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**Opening remarks  
by Federal President Joachim Gauck  
for the Václav Havel European Dialogues  
during the State Visit to the Czech Republic  
Prague, 7 May 2014**

I am delighted to see you all. And I am particularly delighted to be seeing some of you again. I need hardly say just how happy I am to be here in this place with you – it's almost like being at home.

We are here to remember the great Václav Havel, who meant and continues to mean so much to your country, and who was so greatly admired by us Germans and by all Europeans. Václav Havel is probably the first name that springs to mind when people in Germany who consciously experienced the end of the communist dictatorships hear the word "dissident". It is thanks to him that this term has now become something of an honour. His journey from civil rights activist to president is deeply engrained in the minds of my fellow Germans. The scenes on Wenceslas Square in Prague, when Václav Havel was acclaimed by the demonstrators, with their unforgotten call "Havel to the castle!", are a fixture in the Czech Republic's image in Germany even today.

Anyone thinking further back to the painful elements of Czech German history, in particular of course the destruction of the First Czechoslovak Republic by Nazi Germany, knows that we must be thankful that people like Václav Havel and his fight to win and preserve parliamentary democracy have become reference points in our shared memories, indeed our shared identity.

Of course Václav Havel was not alone. The "Velvet Revolution" and all that preceded it needed other like minded activists, a network of resolute, courageous individuals of conviction. More than a few of them are here today, and if I may turn to them for a moment: I am especially pleased to be here with you.

However, your initiative Václav Havel's European Dialogues and everything we will be discussing here today are not designed to indulge

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the cosy recollections or the nostalgia of veteran activists. Rather, it looks forwards, to the future.

To do otherwise would be to fail to grasp what motivated the man whose name adorns the project.

Welcoming Federal President von Weizsäcker to the castle in Prague in 1990, Václav Havel gave a speech which described Europe as a joint task for the future for Czechs (and Slovaks) and Germans. He spoke of the need to work together to create a Europe of unity in diversity, a Europe which exports not war to the world, but tolerance, a Europe which builds on its best cultural traditions, a Europe which will never again be contaminated with poisonous gas and water.

That was in 1990. We need to ask: where are we now? What is the task at hand today? For all of us together – Czechs and Germans, Europeans from north, south, east and west.

Some issues have remained topical, or have become so once again. These certainly include the issue of peace and freedom. One new challenge which was scarcely conceivable in this form back in 1990 is the question of a secure financial system. The question of the cultural traditions and intellectual and moral attitudes which accompany us through this modern age also remains topical, as does the question of what form our integrated Europe should take.

Perhaps Europe has grown much closer together since 1989 than we could have imagined then. The Czech Republic has been a member of NATO for fifteen years, and of the European Union for ten years. Elections to the European Parliament will be taking place soon. That provides us with a very good reason to pause and think about where we are and where we should be heading: what is the position regarding the Europeans' common spiritual foundation? How can reconciliation succeed? What needs to happen so that we can act together to ensure that Europe really is regarded in the world as a force for peace, justice and fair coexistence? Can we really rely on us all standing up together for the values we proclaim? Have we taught future generations well enough how important it is to protect and enhance freedom and unity in Europe?

These are all questions which will occupy us for a long time and for which there are no definite answers. But the discussion today is one of many steps towards understanding. And I for one am looking forward to it.