

## **Speech at the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II**

*Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister of Sweden  
Westerplatte, Poland, 1 September, 2009*

### **Check against delivery**

Seventy years ago today, we saw the outbreak of a storm. A storm that ravaged our continent and spread throughout the world. World War II began.

It was 4.45 in the morning. Right here in Westerplatte. The battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* suddenly opened fire on the Polish garrison.

In the years that followed, we saw nations fall, democracies tumble and people enslaved. We saw the destruction of invaluable cultural heritage. We saw cities engulfed by fire. We saw killing that we still find hard to understand.

Over 60 million people lost their lives, the majority of them civilians. This makes the Second World War the deadliest, bloodiest conflict in human history.

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We like to celebrate the bright moments in the history of mankind. Our scientific and cultural achievements. Our creation of wealth and welfare. Our good deeds.

Yet we know that man is not simply the genuinely good being we wish we were. Human beings are capable of amazing achievements and good, heartfelt deeds. But humans are also frail.

Frail in the sense of being capable of actions that can hurt ourselves or others. At their worst, these actions can cause enormous destruction. Such actions have given us words like genocide and holocaust. Though these deeds cannot be described in words.

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Gathered here today, we call for the remembrance of one of the darkest hours in the history of mankind. And remembrance is necessary. It is necessary because if not remembered, history may repeat itself.

World War II changed not only Europe but the entire world. And in Europe we learnt the lesson that we must build our common future not on conflict but on cooperation.

It was a painful lesson. And that makes it even more important to remember.

Never again. These were the words that rose to the skies from the survivors in the ruins left by the war. Never again war. That was the founding pillar of the European project that we know today as the European Union.

The European cooperation that followed the end of World War II was not only created as an escape from the extreme forms of nationalism which had devastated our continent. It was also founded in order to give the people of Europe a chance to build a common future. Based on values such as tolerance, democracy, market economy and rule of law.

From this point of view, this year is also a year of celebration and remembrance of European cooperation, integration, democracy and freedom.

Sixty years ago the Council of Europe was founded and just two years later the European Coal and Steel Community was established. Thirty years ago the first direct elections to the European Parliament were held.

And twenty years ago we saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the birth of a new and free Europe.

Certainly, we have reason to celebrate. Yet these celebrations are worth nothing if we do not remember the war that seventy years ago ravaged our continent. If we do not remember the victims, the survivors and the people who gave their lives to save others. If we do not remember and honour those who sacrificed their lives to defend respect for human dignity.

Our collective memory becomes weaker and weaker as the older generation, those who survived, disappear and can no longer bear witness. But here today we must say – we will never let this memory escape.

We must remember. We must show that we have learnt the lesson.

Today, tomorrow and in the days to come. And we must do so to ensure that two words will have genuine meaning as we build our common future. The words: Never again.

Thank you.