

Speech by President of the Riigikogu Henn Põlluaas on the Day of Mourning, 14 June 2020

People of Estonia! Friends!

79 years ago today, in the early hours of the night, our clocks of history stopped. They stopped together with the deportation trains in our stations.

Soldiers of the Red Army entered thousands of Estonian homes and forced families, including little babies, on open trucks. The lorries, loaded with anguished innocent people, drove to railway stations, where cattle wagons with barred windows were already waiting.

Women and children were separated from husbands and fathers. They were all crammed into packed wagons. The doors were barred. A journey full of desperation started, towards the east, into a land of hunger and misery. People were suffering from lack of air and water. Grief, uncertainty and fear for their own fate and the fate of their families caused them indescribable agony.

The eyes of those who were left behind were also wet with tears. They felt the whole tragedy of the torturous moment, and were unable to hide their pain. Warm and joyful summer was replaced by sadness, mourning and hopelessness. And the summer war, in which the people of Estonia rose up against the Communist occupants.

In June 1941, more than 10,000 people were deported. Nearly 38 per cent of them were underage; over 100 children were less than one year old. Even bedridden old people were deported. Only 40 per cent of them were able to return to Estonia later. Under inhuman conditions, around 6000 people died or were executed, most of them men.

On 14 June, we celebrate the day of commemoration in memory of the deported. It is the Day of Mourning. The June deportation, the war years that followed, and the new deportations by Communists in 1945, 1949 and 1951 left a long-lasting mark. The tragedy we experienced etched a seal of memory into the soul of our nation that we carry from generation to generation.

Today we commemorate the victims of these tragic events – those who suffered, those who perished, those who returned and those who stayed behind. Nor will we forget other victims of Communism. None of them.

We bow our heads in memory of them all. We remember and we commemorate, so that nothing like that would be repeated ever again, and our children would grow up with laughter and joy in a free, cornflower-blue land our ancestors have left us.

We remember!