

## **Prime Minister Vladimir Putin addressed a ceremony in Gdansk marking the 70th anniversary of the start of World War II**

September 1, 2009  
Gdansk, Poland

Mr President of the Polish Republic, Mr Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends.

We, the representatives of different countries, have gathered here today in Gdansk, where the first shots of the bloodiest, most cruel and horrible war in the history of mankind were fired. We have gathered to pay tribute to the heroic deeds of the victors and to bow our heads in memory of the tens of millions of victims. The Allied soldiers and officers, the partisans and Resistance fighters. Civilians - women, children, old people - who died in bombing raids and at the hands of the invaders, and who succumbed to torture in concentration camps. People of different faiths and nationalities, political persuasions and views. People who could not escape this catastrophe.

Victory over Nazism came at a huge price and at the cost of irreparable losses. More than 53,000 Red Army soldiers and officers died liberating Gdansk alone. Buried in Poland are 600,000 of my fellow countrymen who contributed to the victory over Nazism. Six hundred thousand! All in all, half of the 55 million who died in the Second World War were citizens of the USSR. Think about these terrible figures.

It is our moral duty, the duty of all peoples to cherish the memory of the enduring importance of the Great Victory, and the genuine allied effort that took place over the dramatic events in our common history.

When recalling the first day of the war, we should of course think about what pushed the world to that fateful brink, and about the consequences of political cowardice, appeasing the potential aggressor, and attempts to ensure one's own security at the expense of that of others, above all our neighbours, and about what behind-the-scenes plots and agreements lead to.

The Second World War did not just happen. Its sources lie - and I agree with those who have made this point today - in the dire legacy of the Versailles Treaty, which did not only document the defeat of Germany after the First World War, but humiliated it, a fact that the Nazis took advantage of in order to seize power in the mid-1930s. It should be noted that no reliable collective security system had been created at the time.

When analysing the dramatic events leading up to the Second World War, it is incumbent upon us to draw lessons from them. To do so it is necessary to cast aside the political stereotypes of the past, the clichés and distortions of history, and the blatant suppression of certain facts.

It is important to understand that any collaboration with extremists, which in the Second World War meant Nazism and its underlings, leads to tragedy, whatever the motives for such collaboration. In effect it is not collaboration, but collusion aimed at furthering one's ends at the expense of others.

Therefore, it has to be admitted that all the attempts made between 1934 and 1939 to appease the Nazis with various agreements and pacts were morally unacceptable and practically meaningless, as well as harmful and dangerous. It was the combination of all these actions that led to this tragedy, to the start of World War II.

Of course, mistakes have to be admitted. Our country has done so. The State Duma of the Russian Federation, our country's Parliament, has condemned the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. We are entitled to expect the same from other countries that had made a deal with the Nazis, and not at the level of statements by political leaders, but at the level of political decisions.

We must, of course, think about the victims. Without a profound understanding of what has happened, we will be unable to build a truly secure world, eradicate the legacy of the Cold War, and remove the artificial dividing lines. I would like to note that my country does not only recognize the mistakes and tragedies of the past, but is making a practical contribution to building a new world based on new principles.

It is due to the position of my country that the virtual and real Berlin Wall was brought down, and prerequisites were established for the building of a new Europe without dividing lines.

We should cure society of the pestilence of xenophobia, racial hatred, and mutual mistrust built on cynical distortion or crude falsification of history.

Modern civilized policy should be based on shared moral and common legal principles. I am confident that only then can we turn the tragic page of the history on the Second World War - in memory of the fallen and for the sake of a peaceful future for our children.

An example of how old wounds can be healed - I am confident of this today - is the relationship of true partnership between the Federal Republic of Germany and the new Russia that has taken shape in recent years. Our two nations' reconciliation and magnanimity have risen above the settling of historical scores.

It is our genuine wish to see a relationship between Russia and Poland free from the ghosts of the past, and to develop in the spirit of neighbourly cooperation in order to do justice to the two great European nations.

In conclusion I would like to address the main participants in today's ceremony, the comrades-in-arms of those who defended Westerplatte and Stalingrad, landed in Italy and Normandy, and liberated Warsaw, Paris, Prague and Berlin.

Your feat is immortal. It will remain forever in our hearts as a true measure of fortitude, courage, valour and honour.

Thank you for your attention.

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