

Federal President Johannes Rau Calls for Greater Tolerance toward Immigrants (May 12, 2000)

Abstract

In a moving speech, Federal President Johannes Rau asks the German public to show more tolerance toward immigrants, whom he describes as an asset to society. He also calls on immigrants to make greater efforts to integrate.

Source

Without Fear and without Illusions: Living together in Germany

Federal President Johannes Rau, May 12, 2000

House of World Cultures, Berlin

I.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- 30% of all children in German schools come from immigrant or recently naturalized families. At some schools the proportion is 60% or more.
- In 1997 and 1998 more people from other countries left Germany than arrived.
- Between 1990 and 1998 50% of all asylum seekers within the European Union applied for asylum in Germany. In 1999 it was at least a quarter.
- Of all those who seek asylum here in Germany, around 4% are granted asylum by the relevant federal authority.
- Turks alone have established more than 50,000 companies in Germany and created 200,000 jobs.
- The German economy will in the future not have enough qualified personnel.

These are six widely differing statements on reality in Germany – and yet they are all part of a broader picture.

Immigration, contingents of refugees, limitations on establishment of residence, immigrants, integration, green cards, asylum, deportation, repatriation – these keywords have for years repeatedly returned to mould political discussion.

Many individual problems and many detailed issues also form the stuff of private conversations – and also often lead to wordless confrontation.

More than seven million foreigners live in Germany. They have in the past years changed our society. But we do not give enough consideration to what this means for life in our country.

And we do not act in accordance with this changed reality.

How we live with one another is one of the most important topics of all when we think about the future of our society.

We must come to grips with this topic

- because it concerns everyone in our country, even if some people have not yet noticed,
- because in some respects it goes to the very heart of our constitutional order and our constitutional reality,
- because waiting does not solve problems but aggravates them,
- and lastly because it comes down to whether we can join forces to provide a good future for everyone.

Everybody knows that immigration gives rise to strong emotions in many people – good emotions as well as less admirable ones. Precisely for this reason we must talk as openly as possible about it – and as calmly and realistically as possible.

Often there is too much that remains unspoken. Often we lead illusionary debates rather than tackling the broader and more fundamental topic of harmonious coexistence.

We have to find answers to the right questions:

- How best to live in harmony with the people who are legal long-term residents in Germany and who want to stay here?
- How should we treat those whom we only want to take or can take for a short time?
- How should we cope with the problems that concern many people in our country?
- What can and must we require of those who want to live and work long-term in Germany?
- What are the demands we have to make on ourselves?

We need a public discussion on these issues that reaches far beyond the ranks of the parties. We need to talk about immigration and coexistence in Germany – about the opportunities and difficulties that it brings – with all groups of society and all institutions.

And we must act without fear and without illusions.

We can only act successfully if we overcome two attitudes that are far too widespread:

We must overcome uncertainty and fear, which can lead to xenophobia, hatred and violence.

We must overcome a blind xenophilia, which denies that there are problems or conflicts when people of differing origins live together.

II.

A simple truth must first be recognized: the fact that people of different origins and cultures live together in our country will not change. Integration is therefore the task that we must approach jointly if we want to live together successfully and peaceably.

We have lived for too long in the belief that all this is just a temporary condition.

This belief is illustrated particularly clearly in the word "Gastarbeiter", "guest worker". This word was coined to make clear that these people were guests, and would go home again after a certain period of time.

We have long known, however, that most people who come stay – and we have for too long closed our eyes to the fact that this has a number of practical consequences.

The guest workers stayed – most of them to the benefit of us all:

Without workers and employees from other countries many sectors of business would be facing great difficulties. Men and women holding foreign passports have now founded tens of thousands of small and larger enterprises. They provide jobs and training places.

The vast majority of the foreign population meets their obligations and contributes to our prosperity and to our social security system.

They pay income tax and value-added tax, like the rest of us.

They too pay pension contributions and help finance the Federal Institute for Employment and the statutory Health Insurance Companies.

We do not need any artificial debates on whether Germany is an immigration country or an in-migration country.

We must not continue to pluck isolated issues from the discussion: today Islamic religion classes in schools, tomorrow green cards, then work permits for seasonal workers, or the treatment of refugees from civil wars.

We need a new perspective – we need to take a look at the whole.

We must free ourselves of our misconceptions and see the world as it is; we must take the necessary decisions, and go down new roads.

We need a fresh start to enable all people in Germany to live together in harmony – without fear and without illusions.

One thing must be clear at the start of any discussion: there is no such thing as "the foreigners" – there are only individual people.

People with their unique roots –

- whether a job-seeker from Anatolia,
- whether an ethnic German immigrant from a small village deep in Kazakhstan,
- whether someone fleeing persecution and torture in Sudan,
- whether a refugee from the destroyed towns and villages of Kosovo.

Each one has their own story, each one their dreams, each one has been molded by their culture and religion, each one has their own way of interacting with others.

As different as they may be, they all have one thing in common: each of them is looking for refuge or a new home in Germany – some voluntarily and some by force of circumstance, some for a transitional period only, but many for good.

III.

Leaving a homeland and adapting to a new culture is a story that has been repeated throughout history – in the history of Germany too. We therefore know that immigration and integration are not without their conflicts, that they do not happen automatically.

The migrations to Germany of the past centuries cannot of course be directly compared with the situation today. There are many aspects that require more time and quite a few things that are more difficult when people from very different cultural and religious backgrounds have to learn to live together.

Many things are more difficult in this day and age, now that migrants can maintain close ties with their homelands via telephone and satellite television.

Nevertheless, a look back can show that new arrivals to Germany have been successfully integrated in the past, and can be successfully integrated again.

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards we in Germany have taken in hundreds of thousands of people seeking work and their daily bread. They came from the Eastern provinces of the German Reich, from Austria-Hungary, from Russia, amongst them many Poles.

They came to the industrial center that Berlin then was, to the "golden West", to the mines and metalworks of the Ruhr basin. Within one generation villages and small towns were transformed into cities.

The first generation immigrants lived strictly in accordance with the traditions they brought with them, such as Polish-Catholic piety. But the second generation, who worked in the same pits and played in the same football teams, began to pronounce their Polish names in a Germanic, Westphalian way. Just as they were being influenced by their new environment, so they too influenced their new homeland.

How many of us, not just here in Berlin or in the Ruhr area, are descended from immigrants! From fathers and mothers who sought a better life abroad! What reception, what welcome would we have wished upon our grandfathers and great grandfathers?

And how were our fellow countrymen received, when they went abroad?

In its history Germany has not only been at the receiving end of migrations. Poverty and hardship, but also the lure of adventure and the entrepreneurial spirit carried many of our ancestors to Canada and America during the second half of the nineteenth century – year for year in numbers equaling the population of a city.

Germans too were once economic refugees.

Germans too fled political persecution.

Germans too have helped build other nations.

As a consequence of World War II, Germany took in millions of refugees and displaced persons. These people were successfully integrated, but when they first arrived matters were far from easy, even though they were Germans arriving in Germany.

Many people will not forget the opposition they met with, and not just in villages and small towns – even though they had borne the greatest of hardships, although they spoke the same language, although they belonged to the same culture, and even the same denomination as their new neighbors.

Integration requires great patience. It needs acceptance on the part of the local population. But even more – and this is especially true today – it needs the willingness and work of the new arrivals – the willingness not just to be there, but the wish to belong.

IV.

Encounters with the unfamiliar, with people and things that are unknown to us, are full of tension. Such encounters arouse mixed emotions: of curiosity and repulsion, welcome and reserve, a lack of understanding and gradual familiarization.

Immigration always has two sides: it is a burden and an enrichment. One cannot talk about one without seeing and naming the other.

There are many advantages that immigration and contact with other cultures have brought which we no longer notice because we now take them for granted.

Without the guest workers as they were then called, the Federal Republic of Germany would not have experienced the economic boom that it did. We sent out a call for the workers we so urgently required, and they came. They made a significant contribution to the productivity of the German economy. And by transferring money to their families back home they also did much to boost the economy of their countries of origin.

We have been enriched culturally: Music from other countries has opened new worlds to many of us. Today we enjoy listening to many types of music that was still foreign to us two or three decades ago. The exhibition "Heimat Kunst" in this building, and the related projects, demonstrate how encounters between different cultures inspire musicians, singers, painters and writers to new forms of artistic expression.

A little aside – we even eat differently now. The immigrants brought their recipes with them, their specialities, their spices and their drinks. Who can imagine our streets now without pizza and doner kebabs? Olive oil and Turkish bread are now consumed daily by many of us.

Germany is now one of the most colorful and open countries in the world. We have become more relaxed, richer in experience and more tolerant.

It is however also true that there are some people who do not see, or who cannot see, these benefits. They tend to experience more directly the problems associated with having such a large number of immigrants.

V.

Living in a multicultural society is indeed difficult and hard work. Anyone who denies or does not wish to admit it has no credibility when they preach greater tolerance, amity and receptiveness.

It does not help to turn a blind eye to the problems or to label those who merely talk about them xenophobes.

It is not difficult to act in a xenophile manner in well-off areas. It is harder in places which are being changed more and more, where a "local" can no longer read the shops signs, where families from all over the world live together in the same building, where the odors of various cuisines mingle in the corridors, where foreign music is played loud, where we encounter totally different styles of living and religious customs.

Life together becomes difficult when old-established Germans no longer feel at home, when they feel like

foreigners in their own country.

It is one thing to enjoy multicultural radio programs in air-conditioned cars. It is another to sit on the underground or the bus and be surrounded by people whose language one cannot understand.

I can understand parents who are concerned about the educational future of their children in schools with a high percentage of foreign pupils. I have come across it myself.

I can also understand that people are worried by the above-average crime rates among young foreigners and ethnic German immigrants from Eastern Europe.

I can understand how girls and young women are not the only ones afraid of being harrassed or intimidated by gangs of young foreigners.

Anyone who does not take such fears and concerns seriously is talking past their audience, making them ask "what do they know".

Where fears and concerns are justified, an attempt must be made to find a remedy. We must explain and be able to explain why there is no alternative, at least no better one.

Where fears and concerns are not justified, we must inform and enlighten.

Life is like school – unfortunately one tends to remember best the things where one got the wrong end of the stick. Mistakes are the hardest to dislodge.

In order to prevent prejudices taking root and spreading, they must be contradicted time and again.

I see this as a special task and a special responsibility for the media. Explanations and information must be provided.

For example, people get worked up about asylum seekers who sit around all day in the centre of town, thus creating the impression that they are happy to do nothing and be supported by the tax-payers. Far too few of them know that asylum seekers are legally prohibited from working during their first three months here, and that employment offices thereafter continue to turn them away. People who know this may wonder what the point of such a rule is. But they won't accuse asylum seekers of not wanting to work.

I am deeply committed to a worldwide dialogue between cultures and religions. This is an important topic. I have however never viewed it as a substitute for tackling the everyday problems that arise from the coexistence of different cultures in our own country.

We cannot simply talk about harmonious coexistence in the abstract; we have to look at it in a practical context.

VI.

Xenophobia is present in our society, foreigners sometimes meet with hostility. There is violence, even murder. But more dangerous still than individual acts of violence is the social climate that shrouds xenophobia in hidden or even open sympathy.

There is an aggressive intolerance of foreigners, which is encouraged when the majority does not speak out against it. Anyone who does not speak out abets.

We are all called upon. Politicians, policemen, the judiciary and teachers, all have a special responsibility

to counteract hostile tendencies. To do this requires civil courage and support.

Nobody with political responsibility should give in to the temptation to gain politically from xenophobic feelings. Above all they must be careful with their words. I expect them all to show self-discipline and absolute tact.

People who get worked up about the wicked deeds xenophobia gives rise to must not be deaf to the insidious vocabulary that is all too often in use, and must certainly not use it themselves. Atrocious words prepare the ground for atrocious deeds.

Of course we must not abandon anyone to their prejudices and resentments. How often are xenophobia and enmity towards foreigners the result of ignorance and a lack of experience! Only this can explain why there are areas of Germany where xenophobia is widespread although very few foreigners are to be found there.

When right-wing extremists proudly speak of "national liberated zones", the alarm is sounded for the rule of law and democracy and all true patriots are given a reason to hang their heads in shame.

There are reasons and explanations for racism and racist violence, but nothing can justify them. Anyone who uses violence must be punished – the quicker the better.

I do not want to roll out the old argument about Germany's standing in the world. How we are viewed from outside is certainly important. But first and foremost we owe it to ourselves to see that xenophobia is eradicated.

VII.

When we discuss immigration and integration it is not only legitimate but important that we consider our own interests too.

Anyone who comes to Germany must accept the democratically established rules. They are the basis of our society, of our interaction with all others in it. These rules are designed to aid integration, not exclusion. They provide enough leeway for cultural diversity. They guarantee freedom of belief and minority rights.

These rules do however also set limits which nobody may disregard on the basis of their origin or religious conviction.

An important example of this is the rights and role of women in society. Everyone must know that we will not tolerate women having lesser rights on the basis of any tradition or culture.

Everyone must obey the rules that our society has derived for itself, immigrants and Germans.

Integration does not happen of its own accord. It has to be worked for. And that is often hard work.

We must not misunderstand this new effort as a charitable action by which we are doing foreigners a favor. If we are doing something to improve integration, we are not simply acting out of solidarity or Christian neighborly love, but in our own enlightened interest.

There is much debate about whether we are, or should be, a "multicultural society". I can only say that we certainly have a culturally diverse society. However, the different cultures often live side by side rather than together. That is alright as long as diversity is not mistaken for randomness and if we are agreed that a society is not the sum total of minorities.

We need a common idea of how we in Germany intend to live together. We need clear values which ensure that we are all pulling in the same direction.

A society which is divided into fragments cannot be a truly democratic society. Democracy means, among other things, that minorities accept majority decisions, indeed that they wholeheartedly endorse them. This is only possible if, beyond all the conflicts and controversies of day-to-day politics, majority and minority share common basic values. Then they can develop a "we feeling" which binds them together.

We need that, even if, for many reasons, we cannot fall back on the emotion with which other nations portray their harmonious pluralism.

Pride in our constitution is important. However, we also need a certain sense of togetherness. A democratic society cannot endure the division between "us here" and "them there" indefinitely.

When we talk about the danger of our society falling apart we should not only point our fingers at others.

We must ask ourselves if, during all the years, we have always been sufficiently aware of our own identity and whether we have been sufficiently self-confident to win over newcomers on a deeper level.

Do we not have good reason, given our country's successful record of peace and democracy during the last fifty years, to sing the praises of our society, its culture and ways of life, perhaps also its symbols?

Should we not make it much clearer that it is not only prosperity and economic efficiency which make our country attractive?

If we succeed in doing this, we can expect immigrants to become citizens who do not merely live in Germany but actually feel at home here.

Integration does not mean uprooting or faceless assimilation.

Integration is also an alternative to incompatible cultures living side by side without any interaction.

Integration is the commitment, which must be renewed over and over again, of us all to common values. Those who want to live permanently in Germany need not disown their origins. However, they must be prepared to help shape an open society based on the principles contained in the Basic Law. That is our offer to everyone. We can only remain an open society if no isolated groups develop which do not subscribe to our society's basic consensus.

That is why we must promote integration actively and systematically. Everyone who has the right to stay in Germany permanently should be obliged to familiarize themselves with our society: with our values, our traditions and, in particular, with our language.

We should seriously consider following the example of other countries and agree on a law aimed at actively fostering integration.

VIII.

Few of those who have given serious thought to these issues would deny that it will continue to be in our own interests to admit immigrants. That applies not only to Germany but also to other Western countries.

Many in the business world like to look to America and point out the tremendous dynamism of the American economy during the last ten years. The large number of immigrants taken in by America during

the last ten years have made a key contribution towards this dynamism.

A few years ago, President Clinton launched a large-scale program aimed at integrating the different ethnic communities: the program is called "One America" and is intended to prevent society from disintegrating into various ethnic groups.

Attention is not drawn to this very often in Germany.

Why will we and other countries continue to need immigrants? A number of reasons are frequently stated.

For example, it is claimed that only by allowing immigration can we carry on financing our social and pension systems.

It is true that all Western societies have a demographic problem. We should neither play down nor dramatize this. The problem cannot be solved through immigration alone. There is never one right answer to questions with causes and consequences as complex as the inversion of the age pyramid.

We would certainly do well to make our country more child-oriented. It is not the task of politicians to raise the birth rate. However, politicians should do what they can to foster rather than hinder the desire to have children. Having children should not be penalized financially.

There is another reason for demanding immigration which must also be taken seriously. Today, and even more so in the future, there is a shortage of highly-qualified personnel in key areas. The shortcomings of earlier education and vocational training policies are becoming painfully apparent.

The Chancellor has reacted to this with his green card initiative. Although this initiative has met with much approval, including mine, we all know that immigration alone cannot compensate for the shortage of qualified personnel. We cannot do without top-flight professionals from abroad. But we must urgently step up our efforts to improve our own professional and vocational training systems. This can only be achieved through cooperation between educational institutions and industry, which must invest more in training and qualifications in its own best interests. The Chancellor has also pointed this out.

IX.

We cannot leave relations between the different cultures within our society to chance. The demands we place on ourselves and on those who come to live with us must be well thought-out, discussed with caution and wisely laid down.

We must be clear about the conditions for immigration and we must make them binding. Everyone must know what to expect and what is expected of them.

It will certainly not be easy to reach agreement on these fundamental issues concerning how we live together in our society. However, we must not evade these issues. We must conduct this discussion now.

The rules on integration and immigration must be determined by the social and economic interests of our society. It is therefore all the more important to distinguish between two things: immigration and the right to asylum. Drawing up rules on immigration is in our own interests, the right to asylum is based on selfless motives.

Those who say that the world's problems cannot all be solved in Germany are quite right. However, I would add that Germany must remain a good and safe address for people who fear the loss of their freedom and indeed of their lives.

X.

No matter how we regulate immigration in the future, we must be well-prepared – intellectually, politically and institutionally. We must be prepared for people coming from whom we expect something and who expect something from us.

We must be prepared in many spheres.

Most important of all are kindergartens, schools and universities.

These are the places where it is determined whether integration is succeeding in our country. They are where we learn to live together and they also provide the basis for this.

One can isolate oneself in everyday life and remain within one's own community in one's own district. At school one inevitably comes together with others. Here one must get along with others whether one wants to or not.

Schools are the nation's school. They highlight all the difficulties which living together can involve, often most clearly.

That is why I would like to sincerely thank all those teachers who have to cope every single day with the fact that our society has become so diverse and thus also so difficult. Particularly in primary schools and Hauptschulen, they experience at close quarters what is happening in our society, as well as the problems it faces.

I would also like to thank all those who work in day nurseries, in the youth departments of clubs and in open youth work, who do integration work for us all on a daily basis.

I would also like to thank those who work for the police and within the judicial system, as well as the staff in residents' registration offices and aliens authorities, employment offices and social services for their often difficult and sometimes frustrating work for which they need much patience and sensitivity.

I pointed out at the beginning of my speech that 30 percent of all schoolchildren in Germany now have an "immigrant background". That often means insufficient knowledge of German, inadequate integration in class, little involvement on the part of parents who cooperate with kindergartens and schools very little or not at all.

How many problems, from kindergarten onwards, are simply passed onto the next educational establishment up!

In reality, we therefore need teaching from kindergarten and primary school onwards which recognizes that promoting integration is not an issue of secondary importance.

Is this task being given sufficient attention in teacher training? Are teachers already adequately equipped to teach in classes where half or more of the children are not German? Female teachers in particular are often faced with unacceptable behavior resulting from quite different ideas about authority and the roles of the sexes. What can be done about this? What is not done in school often cannot be compensated for later in life.

It is encouraging that the number of students of Turkish descent at our universities has doubled during the last ten years.

However, the number of foreign pupils at Hauptschulen is three times greater than that of their German peers, and the reverse is the case at more advanced schools.

Forty percent of non-German youths with a leaving certificate from a Hauptschule do not find an apprenticeship.

- We need education concepts which acknowledge that pupils from German families with a Western Christian background are no longer the normal case everywhere. This must be given greater attention in basic and further training for teachers.
- We have good pilot projects in which mothers and children learn German together, because it is usually the mothers who have the main responsibility for bringing up their children.
- Those who live in Germany permanently must be able to speak German. That is why "German for Foreigners" is a key educational project for our society's future. We need more teachers for this. I know that this will cost money. However, I also know that cutting costs in the wrong areas today will result in considerable costs later.
- It is not a sign of xenophobia when teachers and head teachers ensure that German is spoken in school. On the contrary, where that is not the case, integration fails from the outset, to the detriment of all children.
- It is in our common interests that all foreigners or newly naturalized citizens have the best possible educational opportunities. Education fosters integration, education opens up opportunities of good jobs, education gives people a voice.
- Education is, after all, the key element of any encounter between cultures worthy of this name. Only education can help to overcome prejudice. It is the best protection against fundamentalism and racism.

What we must avoid at all costs is the emergence of a new educational proletariat, a section of the population which suffers social exclusion as a result of its poor education. That leads to the formation of ethnic ghettos with all the damaging, indeed dangerous, consequences.

XI.

The damaging consequences of the formation of ghettos and cliques, of failed integration, a dearth of opportunities on the job market and social exclusion, include violence and crime.

The figures and statistics on this are often misused. If they are read with care, then some conclusions turn out to be mere prejudice.

However, it is true that young male foreigners and ethnic German immigrants from Eastern Europe in particular are involved in a disproportionately large share of crimes and acts of violence. They must, just like all other criminals, be duly punished, and as quickly as possible.

However, the statistics also show that where integration, through education, vocational training and work, has succeeded, violence and crime is no more prevalent among young foreigners than among young Germans.

Incidentally, a skinhead with heavy boots does not seem any less dangerous to me just because he might have a German passport.

XII.

Although our society is still strongly influenced by Christian traditions, it is more secularized than many realize. Is it not so nowadays that for some without a religious upbringing themselves, their Muslim neighbor is the first person they have encountered who lives his religion in his daily life? And, inversely, is

it not the case that devout Muslims, particularly in our cities, often have the impression that they really do live in a world of "unbelievers", against which they believe they can only protect themselves by strictly adhering to their own traditions? Strict Islamic educators and parents are afraid that their children will turn their backs on religion, thus mirroring the experiences of parents in this country with their children during the last few decades.

Freedom of belief and religion applies to everyone in our country, not only to Christians. That also includes the freedom to express one's beliefs – in religious ceremonies and in religious premises. That is why there are now mosques in many German cities.

It took many of us a while to get used to the sight of those mosques built in a traditional style. I would add that many would find it easier if Christians in Islamic countries had the same right to live their beliefs, as well as to build churches.

I support the right to Islamic religious instruction in our schools. These lessons should be conducted in German by state-trained and approved teachers and based on teaching concepts which have been drawn up by approved Islamic partners and authorized by the Ministries of Education.

We therefore require teacher training courses in the Islamic religion, as well as reliable Islamic partners with whom we can discuss these difficult issues.

Our constitution is based on cooperation in a spirit of trust between the state and religious communities. Islam is not structured like a church. That is why we need a new form of reliable, institutional cooperation with Muslims in Germany. Based on our constitution, we need rules which take into account the legitimate interests of our Muslim citizens.

What we must insist on, also in the interests of all children living here, is that children be educated in state and private schools in accordance with the basic values enshrined in our constitution, also in religious education.

XIII.

I have already mentioned that the basic right to asylum, as it was newly formulated a few years ago, should not be called into question.

However, the current law has resulted time and again in many individual cases in decisions which are even regarded as wrong and unjustifiable by many of those who, in principle, are in favor of a restrictive asylum policy. I receive many letters in which members of the Bundestag and employers, school classes, congregations and committed citizens speak out against the deportation of individual refugees. I can often understand why.

In most cases, however, it turns out that these people cannot be helped. They cannot stay here because it would contravene prevailing law.

Perhaps the authorities need greater leeway in making decisions so that they can better take into account the special circumstances in individual cases. Those who would like to see this, too, must call for the appropriate amendments in the Bundestag. They would have my sympathy.

XIV.

We need renewed joint efforts to ensure that we can all live together in harmony in our country. We must revise our thinking in all areas of society and of political and state action.

We must acknowledge reality if we want to shape it successfully – without fear and without illusions.

Successful integration is in our own vital interests. It mobilizes forces which we need for a prosperous future.

Let us clearly define our interests and goals.

Let us decide how we want to shape integration.

Let us set realistic goals.

Education and once more education – that is the fundamental prerequisite for any integration. Integration must be a key component in all education policies.

Immigration must not be left to chance. We need well thought-out, practical concepts which do not place too great a burden on anyone. We need the courage to do the right thing even if it is not always popular in all quarters.

We need a broad-based consensus on integration and immigration. That is why I would ask everyone with a role to play and a voice in our society to discuss the best way to achieve this objective. But it must be done in such a way that it neither stirs up fear nor awakens illusions.

We also need coordination within Europe on migration policy. However, that must not be used as an excuse not to do what can be done in our own country.

Many foreigners living in Germany are actively involved in our country: in organizations and associations, as self-employed and employers who create jobs and offer apprenticeships. For that I thank them.

I would like to say a few words of encouragement to you all:

Take part in our society – in your own districts and in schools, in trade unions or in sport clubs. Only if as many as possible play an active role in society can we make full use of the riches which can become available to us when people from different cultures live together.

I urge you to learn German! If we live together we must understand each other. Everyone who grows up in Germany or comes to live in our country must speak and understand German.

Promoting integration is a prime task for our society. We must take it very seriously. It should be so important to us that we create a legal foundation for it.

We need a discussion on how to shape immigration and what rules are required.

I would like to see a diverse and vibrant Germany – peaceful and cosmopolitan.

Working towards this is worth every effort.

What matters is not the origins of the individual but, rather, that we create a prosperous future together.

Source: Johannes Rau, “Ohne Angst und ohne Träumereien: Gemeinsam in Deutschland leben”, Berliner Rede im Haus der Kulturen der Welt am 12. Mai 2000.

<http://www.bundespraesident.de/Reden-und-Interviews/Berliner-Reden-,12090/Berliner-Rede-2000.htm>

Translation: Johannes Rau, "Without Fear and without Illusions: Living together in Germany." Berlin Speech in the House of World Cultures on May 12, 2000.<http://www.bundespraesident.de/en/dokumente/-,5.11962/Rede/dokument.htm>

Recommended Citation: Federal President Johannes Rau Calls for Greater Tolerance toward Immigrants (May 12, 2000), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/a-new-germany-1990-2023/ghdi:document-3693>> [March 14, 2026].