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Page 1 of 3

**Welcome by Federal President Joachim Gauck
at the event „1914 – 2014: a European century“
on 27 June 2014,
in Schloss Bellevue**

Not far from here, the German Historical Museum is showing a big exhibition on the First World War. One exhibit in this exhibition deserves particular attention. It is a POW camp newspaper, written in Arabic, which encouraged Muslim prisoners of war in the German Reich to sign up for jihad against the British on the Turkish front in Iraq.

This exhibit alone makes it clear why we need to talk about the war which broke out in August 1914 in the heart of Europe as a world war. It did not just involve Europe, but affected the other continents too. And it left marks everywhere, marks which can still be seen today. In many places in the world the roots of unresolved problems stem from this war and its aftermath.

Each and every year of the European century which has elapsed since then has been influenced by the First World War, whether or not people were aware of it at the time. That is why we have printed all one hundred years individually on the invitation to this event. And the other two significant events which we're commemorating this year, namely the start of the Second World War 75 years ago and the peaceful revolution in central and eastern Europe, are part of the historical development of this century and would perhaps be unthinkable if it weren't for the First World War.

That is why I decided to host a whole-day event of remembrance and looking forward at Schloss Bellevue. A day with various different themes. This morning we're hearing from different voices from Europe in order for us to experience how much accounts of the war differ even today. This afternoon experts are discussing the undoubtedly controversial, especially now, question of what Europe has learnt from the First World War – and perhaps what it has yet to learn.

In the evening we'll enjoy a performance portraying wartime experiences both on and away from the front, put on by a joint

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production by the Thalia Theater and the theatre of the Flemish town of Ghent. The script is based on texts written by Erich Maria Remarque and Henri Barbusse, and the plays are to be staged in such a way as to enable people to watch from the street outside. The message is clear: this commemoration is not an exclusive affair, it concerns all of us.

You may notice that, from the choice of speakers and topics for the day to the theatre production in the evening, this commemoration has been compiled as a European event. And we have specifically chosen to highlight both the western and eastern European dimensions of the war, as particularly here in Germany, we have had a tendency to commemorate only what happened on our "Western front".

The war affected all of Europe. The continent tore itself apart during the First World War and inflicted infinite suffering on people in so many places. If "remembrance" and "looking forward" – the words which we have chosen as our mottos for the day – are to take on a historical and political sense, then we need this commemoration to have a European dimension.

The First World War has been dubbed the seminal catastrophe of the 20th century, a description which we have become familiar with. But this morning, I expect in any case, that we're going to see how differently this catastrophe was experienced in Europe and to what extent accounts of it still differ now.

For some, at the state level, the war meant the downfall of their empire – as we know this was the case for the German, Russian, as well as the for the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires. For others, for instance Poland or the Baltic States, the end of the war meant the beginning or indeed a new beginning of their own state.

And in terms of concrete wartime experiences, it naturally made a huge difference whether you experienced war in your own country, as did the French or Belgians, or not, as was the case for the vast majority of Germans.

As complex and varied as accounts of the war throughout Europe may be, we would still like to ask ourselves whether it could be possible – and if so, when and how – for us to at least consider creating a joint European account of this seminal catastrophe and its consequences.

I would like to thank the experts who have come from all over Europe and who are sitting on the panel here. They are going to share their perspectives with us before going on to hold a discussion. In the break and following the panel discussion we'll all have the opportunity to talk to one another.

I would like to extend a particular thank you to Etienne Francois, who is moderating the discussion and who I'm about to hand over to. Voilà – a French historian chairs a discussion on the First World War in

the German Head of State's official residence! I hope that this morning will prove interesting for all of us.