



**Speech by Federal President Frank Walter Steinmeier
at the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps
in Schloss Bellevue
on 14 January 2019**

How wonderful it is to see you all again! Last June, we visited the Hanseatic City of Bremen together. We sat beneath metre-long models of ships, traced the footsteps of Elvis Presley, and walked from the South Sea to the North Pole in the Klimahaus within the space of just one hour.

And we also watched football together. Ambassador Jong, we were party to a nail-biting 90 minutes, and even a bit longer if I add the extra time. In the end, the South Korean team won deservedly. And this is football we're talking about! In handball, the opposite was the case at the opening of the World Cup. Germany won against the joint team for North and South Korea.

That's how the pebble rocks in sport. There can only ever be one winner in what is a classic zero-sum game. One team wins, the other loses.

This is all very well if the outcome is sporting fairness. Such fairness seems increasingly to be falling by the wayside in international relations, however. When I read reports about international summits, then this zero-sum logic of "every man for himself" or, even worse, "everyone against everyone else" has gained in traction.

The belief that cooperation and clearly defined rules stand to benefit all those involved is being called into question ever more openly. International organisations, or so it is claimed in certain quarters, harm national interests. Nation states therefore must break free from the bonds of international institutions in order to defend their sovereignty or claw back lost sovereignty.

Excellencies, the opposite is the case. Free and sovereign states must establish common rules; they must define their cooperation so that their actions do not culminate time and again in confrontation, animosity and, ultimately, war, as has happened in the course of

history so often and with such terrible consequences. And today, when our world is more interconnected than ever before, when one country's national interests can no longer be asserted without taking the interests of the others into account, this sort of cooperation is even more important.

To put it in a nutshell, nationalism is ideological poison that is no less poisonous in a new guise.

We in Europe in particular should never forget this, but rather we will keep this memory alive and show that we have learned from our bloody history, especially that of the 20th century.

For me – and I presume for many European friends here in this room – commemorating the end of the First World War together was one of the most moving memories from the past year. I was grateful to be the first German Federal President to attend the ceremony in London marking Remembrance Day. At the Cenotaph, I laid a wreath accompanied by a hand-written message: "Honoured to remember side by side, Grateful for reconciliation, Hopeful for a future in peace and friendship." This continues to be my hope for a common future both in Europe and with our friends in the UK.

Other joint acts commemorating the watershed of 100 years ago are also etched in my memory. In Vilnius, I had the honour to attend the major and moving ceremonies held under the aegis of the Lithuanian state – in what was also an anniversary year marking the restoration of statehood of all three Baltic states. Here in Berlin, at the Konzerthaus Berlin on the Gendarmenmarkt, we joined President Duda in commemorating the rebirth of the Polish state after 1918. And together with President Macron, we celebrated the miracle of reconciliation between France and Germany at Strasbourg Cathedral and in the German Bundestag.

Everywhere I went, I was welcomed as a German among friends – in spite of our bloody history. What fortune, what a historic achievement! This achievement is called the European Union, which is founded on the belief that rampant nationalism led us to the abyss. This is why we promised ourselves that, no, our continent is not an arena or a place where national egoisms compete, and that we must never again allow it to become such a place. Rather, we are stronger when we stand united. We will achieve more when we are united: greater freedom, better prospects and more prosperity.

The European elections in May of this year are a defining moment for us to renew this European promise. I will promote this cause with all of my might.

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit a number of your countries also far beyond the borders of Europe. I returned from these

trips with a sense of encouragement – with the feeling that we are capable of opposing the crumbling of international cooperation.

This is in the interests of us all. As Ambassadors, you are familiar with the countless ways in which our countries cooperate with each another, are connected and depend on one another. This applies in particular to global goods, climate protection and international security, as well as to our efforts to shape the digital world.

As regards economic relations, free and fair trade creates opportunities for economic development for all. In a fair and open trade order, economic success does not come at the expense of others. World trade is likewise not a zero-sum game.

We also need common responses to a common challenge relating to another major issue of our age, namely displacement and migration. With the UN compact for migration, we are still certainly far from a solution, but a step towards cooperation has been taken.

Rest assured that my country will work with you in a spirit of trust on all of these issues. And we are grateful to be able to do so in this year and the next as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

Excellencies, I personally am looking forward to working with all of you in the year that lies ahead of us. And I cannot deny the fact that I am looking forward especially to our trip together. In September, we will head to Land Rhineland-Palatinate, to the beautiful River Mosel and to the Hunsrück region. There will be no football at all this time around, I promise.

Allow me to wish you, your families and all your staff the best of health and happiness in 2019.