



Video message

75th anniversary of the liberation of Dachau concentration camp, April 29, 2020

“Survival was only possible as part of a group and it was only our collective solidarity which allowed us to resist the system developed by the SS of reducing everyone to the same level through hunger, fear and depersonalisation.”

This is a quote from Joseph Rován, who was arrested in 1944 as a member of the French Resistance. He later wrote of his survival in Dachau concentration camp, of the perfidiousness of the SS, who succeeded in turning even innocent people into accomplices. He bore witness to the cruelty, the pseudo-medical tests and the murders. Yet he also recalled acts of courage amongst prisoners and examples of humanity shown. After liberation, Rován helped pave the way to a peaceful Europe through his commitment to Franco-German reconciliation as a politician, writer and historian.

Even today, our Europe is still shaped by the experience of dictatorship and war, division and totalitarianism. It rests on foundations laid 75 years ago: inalienable human rights, democracy and the rule of law retain their fundamental importance, precisely *because* of our historical experiences.

Some people are tired of hearing this message, they have become weary of the mantra “never again”. Over the decades since the end of the Second World War, first-hand memories have faded and, in the foreseeable future, authentic testimony from survivors will no longer be available. Other crimes against humanity have moved into the spotlight. This, of course, has led to shifts in perspective. Yet these crimes cannot be relativised. The deeds committed by one group of persons do not somehow erase those committed by others! The



murders in the concentration camps are not effaced by the torture and killing of others since then. The story of those murdered there remains our story.

And their story shows how easily humanity can be lost; how an organised system of dehumanisation works. Over 200,000 people from across Europe were imprisoned and tormented in Dachau concentration camp. Between March 1933 and the camp's liberation by US army units, over 41,000 people lost their lives in this camp, in which many high-ranking SS officials climbed the first rungs of the career ladder.

It was only belatedly that we acknowledged the suffering of the survivors and began honouring the victims. Both of these are ongoing responsibilities for us as a state and a society. The victims live on in our memory.