

At a conference organized in honor of the Estonian volunteers that participated in the Finnish wars in 1939-1944, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves spoke about the contribution and role of the Finnish Boys in the formation of today's Estonia.

"Before 1940, we could have called them the luckiest sons of the Estonian nation," said the Estonian Head of State. "They received their education in the Republic of Estonia. They had grown up in an independent country. Their education was apparently the best that any Estonian generation before or since has received."

In his speech, President Ilves noted that the Finnish Boys could even be called a remarkable generation, if we examine what those who survived the war and escaped to the West have achieved.

"Let's also think about the fact that it is only now in 2007 that young Estonians, graduating from secondary school, have advantages and qualifications similar to those of the Finnish Boys 65 years ago—to be born, grow up and be educated in a democratic and independent Estonia," the Head of State added.

According President Ilves, the Finns are wont to say that they were left alone in the Second World War. "True, countries did not come to their aid or were not able to do so. But what about volunteers?" the Head of State asked. "Three thousand three hundred and fifty-eight men are more than the number of professional soldiers Estonia has today. I ask that the contribution and fate of these men be taken into consideration," he emphasized.

In his address, President Ilves spoke about the experience of the Second World War and its impact on the foreign policy and security views of Estonia and the Estonians, "Estonians too can say that we were left alone. Were left alone for half a century; and in 1991, there were still those who considered Estonia's aspirations to restore its independence as a danger to their national interests."

However, I dare to say that Estonians believe deeply and sincerely in allied relations. We believe in the concept that if we help others in need, they will help us when we need their help,"

said the Head of State. "We believe in the obligation to help our friends, as did our fathers, uncles, and grandfathers when they went to fight for Finnish freedom."

"For years, or rather decades, I have wanted to do something to highlight the contribution of the Finnish Boys. Therefore, I am especially pleased that I can say what I have just said as the Estonian Head of State," said President Ilves. "You did the right thing. You sacrificed yourselves in the name of the right thing. Today, we thank you not only with words, but with the knowledge that it was you who created the understanding of obligations and the essence of allied relations for re-independent Estonia," the Head of State concluded.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229