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## **Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Dr Janez Drnovšek at the State Commemoration Ceremony in the Teharje Memorial Park**

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Ladies and Gentlemen, a few days ago we celebrated in Slovenia the 60 th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and of the victory over Nazism and Fascism. We remembered the atrocities of the war and emphasised that also the Slovenes had given their contribution to the victory over the powers of the Axis – the powers of the evil.



If the Nazi and the Fascist ideologies had prevailed, some nations would today not have existed any more. We can assume soundly that the Slovenes would have been among them.

Democratic countries as well as the communist Soviet Union, after being brutally attacked by the Nazis, withstood the Nazis and the Fascists. The then Yugoslavia and Slovenia were broken into smaller units and occupied by the powers of the Axis.



The political elite of the time was indecisive. It was wavering between the idea of a passive resistance and waiting for the allies and between the tactical cooperation with the occupiers. In contrast to them the Communist party had clearly determined and interlinked

goals: the fight against the occupiers and a simultaneous change of the social order.

German and especially Italian occupiers exercised severe repression over the Slovenes. Exiles, concentration camps, hostage shootings affected our nation severely. The National Liberation War was hard and uncompromising. The occupiers' soldiers were killed, the partisans were killed and the number of victims of the fratricidal slaughters was increasing.



The revolutionary nature of the National Liberation War was becoming ever more evident. And on the other side the counterrevolution. Ever less space was left for the bourgeois politicians, numerous peasants and indetermined individuals between the communist resistance and the cooperation with the occupier. Many of them chose the cooperation with the occupier because they saw there better

chances to preserve their institutions, their way of life or even life itself. Thus they became connected with the occupiers' side that was perpetrating the destructive war and the crimes against humanity. And, they found themselves on the side of the defeated.

Their fate was sad. Atrocious. Thousands of members of the home guard, having broken through across the border, were returned by the allies to the revolutionary authority in Yugoslavia. What will their destiny be?



The decision was obviously taken by the highest Party and State authority of the time. Without questioning the guilt, with no trials they were killed in secrecy, by night and buried in numerous graves throughout Slovenia. It is assumed there were more than 13.000 of them. And all this after the war.

The killing was totally senseless from the military point of view. Slovenia was already liberated. It was mere revenge. And the liquidation of the class enemy.

The crime was so evil that the authorities of the time concealed it from the domestic as well as from the foreign public. For decades we were celebrating only the bright victories over the occupiers and the traitors of the nation, while the dark sides of the revolutionary victory were not spoken of. A great majority of the Slovenes did not know anything about it. For a long time they only had a presentiment of the human tragedy.

This crime does not represent a burden for numerous partisans who fought bravely against the occupier among whom many lost their lives. It is not a burden to the majority of the people, the communists as well, who wished for a more rightful social order and did not take part in the fratricidal slaughters. However, it does burden the revolutionary leaders and their staff who were ready to kill without any scruples thousands of people regardless of their factual guilt.

The Yugoslav communists of that time were faithful disciples of Stalin. After Tito's dispute with Stalin slightly more humane dimensions were given to the Yugoslav socialism. But the beginnings were hard. Disrespect for human life and human freedoms in the end destroyed for many people the noble idea of a more rightful social order also on the world scale.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

all wars bring along suffering. This is difficult to imagine when living in peace. People change in war. They do things that they otherwise would not even think of.

Thus it is difficult to understand in the peace and from the time distance what was going on then. Neither are the wars black and white. Very often incomprehensible atrocities occur, even today when we think it is not possible. It is, though. Just remind us of Srebrenica.

There can be no nice war. This is why the fundamental message of the today's day is directed against the war. And against a sanguinary revolution. Against totalitarianism of any kind.

We must settle our disputes and lead our coexistence in a peaceful manner, with a democratic dialogue and with legal means. With the respect for every man, with understanding and taking into consideration the differences. And, sometimes we can also forgive.

What happened during the Second World War and after it must never happen again. This is why we are building the democratic European union. With the sound foundations of the rule of law, on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance.

In the first place it must never happen again that a Slovene would be killing a Slovene. We must never forget what happened during the Second World War and after it. We regret and we respect every lost life. Let us pay our respect to the victims. Let us give them back their dignity at least in the death. Let their deaths be an eternal reminder to us all. Let them rest in peace.

Let us start to live our lives anew. The time has come for the forgiving and reconciliation. New generations are here. Our present and future life must not be burdened with the past and old grudges. But it must be based on the truth. Also on the truth about what happened here in those days sixty years ago.