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## Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies

### Challenges to Peace and Security in Europe

*H.E. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia*

On Friday, September 26, 2014, the Harriman Institute and Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) hosted His Excellency Toomas Hendrik Ilves (CC '75), President of the Republic of Estonia. Ilves's talk, titled "Challenges to Peace and Security in Europe," expounded a gloomy interpretation of recent history and current events in Eastern Europe. In particular, Ilves bemoans that in the ideological battle between democracy and authoritarianism "liberal democratic values are no longer the obvious winner."

Ilves was born in Sweden and grew up in New Jersey. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology from Columbia College and worked in the United States and Canada before settling in Germany in 1984. There he worked for Radio Free Europe until 1991, when he moved into politics, serving simultaneously as Estonian ambassador to the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Five years later, he began to rise quickly through the ranks of the Estonian government, becoming foreign minister, then prime minister, then, in 2006, president.

"For fifty years before 1989, the world was bipolar," said Ilves, describing the traditional post-World War II paradigm, in which market capitalism opposed communism in developed countries, and developing countries existed in the "so-called third world." As the 1980s came to a close, "this neat, simplistic order was beginning to crumble." There was a feeling of elation as liberal democracy seemed to triumph in the struggle with authoritarianism. But many people in Europe were overzealous in their enthusiasm. "Now," said Ilves, "we see a ghost of the twentieth century."

Ilves outlined parallels between Hitler's Germany and Putin's Russia, equating the popular idea of an ethnic "Russian world" that transcends international borders with Hitler's pan-Germanism. "Military aggression in Crimea was justified by the presence of co-ethnics, just as Adolf Hitler annexed the Sudetenland. He used precisely the same argument."

In fact, "the argument is much older," said Ilves, tracing its origins to the Roman slogan, "where there are Romans, there is Rome." But, in 1945, the United Nations Charter put an end to that doctrine. In order to prevent another world war, nations agreed to leave each other's borders alone. For the most part, they abided by these rules throughout the Cold War. But Putin, he said, has recast the Roman statement as "where there is a Russian, there is Russia." "Which," Ilves quipped wryly, "is not only worrisome for countries like mine, but also for Brighton Beach."

Ilves cautioned against viewing recent developments as confined to Ukraine or even to Eastern Europe. "Versions of this sinister ideology have appeal in what we thought of as the bastion of liberal democracy—Western Europe," he said, "which should remember all too well the demons of the ideology of hatred." He listed far-right parties that have gained influence in France, Sweden, and other democratic nations. "The situation," he stated, "is far more serious than we realize."

"Today," said Ilves, "we find ourselves in a completely new and unforeseen security environment." In his analysis, the Cold War's conflicts adhered for the most part to certain agreed-upon limitations. The stand-off between the superpowers relied on threats more than action, and nations mostly played by what Ilves called "the old rules." "Now," he said, "we reside in the world described by Thomas Hobbes, in which life is a war against all."

Answering questions from the audience, Ilves argued that the Baltic states' post-Soviet success came from privatization. Russia and Ukraine privatized using a voucher system, which, Ilves said, created oligarchs and corrupted the nascent market system. The Baltic states steered clear of this method, thereby avoiding not only the "wild nineties" but also the populist backlash against moneyed interests that brought Vladimir Putin to power.

Finally, Ilves warned that if Ukraine cannot maintain its momentum away from Russia, it is likely to fall into its larger neighbor's grasp once again. He predicted that Ukraine may not enjoy the current level of energy or international support for a long time. "There have been three revolutions in Ukraine," he said. "If this revolution fails there will

be such Ukraine fatigue in the world that there will not be a fourth."

*Reported by Matthew Van Meter  
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