



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps
at Schloss Bellevue
on 13 January 2020**

I would very much have liked to welcome you all here to a peaceful start to the year. This is, unfortunately, not the case.

All of us are gathered here today as representatives of our sovereign states – and yet we are also a community and not just individual competitors. I say this so candidly because I am deeply concerned about the abyss and the unforeseeable consequences of a development in which states no longer cherish the spirit of understanding and shared responsibility. What we as states agree and negotiate with one another are, as a rule, incomplete compromises. Criticism of this is as old as it is justified. But our common experience goes beyond this. Each and every agreement that holds creates trust and offers opportunities for more.

But where do we stand when agreements no longer apply? When all trust is lost and no threat can be big or tough enough? When boundaries are no longer respected? When the credibility and authority of all of the international community's mediating institutions is deliberately weakened? This is an anxious question that we are all confronted with at the beginning of this year.

This can and must not be Europe's path. This cannot be Germany's path.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres summed up what is necessary in a dramatic appeal last Monday: "Stop escalation. Exercise maximum restraint. Re-start dialogue. Renew international cooperation."

I hope that the shock following the escalation of recent days and its catastrophic consequences will encourage a shift in attitude back to the arduous and tough, but also most necessary attempt to build up trust once again. I hope that, beyond national ambition, the lives and

survival of people on all continents is returned to the centre of policy once more.

2020 is a special year – a year in which we will remember the end of the war 75 years ago. We will call to mind the moment when the world was liberated from a National Socialist Germany that wanted to rise up over its neighbours with its inhuman ideology, believed that it was superior to everything and everyone else, and which descended into the abyss of war, annihilation and mass murder. In Wieluń and Warsaw, Fivizzano in Italy, and most recently, just a few days ago, in Bastogne in Belgium, we called to mind last year the heavy burden that Europe continues to bear to this day on account of the suffering and destruction that Germany brought to the continent and how deeply indebted we are to the Allies, who liberated not only Europe, but also Germany.

When, in a few days from now, we commemorate the liberation of the German concentration camp Auschwitz 75 years ago, then we will do this to mourn the millions of human lives that were lost and to fathom the pain that this loss caused all across Europe. But we will only do justice to their memory, to the memory of the victims, if we acknowledge and assume the task that remembering them imposes upon us for our present. This task involves calling to mind the destruction of the rule of law and of the democracy of the Weimar Republic, as well as the dangers of nationalist hubris. We are able to discern our responsibility for the future in these early stages of the German aberration. This responsibility charges us to stand up and fight for our liberal and democratic community, to uphold the law and to protect the rule of law. This responsibility charges us to make human dignity the benchmark of our political action both today and in the future.

Striving for a future in a united, peaceful Europe whose peoples live in peace and self-determination, determining their destinies together in the European Union and resolving conflicts among each other peacefully – that is the lesson that we have learned from two devastating wars on our continent in the last century.

I know that not every hope has been fulfilled. We have also faced setbacks. The European Union is facing one of the most painful such setbacks in just a few days' time in the form of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. However, the idea that is European integration is not losing any of its currency as a result of this. This idea has proven itself to be fit for the future over the course of seven decades. It will be up to us, up to all Europeans, to advocate for and breathe new life into this idea time and again in the present. Germany wants to and will do its part in this regard, most especially during its EU Council Presidency in the second half of this year.

We are aware of the special responsibility that this task is bound up with for our country. In Europe, the goal is to seize the opportunities for a fresh start following a difficult period. The Green New Deal launched by the new Commission President offers one such opportunity. Europe has the means and the capacity, as well as the innovative drive and the economic strength to become a pioneer of global solutions in the fight against climate change. However, it is also true that the future of us all also depends on whether we, above and beyond Europe, manage at COP26 in Glasgow to return to that spirit of understanding and common responsibility that the Paris Climate Agreement once made possible.

We need this spirit in order to make our world a more peaceful, better place, and not only in climate policy. I know that people also expect this in Europe's neighbourhood and on all continents around the world. When I look back on the year 2019, then I see too many unresolved conflicts and far too much suffering and violence. However, I also experienced a great deal of encouragement on my trips during the past year. Countries in which change is palpable, in which hunger and corruption are being tackled more effectively, in which politics really makes a difference to people's lives. And I see many courageous, self-confident people around the world who call for dignity, respect and opportunities for a dignified future, who want to help shape this future themselves. That gives me hope.

2020 is a special year – a year of memory, but, if I dare to make a prediction, also a year of very important decisions for the future. If we manage to think of both of these things in tandem and to connect them, then it will be a good year. Let us work together to make this happen.

Thank you very much.