

At the reception on the 23rd anniversary of the restoration of Estonia's independence, held in the rose garden of the Office of the President, Head of State Toomas Hendrik Ilves commended the Estonian Defence League (Kaitseliit) as one of the key facilitators of that restoration process.

"The Defence League was restored due to the free initiative of patriotic men and over this quarter of a century it has evolved from a mere association of like-minded persons into a strong and coherent state defence organisation. Yet the free will of Estonian citizens remains the backbone of our Defence League. It serves as a deterrent to possible aggressors," said President Ilves.

"The Defence League is an organisation for all of us, just as national defence is a task for all of us. One's status or distinctions do not count here; what matters are the desire to participate in the defence of your own country and the corresponding skills. I thank you all, those who restored the Defence League, those who serve in it now and those who are members of its subsidiary organisations," said the Head of State.

"I am so pleased to see many cultural figures among you, from journalists to film directors and from actors to writers. Indeed, efficient national defence requires good training, modern equipment and weapons, the will of the population to resist invaders and inevitably a good deal of strategic creativity," remarked President Ilves.

The memorial stone of independence restoration was received from the Head of State by Jaan Tätte and Raivo E. Tamm, members of the Defence League who will deliver it to the headquarters of the organisation.

So far President Ilves has awarded this stone hewn out of the boulder used in the defence of Toompea Hill in 1991 as recognition of their efforts to the defenders of the Tallinn TV Tower during the attempted coup in August of that year, freedom fighter Lagle Parek, author of the phrase that united Estonia – "One day, no matter what, we will win!" – Heinz Valk, the Supreme Council that voted to restore the independence, the journalists who supported that drive and authors of patriotic songs Jüri Leesment and Alo Mattiisen.

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