

## **EUROPE DAY 2014**

**Gaborone, 8 May 2014**

### **ADDRESS BY THE HEAD OF DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO BOTSWANA & SADC**

**AMBASSADOR GERARD McGOVERN**

It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you here tonight as we mark the 2014 Europe Day. I thank the University of Botswana for making available this excellent venue for the event. I hope that the warmth generated by representatives of over 50 countries gathered here in friendship tonight can overcome the cool night air.

Dear friends, I have the pleasure to host tonight's event in collaboration with my British, French and German counterparts. Their missions in Gaborone will, throughout the year, commemorate some of the key aspects of the First World War; tonight they accompany me in sharing the joint European dimension of this conflict.

This year, we celebrate Europe Day in a slightly different way compared to years gone by as we respectfully and humbly also remember that:

One hundred years ago, in July 1914, the First World War started;

And of course we cannot forget that seventy-five years ago, in September 1939, the Second World War was unleashed upon the world.

Europe was at the very core of both these terrible conflicts that twice laid waste to the continent in the space of a generation.

As a Union that was born out of war, out of the necessity to prevent further bloodshed, tonight we remember an undeniable part of our past.

And it is only fair to stress that neither of these conflicts confined themselves to the borders of Europe; they were truly global in nature and engulfed peoples and regions far away from the European battlefields. For example, the First World War was also fought in what today is the SADC region – Southern Africa, and Dr Jeff Ramsay, our guest speaker, will shortly elaborate on this during his presentation [...].

World War I, known as the Great War, is said to have claimed the lives of nine million combatants.

To many today, the name evokes cinematographic fast-forward black and white images of soldiers and tanks somewhere in Flanders, Belgium, advancing and retreating over trenches and barbed wire. Does this footage help understand what the Great War was about or, on the contrary, do these images speak of a reality too far removed from ours, a movie we cannot comprehend as being real?

Be it as it may, the Great War did shape our world like no other conflict did before. It is widely assumed that it spawned the even deadlier Second World War. As I mentioned before, the Great War was also an African war, even a Southern African war, very real for today's Namibia, South Africa, Angola, Tanzania, Malawi, the DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe,

Mozambique and Botswana - whose sons fought and died, some far off in Flanders fields. So many countries around us that also experienced fighting on their soil or contributed troops and support personnel to the war effort.

That was then, in Europe and in Southern Africa. How different things look today. Let us make no mistake, neither region experienced uninterrupted peace for the past 100 years - on the contrary, further and terrible struggles lay ahead - but a century on, cooperation and the absence of conflict is what we see around us.

The Irish author, statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke, is often credited with a famous quote: 'the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing'. As a generation of Europeans that has enjoyed the benefits of peace and prosperity we very much take this to heart. But, let us not take things for granted and let's be aware that what has been achieved at such tremendous cost and sacrifice must be protected and nurtured across the world. I need not mention some of the threats to peace in our time, for example when we look to the South or Eastwards in Europe's own neighbourhood today.

Europe has major responsibilities at home and in its immediate neighbourhood, but it also has global responsibilities. In a few days time we will have elections to the European Parliament where voters in our 28 Member States will elect 751 Members of Parliament (MEPs) to represent the interests of over 500 million citizens. Yes, I know it is also election time in Botswana and four other SADC countries in 2014 and we wish the people well as they do their democratic duty. In the run-up to

the European elections, not surprisingly, there is debate about the role of Europe in the world. In this regard, the Union and its recently created diplomatic service, the European External Action Service, (the EEAS – my employer), together with our Council of Ministers, the Parliament, the Commission and other institutions of our Union every day take up the challenges to peace and development beyond our borders, be it conflict, climate change, energy security, pandemics or human rights violations.

On these endeavours, for example, we work together with the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and its Secretariat here in Gaborone, and with our host nation, Botswana, whose reputation as an advocate of peace and justice in the international arena is second to none.

Let me now conclude my remarks with a final thought:

One can enjoy very pleasurable walks through the fields of Flanders today, at the very place where such slaughter was committed. One can enjoy the wonderful landscapes of Namibia, where such ferocious combats took place.

But let us not forget where we come from; let us enjoy the fruits of peace and reconciliation; let us make sure that a hundred years forth future generations will look back again and have no war to lament.

Ich danke Ihnen sehr/Merci Beaucoup/Thank you very much

Ke a leboga

In closing, I invite all of you to join me in a toast to the health and long life of His Excellency Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of the Republic, to the prosperity and happiness of the people of Botswana and to the ever growing friendship between the European Union and this country and region.

To the President of the Republic of Botswana, H.E. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, PULA!