

The President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is in Sweden on a state visit, paid a visit to the Gate of Freedom monument in Stockholm, which symbolises the gratitude felt by the thousands of refugees who arrived by boats towards Sweden and the Swedish people, who accepted the refugees more than sixty-five years ago.

Thousands of Estonians and Estonian Swedes left behind their homes and homeland, as they escaped war, occupation, and violence and arrived across the Baltic Sea, President Ilves recalled.

“Deprived of their homes and homeland, they stood tentatively on these shores, and yet cherished a hope that had been shaken by the winds of fate. The Swedish state and the Swedes reached out their hands and gave them a new roof over their heads,” the Estonian Head of State said. “This is why the monument that has been built with donations from Estonians living in Sweden is an expression of our gratitude to Sweden and to the Swedish people.”

President Ilves reminded those present that these events had a direct link to his own family, as his parents were amongst those who arrived in Sweden back in the autumn of 1944, as they escaped the war and occupation. Sweden became their first home in the free world and they were able to continue their lives as free people.

The Estonian Head of State thanked His Majesty, King Carl XVI Gustaf, for his help and support in erecting the monument to the Estonian refugees and to all of those whose donations contributed to the erection of the monument.

Background information:

A monument of grey granite standing eight metres high and with a narrow opening – the Gate of

Freedom – was blessed and officially handed over to the Swedish people on 7th October 1994. The monument was sculpted by Estonian sculptor Matti Varik. His Majesty, the King of Sweden Carl XVI Gustaf, said at the opening ceremony of the monument at Cape Manilla Holme of Southern Djurgården, Stockholm, that he wished for the Gate of Freedom to stand in memory of the Estonian people's courageous fight for democracy and justice and to let this monument bear witness to the close links between these two nations.

The following words, in Estonian and Sweden, have been engraved on the monument:

“We came in small boats across the sea to escape terror and dictatorship. Thirty thousand men, women, and children made it – workers, fishermen, peasants, intellectuals... We were treated well; we got jobs and built ourselves safe homes and families. We never forgot the land that we were forced to leave, and we worked for the freedom of this land.

May the Gate of Freedom stand as a monument to the humanity and tolerance that the Swedish people had for these refugees, as we sought shelter during evil times, and may it remind us of a tiny part of a nation that found itself a new home here.”

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