



Bundespräsident
Alexander Van der Bellen

Address by
Austrian Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen on
the Occasion of the New Year's Reception for the
Diplomatic Corps

23 January 2025
Ceremonial Hall of the Vienna Hofburg

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Most Reverend Apostolic Nuncio,
Secretary General Ambassador Marschik,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Hofburg.
Welcome to our modest imperial offices.

First of all, let me thank you, most Reverend Apostolic Nuncio for your kind and much appreciated New Year's wishes on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps!

As every year, I would like to say a few words about the past year and the year ahead.

First of all, the **major political situation** in the world:

Well, I don't think it will surprise anyone when I say we are truly living in "interesting times" - which, as I'm sure you know, is not meant as something positive.

The trend towards difficult upheavals, crises and threats has unfortunately not calmed down, on the contrary, it has accelerated. And we can only hope that things will get better next year.

The "new world order" that is emerging contains plenty of material for the above mentioned "interesting times":

Divisions are deepening within our societies as well as in international relations.

The war on European soil rages on. President Putin has brought it to us and nobody knows when he will let go of his victim, **Ukraine**. What's more, inside his country, he is stirring up hatred vis-à-vis the West and inside OUR countries, he is trying to destabilize our democratic, liberal societies by means of disinformation. And it turns out we are not immune against these threats. We have not enough tools to counter the lies and the distortion that are flooding our society via social media inter alia. And it seems like a great tug-of-war has begun for the minds of people and governments.

The **Middle East** has been experiencing unprecedented suffering for almost a year and a half now. Far too many people have died or lost loved ones, in Israel, in Gaza, and in other countries. We can only hope that the urgently needed deal, that has been in place since Sunday, will hold. We can only hope that all Israeli hostages, who have had to live through an unimaginable horror, will be released as soon as possible and can return to their families. and that the civilian population in Gaza will quickly be provided with enough food, shelter and medical assistance.

And then it is about looking to the future and finding a way for Israel and Palestine, Jews and Arabs, to live together, side by side, in peace and trust. This is a long way off, but there will have to be a solution. There **MUST** be a solution.

Yes, the shocks that have hit us in the past year, are so enormous that another big crisis - the **climate crisis** – has received too little attention. Political parties that put climate protection at the heart of their policies have often scored badly in the elections. Yet every year, we see more clearly what the climate crisis is doing: storms, droughts, severe weather. And 2025 will be no exception. The huge, devastating fires in California, in Los Angeles, are just the latest disaster¹.

If I may stay geographically in the region: it is also unclear how the **new US administration** under President Trump, who was inaugurated on Monday, will use their power and how their decisions will affect our countries, our multilateral institutions, the international climate protection, our trade flows and thus our economies. But one thing is clear: our transatlantic partnership has grown and flourished over many decades and is an important pillar of Austria's and Europe's foreign policy. I trust that this will remain the case and that our alliance will continue to be based on respect, goodwill and shared values.

I trust in this, just as I generally do not believe in falling into fatalism. Fatalism has never solved a conflict or prevented a flood. What we need is **hope and determination**.

¹ <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2025/01/15/much-of-the-damage-from-the-la-fires-could-have-been-averted>

And there is good reason for hope. Not everything in this world has changed for the worse, on the contrary: in the Global South, the living conditions of many people are continuing to improve. Poverty, hunger and infant mortality are decreasing, life expectancy is increasing, access to education is becoming more widespread and illiteracy is decreasing. Medical progress is being made. Renewable forms of energy are becoming more and more widespread, with wind and photovoltaics providing clean electricity. And I can think of many positive developments. So yes, changes - political, climatic, etc. – are just around the corner. But we must try to steer and shape these changes. Now more than ever, we need to work together, to talk to each other, to listen to each other and to identify common solutions. We need **partnerships**, **multilateralism** - the European Union, the United Nations – and we need **diplomacy**.

Because we are stronger together.

For this reason, Austria must and will continue to be a stable partner in the European Union. For this reason, Austria is applying for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for the period 2027-28. And for this reason, I look forward to reaching out to a number of countries which I plan to visit this year or whose Heads of State I shall welcome in Vienna.

2025 must be the year when - instead of further deepening tensions – we cooperate even more closely. That is my New Year's resolution, my wish for the world in 2025.

Excellencies!

Allow me to return from the wide world to Austria.

We are celebrating a number of important **anniversaries** this year. On January 1st, we celebrated 30 years of Austrian membership of the EU. At the end of April, we will celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Second Republic. And in May we will first commemorate 80 years since the end of the Second World War and just a few days later 70 years since the Austrian State Treaty of 1955.

These dates should serve as occasions to remind us how valuable it is what we have: Freedom from war, independence, a liberal democracy, the rule of law, participation in a community of friendly states. We must always keep these important lessons from history in mind. I for one - and some of your Heads of

State, as far as I know – will have a good opportunity to do so when I visiting former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz on January 27th, to commemorate its liberation in 1945.

Before coming to the end, let me add a few words regarding the **domestic political situation in Austria**. Two political parties, the FPÖ and the ÖVP, are currently negotiating to form a coalition to govern Austria.

As you know, I did not take lightly the decision to entrust the FPÖ with the task of forming a government. In October 2024, I gave the first mandate to form a government to former Chancellor Karl Nehammer. These talks failed. As a consequence, a new picture has emerged - one in which those voices within the ÖVP that had formerly ruled out cooperation with an FPÖ under Mr. Kickl have become much quieter. This in turn means that a new path for coalition building may be opening up. Whatever the outcome of these current coalition negotiations I will continue to ensure that the principles and rules of our constitution are correctly observed and adhered to. That is my task as Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

Excellencies!

A challenging year has come to an end. Will 2025 be easier? We don't know. But I am sure that as diplomats and ambassadors of your countries you will once again work tirelessly and give your best to stand up to these challenges. Thank you for doing so! And thank you for continuing to believe that we can succeed in making the world a better place, where peace and justice prevail and people can live in an intact environment. Together we can achieve this.

I wish you and your families a happy and prosperous new year 2025!