

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The current global health crisis has prevented us from congregating in person today at the memorial sites.

Nevertheless, I wanted to be with you on this day in order to commemorate the liberation of the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

I wanted that our voices and thoughts unite on this occasion in order to pay solemn tribute to all victims of Nazi barbarity. As Malraux once said, “all those eyes remain shut till the depths of the dark gloomy night.”

It is with the profoundest respect and deepest emotion that I salute all former deportees along with their families and loved ones, 75 years after the liberation of the concentration camp.

On behalf of the French government, I would like to express our respect to you and to reassure you of our unwavering support.

Across several decades, the remembrance work you have been doing has constituted one of the pillars upon which the Franco-German friendship is built. It is a unifying component in European integration, the true value and fragility of which we witness with each passing day.

This work on memory is fundamental; it is irreplaceable. The democratic and peaceful societies we created in the aftermath of World War II are founded upon it. Although we cannot repair that which has been irreparably destroyed, this act of honouring the memory of victims of the Nazi regime enables us to work on this past—whenever we research the deportees’ names, whenever we give them a face or retrace their individual trajectories.

Because we should never, ever forget what took place here in Ravensbrück, as well as in all the other death camps.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By exposing what happened in our past, we will reinforce the values to which our democratic Europe is now attached: namely, peace, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, notably women’s rights, for which the former deportees who survived Ravensbrück advocated, and also, in a broader sense, for a rapprochement between the peoples of Europe.

Whenever we listen to the testimony of the deported women from Ravensbrück, or discover the outstanding *Faces of Europe* exhibition, we yet again learn how the unimaginable did happen.

The living witnesses of Ravensbrück and their families have issued us a warning call, without ever yielding to the spirit of revenge or hatred.

European integration, for which I’m fighting on a daily basis, owes a great deal to their pioneering endeavours and I would like to avail of this opportunity to solemnly thank them for their commitment.

As we currently observe the creeping rise of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, revisionism, and nationalist tensions right across Europe, this work on remembrance has never been so critical for consolidating our democracies.

It constitutes a refuge for the critical mind and a vital field for the transfer of knowledge.

For precisely this reason the Minister-President Plenipotentiary of the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia, Armin LASCHET, and the French Minister of National Education and Youth, Jean-Michel BLANQUER, expressed the wish to dedicate the Franco-German Day, namely January 22nd, to the work on remembrance, 75 years after the liberation of the concentration camps.

This affords me an opportunity to salute the remarkable achievements by the memorial sites and notably that of Ravensbrück. In the true spirit of knowledge transfer, it has constantly been committed to taking a ground-breaking and educational approach to furthering research.

Hence, it is our collective responsibility to provide whatever means necessary to strengthen and renew this remembrance culture, without, of course, ever interfering with the work of historians.

We should also jointly reconsider our school curricula. This is why, in its role as Chair of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in late 2019, France, in concert with its European partners, proposed an Observatory on History Teaching in Europe.

To conclude, I would like to directly address the former Ravensbrück deportees, to both the women and the men, for there were also a large number of men in their midst – as well as to their families: I am convinced that Europe's youth will assume with courage, talent, and creativity the mantle of remembrance bestowed upon them by the contemporary witnesses.

Your courage and your deep faith in Europe have served for each and every one of us as a model for commitment in how to respond to the immense challenges confronting us.

Thank you.

Amélie de Montchalin
French Secretary of State for European Affairs