese Armed Forces have shown over the past few weeks and months that they can uphold and defend Lebanese sovereignty – for this you deserve our great respect, and we congratulate you on the successful conclusion of operation « Fajr al-Joroud »! At the same time, we are deeply affected by the loss of lives incurred, as well as by the fate of 9 Lebanese soldiers who had lost their lives three years earlier in the struggle against barbarian extremists.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The German Embassy has changed location. Strictly speaking, we have now **two** locations for **one** German Embassy: one in Rabieh, one in Dekwaneh. For many people – especially the cab drivers – this is still confusing.

Naturally, I will not quantify how much the Federal Government has put into expanding our embassy but I can say this: after tons of gravel, and concrete, after installing dozens of writing desks, 75 extension desks, 72 desk chairs, 105 stacking chairs, computers, shelves, phones and laying 35 kilometers of data cable into concrete, we can say: that was a huge task, and we realized it!

For that I would like to thank all the colleagues at the embassy, especially the administration, for their commitment.

Meine Damen und Herren, liebe Freunde

die Deutsche Botschaft ist nicht die einzige Neueroeffnung, die wir dieses Jahr in der deutschen Community in Beirut gesehen haben:

Das Goethe Institut hat vor einer Woche seine Tueren an einem neuen Standort wiedergeoeffnet und erstrahlt in neuem Glanz!

Lieber Mani Pournaghi, an dieser Stelle, nochmal alles Gute fuer den neuen Start in Gemmayze!

Und da wir gerade bei Neuanfaengen sind: Lassen Sie mich Frau Prof. Schaebler begruessen, die in wenigen Tagen die Leitung des Orient-Instituts uebernehmen wird – herzlich Willkommen! Mein besonderer Dank gilt an dieser Stelle natuerlich Herrn Professor Leder, der das Institut die vergangenen zehn Jahre geleitet und beträchtlich ausgebaut hat. Vielen Dank Herr Professor Leder fuer Ihre Arbeit!

Ich begruesse ganz herzlich auch alle Vertreter der libanesischen und deutschen Wirtschaft, allen voran unsere Sponsoren, die ganz wesentlich zum Zustandekommen dieses Abends beigetragen haben – nutzen Sie die Gelegenheit, sich mit den Aktivitäten und Produkten unserer Sponsoren bekannt zu machen! Deutschland kann stolz sein auf seine Innovationskraft und seinen Wirtschaftsstandort, dies zeigen auch unsere Sponsoren – und das darf zu keinem Jubilaem der deutschen Einheit fehlen. Vielen Dank an Sie!

Dear all,

A few more words on how this evening will go about: We will now listen to Mrs. Franziska Rabl and Mr. Bechara Moufarrej partly singing in duet - thank you very much for coming tonight - I am looking forward to your performance!

After that, the Lebanese Band Association for the Promotion of Music - in short, Le Bam – will take the stage: thank you for joining us tonight!

After them, we will listen to Helmut Schraner and his Holledauer Musikanten - thank you and thanks also to the Bavarian Beer Queen Lena Hochstraßer for being here tonight.

I would also like to thank everyone involved in the preparation of this evening, last but not least the Yacht Club, Zaitounay Bay, and Mr Nazih Tabbara, who will impress us with fireworks in about half an hour.

Finally, I would like to thank all our Lebanese friends who have come in great numbers tonight. This is your evening, tonight we try to give back some of your warmth and hospitality.

And now let me raise my glass to the German-Lebanese relations and to the friendship of our people! Long live Lebanon, and long live Germany ! Enjoy the evening !