

27 October 2024

# Steinmeier: Strength of democracy in climate and environmental protection

## DBU German Environmental Award goes to Tanneberger and Speidel

**Osnabrück/Mainz.** Germany's Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has made a vehement plea in favour of the "strength of democracy" in the face of the challenges posed by climate and environmental protection. "This approach will always remain superior to populism and the arbitrariness of an autocracy," Steinmeier said today (Sunday) at the presentation of the German Environmental Award by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (*Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, DBU*) in Mainz. The DBU awards the prize totalling 500,000 euros once a year. It is one of Europe's most highly endowed environmental awards. This year, the prize is shared by moor researcher Dr Franziska Tanneberger and e-mobility pioneer Thomas Speidel.

*Bonde: It's simply about preserving our livelihoods*

Despite multiple wars and crises worldwide, DBU Secretary-General Alexander Bonde called for "courageous action to continue day after day to protect climate, environment, resources and biodiversity. It is simply about preserving the basis of life for people, but of course also for animals and plants." Bonde continued: "Business and science again and again can be the source of clever and innovative ideas to tackle this task for the future. Such findings and role models in turn have what it takes to inspire other people to come up with pioneering ideas." In times of increasing fake news on climate and environmental issues, such encouragement is even more important "so that we don't let up on climate and environmental protection".

*"The classic combustion engine will come to an end"*

Addressing Thomas Speidel and with a view to his work, the Federal President took a clear stance, referring to Carl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler as "two of the most visionary German inventors" who, like Speidel, came from south-west Germany and made "individual mobility possible for the whole world". Steinmeier: "The classic combustion engine, on which this mobility was based, will come to an end." Due to the "climate-changing" emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) "caused by car and lorry traffic, there can be no reasonable doubt about this". However, how quickly e-mobility becomes a reality on a large scale depends on "whether we find ways and means of overcoming the technical and factual obstacles that still exist in everyday life". According to Steinmeier, this is precisely where "the strength of democracy" lies, as it makes it possible to "repeatedly correct dead ends, weak points and mistakes that are unavoidable on the

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unknown path to comprehensive and sustainably effective climate and environmental protection". Only in a democracy is it possible to negotiate "how quickly and how decisively we want to – or more precisely have to – go down this or that path". Equally important is "what balance is fairly necessary for those who are facing serious upheavals and cannot cope with them as easily as others," Steinmeier said. According to the Federal President, award winner Speidel, for example, has found a solution for new approaches to electromobility: Namely, how to charge an electric car in the shortest possible time, even in places where there is no developed electricity grid for the charging infrastructure.

*Intact moors are important for a favourable climate and biodiversity*

Mire researcher Tanneberger, who was involved in the first global peatland status report, is being honoured with the German Environmental Award by the DBU because, according to Bonde, "as a driving force, she has advanced the revitalisation of peatlands and at the same time managed to build bridges between science, politics and agriculture". The Federal President also honoured Tanneberger's achievement with a clear stance - including a rhetorical excursion into poetry. The moor was "often a little-appreciated landscape", said Steinmeier. Among other things, this had led to "the moors being little valued, lightly sacrificed, drained and put to agricultural use". Drained moors result in large quantities of climate-damaging greenhouse gases escaping. According to Steinmeier, moorland is rarely the subject of stories, novels, songs and poetry - and when it is, it tends to be in gloomy variations, such as in the work of Westphalian poet Annette von Droste-Hülshoff. However, said Steinmeier, Tanneberger has succeeded in creating an awareness of "how important intact moors are for a good climate and also for biodiversity".

*Daring a radical transformation: from a supplier of combustion engines to a pioneer of e-mobility*

Electrical engineer Thomas Speidel (57) is Managing Director of ads-tec Energy in Nürtingen near Stuttgart, which is now listed on the stock exchange, with other locations including Klipphausen near Dresden and Auburn in the US state of Alabama. His portfolio includes more than 60 German and international patent applications. The DBU honoured him with the German Environmental Award firstly because his innovations in battery-buffered fast-charging systems called *ChargeBox* and *ChargePost* enable electric vehicles to be charged in a matter of minutes instead of hours, thereby speeding up the expansion of electromobility. Secondly, because he himself has dared to undergo a radical transformation with his company: from a supplier of equipment for combustion engines to a pioneer of e-mobility. Moor researcher Tanneberger (46), on the other hand, is co-director of the Greifswald Moor Centre and works tirelessly for the rewetting of moors. Her voice carries great weight both nationally and internationally, for example at the 2023 World Climate Conference in Dubai. For her, peatland protection and peatland utilisation are not a contradiction in terms. Tanneberger has managed to "get farmers on board for better protection of climate and biodiversity, because peatlands can also be used wet," says DBU Secretary-General Bonde.

- **Data, facts and figures also in the DBU Environmental Award blog:** <https://www.dbu.de/umweltpreis/umweltpreis-blog/>

**Background:**

The DBU's German Environmental Award, which will be presented for the 32nd time in 2024, honours the achievements of people who make an exemplary contribution to protecting and preserving the environment. Candidates are nominated to the DBU. Employers' associations and trade unions, churches, environmental and nature conservation organisations, scientific associations and research communities, the media, the skilled trades and business associations are all eligible. Self-proposals are not possible. A jury of independent experts from business, science, technology and social groups appointed by the DBU Board of Trustees recommends award winners for the respective year to the DBU Board of Trustees. The DBU Board of Trustees makes the final decision. Information on the German Environmental Award and award winners: <https://www.dbu.de/umweltpreis>.

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