

Today, as in the past seven years on August 20th, Estonian writers, composers, journalists and architects gather here in Kadriorg's Rose Garden. So do many other creative people. And former dissidents. As well as the members of the Supreme Soviet of the days past, and organisers of the Popular Front and the Estonian Congress, whom, today, we would call the voluntary sector.

We are here to celebrate the restoration of our independence 23 years ago. To be more specific, our contribution and the contribution of our colleagues during the period of restoring our independence that culminated on August 20th 1991 with the declaration of having restored Estonian independence.

This was the culmination of hard work. Unlike most of those who shared our fate, Estonia managed to restore its independence as a democratic state. Independence did not come unanticipated, as it did to many others. How and what to do, had, for a long time, been clear to Estonians, even if our visions for the future differed significantly.

Some of the problems that we see among those who used to share our fate derive from them finding themselves independent unexpectedly. Without having thought about what to do with their newly found freedom.

We knew. Debates had already been ongoing for many years in the Estonian Congress, the Popular Front, the IME program, and the creative unions. We knew that Estonian independence had to be restored, instead of creating a new entity. We knew that we needed our own currency. That it was necessary to shift towards the West. That we must reintegrate into Europe, the origin of our culture. All this was clear long before August 20th 1991.

Hence probably the feeling that it all went so well because it was meant to be. We knew beforehand what our state should look like. It is possible that we demanded a naive perfection. Estonia was to become a democratic, rule of law-based state with freedom of speech and other liberties. As in the West. Just like the real thing.

We took it as if for granted. As we did with living in a free country. That establishing such a state

takes time, that, as the Solidarnosc activist Adam Michnik has said, it isn't so easy to restore an aquarium from fish soup – something we did not understand straight away. We thought that with our own currency we would all of a sudden become as rich as our northern neighbours.

We took it all for granted. Even that we gather here to celebrate August 20th.

But this year's gathering is only the eighth of its kind. Before, this day was not observed here.

\*

In the past couple of months, we have realised increasingly clearly that everything cannot be taken for granted, far from it.

I do not mean only what we have achieved ourselves. I also mean the circumstances that made it possible.

Already at the end of last year, witnessing what Ukrainians were protesting against on Maidan, we saw that things had developed differently elsewhere. We had slowly noticed how freedom of speech and other freedoms that we had started to take for granted in one generation, had gradually been silenced. Even silent protest is suppressed with an iron fist.

Not to mention the events of the past four months. We have seen how the full range of the principles of the past half a century have been trodden on. Smashed.

Concepts such as aggression, occupation, lawlessness, and war have all of a sudden become topical again.

Liberal democracy, the Estonian ideal for years, is no longer a good thing that can be taken for

granted. Not even within the European Union if we look at the results of the last European Parliament elections or what some European leaders have voiced.

\*

I know, I hear, and I feel that people are worried.

Part of this is groundless – for instance, mindless articles about whether our sportsmen would make it into the Russian team if there were an occupation.

Yet, a great many of us are worried because, suddenly, we sense the fragility of our civilisation, the fragility of our success and wellbeing. This feeling is amplified by the stories of our grandparents and great-grandparents about how and with what speed everything was taken away. And what followed.

Added to this is the silent acknowledgement that, should there be a next time, our quarter of a century-old narrative of the singing revolution, with the joint efforts of the peaceful voluntary sector, artists and politicians, would most likely not work again.

Last time we were up against a government that itself, to a large extent, looked to the West. One that despite its bloody acts in Lithuania and Latvia, did not contrast itself to the West.

Now we are faced with an ideology that has set itself at enmity with the foundational principles of the West.

Tolerance, free elections, the separation of Church and state, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are, allegedly, degenerate. The retreat of Russian media from the principles of freedom of the press forces us to look at this field from a completely new angle.

Churchmen bless lethal weapons. Ideologues call upon the killing of foreigners, in this case Ukrainians. Working in the field of culture does not save one. Instead, it is the reason why people go missing, as we saw recently in the case of a Ukrainian director and artist. Teaching Ukrainian is being banned, as happened in Crimea last week.

All this is encouraged by the cultural intelligentsia that participates in it. Which was pointed out by a Leni Riefenstahl-style so-called biker show in Sevastopol. A true Gesamtkunstwerk.

In brief: What brought us freedom won't do so twice.

\*

All this puts us in a new situation, which isn't normal in the East or the West.

How should an educated, creative intelligentsia that values Western principles act when their neighbour declares these values anathema? If what we value the most is someone else's Kulturkampf  
's ideological enemy?

A mocking stance in the style of: "well, in that case, we'll sing atsih-aitsah" serves to feed a frivolous spitefulness. But life, for people, families and children, is a more serious thing.

In the past six months, we have witnessed that Estonia's consistent effort to fulfil NATO's defence spending commitment may not be that ridiculous. An arrogant stance towards psychological defence no longer appears meaningful when we see how massively and brutally lies about Ukraine are fed to the world's public.

That is, an unexpectedly and dramatically changed environment around us forces us to reconsider what we took for granted. What we thought of as even boring.

All of a sudden, there's the realisation that the world in which we live might not be eternal after all. That we might maybe have to contribute to preserving it.

\*

What should we do in such circumstances? Now we all, who before did not realise this, can see that NATO has a reason. That it is smart to invest in defence.

We understand that the principles of liberal democracy must be valued as a self-created privilege. This is not something that is there in and of itself, no matter what.

We see that our high ranking in terms of freedom is real. And we have possibly come to appreciate this a bit more seriously.

I call upon you to consider what the defence of an open society and democracy mean today. What we can do to feel more secure now that history is on the rise again. A history that has been so cruel to our people and culture.

I myself think we can do a lot. Firstly, to be more tolerant. Our small size is felt especially when someone threatens to wipe us off the Earth – which indeed is what we read about us only a week ago.

We do not need to categorise our own people into the right ones and the second-rate. This is completely incomprehensible, especially now, when we should be inclusive, not antagonistic towards our fellow-countrymen. Also, when liberty is in danger, one does not ask who someone's partner is.

Each and every one of us, dear friends. In these circumstances, hatred is a needless luxury. Let

us grasp the opportunity to get over it. If there are who knows what clouds on the horizon, let us be reconciled with those against whom we have fought over the past 23 years. Let us ask for forgiveness from those we have hurt. Let us reply to those who have hurt us: let's be reconciled.

And let us consider what every one of us can do for this oft- and too easily criticised state that has made it possible for us to enjoy what the Estonian people have enjoyed too little: freedom.

Let us think about joining the Defence League and the Women's Voluntary Defence Organisation. Or any other society or association that helps develop Estonia. For the past quarter of a century, having our own state has provided us all with countless unprecedented opportunities.

Let us think how we can give something back.

If we do not value or appreciate our own state, we will all pay dearly.

Let us defend Estonia.  
Long live Estonia!

\*

And, to continue,  
Dear friends,

Every 20th of August, here in Kadriorg, we have thanked those who have been the lead characters in the narrative of the restoration of Estonian independence: the defenders of Tallinn's TV-tower during the August putsch, Lagle Parek and Heinz Valk, the pre-independence Supreme Soviet, the media of the day, the National heritage movement, Jüri

Leesment and Alo Mattiisen.

Right now, at the end of the summer of 2014, it is the right time and place to give the Defence League a piece cut from the boulder that was used to defend Toompea 23 years ago.

During the quarter of a century the Defence League, reborn from the voluntariness of patriotic men, has grown from an association of people sharing the same views to a strong and well-organised state defence organisation. However, the free will of Estonians continues to be the backbone of the Defence League. This is one form of deterrence towards any possible aggressor.

The Defence League is an organisation for us all; defence concerns us all. No one's status or fame counts here, instead the will and skills to participate in defending one's country are important. I thank you all, the restorers of the Defence League, today's members as well as those of the Defence League's subsidiaries.

I'm glad that there are many people among you from the cultural field – ranging from journalists to film directors, from actors to writers. Truly, an effective defence requires good training, modern equipment and weaponry, the will of the people to defend themselves and a fair amount of strategic creativity.

And for this reason, members of the Defence League Jaan Tätte and Raivo E. Tamm, please come forward and receive a piece of the boulder as a mark of gratitude and take it to the Defence League's headquarters.