

At the invitation of Polish head of state Bronisław Komorowski, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves is participating together with many other government leaders in an international ceremony in Gdansk today and tomorrow to commemorate the end of the European battles of World War II.

It is symbolic that May 8th, the day when the memory of all the people, nations and countries that suffered in World War II is being honoured should occur in Poland, the country that was attacked by Hitler's Germany on the 1st of September 1939 and by Stalin's Soviet Union on September 17th, and where the European battles of World War II started.

President Ilves emphasised that May 8th does not divide us into winners or losers; this day embodies the spirit of remembrance and reconciliation.

"We cannot say that that World War II was won by only one country and lost by only one country. This catastrophe struck us all and its impact is still felt today," he said.

"The terrible violence that was unleashed by Hitler and Stalin's secret pact deprived states of their independence, people of their countries. The bloody victory over Nazism ended the war and brought freedom to many peoples and countries, but not to all. This painfully touched the Poles and other Eastern European nations, who were left in a totalitarian regime's sphere of influence at the end of the war, and also the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians, whose countries were occupied by this regime for almost half a century." President Ilves said.

"The answer to the evil of World War II is the membership of the majority of European Union states in NATO and of course the European Union itself, with its goal of a united, peaceful and democratic Europe. A Europe that is not divided between us and the enemy, and where no one's fate will ever again be determined by walls, spheres of influence and secret pacts." the Estonian head of state affirmed.

At an international conference in Gdansk this evening, President Ilves will speak along with the other government leaders about European integration as a lesson learnt after World War II and what this means today.

The following leaders are travelling to Gdansk to attend the ceremonies commemorating the end of World War II: Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev, Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, Czech President Miloš Zeman, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, President of the European Council Donald Tusk, Speaker of the Danish Parliament Mogens Lykketoft, Speaker of the Spanish Parliament Jesús Posada Moreno, Speaker of the Latvian Parliament Ināra Mūrniece, former German President Horst Köhler, Márta Mátrai, a respected member of the Hungarian National Assembly and French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

Office of the President of the Republic
Public Relations Department