

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the commemoration event of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Gdansk, 7. May 2015.

Thank you President Komorowski for your invitation to gather here in Westerplatte to commemorate the end of the Second World War, a war whose influence will reverberate through history for centuries to come. This place, so rich in symbolism, allows us to remember all those who died in that war as well as the fates of those who survived. Especially in this part of the world. On May 8th 2015 there are no victors, no losers, only survivors and their children and children's children. It is a day to honor all those who needlessly suffered.

The horrendous violence unleashed by two dictators through a secret agreement destroyed states, took their countries from their people. The sacrifices of millions of allies brought freedom to the victims. But Freedom only for some. Others continued in slavery, only the masters changed, along with the masters' symbols changed. Totalitarian rule remained. Eastern Europe found their yokes changed but they were not free.

The Western part of Europe, the part that was truly liberated, found an answer: the integration of Europe, democratic and at peace, without "spheres of influence", without secret protocols.

We have been at peace among ourselves for so long now – seven decades – that we believe this to be the status quo. It is, but only within our own borders. Yet we only delude ourselves if we believe that our own security and safety remains unaffected when our neighbors are invaded, their territory annexed, their cities bombed with Grad missiles. This is no less than a complete abandonment of international law and the foundations of the peace that has reigned on our continent since 1945.

Fortunately Europe has, for better or worse, responded. We no longer hear weekly announcements of "grave concern". We have responded politically, diplomatically, with sanctions, demonstrating a unity, achieved with a consensus among those privileged enough to part of the peace project known as the European Union.

How to proceed? I say, stay the course. If steps are taken to de-escalate, we too should take steps. If the aggression continues, then we must recognize we have done too little.

We from the member states that still even to this day are called "new", know well how little our concerns were listened too throughout the past twenty years. Our worries were belittled, down-played, ignored. Today, however, it is hardly comforting to know our concerns were justified. We learned to be quiet, to show what Vaclav Havel called in his speech exactly 20 years ago on 8. May 1995 in Prague, "cringing caution". Here is the full passage:

"The cringing caution which many of us were so good at showing both after Munich and during the Nazi occupation and later under Communism must never again be our national programme. We have to build on something else: on love for freedom and justice, on respect for human dignity, and on the ability to prove the validity of these feelings, if need be, by concrete deeds. In other words, the values which we need now are the very qualities which were demonstrated by all the men and women to whom we give our thanks today and whose memory we honour."

The choices of the 1930s are the same choices we face again today. Do we remain true to the foundational values of our European democracy? Or do we make a "deal", a deal that will ultimately return us to the chaos of the past? The choice is ours, Europe's.

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