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**Speech by
Federal President Joachim Gauck
on the occasion of his visit
to Hartmannsweilerkopf Memorial with President Hollande
on Sunday, 3 August 2014
in France**

Here on Hartmannsweilerkopf today, one hundred years after Germany declared war on France, we remember one of the bleakest and darkest chapters in our shared history. We remember this period at a place which symbolises the senselessness and horror of these years more than most. We remember those killed in action, the missing and the wounded on both sides. We mourn them and honour their memory. They are not forgotten.

It was only a few square kilometres, a few hundred metres in altitude, within which tens of thousands of soldiers, tens of thousands of human beings lay in wait for and eavesdropped on each other, attacked and hunted down each other, shot dead and stabbed each other – not to mention the wounded and crippled. Most of them were scarred for life. One man who was on Hartmannsweilerkopf wrote to this loved ones in April 1915, "...everything was so peaceful and beautiful and now evil human beings are bringing death and destruction upon each other! – Oh, how wonderful it will be when there is peace again in these blue mountains!!"

Hartmannsweilerkopf was a slaughterhouse. To this very day, it is known as the man-eating mountain, the mangeur d'hommes. But it was not the mountain which destroyed and devoured people. It was people who quite literally tried and used any means to destroy each other. For only humans can act inhumanely.

Today it is difficult for us to even begin to imagine what this – known as hell on earth during the First World War – was like. Here in

one of the most beautiful landscapes you can imagine, here – in the old heartland of Europe – here Europe betrayed its values, its culture and its civilisation.

If we are honest, we have to admit that we are profoundly perplexed and aghast in the face of these events which history tells us really did happen. We can hardly believe the extent of the fanatical will to destroy with which the soldiers fought, nor their fanatical readiness to sacrifice themselves. Indeed we simply cannot believe it was possible.

We know today that this fanaticism was the result of a terrible intellectual and moral delusion. Everyone fighting here and elsewhere believed they were doing the right thing. Everyone believed the slaughter was justified. They believed that war, also in this modern industrialised form, was the only way to advance the righteous national cause. Everyone believed they were on the side of the true culture and civilisation, which had to be defended from the enemy – and everyone played their part in destroying this very culture and civilisation. The old Europe, which had experienced the magnificent Belle Epoque not long before, which is regarded with misty-eyed nostalgia today, sank into barbarism – misled by an excessive nationalism which brought misery and destruction.

The concept of nation is precious – no-one knows that better than the French. However, it can also be taken too seriously, indeed to the extreme. Extreme nationalism drove us Germans into two world wars – and twice it incited our two peoples to fight one another.

The people of Alsace and Lorraine experienced these tragedies especially keenly. Much of the fighting and trench warfare took place over the course of many years here in this border region, traditionally characterised by exchange and transition. The countryside bears the scars to this very day. The people of this region felt like pawns, at the mercy of the vicissitudes of history. The suffering which they in particular had to endure should be taken seriously. That is part of our culture of remembrance.

That France and Germany would one day be two self-confident nations who enjoyed amicable relations with one another was inconceivable for a long time. As Germany had attacked France in both the First and the Second World Wars, we Germans in particular should see this reconciliation as a gift. And all of us have to be profoundly grateful for the great reconciliation efforts initiated by members of a generation which only shortly before had regarded each other as arch-enemies. Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer symbolise the friendship which is possible today between Germany and France.

I can see the dramatic changes in relation to war and peace and to so-called enemies in my own family history. All of my forefathers went to war once or even twice. I myself, my sons and grandchildren do not know how that feels. All of my forefathers lived with the certainty that they had born enemies. But this idea is completely alien to my sons and grandchildren. When I was growing up, we still had patriotic literature in our home about German war heroes, the naval fleet, submarine heroes and famous fighter pilots. Not even my eldest son experienced any of that. A new way of thinking and new memories changed the old Germany fundamentally. The term arch-enemy seems archaic in the new Germany – coined in pre-modern times when an exaggerated nationalism would not allow the shared traditions of European civilisation to be acknowledged.

We have – hopefully for all time – understood that the nation can be important as a home and as a reference point for our identity and sense of belonging but that it should not make us feel superior to others or even force us to prove that we are.

Our shared Europe and our shared European institutions are not an accident of history. Rather, they bear witness to the fact that we have learned the lessons of history. They protect us from aberrations and temptation. One of the great tasks of the present and of the future will be to highlight time and again the profound and absolutely vital importance of our common European institutions, indeed our entire common European policies. Civil society is always involved in this. I am grateful for the work done over the course of many years by the Franco-German Youth Office, whose representatives are here today.

Remembrance days like this one are important. Only in retrospect can we judge what a long road we in Europe had to travel along to arrive at where we are today. In stark contrast to 1914, we can say that we have learned in many painful lessons to turn differences into diversity. We have learned to transform antagonistic sentiments into a sense of mutual enhancement.

That is why we want to pledge time and again that we will not lose the political will to turn old adversaries into friends and partners. We want to pledge that we will preserve diversity in Europe and keep up our tireless efforts towards this end. But we also want to pledge that we will not take the easy way out and give in to the populist movements which are whipping up anti-European sentiment with trite slogans.

It is true that Europe is a difficult project. However, the generations before us would have loved to have had our problems, those forefathers on the battlefields of Hartmannsweilerkopf, the Marne or Verdun. We can overcome our problems together; we can work on an historic project in which there are no longer winners on one

side and losers on the other, but only winners. But we can only do this by working together.

Europe has a long history, a history which, however, is primarily told in the individual histories of nations and peoples, of countries and regions. We have still not learned to tell our European history as a shared history. Not only our European languages are different, also our view of ourselves, of others and of the world.

That is why I am pleased to be here on Hartmannsweilerkopf with President Hollande today to lay the foundation stone of a joint Franco-German memorial.

If we can find the patience to find out about the views and perspectives of others, then we will learn to be ever better at showing solidarity with one another. The new memorial can play a role in this.

The warning sounded by the bloody 20th century should not be in vain. Let us continue to learn from and with one another, let us intensify our dialogue with one another and let us develop a culture of trust together for a present and a future in peace and freedom – throughout Europe.