



## **“Europe: renewing confidence – strengthening commitment”**

**Speech by  
Federal President Joachim Gauck  
on the prospects for the European idea  
on 22 February 2013  
at Schloss Bellevue**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

There has never been this much Europe! I say that as someone who is profoundly grateful to be able to look across this room and welcome guests from Germany and from all over Europe. Allow me to extend a warm welcome to you.

There has never been this much Europe. A lot of people, especially in Germany, currently have very different feelings about that when they, for example, open their morning newspapers. There we usually find Europe reduced to four letters – euro – and read about crisis. Time and again, the stories centre around summit diplomacy and rescue packages. It is disheartening. We read about difficult negotiations, and when we read about successes they are usually only partial successes. And time and again, the main theme is a sense of unease, even unmistakable anger, which cannot be ignored. In some member states, people are afraid they are the ones footing the bill in this crisis. In others, there is growing fear of facing ever harsher austerity and falling into poverty. For many ordinary people in Europe, the balance between giving and receiving, between debt and liability, responsibility and a place at the table no longer seems fair.

Add to that the litany of criticism we have been hearing about for a long time: annoyance with so-called Brussels technocrats and their mania for regulation; complaints that decisions are not transparent enough; distrust of an impenetrably complex network of institutions;

and, not least, resistance to the growing significance of the European Council and the dominant role of the Franco-German tandem.

Attractive though Europe is, the European Union leaves too many people feeling powerless and without a voice. I hear this and read it on almost a daily basis and can tell you: there are issues in Europe that need clearing up. When I see all the signs of people's impatience, exhaustion and frustration, when I hear about polls showing a populace unsure about pursuing "more" Europe, it seems to me that we are pausing on a new threshold – unsure whether we should really stride out on the onward journey. There is more to this crisis than its economic dimension. It is also a crisis of confidence in Europe as a political project. This is not just a struggle for our currency; we are struggling with an internal quandary too.

All that being said – you still see before you an unabashed pro-European, and a man who feels the need to reflect on what Europe has meant in the past, what it means now, and what potential it still has for the future. Let me take you through these things as I see them today.

This is also a chance for me to reassess what I said so euphorically shortly after I came to office. I said straight out that we wanted to go for more Europe. These days, I would no longer put it quite so impetuously. When we talk about "more Europe", we need to at least know what it means, we need nuance. In what areas can and should more Europe help our joint venture succeed? What do we want Europe to look like? What do we want to develop and strengthen, and what do we want to keep in bounds? Last but not least, how can we engender greater confidence in more Europe, more confidence than we have at present?

Let us look back. The beginning was certainly full of promise. Only five years after the end of the Second World War, France's Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed to his partners in Europe that they found a European Coal and Steel Community. France and Germany thus became the major drivers of European development – and wartime enemies became close partners. Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Élysée Treaty this January, we realized anew how valuable a friendship this has become for Europe, and how fortunate we are to have the friendship live on through the next generation, which will continue to shape it.

When it all began, in 1950, the visionary was Jean Monnet. His goal was to secure peace in Europe by turning it into a community which would benefit the member states rationally at the same time. It was not only sensible but also in their national interest. This integration also constituted West Germany's first step towards rehabilitation in the international community. France and the other partner countries had their security concerns alleviated by checks on

coal and steel production that included German industry. The idea, difficult to put into practice, but politically very clear-sighted, was that economic integration would eventually lead to political integration too. Incidentally, Walther Rathenau said that back in 1913, exactly one hundred years ago. Where states once fought for resources and hegemony, peace is flourishing through mutual ties.

Of course, 1950 was too soon for comprehensive supranational policy making. Economic integration was only to become political integration step by step, areas of community-level policy growing larger and larger as a shared Europe slowly emerged. Some were to see it as a European federation; others saw a Europe of cooperating fatherlands. That pragmatic way of advancing the European project did work for many years. Now, however, we find ourselves forced to rethink how we are to proceed. Because things were allowed to develop without enough of an overarching political framework, those who should be shaping policy have ended up swept along by events instead.

Even when we look back at significant milestones, the political dimension was often left underdeveloped. For instance, ten countries became EU members after the Communist bloc collapsed, but the foundations for such a large EU were not in place. The biggest EU enlargement ever, this process left many questions about deepening integration unanswered. Introducing a common currency was also to have ramifications. Seventeen countries joined the euro over the years, but there was no financial policy to provide direction. That structural flaw led to an imbalance in the European Union which was only corrected by emergency measures, such as the European Stability Mechanism and fiscal compact, when it became absolutely necessary.

I remain convinced, nonetheless, that even the failure of individual rescue measures would not call into question the European project as a whole. The advantages it has brought so far are too obvious. We can travel from the Neman to the Atlantic and from Finland to Sicily without at any point having to dig out a passport. We can use one and the same currency across much of Europe, and we buy Spanish shoes or Czech cars without paying extra customs charges. In many parts of Germany, we get treatment from Polish doctors – and we are grateful that they are here to help keep our health centres open. Our entrepreneurs are increasingly employing staff from all the EU's member states, people who would often find no jobs, or have to work for far worse conditions, in their home countries. And some of our pensioners spend their retirement years on the Spanish coast or on the Baltic in Poland. In a very positive way, therefore, more Europe has become part of our everyday lives.

That is why the results of polls only seem contradictory at first glance. People may have been expressing more and more scepticism about the EU in recent years, but the majority remain convinced that the complex and increasingly globalized reality we live in calls for some supranational order. Coming together has brought major political and economic benefits to all of us in Europe.

However, it is still hard to pinpoint what it is that makes us European, what it means to have a European identity. Some young guests visiting Bellevue the other day confirmed something that I think will ring bells with many of you here. "When we are out in the big wide world," they said, "we think of ourselves as European. When we are in Europe, we think of ourselves as German. And when we are in Germany, we think of ourselves as Saxon or from Hamburg."

As we can see, identity can have a lot of layers to it. And we realize that our European identity does not negate regional identities, or national ones, but exists alongside them. During my recent visit to the Free State of Bavaria, I met a student taking part in the Europaeum project at Regensburg University who grew up in Germany thinking of himself as Polish. Polish was his first language; when there were sporting competitions on, he wore the Polish flag. But when he spent a semester studying in Poland and his classmates saw him as completely German, he became aware himself of the German side of his identity. He was able to embrace it without any problem. He is far from alone in his experience. Comparison with others is often what it takes to let us recognize our own identity.

Writing back in the late 1950s, the Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont put it like this: "It is only necessary to go away from Europe, in any direction, to feel the reality of our cultural unity". He went on to say, "In the United States already, in the Soviet Union without hesitation, and in Asia beyond all possible doubt, Frenchmen and Greeks, Englishmen and Swiss, Swedes and Castilians are seen as Europeans. [...] Seen from out-side the existence of 'Europe' is obvious."

Is it just as clear from within that Europe exists? Even geographically speaking, the continent is hard to define. Does it stop at the River Bug, for example, or go on to the Ural mountains? To the Bosphorus or to Anatolia? Europe's long history has seen many changes in what it has taken as the source of its identity. Our understanding today is that there was a whole panoply of elements – from the legacy of Ancient Greece, to the Roman idea of empire and Roman law, to the Judeo-Christian religious heritage that helped shape us too.

But what identifies us today? What unifying bond marks out the people of Europe? Where does Europe get its unmistakable meaning, its political legitimacy, the recognition of its people?

When the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last November, the speeches described, celebrated and honoured it as a project for peace. We'll never forget Winston Churchill calling for the re-creation of the European family in his famous speech to young people in Zurich in 1946. We'll never forget that the most strongly held conviction for politicians and ordinary people after the war could be expressed in two words: "never again!" And we'll never forget how 700 politicians and intellectuals gathered for the Hague Congress in 1948, bringing together such a variety of figures as Bertrand Russell, the Italian Ignazio Silone and Germans like Konrad Adenauer, Walter Hallstein and Eugen Kogon.

The French philosopher Raymond Aron later summed up what their intentions were. "Nobody knows," he said, "whether perpetual peace is possible on this Earth – but there is not the least doubt that we all share a duty to limit violence in this violent century."

As it turned out, the idea of Europe soon came to apply only to Western Europe. In the Cold War, the continent was split into two political blocs. Nonetheless, though Central and Eastern Europe was cut off for more than forty years, the people living there never really left the European project, not in spirit. For them, and for me, saying yes to a free, democratic and prosperous Europe in 1989/90, as we did with such conviction, was like going back and founding Europe all over again – bringing on board part of the continent that had been unable to join in when it all began. The enlargement also added to Europe in qualitative terms. Just as Europe after the Second World War had been principally a pursuit of peace, after 1989 it first and foremost came to embody freedom.

The younger generation, born in or after the 80s, has yet another different way of seeing Europe. Their grandparents and great-grandparents, who had seen Berlin, Warsaw and Rotterdam in ruins, managed to rebuild Europe and in the West were even able to give their children and grandchildren prosperity.

You school pupils who are here today – I know that your very first pocket money was in euros; you are learning at least two foreign languages; your school trips go to Paris, London, Madrid, maybe Warsaw, Prague or Budapest; and when you finish school, there will be scholarships open to you from Erasmus, or vocational training funds from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme. You and your peers in Europe often learn alongside one another, not about one another. You party together too, at European music festivals and in the vibrant cities around Europe. No previous generation has had so much occasion to say, "We are Europe!" And you really do get to experience "more Europe" than any generation that has gone before.

That said, though, it is of course true what people say: there is no overarching narrative to give Europe its identity. We do not have

the sort of shared narrative for Europe that might unite the EU's more than 500 million people in a shared history, have a place in their hearts and spur them to build on it. That is a fact. We Europeans have no founding myth, like a decisive battle where we would face a common enemy and, win or lose, at least defend our identity. A successful revolution might have provided a founding myth too, with the people of our continent achieving some act of political or social emancipation together – but we have not had one of those either. There is no single European identity, just as there is no such thing as a European demos, a single European people or one European nation.

And yet – Europe does have a source of identity: an essentially timeless canon of values which unites us at two different levels, both in our profession of respect for them and in the action we take to uphold them. When we stand in the name of Europe, we do not stand around monuments that base the greatness of some on the defeat of others. We stand together for something: for peace and freedom, for democracy and the rule of law, for equality, human rights and solidarity.

All of these European values have not just been promised – they have been actually set down in treaties and enshrined in legislation. They form points of reference for our shared republican worldview, the basis of the idea that everyone has an equal right to participation in society and politics. Our European values create a space for our European *res publica*.

Our European community of values wants to be a space of freedom and tolerance. It penalizes fanatics and ideologists who stir people up against one another, incite them to violence or undermine our political foundations. It provides a space where peoples live together peacefully and no longer go to war against each other. The bloody reality of war – like the recent war in the Balkans, where European soldiers and civilian forces are still needed to keep the peace – must never be allowed to happen again.

It is often people who have come here from other continents who can most clearly see how much there is to be cherished in Europe. They know the poverty, wars, tyranny and injustice that exist in other parts of the world. They experience Europe as a place of prosperity and self-fulfilment – and, in many cases, as a place where they are protected, where they can live free from state censorship in the media and online; from torture and the death penalty; from child labour and violence against women; or from persecution for living in same-sex relationships.

Our European values are binding, and they bind us together. When European states occasionally violate European rules, they can be brought before European courts. There may still be cause, now and again, to accuse Europe or Germany of adopting an ambiguous

approach to human or civil rights – but Europe guarantees that the public and the media will always be free to criticize and able to take the side of the persecuted or oppressed, especially in dictatorial or authoritarian states.

The European canon of values is not bound by national borders, and it is valid beyond all national, ethnic, cultural and religious differences. An illustrative example is provided by the Muslim people who live in Europe, who have become an integral part of our European society. European identity is not about excluding those who are different. Rather, European identity grows out of our deepening cooperation and the conviction of those who say we want to be part of this community because we share common values. More Europe means making diversity more genuinely part of our lives and allowing it to unite us.

All the things we have had to learn, and indeed continue to learn, about international relations to secure peace among our nations – these are also things we are having to keep learning within our societies in order to maintain a balance between increasingly different elements. As we have daily proof, we are still Europeans when we stay at home. In Germany, you will find restaurant owners from Italy, nurses from Spain and football players from Turkey. There are more and more people at universities and in companies, on the stage and in shops who have family roots in other countries and who, if they are religious, attend different places of worship from Protestant or Catholic Germans. We have had more Europe for a while now. Diversity has become part of everyday life in our society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Happily, hardly anyone in Europe calls into question our canon of values. However, there is an intensive debate going on at present about Europe's current institutional framework. For some, a federal European union is our continent's only chance, while others seek to improve the existing institutions – for example by establishing a second chamber or extending the rights of the European Parliament. Some believe it is enough to maintain the status quo provided we exert greater political will and take full advantage of the possibilities this offers us. And eurosceptics would love to limit the European level.

But even noted pro-Europeans wonder whether all the regulations from Brussels to date really do have to come from there. We are thus in the midst of this discussion, not at the end. We will find it easier to reach agreement on the institutional arrangements, on the institutional framework once we have discussed together and at length the fundamental issues affecting the future of the European project.

Fortunately, policymakers have now – under pressure – made the necessary economic and financial policy adjustments in the eurozone.

However, we all know that Europe faces further challenges. I spoke of a threshold at the start of my speech: we are pausing to reflect so that we can equip ourselves both intellectually and emotionally for the next step, which will require us to enter uncharted territory.

Once, European countries were major powers and global players. In today's globalized world with the new emerging economies, only a united Europe has any chance of holding its own as a global player: in political terms, so that it can play a key role in major decisions and champion its values – freedom, human dignity and solidarity – around the world. And in economic terms, so that it remains competitive, thus guaranteeing Europe's material security and social peace.

So far, Europe has done little to prepare itself for this role. We need further harmonization within Europe. For without financial and economic policy integration, it will be difficult for a single currency to survive. We also need greater harmonization in the spheres of foreign, security and defence policy in order to be armed against new threats, act more effectively and speak with one voice. We also need joint strategies in the ecological, social – I'm thinking here of migration – and, not least, demographic fields.

Everyone committed to the European project has a duty to get this across with patience and care. We must prevent anyone being driven into the arms of populists and nationalists by uncertainty or fear. The main question in the face of all these changes should therefore be: what would a democratic Europe look like which allays the fears of citizens and gives them scope for action? In short, a Europe with which they can identify.

Those who think that European integration is an artificial construct incapable of bringing together its disparate citizens from – in the near future – 28 nation-states, should remember that nation-states did not evolve naturally and are not built for eternity. Indeed, in many cases their citizens were very slow to accept them. When Italian unification was achieved in 1861, the author and politician Massimo D'Azeglio declared, "We have made Italy; now we must make Italians." At that time, less than ten per cent of the population spoke Italian and the masses could only speak dialects.

However, in contrast to the situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the German Reich was also created from a patchwork of kingdoms and principalities, we cannot decree European unification from above. Nor do we want to. We now have strong civil societies. No European nation, no Europe, could grow without the consent of its citizens. The pace and depth of European integration will ultimately be determined by Europe's citizens.

I would now like to turn to Britain. I listened with interest to the Prime Minister's comments and dual message: the "yes" to British



traditions and to British interests which is not intended to be a “no” to Europe. Of course, it is up to the British to decide on their own future, but perhaps they are at least prepared to listen to an appeal from Schloss Bellevue: My appeal is:

Dear people of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, dear new citizens of Britain! We would like you to stay with us! We need your experience as the oldest parliamentary democracy, we value your traditions but we also need your pragmatism and your courage! During the Second World War, your efforts helped to save our Europe – and it is also your Europe. Let us continue to engage in discussion on how to move towards the European res publica, and perhaps even argue about it, for we will only be able to master future challenges if we work together. More Europe cannot mean a Europe without you!

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am concerned that Germany's role in the European process is currently being regarded with scepticism and distrust in some countries. Yes, it is true that Germany has benefited greatly from the euro. It has made Germany strong. And Germany's rise to become the largest economic power in the heart of the continent after reunification has aroused the fears of many people. I am shocked at how quickly perceptions became distorted, as if today's Germany was continuing in the tradition of German great power politics, or even German crimes. It is not only populist parties which are even portraying the German Chancellor as the representative of a state which, just like in former times, supposedly wants to enforce a German Europe and oppress other peoples.

I want to assure all citizens of neighbouring countries that I cannot imagine any of Germany's policymakers seeking to impose a German diktat. Until now, our society has proved to be rational and mature. In Germany – and I am grateful for this – no populist, nationalist party has won enough support among the population to gain any seats in the German Bundestag. It is my heartfelt conviction that in Germany more Europe does not mean a German Europe. For us, more Europe means a European Germany!

We do not want to intimidate others, nor force our ideas on them. However, we stand by our experience and would like to pass it on to others. Less than ten years ago, the world and indeed our own citizens regarded Germany as the sick man of Europe. Despite the severe domestic conflicts they provoked, the measures which led us out of the economic crisis then have been successful. At the same time, we know that there are different economic strategies and that there is more than one way to achieve our goal.

If any German politician has shown too little empathy for the situation of others or if rationality has sometimes come across as cold-

heartedness or a know-it-all attitude, it was certainly the exception and not the rule. Perhaps it was due to the necessary discussion on the right way forward. However, if critical comments have been disdainful or even contemptuous in tone then that is not only morally reprehensible but also politically counterproductive. It makes the self-critical discourse which is already taking form in all crisis countries, at least among a minority of people, more difficult or even impossible. We in Germany should be aware that those who have confidence in their own arguments have no need to provoke or even humiliate their partners.

It is worth the effort for all 27 partners in our community to recall once more the pledges made when economic and monetary union was launched. This Union is based on the idea that rules are abided by and any breaches penalized. This Union is characterized by give and take. It should never be a one-way street for anyone. It is based on the principles of reciprocity, equal rights and equal obligations. More Europe must mean more reliability. Reliability and solidarity stand or fall with each other.

I firmly believe that if everyone in Europe remains committed to this principle then solidarity within Europe can even grow and, in the long term, reduce the great inequalities on our continent, thus helping to improve conditions where they need improving, where people see no future in their own countries but need to have one.

Ladies and gentlemen,

more Europe requires more courage from everyone! What Europe needs now are not doubters but standard-bearers, not ditherers but people who are prepared to knuckle down, not those who simply go with the flow but active players.

You, Excellencies, know that even with a pro-European stance some efforts have no impact. I do not want to ignore such difficulties today. It seems to me that one of the main problems we have in building a more integrated European community is the inadequate communication within Europe. And by that I mean in the everyday life of people – or peoples – rather than at the diplomatic level. To this day, it is often the case that each one of the 27 member nations interprets the same European treaties in its own way. Media coverage is almost exclusively dominated by national considerations. Knowledge about neighbouring countries is still scanty – with the exception of a comparatively small group of students, business people, intellectuals and artists. To date, Europe does not have a single European public space which could be compared to what we regard as a public sphere at national level. First of all we lack a lingua franca. There are 23 official languages in Europe, plus countless other languages and dialects. A German who does not also speak English or French will find it difficult to communicate with someone from Portugal, or from

Lithuania or Hungary. It is true to say that young people are growing up with English as the lingua franca. However, I feel that we should not simply let things take their course when it comes to linguistic integration. For more Europe means multilingualism not only for the elites but also for ever larger sections of the population, for ever more people, ultimately for everyone! I am convinced that feeling at home in one's native language and its magic and being able to speak enough English to get by in all situations and at all ages can exist alongside each other in Europe.

A common language would make it easier to realize my wish for Europe's future – a European agora, a common forum for discussion to enable us to live together in a democratic order. This agora would be even more wide-ranging than the one pupils perhaps know from the history books. In Ancient Greece, it was a central meeting-place, a place for ceremonial gatherings and a court at the same time, a place for public discussion where efforts focused on creating a well-ordered society. Today we need an extended model. Perhaps our media could produce an innovation to foster more Europe, perhaps like an ARTE channel for everyone, a multichannel linked to the Internet for at least 27 states – for 28 states of course – for young and old, for onliners and offliners, for pro-Europeans and eurosceptics. It would have to do more than broadcast the Eurovision Song Contest or European detective series. For example, it would have to broadcast reports on the founders of companies in Poland, young unemployed people in Spain or family policies in Denmark. It would have to organize discussions which bring home to us the sensibilities of our neighbours and help us to understand why they may regard the same event in a very different light. And on the grand political stage, the doors would then open after a crisis summit and the cameras would show everyone at the negotiating table, not just one face.

With or without such a TV channel, we need an agora. It would disseminate knowledge, help to develop a European civic spirit and also act as a corrective when national media adopt a nationalistic approach and report on neighbouring countries without sensitivity or real knowledge, thus encouraging prejudices. I know that many media companies have already attempted to create a European public space by reporting on other countries, by focusing on Europe and by putting into practice many good ideas. I know that. But let us see more of this – more reports on and more communication with Europe!

We are talking here about communication. I do not regard communication as a side aspect of the political process. Rather, providing adequate information on issues and problems is politics itself. Politics which expects the participants in the agora to be responsible and does not discount them as subservient, disinterested and ignorant.

For me, more Europe means more European civil society. I am therefore delighted that 2013 is the European Year of Citizens. I would not want to go so far as the authors of the Manifesto for Rebuilding Europe, but I very much like the banner under which the supporters have gathered. It is: "Don't ask what Europe can do for you but ask what you can do for Europe!" Although we all know that this is based on an even more famous quote, such an attitude would take us a giant step forward. The European Joachim Gauck – having asked himself what he wants in this situation – has listed his responses.

First, do not be indifferent! Brussels may be far away, but the issues which are negotiated and decided there concern all of us. We cannot be indifferent to how the EU influences norms which subsequently have an impact in our children's bedrooms or on our tables. We cannot be indifferent to the yardsticks by which we measure the foreign, security, environment and development policies implemented on our behalf. We cannot be indifferent to how the EU deals with people who have to leave their countries for political reasons.

Second, do not be lazy! The European Union is complicated, it truly is, but it has to achieve very complicated things. It deserves citizens who are interested and keep themselves informed. It deserves more than a 43 per cent turnout at European Parliament elections. And it does not deserve to have Brussels made a scapegoat, especially not when national interests or national failures are to blame for any problems.

Third, recognize your ability to make a contribution! A better Europe will not emerge if we always believe that others should shoulder the responsibility. We have so many possibilities. Anyone who wants to initiate or prevent something can take advantage of the European Citizens' Initiative. Anyone who wants to found or build something can apply for a grant. And anyone who wants to do good and get to know their neighbours can apply to join the European Voluntary Service. Everyone can find a good reason to say: Yes, I want Europe! Does anyone know this comment, this wish, better than you here in this room? Who knows it better?

I would like to thank so many people today, starting with the European Ambassadors with us here and European activists in the education field, academia and society, not to mention the fantastic teachers in bilingual nurseries in the euroregions. I would like to thank everyone who is helping to link up Europe in countless ways – economically, socially and culturally. I also very much want to thank our German politicians who have reconciled their national tasks with our European obligations. And my special thanks go to those who do not believe that solidarity simply means looking after the property of the propertied class.

Ladies and gentlemen,

deep in our hearts, we Germans in particular know that there is something which ties us to Europe in a special way. After all, it was from our country that the attempts to destroy everything European, all universal values were unleashed. Despite everything that happened, the Allies granted our country support and solidarity straight after the war. We were spared what could so easily have followed our hubris: an existence as a disowned outcast outside the family of nations.

Instead, we were invited, received and welcomed – something which seems especially unexpected and wonderful from today's viewpoint. We became partners!

We had the fortunate experience of learning to respect ourselves and being respected by others when we wanted to be "not above and not below other peoples". We have committed ourselves to Europe. Indeed, we have pledged ourselves to Europe.

Today we renew this pledge.

We will pause to consider before crossing the threshold, we will rethink the situation. Then armed with new ideas and good reasons, we will renew confidence, strengthen our commitment and continue to build what we have been building – Europe.