

# HOLOCAUST DISTORTION IN JERUSALEM

**E**stonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves visited Jerusalem for two days on June 28 and 29, ostensibly to encourage trade, pledge his country's support for Israel-Palestinian peace, and generally strengthen ties between Jerusalem and Tallinn. As part of the official diplomatic itinerary, Ilves paid an obligatory visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial, chatted over afternoon tea with Shimon Peres, and "bowed his head in memory of the millions of victims of the Holocaust."

But at home Ilves is also actively promoting a revisionist view of history by equating the Nazi Holocaust with crimes committed against the Baltic states by the Soviet Union. In the past Ilves has said, "The Nazis left Estonia after four years, but the Soviets stayed for fifty years, so the Soviet Union was worse than Nazi Germany." On May 8, he participated in a memorial ceremony in Tallinn "to those who lost their lives" during World War II, including Nazi fighters, Estonian locals who murdered Jews, Soviet killers — and the Jews who died. That ceremony was organized by the Estonian Freedom Fighters

Association, a successor organization to local Estonian groups that fought alongside the SS during World War II.

The next day in Moscow, Ilves "celebrated" the anniversary of the Allied victory with a call to remember "all" the victims of that war: "When speaking about World War II, it is out of place to speak of winners and losers ... all were victims of this war, [which resulted in] tremendous losses for all nations of Europe."

Some might say that Ilves's remarks seem reasonable, even justified. After all, well over 20 million Russians died during the war, and it is likely that more Germans died during that period than Jews.

"That's outrageous," says Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem. "When he says 'all victims of this war,' he is including Nazis, Estonians, Lithuanians, and other civilians who supported the Nazi invasion, and who fought along side the Third Reich. It is a case of Holocaust distortion and relativization."

President Ilves rejected repeated requests to be interviewed for this story.



Photo: Reuters

Laying a wreath, but for whom? Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves at Yad Vashem