



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps
in Schloss Bellevue
on 11 January 2018**

“Concordia domi foris pax” – “harmony within, peace without”. Three years ago, while still Foreign Minister, I stood with my G7 counterparts and gazed at this inscription on the famous Holsten Gate in the Hanseatic city of Lübeck.

You are all aware that one important issue I have chosen to focus on during my term of office is the future of democracy. Ensuring “harmony within” is a challenge not only in virtually every democracy. On my travels both in Germany and abroad, I have seen again and again the polarisation of many societies, growing irreconcilability between political opponents and increasing distance between social groups. The pressures of globalisation and the changed culture of debate in the digital age are putting our societies’ internal cohesion to the test.

Germany is not exempt from this. If we lose sight of all that we have in common, of all that links us, and if the tone of political debate becomes rougher, perhaps even hostile, then society is bound to be affected. In many cases, such attitudes are born of fear of what the future might bring, and the worry caused by uncertainty. Some people in our country believe the best response to this is withdrawal and isolation, a return to an allegedly golden past – though on closer inspection it wasn’t really all that golden. In some countries – including in Europe – this withdrawal has become the prevailing policy: it is a matter of circling up the wagons, shutting out a hostile outside world.

Withdrawing like this to secure “harmony within” was something that never entered the minds of the citizens of the proud Hanseatic cities like Lübeck back then. They thrived on openness, on exchange, on the curiosity and confidence of their merchants and seamen, who dared to venture even into the unknown.

Particularly in this day and age, withdrawal and isolation cannot be on the agenda for a country like Germany either, a country that owes its peace and prosperity to the trust placed in it by countless partners around the world.

We are grateful for this trust and for this cooperation. Germany will continue to endeavour to formulate its interests in an enlightened and far sighted manner, attaching crucial importance to the wellbeing of our European neighbours. And, in collaboration with the global community, we want to work to protect our common heritage, to champion climate protection, clean seas, education, health and sustainable development. One thing is clear: we will not regard the world as an arena in which everyone pursues merely his own interests, on a national basis, thinking only in the short term and with no consideration for others.

"Harmony within, peace without": the phrase also points to the close link between domestic and foreign policy. Today the two appear more interwoven than ever before. This is the result of technological developments which penetrate right to the very heart of our societies while at the same time effecting sweeping changes in the world. It is therefore all the more important not to play domestic and foreign policy off against one another. Rather, we must try to reconcile them in a responsible manner.

As diplomats, ladies and gentlemen, you have the task of making such reconciliation possible. In order to read the mood correctly, to assess what room there is for manoeuvre, to understand how a country thinks, how it defines its role in the world, you have to be in that country. It does not work merely in virtual space. It does not even work if you never venture outside the capital.

That is one reason why we travelled together last September to Saxony-Anhalt, and to the Garden Kingdom of Dessau-Wörlitz. In the final chapter of 'Candide', Voltaire has his protagonist say "We must cultivate our garden" – and then withdraw from the world. Of course, in reality Voltaire meant exactly the opposite: what is happening in the other "gardens" of this world concerns us all, particularly if we want to preserve harmony within and peace without.

I am looking forward to visiting some of your countries this year in order to strengthen and develop our ties. I am also looking forward to visiting Bremen with you in the summer. Like Lübeck, it is a Hanseatic city and one of Germany's gateways to the world.

We are aware of the expectations being directed at Germany at the start of this new year. Following the Bundestag elections in September, it is taking longer to form a government than it ever has before in the Federal Republic. But just because it is happening for the first time does not mean that it falls outside the realm of the rules. The

Basic Law, our constitution, gives us clear rules and clear orientation for a situation like this. The past few weeks have shown that the interplay between our country's various institutions works. Those who bear responsibility in the institutions and parties are taking it seriously. And they know that they have this responsibility not only towards the members of their own party and their own political future. Rather, it is always also a responsibility for Europe, and for reliability, partnership and engagement in international politics.

I look forward to working with you in the year ahead. I wish you, your families and all your staff harmony, peace and good health in 2018!