



**Memorial Ceremony  
23<sup>th</sup> August 2022  
Maarjamäe, Tallinn**

**Minister of Justice Lea Danilson-Järg**

83 years ago today, two executioners, Stalin and Hitler, made an agreement that laid the foundation for the outbreak of World War II. In this deadliest war in Europe, all legal norms were trampled on and attempts were made to destroy entire nations with mass murders and deportations.

This horrendous crime was possible because democratic countries were unable to confront the evil with sufficient force and unity. Mass murderers were treated as leaders of states, not as dangerous criminals who needed to be locked up immediately. Estonia lost its freedom and independence and a population of nearly 250,000 people in this tragedy. Every fifth resident of Estonia lost their life due to war and repression or was forced to leave their homeland. In one way or another, the war touched every Estonian family. I also lost my grandmother to the Red Terror and have never met her, because my mother was still a small child at the time.

All this could happen because we were alone. We, as well as many other countries, fought alone against evil, violence, and injustice.

We must remember and constantly remind all democratic countries of this lesson, this fatal mistake, and this terrible experience – especially now that Europe is at war again and Ukraine is fighting for the freedom of all of us.

We must not leave Ukraine alone!

Only by remembering the pain of the divided Europe of the 20th century can we preserve the common Europe of the 21st century.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed 83 years ago today, has long been in the ash heap of history, but the aggressiveness and brazen attempts of Russia to forcefully change national borders are still causing problems.

If we do not want to repeat the mistakes made in the past, the response of the European Union and the entire democratic world to Russian aggression must be unwavering, effective, and unanimous.

Together with our allies, we must continue to strive for the fact that the crimes of communism are condemned as much as the crimes of the Nazis, because Putin's war machine also relies on the Soviet legacy.

In April 2009, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the member states to honour the memory of the victims of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes on 23 August. Estonia was the first country to support this resolution.

However, 23 August is not only associated with the heartbreak caused by communism and nazism, but also with the fight against these criminal regimes.

The new awakening period of our nation began with the Hirvepark meeting organised on 23 August 1987, where the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was demanded to be made public.

Two years later, on 23 August 1989, nearly two million Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians formed a 675-kilometre-long human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius, showing the whole world how powerful is our will for freedom and independence.

Today we can safely say our determination and will has not changed. The Baltic Way now stretches from Tallinn to Kyiv and connects all European capitals, all European nations. Russia has not changed in 83 years, but Europe has learned from its past and now stands united in its fight for democracy and freedom.

As a national holiday, Estonia will celebrate the Resistance Fighting Day in a month, on 22 September. In the autumn of 1944, tens of thousands of people tried to save themselves by fleeing from the invading Red Army to the west, to find refuge in other countries and continue the fight for the freedom of their homeland from there. So far, we have celebrated this great escape on 19 September.

Many died, but those who survived laid the foundation for a decades-long fight for the freedom of their homeland.

Now that Russia is again trying to expand its borders of influence towards the west with weapons, and our society has opened its doors to support Ukrainian war refugees and we are helping Ukraine in any way we can, there is a reason to think about whether we have preserved the memory of our people's resistance with enough dignity.

The great escape and resistance to the enemy are not opposite events here, but different aspects of the same process: it was and still is an attempt to survive as a nation. That is why we should pay more attention to the celebration of 22 September to also commemorate the great escape.

Dear listeners!

23 August is a day of evil, but it is also the day of our common victory over evil. Therefore, let us think with gratitude of all those who have sacrificed their lives for the freedom of Estonia and Europe by this black wall of mourning.

Let us also think of all those who are still fighting for our freedom in Kharkiv, Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, Bakhmut, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and many other regions of Ukraine that have by now become as familiar to us as R pina or P rnu.

Allow me to greet all these heroes and all the brave people of Ukraine who are celebrating the Independence Day of Ukraine tomorrow with the words that united and inspired all Estonians in the days of the Singing Revolution,

*One day, no matter what, we will win!*

Long live Estonia!

Slava Ukraini!