



**Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
at the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps  
at Schloss Bellevue  
12 January 2017**

I am very pleased to see you all again here right at the start of the New Year. Like the other annual events we share with the Diplomatic Corps, the New Year Reception is one of the pleasant traditions one enjoys in the office of Federal President. I have excellent memories of our events, such as our long-standing shared outings – last year, as you will recall, we were in the Saarland together – and of my conversations with you. You have given me a great variety of ideas during my five years in office, and I thank you for it.

Looking around me, I can see the diversity of the countries you represent. Nowadays, that diversity has become part of ordinary life in our country and across Europe. In our capital cities and urban centres, we see a mix of skin colours, languages, religions, lifestyles and cultures on a daily basis. And we value that enrichment. Many young people choose to study or work abroad, gathering experience in other countries and letting themselves be inspired, just as I have let myself be inspired in my meetings with you and on my travels. Last year, those travels took me not only to familiar European partner countries but also to places far from home like Nigeria, Mali, Chile, Uruguay, China and Japan.

If one has had the good fortune to experience such things, one finds it easy, or at least easier, to search for and often find the commonalities and connections we share with countries, people and cultures that seem different and unique. One learns to value the unfamiliar, gaining, in my experience, a fresh and just as enriching appreciation of the familiar.

One reason why I want to highlight this is that I believe much of the reaction we have been seeing, in Germany as elsewhere, to the arrival of many refugees has its origins in people's fear of being made to feel alienated and uprooted. Interacting with other cultures in one's

own country, while many do feel enriched by it, is seen by others as a threat to their cultural identity.

Fear is a feeling. Arguing that it's irrational is seldom very helpful. And after all, the challenges we have had to face in recent years are of a sort liable to awake fears. The terrorism that has struck us in many places around the world and now in this country as well is an attack on our values, on our way of life. What happened here in Berlin before Christmas will have lasting effects. The victims of the attack, innocent visitors to a Christmas market, will be missed. But I am certain that the murderer's plan will not succeed. Our solidarity, as democrats and as Germans, does not become weaker when we are attacked – it becomes stronger. The aftershocks of terrorist attacks and political upheaval are felt in almost every corner of the globe, and no border, however well protected, would keep them out entirely. In view of that fact, we will have to work together to overcome these crises. And I firmly believe that, if we manage to cooperate, we will see the results we need to allay the fear that many people feel.

The Leaders' Summit on Refugees in New York set the agenda for that joint endeavour. We need to make more of a serious effort to jointly combat the causes of refugee movements, to prevent crises and conflicts, and finally to integrate people seeking refuge from war and terrorism. Furthermore, the European Union will have no option but to maintain enhanced control of its external borders. These are major tasks. No country could manage them on its own. Particularly at a time when the international order based on international law is being called into question in some quarters, we are called upon to reaffirm that order and also to strengthen those institutions, like the United Nations, that we can use to deal with global crises. We will not stand helpless in the face of the violence that is besetting so many places around the world, in eastern Ukraine, in Yemen, in South Sudan and above all in Syria, to name just a few examples. And we will not bow to the terrorism which so brutally cut short the lives of so many people last year, and sadly already has this year too, for example in Belgium, in France, in Turkey, in Nigeria and in Iraq too.

Like the UN, the EU is in my view one of those institutions that bears global responsibility. To realise how precious and indispensable the European Union is, we should remember that this unification of Europe was for decades no more than a hope for peace and understanding. In March, it will be 60 years since the Rome Treaties were signed. Ten years ago, on the 50th anniversary, the member states signed the Berlin Declaration reaffirming their commitment to their common values – to peace and liberty, to democracy and the rule of law. They also promised to work towards the peaceful settlement of conflicts around the world and prevent people from becoming casualties of war, terrorism and violence. Europeans need to fulfil that promise.

One of the encounters that left the deepest impression on me last year was my meeting with members of the White Helmets relief organisation, who were awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize in December. They were tailors, bakers, teachers, people from various professions, who were risking their own lives to save others. These people have no political agenda, paying no heed to people's religious or party-political affiliations, and their actions are saving far more than human lives – they are saving humanity itself. Their work shows us that no hatred is great enough to completely destroy our human solidarity. It is not least in view of their example that we have a duty not to give up.

There are also encouraging signs that persistent, quiet diplomacy that plays the long game can resolve even long-running conflicts in the end. Decades of radio silence between the United States and Cuba have come to an end; in Colombia, an equally long, devastating guerilla war has been laid to rest.

We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by fear, nor intimidated by terrorism. So let us place our trust in the tools of diplomacy. Let us strengthen the rule of law and the cohesion of the international community, and let us uphold that community.

And on that note, allow me to wish you and your families a happy and successful 2017.