



Bundespräsident  
Alexander Van der Bellen

**Address by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen  
to the Diplomatic Corps on the Occasion of the  
Virtual New Year's Reception 2022  
20 January 2022**

Check against delivery!

Most Reverend Apostolic Nuncio,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year already, I was unable to give you my good wishes for the new year in person – and who would have thought that we would witness this scenario again this year.

But that is the way it is, so today again, I would like to convey my thanks and my best wishes for this new year in this particular format.

Thank you very much, Most Reverend Apostolic Nuncio, for the kind wishes for the new year that you have extended on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps.

The COVID-19 pandemic has weighed on all of this past year's events like a heavy blanket that cannot be shaken off.

The longer this state of emergency persists, with another lockdown, and then another one, the more apparent the rifts in our communities – both national and international – become.

And as of yet, there is no end in sight to COVID.

Just when we thought the worst was behind us, Omicron was around the corner.

And to be honest, we do not really know what the coming weeks – or even the coming days – will bring in that respect.

But in spite of all that, we must not lose courage.

There is good news, too:

We have vaccines! Both in Austria and worldwide, they have proven an effective response against the virus.

While countries located primarily in the Global North are in a fortunate situation, already able to administer booster shots, many parts of the world still urgently need vaccines.

Therefore, more than ever, international solidarity is key.

Within the EU, we have recently agreed to donate 700 million vaccine doses worldwide by mid-2022.

Austria will play an active role in this effort, having already delivered over three million vaccine doses to partner countries and particularly vulnerable third countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of you have continued to engage in active diplomacy under pandemic conditions over the past twelve months and had to overcome a number of challenges along the way.

I can only thank you for your tireless commitment to foster the bilateral relations between Austria and your respective countries in spite of the circumstances.

Home to many diplomatic missions and international organisations and institutions, Austria is aware of its particular role as a host country.

Members of the international community in Austria were taken into account early on in our national vaccination measures and continue to be in our efforts to strengthen immunisation through booster vaccinations.

An issue no less pressing is the climate crisis.

Even though, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it somewhat shifted to the back of our minds.

The warnings from climate scientists are increasingly urgent:

Extreme weather events and storms are becoming more frequent and intense.

The climate crisis is surely the greatest challenge humankind has ever faced.

We could still avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis if we were to limit global warming to under 1.5 degree Celsius, as stipulated in the Paris Agreement.

This target was recently reaffirmed at COP26 in Glasgow.

In 2021, large nations joined the fight against the climate crisis or took significant steps towards climate neutrality and sustainability.

We are starting to see all nations close ranks.

But we must do more to move from promises to actions!

And now, young people are no longer the only ones calling for increased climate action: many companies, including in the financial sector, have understood that market risks are changing and vigorous action is needed.

If we are too slow in our fight against greenhouse gas emissions, the next generations will have to bear the horrendous costs of global heating.

As with the COVID pandemic, the EU must demonstrate cohesion in addressing the climate crisis and lead by example on the international stage.

In Austria and in the EU, the course is currently set to achieve this.

Our actions in this regard must be mindful of social considerations, both domestically and worldwide. Countries in the Global North have a particular responsibility in this respect, although it is clear that all countries will need to contribute.

Austria is ready to make its contribution to the fight against the climate crisis.

Your Excellencies, you are welcome to rely on our platforms for dialogue and on Austrian climate and energy know-how for your own countries.

Particularly these challenges I just mentioned show very clearly that we will only be able to meet the main challenges of our time together.

The UN and over forty international organisations represented in Vienna make an invaluable contribution to safety, security, sustainability and prosperity around the world.

We are proud that Vienna continues to serve as a place for dialogue, for instance by hosting the talks on the nuclear agreement with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, which resumed in late November after a long pause.

Just as there is no alternative to dialogue, we believe there is no alternative to the JCPOA. This underscores the importance of finding a positive outcome to these negotiations.

Excellencies,

As you know, Austria would like to take on extra responsibility as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2027–2028 term.

And of course, we hope to have your support in this effort!

Austria is also home to the OSCE headquarters.

Unfortunately, this past year has again shown us that crisis and conflict are ubiquitous in the OSCE area.

These crises, in addition to causing human suffering, highlight the importance of seeking long-term solutions.

It is difficult to accept that there is no solution in sight in Belarus – no end to the repression of civil society and political opposition, and no prospect of a national dialogue starting.

As far as the tense situation between Ukraine and Russia is concerned, de-escalation and a pragmatic, constructive dialogue are of paramount importance.

The increasing erosion of our achievements in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is also concerning.

It is up to us, together with civil society, to defend these values, which are the foundations of any free and open society.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times like these, you are all making a significant contribution to building bridges.

In moments when, as nations and communities of values, we often feel like we are drifting too far apart, your work is particularly crucial.

You contribute to promoting mutual understanding and strengthening international cooperation.

I encourage you to uphold this commitment and keep your faith in what brings us together.

And I encourage you to continue working towards a better future for us and the generations to come.

Over the past year, your role, your work, and the challenges you face have not become smaller – quite the opposite.

I would like to thank you once more for your invaluable work and hope we can soon shake off the heavy blanket of this pandemic, allowing us to meet in person again.

I wish you and your families a happy new year, good luck and good health!