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Amid Widespread Snubs, Czech President to Attend Victory Day in Moscow

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Czech Republic President Milos Zeman

Czech President Milos Zeman says he will attend Moscow's grand celebration of Victory Day, despite many other Western leaders snubbing the event due to tensions over Ukraine.

"The victory over Hitler would have been impossible without the Soviet Union," Zeman told Czech radio station Frekvence 1 on Sunday.

"I am going as a symbol of appreciation for the fact that my country does not have to speak German — that we do not have to say 'Heil Hitler.'"

Moscow plans on May 9 to have an extravagant celebration of the 70th anniversary since Nazi Germany's surrender at the end of World War II.

Russia's close allies in Asia, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and reclusive North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, are expected to attend.

But many Western leaders have balked at the invitation because of Russia's perceived role in the Ukraine crisis.

The leaders of the United States, Britain, Germany, Poland, Israel and all three Baltic states — Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia — have expressed that they will not attend. And recently the leaders of Japan and Norway joined that list of refusals.

Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine last year, as well as its support for separatists in that country's east, has brought its relations with many Western governments to a post-Cold War low.

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