

Bundestag, 17 November 2019.

Dear President of the Federal Republic of Germany,
Dear Vice President of Bundestag,
Dear President of People's Association for Military Graves Care,
Dear All!

On 1 September 1939 the German army invaded Poland. The Second World War began. It lasted six years and claimed more than 60,000,000 victims.

Imagine the interior of the German "Neue Wache" "guardhouse", the place commemorating the victims of wars and terror. Look at the sculpture of a mother holding dead son in her arms and, while closing your eyes, let's multiply this picture by 60,000,000.

Imagine a pilgrim that wanders the world and everyday visits just one grave of one war victim. Such a pilgrimage would have to last almost 200 years.

But only 80 years has passed. Since the year and the day that was the beginning of hecatomb, which was to devour and destroy, annihilate 60,000,000 human lives. One tenth of these victims were Poles, the half of which were Jewish.

My father told me that the beginning of September 1939 was very warm. His mother - my grandmother - dressed him in shorts during the first days of the so-called running away from Germans. My grandfather, the father of my father, fought during the September campaign.

My second grandfather, the father of my mother, was taken to Ostaszkowo by the Soviets, when on 17 September 1939 the second war against Poland began. He was murdered there.

Everything I learned from them - from my parents and grandparents - was thinking about reconciliation between people.

We may not harm others.

While leaving “Neue Wache”, I am reading the text of the prayer, which I consider also my prayer:

“... We honour the memory of millions murdered Jews. We honour the memory ... of Sinti and of Romani people. ... of all those who were murdered due to their origin, homosexuality or because of illness and weakness. ... of all, who were refused the right to live.

We honour the memory of people, who had to die due to their religious and political beliefs. ... all of those who became the victims of tyranny and lost their lives despite innocence. ...”

That is what had been happening for the six years after (I quote the president Steinmeier):

“... hell fell on Wieluń - the hell created by the German, racist insanity and desire to destroy.”

When, in the 1960s, I had been coming, from a faraway town, where we had lived, to the city, which later, much later, I governed for 16 years, to Wrocław, I had watched there, in Wrocław, the relics of the end of the war, the huge gaps in urban fabric, ruins and empty spaces.

Almost 80% of the city, of my city, was destroyed during the last weeks of war. Between February and May 1945, more than 170,000 civilians, citizens of the city, perished. It is the amount similar to the number of persons killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki a few months later.

Before the war, Wrocław was a German city. Now it is a Polish city. This is probably the only large city in the world, where the entire population was replaced. A few hundred thousand of the German citizens of Wrocław were expelled and Poles took their place, many of them were also expelled from their homes situated at the area of the eastern part of pre-war Poland.

And the graves of the ancestors of those expelled were destroyed during the communist regime. In Wrocław, after the war, seventy cemeteries were destroyed. For this reason, I wanted to build and I have built in my, in our city, the “Monument of Common Memory” dedicated to all citizens of Wrocław, whose graves no longer exist. I remember the tears in the eyes of Richard von

Weizsäcker and Fritz Stern, when we were lighting together candles before that monument.

There are also other monuments in Wrocław. There is a monument of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But there is also a monument with inscriptions in two languages: *“We forgive and we ask for forgiveness!”*

It is the monument of the author of these words, Bolesław Kominek.

Kominek included this sentence in the letter of the Polish bishops to the German bishops in 1965. The letter described and summed up 1000 years of the complicated Polish-German relations.

I want you to hear it.

Twenty years after the Second World War, a citizen of the city of expulsions, the Pole, whose family, like every Polish family, was affected by the tragedy of the Second World War, wrote:

“We forgive and we ask for forgiveness!”

In 1966, cardinal Kominek, asked why the Polish-German reconciliation is so important, replied briefly:

“The way of speaking must be European in the deepest sense of this word. Europe is our future – nationalisms are yesterday. (...) Extending the discussion about developing federative solution for all nations of Europe, i. a. by a gradual resignation from the national sovereignty in respect of the issues of security, economy and foreign policy (is necessary).”

If you think about the contemporary situation of Europe, you will immediately notice another important turning point covering the marks of the Second World War - the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Fritz Stern wrote about it in his wonderful book, “Five Germanys I Have Known”:

“And so, from far away, I watched Wrocław in the 1980s gaining new, noble significance: becoming the stronghold of Solidarity, this Polish social movement,

which led to the Middle Europe freeing itself and the reunification of Germany (the fifth Germany in my lifetime)."

In the Treaty on European Union, we can read:

"The EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society where pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

The European Union is one of the best answers of our continent to the tragedy of the Second World War. The Union exists because of, among others, the memory and reflection on the war claiming so many millions of victims. Including so many Poles, in the Warsaw Uprising alone 200,000 of them perished.

Now, I would like to, here, in Bundestag, thank for the concept, the idea of the monument dedicated to the victims of the German occupation of Poland.

It is great that Warsaw, so badly destroyed during and after the uprising of 1944, is one of the capital cities of the European Union.

It is good that Warsaw is influenced and obliged by the values described by the Treaty on European Union.

These values should help us destroy, suppress the wave of nationalisms and populisms flowing also across our continent.

Attacking nationalisms, I do not turn against nations.

The power of the national imaginative relations is so significant across the history of the human kind that even left-wing philosophers, such as Habermas, are inclined to say that if the national states had not been created, they should be invented.

However, thinking in the categories of community is more and more widespread.

Nation is a step in communities creation, it is an element of development of a human and of the humanity.

A nationality needs internationality, currently and in the future a nation can only fulfil its function on the transnational level, in our case within the framework of the European Community.

I bow my head to 60,000,000 victims of war. Victims, many of which were buried in unmarked graves. All of them shall be protected by the Mother Earth forever.

Maybe this is exactly the additional and valid reason to care for her and to save her - the Mother Earth.

I do not see more important tasks before us, Europeans, than exactly these two:

- deepening the European integration - for peace,
- responding to challenges of climate change - for survival.

I believe that Europe is our future and nationalisms are yesterday.

I believe in Polish-German reconciliation. I believe in Polish-German friendship. In the friendship between Poles and Germans.

I am saying this today, as a Polish European, as a citizen of Wrocław.

I am saying this today as “ein Berliner”.