

My ladies and gentlemen,

There are currently 2,500 people living in Estonia who have stood firm for Estonia's security far away from their homes. These men and women all share invaluable work and life experience and they are willing to give everything – anything – for our country and our people. These are the veterans of the Estonian Defence Forces and the Defence League.

Last week I wore and tomorrow I will wear a liver leaf badge – as I am proud of those who protect Estonia, both at home and away. I can see, my dear friends, that you are also wearing the liver leaf badges. This is a great initiative and I do hope that a beautiful tradition has begun.

Tomorrow, Estonia will celebrate Veteran's Day. I invite all of you to hoist a flag tomorrow to acknowledge those who have held our blue, black and white tricolour high in locations of crisis all over the world. Today, at the initiative and with the participation of the Carolin Illenzeer Foundation, we support the children of the members of the Defence Forces who have been killed or injured in action.

The veterans' policy extends to all levels of Estonian society as all these 2,500 men and women are Estonian soldiers – they are our soldiers. For Estonia, an independent defence capability, a reserve army based on military service and a voluntary Defence League that relies on the defence will of our people remain important. All of these symbolise our lasting defence will, smartness, flexibility and co-operation between the public and private sectors. Thousands of people all over Estonia contribute to national defence – their time, advice and energy – as members of the Defence Force, Defence League, policemen, border guards or members of voluntary rescue organisations. The defence will of our people is strong. This makes me glad and gives us a sense of security. And this will also act as deterrence to those who need to be deterred. Let us all appreciate it.

We have, quite quickly, begun to take freedom for granted. The incidents that are currently taking place in Ukraine demonstrate how misleading and lulling this can be. As I keep reading the reports, I also keep remembering the stories that I have read in accounts from the year of 1940 – these events are all very similar. The events that are taking place in Kiev, Donetsk and Crimea are much closer to us in time, space and fate – closer than we are willing to admit.

Here, I would like to emphasise three important conclusions.

First of all, the crisis in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea by Russia has resulted in a completely new security policy situation. The world regime that relied upon respect for the territorial sovereignty of countries and the belief that relations can be built upon common, shared values has collapsed. The Helsinki Accords, adopted at the Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1975 in Helsinki – providing that frontiers must not be violated with aggression – are no longer valid following the annexation of Crimea.

We can no longer assume compliance with the basic principles that have been recounted to us for the last 25 years. We have reached a new "era of realism". The world as we know it since the collapse of the Berlin Wall – the post 1991 world – is no longer there. International agreements are no longer valid; brute force has taken the floor again and the principle of "who has the power, has the right" applies again or, as Thucydides wrote 2,400 years ago: the strong will do what they want and the weak do what they must. This new type of "normality" will remain with us for a long time. And this also means that an entirely new type of approach will be required of us.

Deterrence has become an important key word in this new situation – this has to be convincing and specific. The visible and long-term presence of NATO and the allies in the Baltic states is one component of deterrence. However, at the same time, deterrence depends on us and on how much we are willing to pay. We can be proud that we are among the few to contribute 2%, but perhaps 2% is too little. We must discuss these matters.

Second, the responsibility of our own politicians for our people has grown even bigger. The current complicated situation must not be used to achieve the goals of political parties and personal domestic policy, particularly in light of the upcoming elections. Both the government and opposition politicians will be expected to behave like statesmen as the situation becomes serious.

Regardless of political and ideological convictions, the politicians of today will be remembered for how they coped with the security crisis – whether they adopted well-considered or populist decisions. I assure you that during the elections the decisions adopted in the sphere of security will have more weight than the implementation of various provisions of the coalition agreement. This is what matters most for the citizens of Estonia – we get many calls and letters on this topic in Kadriorg. Today's problems are existentialist; this has never happened before.

Psychological defence in society is the third component. We must not act upon political provocations. Words have power and psychological war is a component of any war. Even when knowing that we can say anything we want, people must realise that when clicks are collected by spreading propaganda or causing panic, we should ask ourselves whether we want to end up in a society where democracy no longer exists – and therefore, the economy that would no longer benefit from the clicks. And let us all consider our own actions from this point of view. We do see the attempts to create fear and insecurity about our country, our security, don't we?

I believe that journalism should not spread fear or allow fear to spread without valid reason. It is highly cynical to write about Estonian athletes that would be accepted on Russian teams after Estonia becomes a part of Russia. If someone really thinks this is funny, I assure you – it is not. We are scaring our own people, our own compatriots, with things like that.

Let us not forget that the Republic of Estonia includes all of our people. Not just the government, not just the Defence Forces and not only the President. Estonia is a creation shared by every one of us, and we are all responsible for Estonia. We all take part in defending our country, but also in creating our own, internal atmosphere of security.

At the same time, I am also still convinced that Estonia's place in the world is better secured today than ever before. We have a strong defence will, and we have strong allies.

Dear friends,

I am very pleased to see that so many people who care about our country, our Defence Force members and their next of kin have gathered here at the Seaplane Harbour tonight. I have always attached high importance to the development of civic initiatives in Estonia as I am absolutely convinced that good and decent things must rely on the initiative that comes from people. The organisation of our own country is not just the business of the government and the parliament. Any one of us can suggest ideas. In a small country like ours, we can reach everyone.

The Carolin Illenzeer Foundation has acquired the meaning of a symbol. It stands for caring and

the ability to notice each other in Estonian society. Knowing that society cares for the members of its defence forces and their families; knowing that when the worst happens, no one will be left behind, and children will be aided in attaining a good education – this will allow those who have chosen to defend Estonia as their profession to rest assured and be confident.

I extend my gratitude to all the donors, organisers and supporters of today's charity dinner. I thank all of you, you who care for the children of the Carolin Illenzeer Foundation and their future, who care for your country.

And the gratitude that I feel is pure and sincere.