

“I am proud, extremely proud, of the Otto Tief government. In the name of democracy and freedom they met their pre-determined fate, so that no one in the future could say that Tallinn was “liberated” in September of 1944. That the flag that the Red Army tore down from Tall Hermann Tower was the Estonian blue-black-and-white, not the Nazi swastika,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves yesterday at the opening of a photo exhibition of the members of the Otto Tief government at the Bank of Estonia.

He recalled the Atlantic Charter announced by Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill on August 14, 1941, which enumerated the principles of the Western Allies in case of their possible victory, and declared that they recognize the right of all peoples to decide their own system of government and to determine their own fate.

“This declaration was very important to the occupied nations. It provided hope for restoring lost independence. It resulted in the belief that help would arrive from the Western Allies,” said President Ilves.

“The fate of the National Committee formed in February 1944 and the members of the Tief government that assumed office in September 1944 is very symbolic of the situation at the time,” said the Head of State, “first they were arrested by the German authorities. Thereafter, those who were not able to escape were arrested by the NKVD. They were all repressed: some were killed, the rest imprisoned. Those who returned alive from Siberia suffered restrictions of their civic rights.”

Seeing the fates of Estonia’s democrats, there was no difference between the Nazis and Communists, said President Ilves. “The German arrested those they could, and when the Russians arrived, they arrested them again. Neither Nazis or Communists tolerated Estonia or democracy,” he said.

In his speech, the Head of State recommended that the Estonian state and people focus on how to immortalize the memory of the people who remained loyal to their professional and military oaths, ideals of the nation, freedom, democracy and independence, and who were therefore repressed.

“I repeat my appeal to establish an honorable memorial to the tens of thousands who were victims of Communism in Estonia. Not only to the victims of Stalinism, because this would nullify the suffering of those who were imprisoned, repressed, and persecuted between 1953 and 1988. Unfortunately, we still do not know the names of all the victims. Our job is to find out and chisel them in stone. By name.” said President Ilves.

“I know that this is a very extensive undertaking. But the victims deserve it. It might be suitable to establish this memorial on Maarjamäe Hill, where the fallen of World War II are already commemorated. Maybe an even more appropriate location can be found. I do not wish to assume the role of the decision maker,” said the Head of State. “But the completion of this memorial must result from our joint work and efforts. This work can only unite us. It can never divide us under any circumstances. I hope that the Estonian government and Tallinn authorities, along with other decision makers, find the goodwill within themselves to start this work right after the completion of the Freedom Monument.”

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