



**Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the New Year reception
for the Diplomatic Corps
on 15 January 2015
in Schloss Bellevue**

On the evening of 9 November 2014, a good two months ago now, 8000 balloons floated into the sky here in Berlin. Before being released, the row of illuminated balloons had marked the path of the Berlin Wall. People from all over Germany and from many different countries walked along this border of lights that evening, 25 years after the opening of the Berlin Wall, and were amazed by what they saw at the former crossing point in Bornholmer Strasse, at what was once Checkpoint Charlie, at Engelbecken in Kreuzberg and at the Brandenburg Gate. The moment when the balloons rose into the night sky was a special occasion in a special year of commemoration. Some of the balloons made it to Poland, while one floated all the way to Latvia. This was a beautiful symbol of the interconnected Europe in which we now live.

The various moving occasions during 2014 brought to mind both the darkest and some of the brightest hours of the past century. We recalled the outbreak of two appalling world wars, and we commemorated the Peaceful Revolution of 1989, which was a triumph of freedom and human courage.

Ahead of us lies a year in which commemoration will once again play an important role. On 3 October this year, we will celebrate what will already be the 25th anniversary of the achievement of German unification. An important lesson has not lost any meaning in all these years, namely that we Germans could only reunite in freedom by working with our neighbours and partner countries, not without them and certainly not against them. Twenty-five years of German unity also means 25 years of the Two plus Four Treaty, which was negotiated and signed by the former opponents of the Cold War. What a success for

international diplomacy! Let us not forget this great moment of diplomacy either.

However, the new year has started with events that shock us all to the core. During the first days of January, the terror organisation Boko Haram murdered hundreds of people in Nigeria. Last week, the people of France – and with them, all people with feelings, all Europeans and people beyond – experienced a brutal attack on freedom of speech and of the press, an attack on democracy and the right to life. Seventeen people died in Paris at the hands of Islamist terrorists. Several million French people and friends from all over the world honoured the victims in silent marches last Sunday. The flags of many nations flew on the streets and squares of Paris – indeed, as French President François Hollande said, Paris became “the capital of the world” for a day. All of the people who demonstrated in France, here in Germany and in other countries sent a signal – that is, a joint signal that we stand together against hatred and intolerance and that we will defend freedom together.

And thousands of people who gathered in front of the French Embassy and of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin this week at the invitation of Muslim associations provided impressive testimony of this resolve. Alongside political and civic leaders, Muslims, Christians and Jews took a stand against marginalisation and terror – and spoke up for the universal values that allow us to live in freedom, peace, respect and dignity.

We can thus now see clearly that we did not reach the “end of history” in any way a quarter of a century ago, either in Germany or anywhere else in Europe or indeed anywhere in the world. It is true that the Cold War – and hence the confrontation between heavily armed military blocs – was over. But at the same time, the world became more complex, while the threats and risks became more diffuse.

As a peace project, the European Union is indeed a particular success story. However, mutually beneficial peaceful coexistence is not the order of the day everywhere in Europe. Since last year, we Europeans have ourselves been witnesses to military confrontations and attacks.

At the start of 2015, we are facing severe international crises to a far greater extent than we imagined at the beginning of last year. We are confronted by questions that we are not yet able to answer properly.

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq also escalated last year. They have caused people untold pain, and the suffering continues every day. As a result, desperate people who fear for their own lives and the lives of their families are doing everything they can to flee and reach Europe.

What we need to show in this situation is compassion and a willingness to help. This goes to the heart of our values.

We cannot know what truly awaits us in the new year. And yet we can already see some milestones of international politics that await us – milestones that have a great deal to do with you, ladies and gentlemen, my guests here today at this New Year reception. I am talking about diplomats and their work. Yes, diplomacy is hard work. Yes, multilateral negotiation processes are arduous. But how important it is that they exist! We can be glad that we are able to depend on tried-and-tested mechanisms in diplomacy when dealing with the key issues concerning the future of humankind.

And yes, we can hope to see tangible results in important areas this year. In this respect, we are counting on those who understand the art of diplomacy – that is, on you and your colleagues.

One way or another, the year 2015 will be a watershed, as the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals will end and we will then look at what has been accomplished. We see success, of course, but we also see things that we could improve. We want to learn from this. In setting the post-2015 agenda, the international community is on the path to new, global goals that focus on a very important point – the fact that sustainable development is in the interests of all countries. I very much hope that the summit in September will lead to positive outcomes.

I have the same hope for the ongoing negotiations on climate protection. After all, climate change – and hence climate protection – affects us all. It does not distinguish between industrialised, newly industrialising and developing countries, and it certainly does not stop at national borders. If a binding climate agreement is to be reached at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris at the end of the year, then all sides need to show even more willingness to accept binding targets and make compromises.

Politically, but also as regards technology and business, Germany can play a particularly important role in climate policy. The fact that Germany shares and is willing to share global responsibility will become especially clear in the coming year, as the Federal Republic of Germany has held the Presidency of the G7 since June 2014. Development and climate change issues are priority areas of its Presidency.

For the first time, Germany is also assuming the Presidency in the UN Human Rights Council. This coincides with the year of the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations. Our work to defend inalienable human rights is one of our most important and highest aims, so it is good that we are frequently inspired by people who are willing to do everything they can for these rights. With her

optimism and commitment, a courageous young woman from Pakistan called Malala is one such inspiring role model for us all. I would like to quote from her wishes, from Malala's wishes for 2015 that she, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, wrote in a letter to world leaders:

"It can be the year in which we all commit to seeing the last child out of school, the last child forced into slavery and the last child forced to flee their home because of the danger of climate change."

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we will probably not achieve these aims by the end of this year. But I call on you to work together in this spirit in order to come closer to reaching these goals and thus to make the world a better place.

I wish you and your families a happy, peaceful and pleasant 2015!