

## Joint statement

On 23 August 1939, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, Vyacheslav Molotov, and the Foreign Minister of Nazi Germany, Joachim von Ribbentrop, signed a non-aggression pact which led to the outbreak of World War II in Europe. With a secret protocol of the pact, Eastern European countries from Finland to Romania were divided into spheres of interest. As a result, Poland's army was crushed in the autumn of 1939, the Winter War (1939–1940) broke out in Finland, and Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Romanian Bessarabia were occupied and annexed in the summer of 1940. These events were followed by war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the Holocaust, which demanded the lives of millions of European citizens.

After the war, Eastern Europe remained under the power of communist regimes for half a century. The execution, imprisonment or deportation of innocent people, alongside their family members, who were defined as enemies and opponents of the regime culminated in hundreds of thousands of victims. The Soviet Union's iron grip over the subjugated peoples was illustrated, among others, by the use of military force to suppress the popular uprisings in eastern Germany in 1953, in Hungary and Poland in 1956, **as well in Poland in 1968, 1970 and 1981** and to stifle the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia exactly 50 years ago. Only due to the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellites, the spiritual, economic and military collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the inevitable desire of the subjugated peoples, and the support of the democratic world opened up the path to the restoration of freedom and democracy, and to Eastern Europe's return to modern Europe.

**This process gained its momentum with the establishment of the Independent Trade Union "Solidarność" in Poland. Determination of the social movement centered around "Solidarność" resulted after several years in changes in the political system in Eastern European countries and contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This period is known as the "Autumn of Nations", initiated by the first free parliamentary elections in Poland after the II World War.**

On 2 April 2009, the European Parliament adopted the resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, which strongly and unequivocally condemned all crimes against humanity and serious human rights violations committed by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. The European Parliament expressed its condolences to the victims of these crimes and to the families of the victims and insisted that 23 August to be proclaimed the European day of dignified and impartial commemoration of the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Following this call, the victims of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes will be commemorated in many countries for the tenth time today.

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have celebrated 23 August as commemoration day for decades. On 23 August 1979, a public letter by 45 Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian freedom fighters, also known as the Baltic Appeal, was sent to the Secretary-General of the United Nations as well as to the leaders of the Soviet Union, West and East Germany, and the signatories of the Atlantic Charter, demanding the public disclosure of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the restoration of the independence of the Baltic states. As a reaction to the Baltic Appeal, on 13 January 1983, the European Parliament proposed a resolution to support the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. On 23 August 1989 – ten years after the Baltic Appeal – , on the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 2 million Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian citizens unanimously joined their hands in the Baltic Way that extended from Tallinn to Vilnius in the commemoration of the victims of totalitarian regimes, and to demand the restoration of independence of the states that had been destroyed as a result of the pact.

Many of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity under the totalitarian regimes still live among us in a number of European countries. The legal systems of several countries have prosecuted those guilty of crimes against humanity under the communist regime and they have been imposed a fair sentence, which has also been recognised on several occasions by the European Court of Human Rights. **A good example in this field is the activity of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance, which in addition to research and archiving activity, with large successes pursues the perpetrators of communist crimes.**

But the work is not yet finished. Signatory countries of the joint statement support the continued investigation of crimes committed by the communist regime via national law enforcement agencies and the intensification of transnational cooperation in this area.

In the European Parliament resolution of 2009 European Parliament called for the establishment of an international organisation Platform of European Memory and Conscience. PEMC has been active since March 2011 and consists of 57 organisations from 20 countries that are involved in the investigation of totalitarian regimes, reporting the crimes committed by these regimes, and commemorating the victims. The signatories recognise PEMC for its successful efforts to identify those responsible for the crimes committed by the communist regime, which has resulted in the opening of investigations by the law enforcement agencies of several countries. Signatories call on European governments to broaden their support for PEMC activities in raising public awareness of the crimes perpetrated by the communist regimes, and their consequences that affect the lives of many Europeans to this day.

Today, on 23 August 2018, **we keep honouring** the memory of all men and women who were murdered by or who died as victims of totalitarian regimes. We express our deep respect to the tens of thousands of Europeans among us who, after long years in prison camps or living in exile, were able to return to their homeland, the rights of many of whom were restored only after the collapse of the communist regime. We express our respect to those who fell victim of the political terror of totalitarian regimes. We urge all governments to support these people and recognise their determination and courage.

The participants of the meeting also support the initiative of the Estonian government to establish the International Museum for the Victims of Communism in Tallinn.

Signatories