

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear compatriots:

I'm honored and privileged today to welcome you all to the opening ceremony of an exhibition dedicated to the 500th anniversary of Armenian book printing. Cultural and educational cooperation of Armenia with the Federal state of Saxony Anhalt and Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg in particular has been very fruitful and played an important role in the development of Armenian-German relations, the 20th anniversary of which we mark this year. And I'm sure that today's remarkable event will occupy a very distinctive place in the annals of our bilateral relations. Using this opportunity on behalf of my government I want to express my words of sincere appreciation to the sponsors of the exhibition Mr. Stephan Dorgerloh, the minister of culture of Saxony Anhalt, Mrs. Szabados, the mayor of Halle city, Mr. Friedrich Stumpf, the chairman of Sparkassenstiftung Halle, Professor Dr. Udo Sträter, the rector of Martin-Luther-University, and Mrs. Barbara Schneider-Kempf, the General Director of Berlin public library.

My special thanks to the Minister of Culture of Armenia Mrs. Hasmik Poghosyan, who is not here today because of another remarkable Armenian-German cultural event. Ms. Minister, along with your fellow countrywoman, state Minister Mrs. Cornelia Pieper, is opening a German exhibition in Yerevan.

Let me welcome the deputy minister of culture of Armenia, Mr. Arthur Poghosyan, and thank him for the ministry's valuable support in organizing this exhibition.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As important as the last 20 years were for Armenian-German relations, let me tell you that they do not fully reflect the rich history of interaction and collaboration between our nations. As a testimony I would like to refer to one historical fact. Although the first Armenian book was printed in Venice in 1512, it is well documented that the first book with Armenian letters was published here in Germany in 1486.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The formation of linguistic, confessional, and cultural characteristics defines the identity of any nation. Although in geopolitical terms historical Armenia stood between the classical and oriental worlds, it remained essentially an oriental society with a culture strongly influenced by Zoroastrian beliefs and customs. However, two historical

developments turned Armenian culture westwards. The first was Armenia's adoption of Christianity as the state religion about 17 centuries ago, making it the first Christian state in the world. The second was the creation of the Armenian alphabet 16 centuries ago, which erected a new barrier against assimilation and functioned as a powerful weapon for education and evangelical work. While the Armenian ethnos and its historical homeland became gradually separated by external powers, Armenian Apostolic faith and Armenian language augmenting each other defined our national identity.

Introduced 500 years ago in Western Europe, Armenian book printing promoted new movements of cultural advancement for the Armenian nation. This innovation had a profound role on the spread of philosophy, theology, and literature among Armenians throughout Europe and beyond. This method of printing can be credited not only for a revolution in the means of production, but also for fostering rapid development of new professions and skills among Armenians. Who knows, may be these developments echoed later in Singapore, where in 1845 an Armenian Khachik Movses started The Strait Times, the highest-selling English language daily in Singapore today.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On December 14th 2011 in Venice, Italy, the president of Armenia Mr. Sargsyan inaugurated the commencement of events dedicated to the 500th anniversary of Armenian book printing. This historical accomplishment of our forefathers will be celebrated in Armenia and other countries worldwide throughout 2012. Due to the quality and variety of programs, UNESCO has chosen Yerevan as a World Book Capital of 2012. In this regard the Director-General of this organization, Mrs. Irina Bokova said *„I congratulate the city of Yerevan, which has presented a particularly interesting program with many different themes, including the freedom of expression, as well as several activities for children, who will be the readers and authors of tomorrow”*.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The people of Armenia are proud of this recognition and will be happy to host you all and introduce you to our unique cultural heritage and recent accomplishments.

In conclusion, let me thank in your person all those who made this memorable day possible.