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Speech by Foreign Minister Wadephul at the reception to mark the Day of German Unity in Damascus

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Berlin. 9 November 1989. A day that fundamentally changed Germany, and Europe. The Berlin Wall, an utterly impenetrable border, collapsed. A border that for decades had separated German families from one another and divided our country into East and West. I remember it – like almost all Germans who were alive to witness this moment – as if it were yesterday. I could never have imagined back then that I would one day be able to welcome my aunt, my uncle, my cousins, their families, to my home. Because during the years of that division, only I as a West German was able to travel to the East, to the GDR. And not the other way around. Barbed wire, a wall, mines prevented German families from being able to come together. And then there was the day the Wall fell.

And I am sure every Syrian in this room knows that incredible, incomparable and unforgettable feeling. The feeling of hope, of renewal, of a long-awaited new beginning – but also of fear at whether the new freedom is here to stay, whether it will find enough support at home and abroad. Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall did for Germany, 8 December 2024 marks an historic turning point for Syria. The day that more than 50 years of the Assad regime’s reign of terror came to an end and thousands of Syrians around the world took to the streets in celebration. A moment that will go down in history as the beginning of a new chapter for Syria.

In the beginning there was – in Germany as in Syria – boundless joy, courage and hope.

In Germany the fall of the Wall was followed, less than a year later, by 3 October 1990, the day that East and West Germany were reunified. But the path to completely reunifying our society was – and is – not always easy. It was a process full of hard work, marked by political challenges and economic uncertainties – particularly for the people in eastern Germany. And there are some societal rifts that we have still not been able to completely heal. Despite the fact that we in Germany will soon have been reunited in one country for as long as we were separated.

All this to say that, as a German, I can well understand how great the challenge is that you now face in Syria. Your country stands at the beginning of the challenging process of building up its economy and reconciling its society. The long civil war and the decades of dictatorship have left deep wounds. And Syria needs partners and friends. I would therefore like to say to

you all today that, on this long path of growing closer together – on the path towards freedom, prosperity and security – Germany stands ready to help and support Syria with the experience that we have gained.

Freedom, allow me to begin there, is the foundation of any democratic society. And freedom means not just the absence of repression, but also the participation of the various parts of society in political life. This is one reason why Germany stood resolutely against the Assad regime over the years and did not permit any normalisation. And today I can already see that Syria is much freer than one year ago. But we know that Syria's freedom must continue to grow, that the political process must still become more inclusive and participative. In this spirit, I look forward to talking to you all today.

Freedom creates prospects. But for the Syrian people to truly be able to shape their own future, they also need prosperity. That is my second point. I therefore welcome the European Union's decision to lift the economic sanctions on Syria this past May. Having just been named Foreign Minister, I was able to begin campaigning for this immediately with my European counterparts. Happily, this was a success. We lifted the sanctions in order to pave the way for economic development in Syria and create prospects for the future. And I want to say very clearly that Germany is counting on a good future for Syria, Germany is counting on intensive economic relations. This is why I am today accompanied by representatives of German businesses who are interested in helping to rebuild Syria. All of these things together are important steps towards a new prosperity for Syria.

But without security – that is my third point today – freedom and prosperity cannot flourish long-term. When I talk of security, I mean not just the absence of violence, but also stable state institutions. I was very impressed to hear the Syrian President, when I had the chance to speak with him today, repeatedly say: "We are committed to ensuring the state's monopoly on the use of force." This is an important precondition for developing the rule of law, and I am very pleased by it. But security also means fighting terrorism, addressing past injustice and reconciling society. Germany has invested more than 13 billion euro in humanitarian assistance and stabilisation in Syria over the last 14 years. We remain ready and willing to support Syria on its path towards security.

Ladies and gentlemen, after the Second World War Germany lay in ruins, was isolated and battered. And the truth is that without support, without partners and friends, we in Germany would not have managed to rebuild and reunify. This experience continues to shape our actions today.

That is why I stand here today as a friend of Syria. Above all because I hope that in Syria, too – as happened in Germany – what belongs together will once again grow together.

But also because over one million Syrians live in Germany today and have become an integral part of our society. Because our two countries are closely intertwined with one another as a result. I am delighted that some of you have lived and worked in Germany and will now be drawing on your experiences in Germany for the rebuilding of Syria. Thank you for your efforts that strengthen the bridges between our two societies.

The Day of German Unity remains a source of great joy for us Germans. I sincerely hope that you, too, will be able to feel this joy when you look back 35 years from now. On Syria’s path towards freedom, prosperity and security.

To German unity and Syrian unity!

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