

Ladies and Gentlemen, here in the Vanemuine and in homes around Estonia,

95 years ago today a member of the Estonian Peace Treaty delegation, Ants Piip, was able to declare right here in Tartu: "Valorously have we fought; honourably have we achieved peace."

Our people were valorous in their dedication to defending their country, because without the triumphant battles the terms of the Peace Treaty would have been far less favourable to us. And we had sufficiently experienced diplomats who had grown into their roles from their previous professions in life – the very best we could hope for at the time.

Without that dedication to defending the country, and without the military success, we would have had nothing to negotiate beyond the conditions of our surrender. In order for there to be any negotiations in the first place, military success was vital. And yet without shrewd diplomacy the war would not have ended. In this way both aspects formed part of the defence of our country – of our people, our values and our interests, from which we shaped our state.

The self-same Piip, who served several terms as Foreign Minister, wrote 18 months prior to the signing of the Peace Treaty: "...it nevertheless becomes clear also to me that permanent neutrality and guarantees such as those in the case of Belgium will never be attainable to us... As such, the chances of neutrality and guarantees are low."

All the same, 20 years later Estonia was still placing its hopes in neutrality. This was not respected, and we lost our independence. But 23 years ago, when Estonia regained its freedom, we no longer had any doubts: we knew from history and from our own experience that we had to take a side, even if at first this went against the grain; that we could not simply be middling and moderate, as in Kalevipoeg, and see where that got us. Because we knew that if we did not take a side, the worse side would take us. And so we took the side of the democratic world, of the European Union and of NATO.

The fact that we are defended militarily as a NATO ally is the result of lengthy and painstaking diplomatic efforts. NATO membership did not simply fall into the laps of Estonia or the other

Baltic States. History was by no means defined in this instance, either in 1991 or in 2000. Things could have gone very differently. But the fact that they did not reflects the determination and hard work of many people in Tallinn, Washington, Brussels and other capitals in the alliance.

It was not only due to the mettle of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that we got into NATO: both the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Forces did a lot of the groundwork in preparing for our membership, having begun to develop our defensive capabilities more or less from scratch in 1991 and 1992. Kadriorg, our ministries and our high command worked as one team.

Now we can see that Estonia has never before been in the heart of Europe as much as it is today. In February 2015 Estonia is secure, safeguarded and defended. We have allies who have brought their units to Ämari and Tapa. As little as a year ago this seemed unrealistic to many, but today it is reality, part of the new normality that this last year has led to in Europe – a normality that is quite different to the one we enjoyed previously and to which we had grown accustomed since the restoration of our independence.

Now we can see once again that although we support diplomatic solutions, not everyone in this region feels that a Europe without war is there to stay. We have seen that our exertions in developing our national defence – which not everyone considered important – have proven crucial after all.

The strength of our national defence is founded on our clear and comprehensible willingness to actively defend ourselves. Estonia's actual strength, our modern Defence Forces and our ever-improving Defence League, alongside our allies who have come here as the security situation has changed, lend faith to our words. Of course, we also boast a highly focussed foreign policy that protects our national interests.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the Day of Debate in mid-January, speaking about state reform, I remarked with regret that 'safe' today means for many people 'average'. But let us not forget that what made Estonia a success 20 years ago was the passion of its statesmen and -women in trumping each other with new and better ideas. People – their resolve, their creativity and their sense of responsibility –

are to my mind the most important key to success.

But time and again we return to our values. Cold War confrontation saw Western politicians and politics strapped into a moral corset, but the moral and political clarity of that era has vanished – such were the words I wrote eight years ago in Diplomaatia.

I was referring at the time to the peace that had reigned for nigh on quarter of a century, and often to the interest in economic gain of people and countries. This does not mean that anyone wants the Cold War back: what we want is for the Member States of the European Union and the NATO allies to have a moral backbone; to understand that the price of successful trade cannot be the freedom of others.

The European Union and NATO have shown in the last year a strong degree of unity, but we need to show that we are upholding and defending our values more visibly, more convincingly and more effectively. We also need assurance that the current consensus will last. The European Union and NATO must form a moral core that stretches from Europe across the Atlantic – one that advocates democratic values and freedom.

The sanctions that have been imposed in the past year on those attacking Ukraine's independence, both economic and in the form of visa restrictions, reflect the ethical strength of the European Union. Some had started to doubt in this. The incursion of foreign forces into Georgia in August 2008 and the bombings of Poti and Gori were soon forgiven and forgotten so as to return to the status quo ante, as if nothing had happened. No one wanted to stir up an already buzzing hornet's nest; beneficial economic relations were considered more important. This act of forgetting was not dissimilar in its nature to the assent that was once given to dividing Europe up into spheres of influence.

The shooting down of the Malaysian passenger jet and the rocket attack on houses in Mariupol are abhorrent crimes whose perpetrators, as well as their supporters and those arming them, should be brought before the international court. Those inciting and committing such crimes face the sanctions of democratic countries, as do those who mistreat prisoners, thereby transgressing the law of war.

This must be our clear message, and all of our actions must be guided by it. Speaking in

euphemisms is immoral. Those who attack Ukraine attack Europe, attack our values and attack the international system as we know it.

There is no justification for, and no forgiving, aggression. It is not something to get used to, as unfortunately people have started to get used to the conflicts in Transnistria, South Ossetia or Abkhazia.

Observing international rules is important; failing to do so has consequences. This should be our principle. The fate of the democratic world, including Estonia, depends on our attitude towards collective agreements. If we do not adhere to them, we are as good as back on the island of Melos, which was taken in battle against all rules 2500 years ago. Thucydides summed up the situation thus: "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

Unfortunately, neither the end of history promised by Fukuyama nor the eternal peace sought by Kant has arrived. But this does not mean that international law should be replaced by force and the principle of Vae victis! or 'Woe to the vanquished'.

Interaction across borders with those whose principles are different can only take place according to the rules. Maintaining peace in international relations means that if everyone agrees to play chess, one party cannot suddenly switch to checkers. Or to put it in more contemporary terms: one cannot use Grad rockets against the other.

When it comes to the size of states, we should not place ourselves among the small and insignificant ones. Icelandic Minister of Foreign Affairs Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson, one of the strongest supporters of the independence of the Baltic States a quarter of a century ago, once recalled that after giving a speech in support of the Baltics he was approached by a representative of the United States who said something like: "It must be a great privilege to be the Foreign Minister of a small country, because you get to speak the truth."

We should make the most of this privilege – but not only in words. We can see that the policies of the European Union are moving in the direction that Estonia and other likeminded countries have nudged them towards. This places on our shoulders greater responsibility for the shaping and success of a unified European Union policy.

We have witnessed in 2014 the true solidarity of the European Union: what it means when we are listened to and understood. This in turn leads to an obligation on our part to understand that the problems that lie to the east are not the only ones facing the European Union, there are other important issues as well – those of our partners, to the resolving of which we too should contribute, be they the status of the Eurozone, terrorism or the flow of illegal immigrants.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The past year – with the annexation of Crimea and the military attacks on Ukraine – has made the issues of security and defence all the more visible and acute in Estonia, as elsewhere. They will inevitably feature in the context of the forthcoming parliamentary elections, too.

In the case of discussions on national defence I recommend that one underlying principle be borne in mind – one which forms the basis of the Defence Forces development plan: real defence forces alone, which is to say manned, trained, armed and supplied, have the ability to deter and protect. Units that only exist on paper and for whose establishment there are no resources are incapable of defending or deterring anyone or anything. Consider the views of the Defence Forces and the Minister of Defence when deciding what is best for Estonia.

That is why I consider the Siil /hedgehog/ training event this coming spring, which will test Estonia's actual defence capabilities, so important. We will put our defence model into practice: test that the model we have developed for our reserve forces works in an emergency situation, and that people are ready to stand and fight. The motto of the event – 'Every spike counts!' – is one of the best-worded deterrents Estonia has ever come up with, as it summarises in three words our determination to defend ourselves.

For as the chairman of the Estonian Peace Treaty delegation Jaan Poska said on 10 February 1920 before the Constituent Assembly: "Savour peace, but maintain and foster national defence so that we can protect peace in our homeland."

His advice remains as pertinent today as it was 95 years ago.

Thank you.

Long live Estonia!