



**Christmas message  
by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
in Schloss Bellevue  
on 25 December 2018**

I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas!

I hope that over the holidays you will have something that's in short supply the rest of the year – time.

Time to take a deep breath. Perhaps to read, relax or simply sleep in late. Time to reflect on what was important this year, and on what will be important in the next.

There is something else that's special about Christmas – finally, we have time to talk! Of course, time to talk with our loved ones at home; but also and especially with people we neglected during the hustle and bustle of the past twelve months. Time to talk to our old school friend on the phone. To have coffee with a neighbour.

Many of us will have family over for Christmas dinner. Maybe there will again be relatives that we know from the start we will get into an argument with about politics.... Yes, Christmas is a time not only of carols, but sometimes also of quarrels.

I believe it's good for us to engage in debate; it's good for us to talk to each other. If I had one wish for our country, then it would be: let's have more debate!

I feel that we Germans are spending less and less time talking to each other. And even less time listening to each other. Wherever you look – especially on the social media – we see haters; there is shouting and daily outrage.

But what worries me more than the shouting of some is the silence of many others. More and more people are sticking with their own kind, living in self-made bubbles where everyone always agrees one hundred percent – also on who doesn't belong. However, no matter how upset we are about others, or wish they just didn't exist –

one thing remains true: we are all part of this country, regardless of our origin, skin colour, approach to life or favourite sport team.

That's what is so beautiful, and at the same time demanding, about democracy. We must relearn the art of having arguments – without frothing at the mouth – and we must learn to accept each other's differences. People who get into heated debates can also pull themselves together afterwards. We have seen this happen at Christmas family gatherings. However, if you don't talk and, what's more, are unable to listen, then you won't get any closer to finding solutions. Speechlessness brings everything to a grinding halt.

Fellow citizens – it is up to us, and it is up to you! Talk to people who do not agree with you. Make a point of speaking with someone you may have preconceived views about – but whom you otherwise would never have had a conversation with. It's worth a try. That's what I ask of you this Christmas. It is also my personal New Year's resolution. Let's make sure that people keep talking to one another.

What happens when societies drift apart, and when one side can barely talk to the other without it turning into an all-out argument, is all too evident in the world around us. We have seen burning barricades in Paris, deep political rifts in the United States and anxiety in the United Kingdom ahead of Brexit; Europe is being put to the test in Hungary, Italy and other places. We, in the heart of Europe, are of course not immune against these developments. In our country, too, there is uncertainty, there is fear and there is anger.

Maybe all this will be part of the dinner conversation in your home this evening. So I want to say as clearly as I can what I experience every day as Federal President: Our democracy is strong. Millions of people make it that way. You make it that way. Many of you are active in your local communities, associations and city councils. You may be an employee or a volunteer. Especially these days, by the way – in hospitals, police stations, fire brigades and nursing homes, in Germany and abroad. I want to say a very special thank-you to everyone who is on duty this evening.

You make us strong. Our democracy is always just as strong as we make it. Its founding principle is that we voice our opinions, and that we are willing to argue for what we believe in. It also means that we are constantly vulnerable – because someone else may sometimes be right. Reaching compromise does not signal weakness, but rather is a sign of strength. The ability to compromise is the backbone of democracy.

So let us be brave! Let us place our trust in this country. It is our country, and it is our democracy.

As I look to the year that lies ahead, I am full of confidence. And it is my wish that you, too, be confident. Have a most blessed Christmas!