



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps
on 14 January 2014
at Schloss Bellevue**

Let me first of all thank you very much, Nuncio, for your kind words and thought-provoking reflections also on our country's role. I'd like to express heartfelt thanks, too, for the good wishes of the Diplomatic Corps and your greetings to my fellow Germans. It was only in November, Nuncio, that you presented your letters of credence. For your mission in Berlin I wish you the very best and God's blessing. I'm delighted to welcome you and all my guests today to Schloss Bellevue.

For us in Germany this reception early in the new year is a most agreeable tradition. It's an occasion to resume the stimulating conversations we've had with many of you. I look back with pleasure, for example, on the excursion we made last summer – in which most of you participated – to the south of Baden, a famous wine-growing region. The year before we were in Dresden and enjoyed a pleasant cruise together on the Elbe river. Situations like these provide opportunities here and there for candid and friendly talk. So let me thank you for your candour and for what you do here as representatives of your countries to help us Germans understand your countries better and sometimes also to understand ourselves better.

There's one thing these encounters have made clear to me. Your presence here in Germany, here in Berlin, is a great boon. For what you see with the eyes of outsiders enables us also to understand better what our responsibilities are – in the wider world and in Europe, as the Nuncio has just pointed out. Through your opinions, experiences and also the values you stand for, you enrich our public life. That, too, is a great boon. Such exchanges help us realise what we have in common and also of course where our differences lie. They prompt us to reflect time and again on our responsibilities, our role and what we stand for.

As you pointed out, Nuncio, the year 2014 is a very special one. For this year, Excellencies, we commemorate two seminal moments in history – the outbreak of World War I 100 years ago and World War II

75 years ago. This raises the question of what lessons we have learned from the past and what lessons remain to be learned in years to come.

We will continue to ponder together with our former adversaries – now our allies and friends indeed – how we can best meet our present responsibilities. To commemorate something means, however, not simply to remember past events. It means to be conscious of one's own particular perspective on these events today, while at the same time paying tribute to everything positive that has been created in the decades since the war and will continue to evolve over the years ahead.

This is why the way we in Europe approach the legacy of that special year, 1989, is also important. We will be remembering this year that the bitter division of our continent ended a quarter-century ago. People's pent up yearning for freedom and self-determination overwhelmed all obstacles. To have conquered fear is an experience the East Germans have in common with all those who lived in and changed the face of the former communist bloc. This experience of conquering fear is something they have given the new enlarged Europe of today.

This year, when we remember 1914, 1939 and 1989, is a tremendous opportunity – and not only for Europeans. Of course acts of remembrance will be held at historic sites all over Europe. But the fact is that especially World War I was a war in which hundreds of thousands of young men were brought to Europe from the colonies to fight the Europeans' war. Many of these men drafted into the warring parties' armies were killed. Their story lived on in their families and in their countries. When we see how intensively people in Africa and other parts of the world remember to this day the slaughter that took place during that first "Great War", we realise what a global dimension this horrific conflict had.

World War I also acted as a catalyst for all kinds of developments that have shaped the world as we know it today. At the end of the war centuries-old empires lay in ruins, new countries appeared on the map – especially in central and eastern Europe. Russia experienced a revolution that brought forth a communist dictatorship. Conflicts in the Middle East that are still on our agenda today date back to the new era that then dawned. The onward march of democracy was gaining speed but was checked, however – and that's what makes this inter-war era so ambivalent – by the rise of Nazi and fascist dictatorships. In the end the twentieth century turned out to be the bloodiest ever.

There are things that history helps us understand better. But history cannot serve as an excuse for any failure to tackle present-day problems. 2014 enjoins us not only to look back but also to address the urgent challenges of the present day. For us Europeans that means further work to advance our economic and financial agenda. We want

the world to see us, after all, not just as a theatre of past battles but as a strong and reliable partner that plays an active role in shaping globalisation.

We take the preliminary deal reached at the talks with Iran about its nuclear programme as a hopeful sign. It constitutes a first step towards a final settlement of this dispute. To achieve a final settlement, however, trust is required, trust on all sides.

In the Arab world, and above all in Syria, it's crucial to end the violence and overcome hate. There are so many young women and men there waiting for a chance to at long last build their future in a peaceful and secure environment. They long – as indeed we all do – for an upsurge of hope. That goes also for Tunisia and Egypt, where we followed the movements for change with high hopes. We continue to take a keen interest in developments in this region.

Hope, finally, is also what we associate with the current peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

My special wish for 2014 is for us to become more aware also of just how precious human rights are. To help us do this, a few weeks ago we celebrated here in Schloss Bellevue, in this very room where we're gathered today, the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. UN High Commissioner Pillay gave an impressive account of the progress achieved over this period as well as the difficulties encountered. We're most grateful to her for coming to Berlin for this purpose. Both international legal documents and the work of relevant institutions in this area make clear that human dignity is inviolable and that human rights are inalienable, they are to be enjoyed by everyone without distinction.

A great deal would be gained if we all did everything we could both in our own countries and elsewhere in the world to advance the cause of human rights. Nelson Mandela, that great man to whom we bade farewell a few weeks ago, demonstrated what this means in every aspect of his life's work.

I look forward to working with you over the coming year. And I also greatly look forward to the conversations we'll be having in a moment. And now let me wish you, your families and the staff of your missions a Happy New Year 2014!