

## Press release

### From the Holy Alliance to the European idea – German and European high nobility remembered the Battle of the Nations near Leipzig

**Leipzig, 23 October 2013:** Representatives of 17 German and European noble families, whose ancestors had been involved in the Battle of the Nations near Leipzig, took part in an bicentennial anniversary commemorative event of the battle organized by *Sparkasse Leipzig Culture and Environment Foundation Leipziger Land* and *Förderverein Rötha – Gestern. Heute. Morgen. e. V.* (Rötha funding association – Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow.). The event was celebrated on 17 October to 19 October in Leipzig and Rötha. They gathered to commemorate the innumerable military and civil victims of the Battle of the Nations of 1813 in which the armies of Napoleon had fought in Leipzig against the future Holy Alliance, founded later on by the Russian czar, the Prussian king and the Austrian emperor as a result of the Wars of Liberation and the Congress of Vienna.

A church service at Leipzig's St. Nicholas' Church on 18 October 2013 initiated the joint commemoration by the noble families of those once enemies. Church superintendent Martin Henker said: "We know about the dangers of not living according to the Word of God and for the wellbeing of our neighbours. [...] In extreme cases such behaviour leads to such horrifying war catastrophes as the Battle of the Nations." Walter Christian Steinbach, head of *Förderverein Rötha*, commented on the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 that had started and culminated at St. Nicholas' Church.

After an ecumenical service with a contribution by St. Thomas Choir of Leipzig on the next day the noble guests visited the town of Rötha. Jochen Bohl, bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Saxony, first spoke about the "human catastrophe" that the Battle of the Nations had been and then went on to the mythologization of the battle as an act of national liberation in Germany during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and today. "With all that in mind I remind us all that the memory of the slaughtering of so many people, all of them God's creatures, calls for appropriate remembrance", Bohl said. He added that 68 years of peace in Western Europe should not let us forget the following: "The more familiar we feel with our country's history the more grateful we are for what we have and the more we feel committed to doing what we can to preserve these lucky circumstances." In view of the numerous wars all over the world we should always remember that "war changes people and with it people's lives. Unfortunately not for the better."

On behalf of the catholic bishop of the diocese Dresden-Meißen, bishop Dr. Heiner Koch, who was unable to come due to the funeral service for auxiliary bishop Georg Weinhold, the pastor of Borna, Dietrich Oettler argued that we should "let the beatifications come true in our live, put them into practice by helping the poor, the sorrowing and the thirsting". He added that our society is much more open to religious issues than we often think: "I feel very often that there is an alertness for the meaning of life, for what comes after death, for that war cannot be everything, that we need justice and peace. This longing does not always appear in the church context, it is not always expressed in the words of the Holy Scriptures, but it is there."

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The Russian Orthodox Archbishop Longin of Klin delivered greetings and blessings of Kirill I. of Moscow, Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus. He pointed out that over the last 200 years Western and Eastern churches have always been a firm constant within changing political landscapes and have been maintaining a close dialogue: "Due to our openness for dialogue we know each other and know each other better than before, which is very important. We see the image of God in our dialogue partner who is a creature of God the same way we are. Let us pray, dear brothers and sisters, so that we will be able to find solutions to our common problems in peace and harmony, without making war."

Apart from the prayer and the ecumenical service, the program of the commemorative event included the participation of the noble representatives in the bicentennial anniversary ceremonial act of the Battle of the Nations organized by the City of Leipzig and the Free State of Saxony, a reception by Leipzig's Lord Mayor Burkhard Jung and an event at the original location of the headquarter of the historic coalition forces at Rötha castle, blown up in 1969. Georg, Archduke of Austria, praised the diversity of events: This event in Leipzig "sets a high standard of how to deal with such an anniversary and I was very pleased that we had a church service every day because in my opinion this is one of the most important elements that enable us to identify with what we are thinking and how we should remember these events."

### **United in diversity**

The leitmotif of the European Union "United in diversity" was the leitmotif of the closing event of the commemorative meeting that ended with a historic tattoo. 180 participants of the Civil Defence Corps and town band of Villingen forged a musical bridge from "Holy God, we praise thy name" to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy", today's Anthem of Europe. In a joint communiqué that was signed after the tattoo, the representatives of the noble families pointed out to following: "In Leipzig we have experienced how enmity disappears and thus the battles of our forefathers are brought to fulfilment. We wish that decision makers in politics and society, in business and media will follow the example of Leipzig's citizens and guests and focus their actions on bringing peace to the environment of our common house of Europe and on strengthening its foundations."

Stanislaw Tillich, Prime Minister of the Free State of Saxony, explained to the participants of the commemorative event and numerous guests of honour from politics, business and society: "We are not commemorating an event in our role as winners or losers, we are commemorating it as friends." He added that Europe and its institutions might not always proceed with the necessary speed but that dialogue and negotiation are better than the ferocity of a battle as it took place 200 years ago in Leipzig.

Georg, Archduke of Austria supported this approach in his welcoming speech: "The European Union stands for security and stability, not for financial and economic crises." Georgi Mikhailovich, Grand Duke of Russia, called for a perspective and understanding beyond national borders: "We have to do everything in our power to ensure that today and in the future alliances between states and nations exclusively serve the cause of peace."

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Dr. Harald Langenfeld, chairman of Sparkasse Leipzig, commented on the memory of the Battle of the Nations and the commemorative event: "It must be our aim to not only propagate the importance of the historic events but first and foremost to give an orientation for our actions in today's time. Only those who know about the horror of chaos and war, understand the importance of peace and freedom. This is what the Battle of the Nations should remind us of as Europeans from today's perspective."

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