

Another look at 1914 - 1918:

Which voices, which routes for Europe en 2014-2018?

For a common commemoration

This year, Europeans will have a reason to look backwards, and from diverse viewpoints. Despite this diversity, what they see could hold remarkable parallels; a continent in the midst of a whirlwind dragging along others from all over the world.

It is sure that the commemorations will take many different forms. Here and there national unity in the war effort will be celebrated; elsewhere the thoughts will be with the sacrifices, the injuries and the permanent scars. Some will consider the responsibilities, including their own; others will try encouraging the young generations to understand their forebears' lives. For a few it will be the opportunity to contemplate the end of the old Europe, for others that of celebrating the victory of modern democracy, or even nation sovereignty which they had obtained or regained.

Through these different facets of the Great War, to our mind, there emerge certain signs which can be read by all and are destined for all to see.

Firstly we should have a time of thoughtful memory for those who lost their lives. Enlisted from the four corners of the Earth they gave the best of themselves, often for the distant mother nation. As civilians they were caught up in the ravages of war. Yes there is a basic duty to give homage together to these lives the world over who could not flourish, and putting whole continents into mourning.

Then there is the appeal to foresight by those who saw the catastrophe coming. The artists, politicians, reactionary citizens, whose words at the time were laughed and jeered at and hushed up. Jaurès was assassinated. His final discourse of the 25 July 1914 is noteworthy. Georg Trakl the poet killed himself after seeing the horrors of war. His friend the poet Else Lasker-Schüler dedicated these words to him. "George Trakl fell to the war, struck down by his own hand. And there was so much solitude in the world."

How come the majority were so blind? In what way could patriotism be reduced to images of enemies to the point where they were all that remained of the collective mind, so that Jew rose up against Jew, catholic against catholic and socialist against socialist?

Where today are our visionaries, our freedom of thought and our courage? Where is the search for common interest between peoples of Europe?

We can then look back at the enthusiasm of the time. The glorification of the nation, the culture of sacrifice and the call to do your best were the driving force behind many young people who were called to arms. We need to come to terms with this enthusiasm for what was considered to be a noble cause.

What are we doing about youths' need to surpass themselves? They have the right to search for a sense to their lives and models to follow. Resignation and cynicism sap their energy. What do we have to offer them? While young Europeans are attached to their shared sense of belonging, today we need to create "new frontiers" with them.

Finally, there are the signs that can be drawn from the depths of the trenches and the mud, between the lines of barbed wire, there where the soldiers on each side were on constant watch for the enemy, just a stone's throw away. On all the fronts however, the opposing sides came together peacefully from time to time, be it in Italy, Russia, Belgium or France. The acts were small, sometimes derisory. They exchanged tools to repair the barbed wire that each erected against the other. They showed the common decency¹ which is the basis of fraternity. Politically however, these actions could not be mentioned after the war. And yet they existed. And their lesson is twofold. The desire for humaneness cannot be destroyed, and it needs to be upheld.

Humaneness does not have the power of force but, from the bottom of the trenches, from the humiliation and the horror of the death camps, from the depths of our savagery, it lights the way to finally build Europe, a Europe of peace.

It is no small lesson today and it concerns the entire world: if the leaders were to act together with reason and fraternity, many conflicts would be solved through reconciliation before social, economic and political catastrophes arise.

¹ Marc Ferro, *Frères des tranchées*, (Brothers of the trenches) E Perrin, paris 2005

In consideration of all these signs we would like to propose that for the month of August, centenary of the general mobilization in our countries:

- a common official commemoration be organized in all European countries;
- strong gestures of citizen's goodwill should be initiated. Imagine, for example, setting up long buffet tables on the bridges of the Rhine for people to share meals, including all the foreign citizens in the territories of the two banks;
- among the innumerable projects, some should engage in real human encounters, moving from country to country, throughout the years 2014 to 2018, with the objective of strengthening the idea of fraternity and friendship;
- an initiative be undertaken to strengthen and extend the existing European voluntary service. A major European voluntary community service should be a natural offshoot from these commemorative years.

First signatories :

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Signatories :

Membres of choirs Ensemble 2021 et Vocalam : Béatrice Boutet, M. Claude Bouveresse, Olivier Casalis, Gilles Choblet, Terenia Laskowska, Patrick Ninot, Véronique Rebotier, Françoise et Gérard Thiercelin. Et : Malika Benarab-Attou (députée européenne), Henri-Georges Brun, Peace Ambassador of the International Humanitarian League, Albertville; Hugues de Courtivron, Mordelles; Christian et Béatrice v. Hirschhausen, Berlin; Cornelia Keller-Kirst, Agent Culturel, Berlin; Klaus Nussbaum, Poète, Denzlingen ; Astrid Rashed, Actress, Berlin; Sabine Rousseau, historian, Chambéry; Susanne v.Schenck, Journaliste, Berlin ; Dr. Annette Schiller, Société-Franco-Allemande, Halle/S.; Philippe Vachette, economist, Barberaz; Thierry Verney, historian, Chambéry; Françoise Vig, musician, Chambéry; Maria Winkler; Julian Walmsley, translator; Barbara Winzer, playwright, Berlin; Brice Wong, Chambéry.

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² As in the humanitarian dialogues which have proposed annual encounters in different countries of the world since 2002 and will launch a series of encounters for a passage from “a logic of war to one of peace” (www.dialoguesenhumanite.org) or also the project VoCE 2014 – 2018 Voices from Citizens of Europe, which will organise an artistic and citizen's tour of amateur and youth choirs across Europe: VoCE2014-2018@laposte.net