

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

21 January 2026

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Most Reverend Apostolic Nuncio,  
thank you for your kind New Year's wishes  
on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps!

Madam Minister Meisl-Reisinger,  
Secretary of State Schellhorn,  
Secretary General Ambassador Marschik,  
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

welcome to the Hofburg, welcome to a New Year, and a new New-Year's-reception.

As pleasant as it is meeting all of you – and it definitely is – I have to confess that this exercise of recapitulating the events of the preceding twelve months and looking out to the next twelve has changed somewhat in the last years.

I wish I could say that it has changed for the better.

Last year, I talked about how we are living in “interesting times”.

Well, we still do that. I might even say that the only thing that has not changed is the analysis that we are living in times of change.

Of a real whirlwind of change.

The Russian war of aggression has grown even more brutal, with attackers relentlessly killing people every day, and deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure, especially energy related facilities, leaving big parts of the Ukrainian civilian population in the cold and dark.

In Israel and Gaza, an extremely fragile agreement is in place having allowed for the hostages to return home and the bodies of the dead to be handed over to their families.

The people in Gaza have been given a much-needed break from the massive military strikes and better access to humanitarian aid.

But many are still living under extremely precarious conditions, and I very much hope for a swift improvement of their situation as well as for a rapid and complete implementation of the entire Peace Plan.

The war in Sudan, ongoing since April 2023, has intensified, causing immense suffering among the civilians, with no end in sight.

The terrible and brutal oppression of protests in Iran with thousands killed for exercising a democratic right: to take to the streets and protest peacefully.

And then, beginning of January, the US intervention in Venezuela, and the capture of the - in our eyes illegitimate – president, by that violating international law.

And the blatant attempts by a once considered friend to take over Greenland, a territory which is part of Denmark, a close ally and a trusted NATO- and EU Member State.

There are so many other crises and conflicts, too many to cover them here, although each and every one of them would merit to be discussed in detail.

But even though these crises are big enough to be worried about them there is an even bigger and even more worrisome picture.

Which is the classical **return of power politics** in so many parts of the world. The thinking in spheres of influence, in hemispheres, inside of which big powers consider it legitimate to use force and coercion against smaller States. The undermining of the rules-based world order and multilateralism.

Excellencies, at this point, I normally speak about the need for **Europe** to stick together, to join forces and become strong through unity.

This is something that is dear to my heart. Europe must not allow itself to be divided, neither by forces from within nor from without.

Europe needs a *European patriotism*, a feeling – a certainty – of belonging together, of rooting for each other.

As a positive example, let me mention here the recent statements issued by Denmark and several of its European partners, underlining that it is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide Greenlands future and reiterating their full solidarity.

This was a quick, clear and unequivocal reaction.

In Davos, in a few hours, we will hear more about where this is going.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

here in this room, there are many representatives of countries from outside of Europe. Which is why I want to underline also a message that goes beyond Europe.

The message is: to believe in the high art of diplomacy. Which means:

To talk to each other. To **listen** to each other.

To place the art of negotiation above everything else, above power politics, above the art of the military, above the use of tariffs as a political tool.

To resort more to “speaking softly” and less to “carrying a big stick”, to paraphrase the famous saying by US President Roosevelt.

And to uphold the principle of cooperation inside a community of nations. A principle that must outweigh short-term power gains and interests.

Because in the end, all countries, big or small, profit from a world of peace, prosperity and justice. And all countries lose if they are surrounded by a world of instability and poverty.

Not only Europeans have to stick together. All our countries who believe in these values must unite and fight for them. We must become a new “axis of goodness” to paraphrase another famous term coined by a US president.

Excellencies,

this is my New Year’s message to you – as diplomats, who are professionals in this area.

Last year, we celebrated 80 years of the foundation of the United Nations. 70 years of Austria’s accession to the UN, 50 years since the foundation of the OSCE, 30 years of Austria joining the EU.

A good moment thus to remember that we already have forums and processes to come together and sort things out.

Yes, many of their tools seem outdated and weak in today’s demanding environment. And yes, criticizing these forums and processes is absolutely legitimate.

But the world would be much worse off without them. Precisely because of all the challenges ahead of us, we need structures that create a basis for rules and an international order.

That nudge us into cooperation.

That allow for a system where it is not only size and military power that matters, but where we all enjoy equal rights, even smaller countries such as my country, Austria.

And Austria is proud to be host country of some of these structures: Of the United Nations, the OSCE and others. And we are also proud to be a candidate for the UN Security Council with elections in June this year.

We are a candidate because this is what we believe in: That multilateralism makes this world a better place.

And that small countries, neutral countries, countries without much military or economic clout are able to make a difference on the world stage, if they can rely on a framework to do that.

Excellencies!

As we start this new Year 2026, with all the tests that it may – will – bring, let us remember that we - politicians, diplomats - are the ones who have the tools at our hands to lay the foundation, the basis for better times to come.

I know, that this is what you have worked hard for last year.

I know, that this is what you will work hard for in this new year.

Thank you for giving your best and for believing in a future of dialogue, rule of law, justice and peace.

And thank you for being here today. I wish you and your loved ones a happy and prosperous New Year 2026!