



**Speech by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a Turkish-German coffee afternoon
Schloss Bellevue,
22 August 2018**

Welcome to Schloss Bellevue! I'm delighted that you accepted my invitation to a "Turkish-German coffee afternoon", even though it's Eid al-Adha. It's a pleasure to see you all here today!

This especially hot summer is also a summer of emotional and heated debates. There have been many discussions in our country – about inclusion and exclusion, integration and isolation. These discussions are necessary. A vibrant society needs debate – debate which doesn't involve panic-mongering and in which the challenges are addressed head-on. And it needs argument and disagreement – the kind that is conducted without insults and doesn't need to cross certain lines.

I'm pleased that we have this opportunity to have a conversation today: about your daily lives, your experiences and how we live together in Germany. That's why I invited you. As your Federal President. And as your neighbour. I'm looking forward to gathering round a table together for a conversation over coffee and cake – there's also tea – just like neighbours.

The same questions have cropped up time and again in the many contributions made during the last few weeks: Who belongs to German society? How does someone have to be, what do they have to do to belong? And above all, who decides all of this?

Sometimes, the impression has been created that there could be – indeed that there should be – definitive answers to these questions. However, our society is not a rigid construction. The right to belong is not awarded from above like a badge and then possibly taken back later. No. We work together to continuously re-shape our country, the place where we live in freedom and feel at home.

That starts with our stories – telling our stories and listening to those of the others. Naturally, that includes the stories of those who

have more than one home in their hearts. Many of us have their roots in a place other than where they live today and where they plan to spend their future. Incidentally, I'm not only thinking of the refugees whose fate has dominated public debate in recent times. Rather, I'm thinking of the many people who we've asked to work here for economic reasons – from Italy, Greece, Spain or Portugal, and later especially from Turkey. Without them, without their families who joined them later, without their children and grandchildren, our country's economic prosperity, indeed today's society, would be inconceivable. We've achieved this together – and as President of this country, I'd like to thank you for that!

Your stories belong to Germany. They're part of our make-up! Our country has become a new home to many, but that doesn't mean that anyone has to deny their roots. For individuals can have more than one home, both in the emotional and the physical sense. The concept of home is not a means of excluding people. It invites others to join in – just like this gathering.

As the last few weeks have shown, however, the reality is different for many people in our country. Under the hashtag "MeTwo", they have told us of their own personal experiences: of discrimination or racism in everyday life, of exclusion in political debates. Time and again, I hear the children or even grandchildren of immigrants say, "Even though I was born here, even though I've tried so hard, I don't really belong."

I can't forget these stories. They make me feel uneasy. We as a society must be sensitive to these concerns. And by no means should we dismiss them. A permanent suspicion of migrants, no matter how long they've lived in Germany, isn't only hurtful for the individual. It's a cause of shame for our country. Racism and discrimination violate human dignity and damage our democracy. They devalue what we in this country have already achieved together.

For there are no half or whole, no "organic" or "passport" Germans. There are no first or second class citizens, no right or wrong neighbours. There are no Germans on a temporary basis who have to prove over and over again that they belong to our society – and whose membership is withdrawn when their conduct supposedly falls short of the mark.

Rather, there is one Federal Republic of Germany – its citizens with the same rights and duties, together with the many people who live and work here and share one thing: their desire to live peacefully alongside each other in this free country based on the rule of law.

I'm proud to be the President of all these people. I'm your President and I carry out my duties with the same respect and

dedication for everyone in our country, regardless of their origins, skin colour or religion!

Of course, such a society is hard work. Diversity is hard work – diversity resulting from immigration just as much as diversity resulting from our different lifestyles, religions and denominations or political views. We've all experienced this in our own families, so why shouldn't it apply to our country as a whole?

It would be a mistake to believe that integration could come about without any conflicts or that we could attain something resembling a harmonious end state. On the contrary, an open society is full of contradictions and conflicts. Despite that, the vast majority of us wouldn't want to live in any other kind of society!

But there's one thing we still need to learn – conducting the conflicts within our society without immediately casting into doubt anyone's right to belong to it. After all, we are one country – both when things are going well and when they're not going well. We work together to achieve our successes and we can only overcome our crises by joining forces. We've proved that quite a few times during the last decades. To sum up, I would like to see a Germany in which we win and can lose together.

We've been arguing for too long whether our country is a country of immigration. The fact is that immigration is taking place because we've asked people time and again to come. That will remain so in future. And it's good that clear rules on this are now being drawn up.

And yet, simply recognising that we are a country of immigration is not enough. Action has to be taken: by the state, which has the responsibility to organise society so that we can live together; by politicians who have to set out the ground rules for this; and by each and every one of us. For we ourselves shape day-to-day life in our society and no-one, not even politicians, can conduct our conflicts for us.

Integration is neither a favour nor a present. Nor, however, is it a right with no conditions attached. Rather, integration brings obligations for both sides: those who have been Germans for generations and those who have come to live in our country. We are all called upon to reach out to each other, to question prejudices and not to pigeonhole others. We have to respect each other – also our differences, as long as they comply with the law of the land. And we have a shared responsibility to stand against those who sow mistrust, fear or division amongst us – either those here in Germany or those targeting our country from abroad.

Fortunately, we have a firm foundation for all of this – our constitution: the dignity of each and every individual, equality,

democracy, the rule of law and, what's more, responsibility for Germany's history.

If we strive to find solutions together on this basis, then everyone will have changed a bit by the end of the process – and I'm certain that cohesion in our country will get stronger, not weaker.

Dear neighbours, I would now ask you to move outside. You'll find a table set for coffee and cake in the garden. That's typically German, you may think. However, I'd like to point out that coffee originally came to us via Turkey!

You'll find baklava and butter cake on our table. It's the place where we'll talk with each other, where I hope we can laugh together. But it's also the place to share our pain or disappointment and, above all, where we can search for solutions together.

I find this table a lovely symbol – a symbol of a society in which we not only treat each other with respect but also truly show an interest in others. Yes, we Germans have many homes and many different stories. However, we are united by one avowal: I want to live in this country. I want to have a say here, I want to help shape its future.

That's what our table stands for and I hope that there are many events like this around the country. We need such forums. For it's only at a table that everything can be discussed, including difficult issues. At any rate, I myself have decided that in future such a table will play a role in many of my visits around Germany.