Check against delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen,
dear guests,
dear friends,

On November 12, 1955, the first 101 soldiers received their appointment documents for the new armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany. Yesterday marked the 71st anniversary of that day.

This was no ordinary founding ceremony.

Only 16 years earlier, Germany had plunged Europe and the world into a devastating war. Crimes had been committed in Germany's name. Millions had died. Entire countries had been destroyed.

So, in the early 1950s, the question of whether Germany should establish armed forces again was deeply controversial. Germany needed to contribute to the defense of the democratic states of Western Europe and North America—but it could not simply continue where the Wehrmacht had left off.

The crucial question was not only how to build a new army. It was what kind of army it should be.

The answer was the idea of the citizen in uniform.

A soldier was to remain a free citizen: accepting responsibility, respecting human dignity and upholding the values of a democratic constitution. The Bundeswehr was

to be subject to parliamentary control and bound by the law.

This was Germany's answer to its history.

And it remains a defining part of the Bundeswehr's identity today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I joined the Bundeswehr myself in 1992. When I look back, I see how profoundly its mission and structure have changed.

After the end of the Cold War, we hoped for a peaceful Europe—one in which military conflict would become less important. The Bundeswehr was significantly reduced. We

focused on international missions, crisis management and stabilization. Our soldiers did important work, often far from home.

Looking back, however, we underestimated what strong armed forces contribute to peace and security.

We saw the peace dividend too much as an opportunity to reduce military capabilities—and too little as the benefit of peace itself: the opportunity to live in safety, build prosperity and strengthen cooperation.

Peace is not guaranteed by good intentions alone.

In 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea and began its war against Ukraine. We did not

draw the necessary military conclusions with sufficient determination.

Then, on February 24, 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine made the consequences unmistakably clear. War had returned to Europe on a scale that many people had believed impossible.

We have learned that the desire for peace alone does not guarantee peace.

Military strength is not an end in itself. It enables us to defend ourselves against attack, deter aggression and make political decisions freely.

That is why the Bundeswehr is once again focusing on the defense of Germany and its

allies. We must strengthen our capabilities, our equipment, our readiness and our personnel.

Not because we want war.

But because we must be able to protect our country and our partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The history of the Bundeswehr is a history of responsibility: responsibility for the lessons of the past, for the security of the present and for the future of our societies.

Today, we understand more clearly that freedom and security cannot be taken for

granted.

Military strength and democratic responsibility must go hand in hand.

This is what connects the founding of the Bundeswehr, my own generation and the close relationship between Germany and Kazakhstan.

Thank you for joining us on this special day. I thank our Kazakh hosts and friends for the trust and friendship between our countries.

And I thank all soldiers—those serving today and those who served in the past—for their service to peace, freedom and security.

Peace requires hope. Security also requires

people who accept responsibility and are prepared to protect what matters.

Thank you.