

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who in Kadriorg today hosted Victoria, Crown Princess of Sweden, and Prince Daniel, gave them a graphic piece by Estonian artist Endel Kõks called "Merel" (On the Sea) (1953), which depicts boat refugees and conveys the anguish and hope of people.

Several thousand Estonians, including the mother and father of President Ilves, escaped over the stormy Baltic Sea from the war and new occupation in the late summer and autumn of 1944. The Kingdom of Sweden and the Swedes reached out their hands to the refugees and opened the gates of freedom to them. Sweden became their first home in the free world and they continued their lives as free people.

In 1944, Endel Kõks (1912–1983), a graduate of the Pallas art school and one of the most outstanding Estonian artists of his generation, also escaped from Estonia. He spent most of his life as a refugee in Sweden and died in Örebro.

In January 2011, during a state visit to Sweden, President Ilves placed flowers at the Gateway to Freedom monument in Stockholm; the monument symbolises the gratitude of the Estonian boat refugees to Sweden and the Swedes who received them 70 years ago. At the opening of the monument in 1994, the King of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustaf, said that he wants the Gateway to Freedom to be a reminder of the brave struggle of Estonian people for democracy and freedom and for the monument to stand as a witness to the solidarity of our two nations.

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