



18.August.2017

30.August 2017

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Dedre Stavoris,

I thank you for your letter in which you advised that you would not be attending the conference "The Heritage in 21st Century Europe of the Crimes Committed by Communist Regimes" on 23 August of this year. I regret that you made this decision but appreciate your taking the time to provide a thorough explanation for your choice. Allow me, however, not to agree with the arguments that you presented as reasons for declining this invitation.

I do not wish to descend into a debate on 20th century European history. This has been done and will continue to be done by historians, lawyers, social and political scientists and philosophers from many different countries. We are politicians, and our job is to protect values and virtues. Our values are human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to which I see no alternative. This is why I am opposed to any ideology or any political movement that negates these values or which treads upon them once it has assumed power. In this regard there is no difference between Nazism, Fascism or Communism. All of these ideologies claimed the right, in the name of their distorted visions for the future, to destroy entire nations and societal groups, and to declare others to be unworthy and unsuitable for a Utopian future, due to which such peoples and groups had to either be re-educated, forced to suffer in misery without hope for a better future, or banished to uninhabitable wastelands.

Condemnation of crimes against humanity must be particularly important for us as ministers of justice whose task it is to uphold law and justice. This is our duty, irrespective of the reasons these crimes were committed and regardless of who the victims of these crimes were. Every person, irrespective of his or her skin colour, national or ethnic origin, occupation or socio-economic status, has the right to live in dignity within the framework of a democratic state based on the rule of law. All dictatorships – be they Nazi, Fascist or Communist – have robbed millions of their own citizens but also citizens of conquered states and subjugated peoples of this right.

The fate of our two states in the 20th century has been different. In Estonia, you do not need to be a historian to know what happened in Greece during the Nazi occupation. To bring but one example: Louis de Bernières' novel Captain Corelli's Mandolin has been translated into Estonian, and the film based on this book has been seen by thousands of my compatriots. Similarly, The Gulag Archipelago by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was translated into Greek shortly after its publication in 1974. It may interest you to know that Solzhenitsyn completed this book in Estonia during a summer he spent as a guest on the farm of Arnold Susi, an Estonian whom he had met on that very archipelago of which he wrote. There, Solzhenitsyn was less visible to the eyes of the KGB than he would have been in Russia where he was well known. Arnold Susi had been sent to the Gulag simply because he had been a minister in the Government of the Republic of Estonia. The Communist Soviet Union had occupied Estonia, and being a government minister in the Republic of Estonia was a crime in the eyes of the Communist Secret Police. Minister Susi was condemned to the Gulag two months after the Soviet Union together with the Western allies had defeated Nazi Germany, and he would return home only 15 years later. He was one of the lucky ones. Dozens of his colleagues from all of the governments that held office in the Republic of Estonia were murdered in the Gulag or perished there due to famine, disease or inhuman living conditions.

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It goes without saying that Solzhenitsyn's book was banned in Estonia throughout the Soviet occupation.

Unlike Greece, Estonia has the experience of living under two occupations, under two totalitarian dictatorships. Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, then by Nazi Germany in 1941, and again when the Soviet occupation continued in 1944 through to August 1991. In light of the experience of my country and people, I strongly dispute your claim that Communism also had positive aspects. While it is true that the Soviet Union played an important role in defeating Nazi Germany, the Red Army did not liberate Eastern Europe so that the states and peoples that had been occupied by the Nazis could determine their own destinies. This did not happen in East Berlin, and this did not happen in Tallinn. The Greek Civil War ended in 1949. In that same year, the Communist regime deported nearly 2 percent of the population of Estonia only because they as individual farmers refused to go along with the Communist agricultural experiment and join a collective farm. This was in addition to the tens of thousands who had already been imprisoned in the Gulag prison camps or deported and exiled earlier. Thousands more would follow, taken into prison up to mid-1950.

While Stalin's death allowed most of the survivors to return to their homeland, this did not mean that Communism had become humane. I am forty years old, and thus I completed basic education under the Soviet occupation. I know what I am talking about. It may come as a surprise to you that at that time, private property – one of the self-evident foundations of the European economy – was forbidden in the Soviet Union. And free enterprise was a crime.

I know what I am talking about when I say that it is not possible to build freedom, democracy and the rule of law on the foundation of Communist ideology. We all know that this has been attempted on all continents, with the exception of Australia. It has been attempted in various shades of red and under all kinds of nationalist slogans. This has always culminated in economic disaster and the gradual destruction of the rule of law. But there are also countries and peoples for whom the price of a lesson in Communism has been millions of human lives. This cannot be allowed to happen again.

In freedom and democracy, everyone has the right to their religious and ideological beliefs, but we must condemn all attempts or actions that incite others to destroy peoples or societal groups or to overthrow a legitimate regime by force. With regard to innocent victims, however, there is no need to differentiate. It makes no difference to a victim if he is murdered in the name of a better future for the Aryan race or because he belongs to a social class that has no place in a Communist society. We must remember all of the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian dictatorships, as the European Parliament calls for in its resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism. It was this resolution that served as the basis for the commemoration of the victims of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes last week in Tallinn.

I herewith enclose a copy of the resolution of the European Parliament of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism for your reference.

Respectfully yours,



Urmas Reinsalu

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European conscience and totalitarianism

European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 260(III)A of 9 December 1948 on genocide,
- having regard to Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law¹,
- having regard to Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 25 January 2006 on the need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian Communist regimes,
- having regard to its declaration of 23 September 2008 on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism²,
- having regard to its many previous resolutions on democracy and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including that of 12 May 2005 on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe on 8 May 1945³, that of 23 October 2008 on the commemoration of the Holodomor⁴, and that of 15 January 2009 on Srebrenica⁵,
- having regard to the Truth and Justice Commissions established in various parts of the world, which have helped those who have lived under numerous former authoritarian and totalitarian regimes to overcome their differences and achieve reconciliation,
- having regard to the statements made by its President and the political groups on 4 July 2006, 70 years after General Franco's coup d'état in Spain,
- having regard to Rule 103(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas historians agree that fully objective interpretations of historical facts are not

¹ OJ L 328, 6.12.2008, p. 55.

² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0439.

³ OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 392.

⁴ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0523.

⁵ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0028.

possible and objective historical narratives do not exist; whereas, nevertheless, professional historians use scientific tools to study the past, and try to be as impartial as possible,

- B. whereas no political body or political party has a monopoly on interpreting history, and such bodies and parties cannot claim to be objective,
- C. whereas official political interpretations of historical facts should not be imposed by means of majority decisions of parliaments; whereas a parliament cannot legislate on the past,
- D. whereas a core objective of the European integration process is to ensure respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law in the future, and whereas appropriate mechanisms for achieving this goal have been provided for in Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty on European Union,
- E. whereas misinterpretations of history can fuel exclusivist policies and thereby incite hatred and racism,
- F. whereas the memories of Europe's tragic past must be kept alive in order to honour the victims, condemn the perpetrators and lay the foundations for reconciliation based on truth and remembrance,
- G. whereas millions of victims were deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes during the 20th century in Europe; whereas the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged,
- H. whereas the dominant historical experience of Western Europe was Nazism, and whereas Central and Eastern European countries have experienced both Communism and Nazism; whereas understanding has to be promoted in relation to the double legacy of dictatorship borne by these countries,
- I. whereas from the outset European integration has been a response to the suffering inflicted by two world wars and the Nazi tyranny that led to the Holocaust and to the expansion of totalitarian and undemocratic Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as a way of overcoming deep divisions and hostility in Europe through cooperation and integration and of ending war and securing democracy in Europe,
- J. whereas the process of European integration has been successful and has now led to a European Union that encompasses the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which lived under Communist regimes from the end of World War II until the early 1990s, and whereas the earlier accessions of Greece, Spain and Portugal, which suffered under long-lasting fascist regimes, helped secure democracy in the south of Europe,
- K. whereas Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy and brings about an honest and thorough debate on their crimes in the past century,
- L. whereas in 2009 a reunited Europe will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which should provide both an opportunity to enhance awareness of the past and recognise the role of democratic citizens' initiatives, and an incentive to strengthen feelings of togetherness and cohesion,

- M. whereas it is also important to remember those who actively opposed totalitarian rule and who should take their place in the consciousness of Europeans as the heroes of the totalitarian age because of their dedication, faithfulness to ideals, honour and courage,
- N. whereas from the perspective of the victims it is immaterial which regime deprived them of their liberty or tortured or murdered them for whatever reason,
1. Expresses respect for all victims of totalitarian and undemocratic regimes in Europe and pays tribute to those who fought against tyranny and oppression;
 2. Renews its commitment to a peaceful and prosperous Europe founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights;
 3. Underlines the importance of keeping the memories of the past alive, because there can be no reconciliation without truth and remembrance; reconfirms its united stand against all totalitarian rule from whatever ideological background;
 4. Recalls that the most recent crimes against humanity and acts of genocide in Europe were still taking place in July 1995 and that constant vigilance is needed to fight undemocratic, xenophobic, authoritarian and totalitarian ideas and tendencies;
 5. Underlines that, in order to strengthen European awareness of crimes committed by totalitarian and undemocratic regimes, documentation of, and accounts testifying to, Europe's troubled past must be supported, as there can be no reconciliation without remembrance;
 6. Regrets that, 20 years after the collapse of the Communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe, access to documents that are of personal relevance or needed for scientific research is still unduly restricted in some Member States; calls for a genuine effort in all Member States towards opening up archives, including those of the former internal security services, secret police and intelligence agencies, although steps must be taken to ensure that this process is not abused for political purposes;
 7. Condemns strongly and unequivocally all crimes against humanity and the massive human rights violations committed by all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes; extends to the victims of these crimes and their family members its sympathy, understanding and recognition of their suffering;
 8. Declares that European integration as a model of peace and reconciliation represents a free choice by the peoples of Europe to commit to a shared future, and that the European Union has a particular responsibility to promote and safeguard democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, both inside and outside the European Union;
 9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to make further efforts to strengthen the teaching of European history and to underline the historic achievement of European integration and the stark contrast between the tragic past and the peaceful and democratic social order in today's European Union;
 10. Believes that appropriate preservation of historical memory, a comprehensive reassessment of European history and Europe-wide recognition of all historical aspects of modern Europe

will strengthen European integration;

11. Calls in this connection on the Council and the Commission to support and defend the activities of non-governmental organisations, such as Memorial in the Russian Federation, that are actively engaged in researching and collecting documents related to the crimes committed during the Stalinist period;
12. Reiterates its consistent support for strengthened international justice;
13. Calls for the establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience to provide support for networking and cooperation among national research institutes specialising in the subject of totalitarian history, and for the creation of a pan-European documentation centre/memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes;
14. Calls for a strengthening of the existing relevant financial instruments with a view to providing support for professional historical research on the issues outlined above;
15. Calls for the proclamation of 23 August as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, to be commemorated with dignity and impartiality;
16. Is convinced that the ultimate goal of disclosure and assessment of the crimes committed by the Communist totalitarian regimes is reconciliation, which can be achieved by admitting responsibility, asking for forgiveness and fostering moral renewal;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments of the Member States, the governments and parliaments of the candidate countries, the governments and parliaments of the countries associated with the European Union, and the governments and parliaments of the Members of the Council of Europe.