



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at the opening of the conference "How do we
commemorate 9 November? A day between
pogroms and democratic new dawns"
at Schloss Bellevue
on 9 November 2022**

Allow me to offer you all a very warm welcome to Schloss Bellevue for a discussion about 9 November that I am hosting together with the Central Council of Jews in Germany. And so thank you very much, Dr Schuster, for this cooperation. I would like to thank everyone who has agreed to be on the panel afterwards and share their knowledge, experiences and assessments with us. And I would like to thank all of you, esteemed guests, for not only coming here this morning and listening as the day goes on, but for deciding to play an active part in this debate during the course of the day.

9 November presents us with a challenge each year anew: how can we commemorate these various historical events, those of 1918, 1938 and 1989, in such a way that none of them is consigned to historical oblivion? This is not a trivial question, but one that takes us to the heart of our self-image, as I said last year. Our identity is determined by the way in which we Germans remember our 9 November – or our various 9 Novembers plural – and how we commemorate this day in a dignified and appropriate manner.

On this day, if we truly consider all of its aspects, it becomes clear to us time and again what great possibilities and democratic new dawns on the one hand and, on the other, what abysses, what horrific crimes we were capable of here in Germany. And, time and again, we are asked on this day how we want to live together today and tomorrow, now and in the future, what we commit ourselves to together in this country, and what we want to strive for together in this, our country.

If you will, 9 November asks us like no other day whether we really take the three great goals from our national anthem seriously: freedom, the rule of law, unity.

9 November 1918 asks us this question: do we want to live in freedom; do we want to take our lives and our community into our own hands in a self-determined and democratic way? Do we want to respect the institutions of our democracy, and do we want to emphatically reject authoritarian temptations and media manipulations?

9 November 1938 asks us the following urgent question: do we want to acknowledge the rule of law at all times and for everyone in our country? The right to life, to freedom, to equality, the right to our own convictions, ways of life and faith? Do we want to firmly oppose injustice, discrimination, disregard for any form of otherness, and, above all, do we want to oppose antisemitism with all due resolve?

And, last but not least, 9 November 1989 asks us this: do we want to live in unity in our country, not accepting walls, be they physical or mental in nature? Not as a standardised homogeneity, but as a unity of the diverse in their respective individuality: the unity of West and East, of city and country, of woman and man, of young and old, of those born here and those who have moved here?

Precisely one year ago – as many of you will recall – in this very room, we undertook to commemorate 9 November in all its facets, the dark and the light, the joyful and the sad, and those that continue to burden us.

One year ago, the heads of our constitutional bodies, the Federal Chancellor, the President of the Bundestag, the President of the Bundesrat, the President of the Federal Constitutional Court, and also the President of the European Council, as well as a whole series of members of parliament and representatives of religious communities were guests here at Schloss Bellevue. With texts and songs, we called to mind the proclamation of the first German republic following the First World War in 1918, the Night of the Pogrom of 1938 and the jubilant celebrations of freedom on the night of 9 November 1989.

Margot Friedländer, who had just turned one hundred, an eyewitness and survivor of the Shoah, addressed us one year ago. The youngest member of the 20th German Bundestag, Emilia Fester, also spoke to us about remembrance and our obligations stemming from 1918. And, last but not least, civil rights activist and former Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic Roland Jahn drew our attention to the events and repercussions of 9 November 1989. It was clear to those involved and to the guests at the event one year ago that this was an experiment – a long overdue one, some thought, a too daring one, others feared. Yes, it was an experiment to link these events and

commemorate them together at a meeting of just under two hours, events that are so difficult to compare.

The event one year ago was well received. 9 November – or rather the various 9 Novembers – became apparent in their respective exceptionality, but also in their historical reference to one another. We were able to show that it is possible to commemorate the brightest and the darkest hours of German history of the 20th century side by side, as unwieldy as they are when contrasted with each other, and to call them to mind in their respective significance for the present and, above all, to keep this memory alive.

A memorial event such as this in Berlin, attended by government leaders and in front of the cameras, is important, but, and that is why we are here today, it is not enough, of course. So my question is this: how can we manage to enshrine such reflection on and about 9 November in all its facets even more strongly throughout our country? In society as a whole? In schools and municipalities, in East and West?

To be quite clear, my aim is not to rehash the old debate about our national day and the right day for this; that doesn't help us, to my mind. But there are other forms and formats with which we can bring memorial days and days of remembrance to life and make them meaningful for the present. We must keep on searching for such forms and formats anew.

I don't want to say much more than that from the podium right now. After all, we are here in order to find out from the most diverse perspectives how 9 November is already being marked in our country or what it could signify for the present and for the future. It is good and appropriate that we are taking this opportunity today, on the day itself, to reflect on this together and to hear suggestions from a wide range of points of view. And I maintain what I said last year, namely that being able to cope with this ambivalence is par for the course if you are a German.

I am especially delighted, and I wish to say this again, that I am able to host this event today together with the Central Council of Jews in Germany. That was very important to me. There can be no doubt that 9 November will always be a difficult memorial day for us, one that unites us with the Jewish community of our country in a particular way. 9 November 1938 – no, that was not the beginning of the persecution. But what happened on that day of flagrant violence was a harbinger, visible to all, of the disenfranchisement, abduction and eventual extermination of the Jews of Germany and Europe that followed, meticulously planned and carried out with brutal resolve.

One thing is certain here: in our country, it will never be possible to truly commemorate 9 November without remembering the betrayal of all civilised values that was the Holocaust. 9 November will always

exhort us to fight against antisemitism. The fact that we are reflecting today together with the Central Council of Jews in Germany on how we can commemorate the so very different 9 Novembers of our history in the future therefore continues to be particularly important to me.

I hope that we will all take away a great deal of food for thought and many ideas and suggestions for appropriate ways in which to commemorate 9 November in the future. I would like to thank you all once again for being here today. A very warm welcome to you all.