



**An Open Letter to the President of Estonia
Toomas H. Ilves,
Regarding the Sinking of *Estonia***

November 25, 2006

Dear President Ilves,

On the occasion of your meetings with the President of the United States of America George W. Bush and the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, we would like to bring to your attention our concerns regarding the sinking of *Estonia*.

In your speeches, you have often said that for Estonia every person is important. Does that include the thousands of human lives that were carried on M/S *Estonia* and used as "human shields" for criminal gangs involved in transporting secret shipments of Soviet military technology and weaponry to the West? ¹

Have you ever wondered how the victims' relatives feel when their governments obstruct the fair investigation into the sinking of *Estonia*, which took the lives of some 1 000 people, including some who were being smuggled in a closed trailer on car deck? ²

Those who were in power in 1994 are obviously hostile to any meaningful investigation into the sinking. We are convinced that the real reasons behind the *Estonia* catastrophe have been hidden from us.

We want to remind you that as president of Estonia, you have an obligation to be supportive to the investigation of what really happened to *Estonia*. You should actively assist the pursuit of the truth of this catastrophe by your fellow Estonians.

There are at least three files about the sinking of *Estonia* in the archives of the National Security Agency (NSA) of the United States of America. ³

"The documents are classified because their disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause serious damage to the national security,"⁴ according to the NSA.

You should take advantage of the meeting with President Bush and request that these documents be given to the government of Estonia. How can we ever know the full truth of what happened if such secret files exist?

There are secret documents in Swedish government archives that are classified for several generations. In order to find the truth of the sinking and determine accountability all secret documents need to be made public so the cover-up will be brought to an end. This is the least we can do to honor our relatives and countrymen who died at sea on September 28, 1994.

Margus Leivo, chairman of the parliamentary committee investigating the export of military equipment from Estonia, says:

"New evidence is tabled, which was initially denied or ridiculed. Thus, opinion is formed that investigators were not aware of all the facts gathered and therefore could not draw competent conclusions. There is a reason to believe that many facts are still hidden from us and are being concealed even to date."⁵

For some absurd reason, Estonian investigators were never allowed to see or investigate the complete evidence of the sinking of a ship that sailed under the Estonian flag. Sweden dominated the investigation. Given your connections and experience, you could do a lot to assert Estonia's proper and equal role in the international community.

We are encouraged by what you said in your inaugural speech on October 9, 2006, that Estonia should be treated as an equal and that the same rules would apply to us as we apply them to others.

Mr. President, you should know that we are not a quiet group of medicated mourners. We have filed a suit, which has been accepted, in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg on 14 August 2006. Over 80 families have joined the lawsuit thus far.

The organizations of Estonian and Swedish relatives have demanded that the diving ban to the *Estonia* wreck be suspended. A joint letter was sent out on 8 May 2006 to the signatories of the treaty to suspend all measures prohibiting inspection of the wreck and/or securing new evidence.⁶

We support honest and traditional methods to investigate the *Estonia* shipwreck, such as diving to the wreck and lifting it to the surface.⁷

The treaty declaring the wreck to be a gravesite has been the main obstacle preventing the recovery of the remains of our loved ones, something which is customary in the civilized world.

Drew Wilson, author of the recent book, *The Hole: Another look at the sinking of the Estonia ferry on September 28, 1994*, says:

"Throughout history, states have organized dangerous and sometimes hopeless attempts to recover victims regardless of cost, time, technical limitations or individual objections."

"From sunken ships, crashed airlines and space shuttles, from beneath fallen rock and collapsed skyscrapers, authorities in all countries reflexively launch efforts to retrieve human remains after a civil catastrophe. Governments do not squabble and debate the practice, which seems to transcend all political, economic and religious differences around the globe. Recovery work and forensic identification are more of a moral imperative than legal procedure. They simply get done because it is right."

As Wilson says, our moral values demand that we recover the bodies of our lost citizens because it is the right thing to do.

Lennart Berglund, chairman of SEA, has been fighting to recover the bodies. Berglund said about the wreck: "It's a death trap, not a grave. It can never be a grave. They were killed inside the ship."⁸

Spiritually a person needs to see the remains of the loved one to understand the loss and obtain closure. As a psychologist, you should understand the relatives' feeling that they have been forced to abandon their loved ones.

The late Estonian president Lennart Meri justified the decision to leave the bodies in the wreck, saying: "The sea from time to time needs sacrifices. This is very deeply rooted in our culture."

We do not agree with Meri's "old tradition" that our loved ones should remain on the bottom of the sea.

"Western structures do not yield to superstitions in tragic circumstances," Wilson says. *"Tribal beliefs that equate the sea with a grave do not form the basis of institutional decision making. In civilized countries, governments have the compulsory duty to exploit technology and resources in the service of the public to mitigate suffering."*⁹

Ines Uusmann, Sweden's Transport Minister at the time, said that the relatives' plan to raise funds for a recovery operation was "morally atrocious". Johan Franson, director of the Swedish Maritime Administration, repeatedly described how disgusting the bodies would be as if the recovery were a beauty contest.

"I think we should do everything in our power to re-float the ferry," Carl Bildt said as he left office shortly after the ship went down.

Unlike Carl Bildt¹⁰, Russia's President Vladimir Putin stuck to his promise and recovered the bodies from the sunken submarine *Kursk*. In the case of *Kursk*, the bodies had, in addition, been subjected to an explosion and chemical fire. Meri's refusal to insist on retrieval and repatriation of the victims after the *Estonia* tragedy can only be seen as a great failure as president.¹¹

Documents prove that these important decisions were made by the Swedish government. The former Swedish ambassador Lars Arne Grundberg provided Estonian Prime Minister Andres Tarand with a ready made protocol, in Swedish, of an "Estonian government meeting" that simply needed to be signed.¹²

In reality the "gravesite treaty" is a ruse, a tool used to thwart, limit, and prevent any independent investigations of the wreck. A square cannot be drawn in international waters and declared a forbidden zone by any national government. This is what is meant by international waters.¹³

As you travel to the NATO meeting in Riga to discuss freedom and security for Afghanistan, we would like to bring one issue to your attention. On the day *Estonia* sank, NATO began a 10-day exercise in and near the Baltic Sea with the navies of 10 NATO allies and 10 Partnership for Peace nations, including Sweden, Finland, Russia, and the Baltic states. At least 14 of the 20 nations involved provided ships and aircraft for the "Cooperative Venture" exercise, which was a "peacekeeping, humanitarian and search and rescue operation" exercise.¹⁴

There has been, however, no discussion of NATO's role in, or lack of response to, the sinking of *Estonia*. It is hard to understand why none of the rescue equipment from 20 nations was deployed when Europe's worst maritime disaster was unfolding before their eyes.

What kind of a world do we live in when our governments participate in the cover-up of the deaths of hundreds of their own citizens? It is our patriotic duty and moral obligation to find the truth about the sinking of *Estonia*. We owe this to our loved ones¹⁵, to our countrymen, and to mankind. Justice and safety on the seas demands it.

Mr. President, we hope that you can do something to address our concerns. We look forward to opening a dialogue with you.

We wish you success and hope to hear from you.

Respectfully,

AgnEf



B. Calamnius

EHVM



Ü. Veide

ELA



H. Kaskel

FAE



G. Claesson

SEA



L. Berglund

AgnEf **Arbetsgruppen för utredning av M/S Estonias förlisning**
The Working Group for Investigating the MV Estonia Shipwreck
Odd Fellowvägen 29, 127 32 Skärholmen, Sweden

EHVM **ML "Estonia" Hukupohjuste Väljaselgitamise Mittetulundusühing**
Association for clearing up the actual reasons of MV Estonia's shipwreck
Roosi 14, 80014 Pärnu, Estonia

ELA **Estonia Litigation Association**
Tartu mnt. 8-5, Otepää, Estonia

FAE **Föreningen Anhöriga Estonia i Lindesberg**
Association for Families of Estonia Victims in Lindesberg
Gullsättra, 718 92 Frövi, Sweden

SEA **Stiftelsen Estoniaoffren och Anhöriga**
The Foundation for the Estonia Victims and their Relatives
Box 925, 781 29 Borlänge, Sweden

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- ¹ Estonia Symposium 2005, Opening Statement of Helje Kaskel, Chairman of ELA
<http://www.elaestonia.org/eng/index.php?module=lingid&link=232>
- ² "The Hole" by Drew Wilson, Diggory Press, Cornwall, UK 2006
<http://www.elaestonia.org/eng/index.php?module=lingid&link=263>
- ³ The Kurm Report, 10 March 2006
<http://www.elaestonia.org/eng/index.php?module=lingid&link=239>
- ⁴ The Answer to the FOIA re: classified documents about *Estonia*
<http://www.elaestonia.org/index.php?module=lingid&link=287>
- ⁵ Margus Leivo, MP, in support to lift up M/S *Estonia*
<http://www.ms-estonia.org/main.php?lang=eng>
- ⁶ The Joint Appeal to Suspend the Gravesite Treaty
http://estonia.kajen.com/Joint_letter.pdf
- ⁷ Margus Leivo
- ⁸ Lennart Berglund, Chairman of SEA
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2276600854122640473&q=docid%3D2276600854122640473&hl=en>
- ⁹ Wilson 2006
- ¹⁰ Carl Bildt, press conference in Tallinn 22 November 2006
http://estonia.kajen.com/Bildt_Tallinn_061122.mp3
- ¹¹ Wilson 2006
- ¹² Analysis of Per Björkman, lawyer
<http://estonia.kajen.com/fig/forum2.html>
<http://estonia.kajen.com/fig/ud2.pdf>
- ¹³ Wilson 2006
- ¹⁴ NATO Maritime Exercise "Cooperative Venture 94"
<http://www.elaestonia.org/eng/index.php?module=lingid&link=207>
- ¹⁵ In Memoriam <http://elaestonia.org/sea/index.php>