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“Today, we mark the end of World War II in Europe. We stand in memory of all of the war’s victims – all of our compatriots who did not return from that terrible conflict.

World War Two was the result of the treachery and brazen ambitions of totalitarian regimes and the inability of democratic states to stop their ideologies or the states at their command.

It is a grim reminder that morality and ethics are indivisible values also in international relations, and we must never avert our eyes when these values are flouted. If we do look away, it may win us a brief evening respite, but not a peaceful tomorrow.

Geopolitical ideas from the 19th century, when security was to be guaranteed not by a partnership of equals but by regional domination, will not ensure peace and security in today’s world.

The fall of Nazi Germany, one totalitarian regime, led to the birth of a new Europe. A Europe where yesterday’s combatants became reconciled and forgave each other, and later joined a union we know today as the world’s most influential, the European Union.

Such a Europe could be conceived only on the basis of moral principles and liberty, for it was precisely the flouting of principles and lack of liberty that led to the war.

For Estonia, May 1945 did not mean the dawn of freedom and peace. We, and many Eastern and Central European countries were forced behind an iron curtain for long decades, back into the clutches of the occupation.

Our national flag was raised at the United Nations Headquarters – founded after the war to maintain global security – only half a century later. Foreign troops left Estonia even later – 31 August 1994. Only then, figuratively speaking, did World War II end for Estonia.

Estonia’s losses in this war were great beyond measure. Without being a belligerent in this conflict, but rather an overrun country, we lost our independence in World War II along with one-fifth of our population.

Reconciliation is necessary to overcome this painful past – that we be able to honour the memory of all of the war’s victims – for World War II took a very heavy toll on many nations.

But neither, and I stress, must we forget the injustice done to Estonia, or reconcile with those who committed crimes against their own and other peoples during the war. Nor can anyone expect absolution from us for the inhuman ideologies and regimes that sparked World War II.

Many Estonians were unable to choose a side in World War II. The foreign powers who bent Estonia to their will forced our men to fight in foreign uniforms. I regret deeply that Estonia's government and officials of that time did not give our military men the opportunity to fight for their nation's freedom in their own uniform. That was a grievous error, one which must never be repeated.

Today I bow my head in memory of the compatriots who joined the conflict during World War II and believed that the Republic of Estonia could be restored. As we now know, this good fight did not garner sufficient understanding and support in the world in that time. Yet believing in their country gave our men courage in the hopeless situation they were in.

I thank you for your courage and your belief.

As we now know as well, the apparent hopelessness of that time was ultimately illusory, for we have endured as a country, and no foreign power has managed to actually triumph on Estonian soil.

Today, the anniversary of the day on which hostilities in Europe ended, let us think about all of the victims of the war and occupations who came from Estonia, now sleeping in German and Russian war cemeteries, in Tartu County, on the Siberian tundra, in Courland, between Narva and Tallinn, on the floor of the Baltic Sea and in many other places both home and abroad.

The Republic of Estonia is the ultimate monument we could ever erect to them. The Republic of Estonia, a free country, the work of our hands and minds. From the wreckage in the past, we must salvage the conclusion that we have a debt to the future Estonia.

I bow my head before the victims of the Second World War.”

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