

Commemoration of the victims of WW II protects authentic historical memory

Seventy-five years ago today, Germany signed the Act of Military Surrender in Berlin. On European fronts, the battles ended. We bow our heads in respect for all who perished or suffered in the war.

World War II was started by the division of Europe into spheres of influence on the basis of the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact concluded by Germany and the Soviet Union. The war, in which both totalitarian regimes are equally guilty, ruined the lives of millions of people and destroyed the independence of most of the Central and East European countries that remained in the grip of the Kremlin.

The three Baltic countries that were occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union disappeared as independent states from the maps of the world for fifty years, and the bloody terror of the Soviet regime went on unpunished. Therefore, this day, which we celebrate by commemorating the victims of the war, does not mark the end of the war for the Estonian people.

For Estonia, the war ended on 31 August 1994 when the last units of Russian occupation forces left the territory of the again-independent Estonia. For Germany, the war ended on 12 September 1990 when the German Reunification Treaty was signed in Moscow. We thank all the countries who never recognised the Soviet occupation. Unfortunately, our territorial integrity has not been wholly restored even today, and the occupation crimes, like arrests, shooting of people, deportations and forcing people to slave labour, have not been compensated for by today.

War crimes must not be forgotten or forgiven. War is a crime against humanity. We condemn the attempts arising from the aggressive geopolitical ambitions of the Russian Federation to falsify and distort history, and to blame others for the crimes committed by Russia itself, including starting the war. The cynical efforts of the Kremlin to reap political benefits from the sufferings of the victims and to incite mistrust and hatred between nations are bound to fail. The proverb “truth rises, lies sink” also holds true in international relations.

Unfortunately, the truth does not rise by itself; it needs to be supported by strengthening the global historical memory. Today, the high-level meeting to commemorate the end of World War II is held in the UN Security Council under Estonia’s presidency. The meeting will focus on the lessons of the post-war period, security in Europe, and the importance of observing the standards of international law in today’s world.

It is our duty to support authentic historical memory so that the crimes of totalitarian regimes are not forgotten, and to fight against all attempts to falsify history. Knowledge of historical truth helps stand against the threats to democracy and the right to self-determination of peoples. The Riigikogu drew attention to this in its Statement of 19 February 2020 “On Historical Memory and Falsification of History”.

Based on the above, the Parliaments of the three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – call on citizens and societies to jointly condemn crimes against humanity and to support peace, stability and democratic development in Europe and the whole world. Both the past and the future oblige us to this.

Henn Põlluaas

President of the Riigikogu

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