

Dear Finnish Boys,
Dear friends!

Unlike many events where the President of the Republic is present in his official duties, this one was chosen by me, sincerely wishing to be here and address you today. For years, actually for decades, I have wished to do something to highlight the contribution of the Finnish Boys – Estonian volunteers in the Finnish Army.

Therefore, I am especially glad to say these words to you as Estonian Head of State. Thank you!

It is my great regret that so many of those whom I would have liked to address today and thank in the name of the Republic of Estonia – including Leks Terras, Andi Rajandi, and Ott Arens, close friends of mine and my parents' – are no longer with us.

As many people, especially our younger fellow citizens, don't know much about the Finnish Boys, let me read out a few – in fact quite a few – names. That will help you to understand what kind of men rushed to Finland's assistance.

Paul Alvre, who graduated from Helsinki University in 1946 and became lecturer of the Estonian language at Jyväskylä University, and was extradited to the Soviet Union by Finland in 1948, and who later became a renowned scholar of Finno-Ugric languages;

Ivar Grünthal, physician, poet and founder and editor-in-chief of *Mana*, probably the most avant-garde Estonian cultural magazine;

Ilmar Heinsoo, Honorary Consul of Estonia in Toronto;

Sven Ise was extradited by Finland in 1948, was until 1959 in the prison camps of Norilsk and Vladimir; and after Estonia's independence was restored, he founded a leadership college for the Estonian border guard and assisted in building up the General Staff of Estonian Defence Forces;

Ilmar Jaks, author;

Ülo Jõgi, landed in Estonia with a parachute, fought with Erna, Erna I and Erna II, was sentenced to 25+5 years in prison camp and released only in 1971, and not even then allowed to reside in Tallinn. He became a shooting coach in Keila Sports School;

Uno Järvela, who after Siberia was the conductor of the Estonian Academic Male Choir, as well as musical director of the Estonia Theatre and Professor in the Tallinn Conservatoire and General Conductor of several song festivals;

Otniell Jürissaar, author and composer, who became a choir conductor during his banishment

in Mordva after hard labour camp;

Ain Kaalep, poet and translator, who revived the *Akadeemia* magazine and became its first Editor-in-Chief;

Raimond Kaugver, a writer who survived Komi prison camp;

Raimond Kolk, poet and novelist;

Silver Koppel graduated from the medical department of the University, became a doctoral candidate and defended his doctor's degree in philosophy in 1994;

Ilo Käbin, physician and historian;

Vello Laama, Vice President of General Motors;

Väino Kaja, who started university studies after prison camp in Sverdlovsk, and became doctoral candidate in technology and later Director of the Museum of Agriculture;

Paavo Loosberg, was in the navy, later aide-de-camp to President Lennart Meri;

Ilmar Malin, artist, who also survived Siberia;

Heino Mikiver, scenographer of Vanemuine theatre in Tartu, the youngest of the Mikiver brothers, who was extradited by Finland after escape in 1947;

Ilmar Mikiver, Heino's brother, poet and author, editor of Voice of America;

Olev Mikiver, Heino and Ilmar's brother, artist;

Hannes Oja, author and journalist;

Vello Pekomäe, a legendary journalist in Sweden, who finished the Estonian Secondary School in 1980 to get the secondary school certificate that he had failed to obtain because of the war in Finland;

Imant Rebane, Director of the Baltic Institute in Stockholm;

Robert Rebas, art historian;

Heino Relvik, professor of Tallinn Technical University;

Juhan Ross, physicist and academic in Tartu University;

Paul Saar, parson in Ingria and later at Hageri, was sentenced to 25+5 after his extradition by Finland in 1947;

Vello Salo, Doctor of theology; clergyman, scholar of the Old Testament, translator of the Bible;

Erich Saluste, doctor of biochemistry in the US and in Sweden;

Ilmar Sulg, professor of medicine in Norway;

Heino Susi, scientist, author of several novels;

Karl Talpak, leader of the Forest Brothers who attempted to free Tartu in 1941, spiritual leader of the Finnish Boys, also one of the leaders of Erna, military counsellor to Prime Ministers Uluots and Tief;

Ilmar Talve, leading scholar of ethnology in Finland, who despite the efforts of the entire establishment was invited from Sweden to teach in Finnish universities, because he was simply the best;

Aleksander "Leks" Terras, son of Karl Terras, the State Secretary murdered in the Kirov prison camp, a colleague of mine in Radio Free Europe, where he was in charge of the Estonian Office of the RFE for ten years;

Uno Tõnnus, who spent a long time in Soviet prison camps, but still became the chief coach of the Estonian swimming team;

Evald Uustalu, historian;

Leo Valdma, Professor in Tallinn Technical University;

Arved Viirlaid, author, head of the Estonian PEN-Club and author of the widely translated novel „Graves without Crosses“.

Dear Friends.

The names I just recited make me think of the accomplishments of the Finnish Boys. An overwhelming majority of the 3358 Finnish Boys were young, mostly of the same age – a little younger than the Republic of Estonia.

Until 1940, we could have called them the luckiest sons of Estonia. They were educated in the Republic of Estonia; they grew up in an independent country. They probably received a better education than any preceding or following generation in Estonia.

Considering the accomplishments of those who survived the war and escaped to the West, we could call the Finnish Boys a miracle generation.

Unfortunately, the majority never made it to the West. Harsh fate awaited the ones who

remained in Estonia or were extradited. A great number of the Finnish Boys who had survived the war were sent to the Siberian prison camps. In addition to those 336 killed in the war, at least 162 of those who returned to Estonia were killed or died in prison camps.

Some of them made an illustrious career even after their release from prison camps. Still, many lost their health, many were denied self-fulfilment. Just consider what the Finnish Boys could have accomplished in Estonia, had they too been free to make use of their talents.

Let us also consider today that it is only now, in 2007, that young Estonians of almost the same privileges and advantages as the Finnish Boys enjoyed nearly 65 years ago, are finishing secondary school – young Estonians born, raised and educated in democratic and independent Estonia.

Dear friends!

We are used to states and politicians explaining their security and foreign policy trends and approaches proceeding from the historical experience of their state and their people. Also Estonia has her experience of World War II and the Soviet Union, but Finland's experience is something quite different. And the differences between our two countries are explained precisely proceeding from that 65-years-old experience.

The Finns would say that they were let down in World War II. No help came from those they had believed in.

It is true that no states came to Finland's help, or managed to do that. But what about the volunteers? What about the personal choice and contribution of 3358 Estonian soldiers? Did Estonians let Finland down? 3358 Estonians are more than the number of professional military in Estonia today. I beg you to consider the contribution and fate of those men.

Dear friends!

Speaking of Estonian warriors, the Finnish Boys, I would also like to make a brief mention of the experience of World War II in Estonia, and the impact of that experience, which survives to this day. The impact on Estonia's and the Estonians' views on foreign policy and security.

Above all, it has to do with faith in alliances. Also Estonians could say that we were let down. Let down indeed for half a century; and even in 1991, there was no lack of those who believed that Estonia's strive for restoring independence was jeopardising their national interests.

Yet I dare say that Estonians have a deep and genuine faith in alliances. We believe in the idea that if we come to the assistance of others in their hour of need, others will help us when we need help.

This is the essential core of Article 5 of the NATO agreement. We believe in it and demonstrate our faith, participating in very complicated and dangerous peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in Bosnia and Kosovo. Both under the auspices of NATO but

also in accordance with other international agreements.

Trust, concordance, solidarity and resolve are NATO's tower of strength today. This is what gives credibility to Article 5 on mutual defence. No one is let down in times of trouble.

We believe in the commitment to help our friends. Just as our fathers, uncles and grandfathers did, when they went to war for Finland's freedom.

There was no agreement of alliance, but Estonians believed in the freedom of their friends.

I wish once more to thank the Finnish Boys. You did the right thing, made the right sacrifice. Our gratitude today is not plain words, but also the knowledge that it was you who brought the understanding of duty and the essence of alliance to Estonian state after the restoration of independence.

Thank you.