

In his auditorium lecture at the University of Helsinki on Wednesday, President of the Republic Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is on a state visit to Finland, spoke about the common roots of Estonia and Finland, the future of Europe, and security of the Baltic Sea.

“Some of my Estonian acquaintances regard Finland as an ideal country, where they would like to live. Why? Because Finland still has a great deal of that which Estonia, like every other country, needs more of. These are an awareness of identity, unconditional love of country, solidarity, and security,” said President Ilves.

According to President Ilves, at the end of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s, Estonia and Finland, were like a chapter in a history textbook that described what the neutrality of small nations was worth in the Second World War. “This neutrality was worthless—to be bent and trampled on by the major powers,” he said.

Estonia during the Silenced Era turned out to be especially weak. According to President Ilves, he read with embarrassment from the memoirs of Endel Kingo, Envoy of the Estonian Embassy that, during the closing days of the Winter War, Aleksander Warma, the Estonian Ambassador in Finland, had said that Estonia was smart to sign the military bases agreement with the Soviet Union, because Estonia lost less land than Finland.

“Moreover, I was even more embarrassed when I thought about the airfields given to the Soviet Union by the Estonian Government, for instance in Kuusiku, from which bombers with five-pointed stars rose into the air to fly bombing raids on southern and western Finland,” said the Estonian Head of State. “It is painfully instructive to know that pre-war Estonia had itself made the first concessions to democracy, whereby we could be deprived of our freedom quickly and completely. I am sad that Estonia was so weak at the time, that we did not have the opportunity to stand with dignity alongside Finland that was defending itself.”

President Ilves said he is proud of the 60 Estonians, who, in defiance of the Estonian authorities, came to fight in the Winter War, and of the almost 3,500 volunteers who joined the Finnish Army during the Continuation War. “However—some of the Estonian men who remained in Finland after the end of the war were turned over to the Soviet Union, where they were victims of repressions. The basis for politics at that time was geography, to quote Paasikivi, and this lasted for a half century,” said the Estonian Head of State.

“What can we learn from the neutrality that was trampled and bent?” asked President Ilves. “Estonia’s answer is membership in the European Union and NATO. Estonia’s answer is to find allies and to jointly contribute to the creation of the common security.”

In the auditorium lecture at the University of Helsinki, President Ilves expressed special concern about the Baltic Sea, which has almost become a European inland sea. General environmental warming will cause unpredictable changes in the Baltic Sea—some species of fish may disappear and the increase of eutrophication noticed in recent years will increase further.

“Our sea, mare nostrum, is also threatened by local risks,” noted the Estonian Head of State, recollecting that Russia plans to increase the number of submarines in the Baltic Sea to ten. “This in a peaceful region, where only a small percentage of the coast does not belong to the European Union,” said President Ilves, calling the plan of the Russian Government to make the Baltic Sea its corridor for crude oil transit by shipping up to 150 million tons of crude oil and crude oil products through the port of Primorsk perilous.

Office of the President, Public Relations Department
Kadriorg, 14 March 2007