

Dear listeners, here and at home.

The world, Europe and Estonia in Europe has again arrived at the threshold of change. And in places even crossed this threshold. The world is changing a lot, changing rapidly and it is up to us, to make sure it is for the better.

Life in the 21st century is not progressing along the same peaceful path for Estonia that we seem to remember from the past few decades. Nevertheless, there is no sense in wishing for the past to return. All the more because we cannot get it back.

To date, it has been acknowledged countless times that the collapse of the Soviet empire was not accompanied by a positive end to history. Free societies, along with a general increase in people's spiritual and material wellbeing, did not achieve a final victory everywhere. Think for instance about the states that have shared our fate.

What actually happened was that global power started to shift, with both good and bad results. For instance, the migration of peoples, the thinning of the middle class, and globalization.

But these shifts also created technological development, which make dreams possible. If we properly use this development, people's lives will also improve in the future.

There is nothing predetermined or inevitable about the progress of history. Therefore, it is filled with opportunities. Also in Estonia.

It's true, that great or even revolutionary times and great deeds require people who want to, know how to, and dare to accept responsibility.

Knowing that they will be thanked afterwards. If at all.

Dear friends,

During the last few years, we have all probably sensed new concerns, new fears and increased tensions in Estonia. These are all underscored by our main questions:

What will become of us?

What will become of Estonia?

What will become of Europe?

Estonia's concern is amplified by the fear that everything that has been restored and created anew during the last quarter century may disappear again. We are always worried about our survival. This distinguishes us from other states and peoples.

But, dear listeners, in the same way, we are distinguished by the conviction that Estonia is not like the others. We can cope; we are faster, smarter, more flexible; we find and invent solutions. And this is what we have done for a quarter century.

Fear of the unknown is understandable. The unfathomable is sometimes worse because it is fed not only by reality, but also by prejudices and often by direct lies.

However, let's talk about it calmly and honestly. Although it is not the most pleasant story for a birthday. Let's talk about the Syrian war refugees, about refugees.

Yes, their language and cultural background are very different from ours. It's true that at least the extremist and aggressive form of the Islamic faith goes counter to Estonia's lifestyle, values and convictions. Yes, terrorism is an indisputable threat to the security of any country.

We must deal with these risks. And the Estonian state is doing just that. Every day and very comprehensively. Among other things, this is also a reason why not a single war refugee assigned to Estonia under the quota has arrived here.

Dear friends.

Our constitution establishes the realm of Estonia's values, which is based on freedom and equal rights, with the objective of preserving, protecting and developing the Estonian state, people, and culture.

The Estonian government cannot, must not, or even plan to, abandon these principles. This is our nation's agreement, which marks the red lines that we will not cross nor will we let others do so.

Furthermore, let's ask, sensibly and calmly: what immigration policy could fit inside these red lines? I am convinced that the thousands who every year – and for many years already – have settled here in the course of immigration can definitely be accommodated.

We can probably also successfully cope with the war refugees, of whom there are only a few and whose backgrounds we have carefully checked.

We, as well as all of Europe and the world, must acknowledge that the wars in the Middle East and Africa, as well as a population explosion and poverty, have forced masses of people to migrate. This is an extraordinary situation, which cannot be solved by the old UN refugee conventions and many of the EU's internal regulations.

There is no sense in arguing that the right decisions were not made at the right time. We, along with the other Europeans, are now faced with the reality. Finding the solution is difficult, but necessary.

The external borders of the European Union must be secured. All of Europe must be ready to contribute to this effort. If we cannot manage, the free movement of people within Europe, a right that we consider to be natural, will be the price we pay.

Those who have fled from war do not threaten Estonia's security. Those who wish to live in Europe and therefore to live in Estonia's realm of values like us, must be accepted. The remainder, or those who are just economic migrants or fortune seekers, must be sent back as, for instance, Finland has exemplarily started doing.

Not all the arrivals are coming from war zones. They must be helped to create wellbeing back home. But the real refugees are a totally different story. We must help them as people and as Europeans.

Among other reasons, because along with dreams and rights, obligations are also accommodated within the red lines of the constitution that protect us as a people.

There are very different people among the refugees and exiles. Just like everywhere, including Estonia. From criminals to geniuses. Let's hope we have the sufficient skill and will to differentiate between them. That we keep any possible terrorists away, but also accept the next child of a Syrian exile – as Steve Jobs was.

To achieve this, we must act sensibly, without fear or threats. And maybe from time to time recalling our recent history and the people who escaped from bombing, killing, imprisonment and violence.

No, I am not speaking about the Syrians. I am speaking about 70 thousand Estonians, who 70 years ago escaped across the sea.

But not only. I am talking about those hundreds of thousands of East Europeans, including Estonians, who during the last few decades have gone to study, find work and be reunited with their families in Western Europe.

We know that the "Polish plumber" is an unfair and offensive image, as is the "Estonian criminal" who has been berated in the Finnish media. The unjust label of "Syrian terrorist", which had been attached to an entire nation, sounds the same.

Good people of Estonia.

The constitution places a clear obligation on the president to support the advancement of Estonia's foreign and defense policies, participate in their development and implementation. Looking at things from this angle, I must admit that I am concerned. Especially in connection with this crisis.

I am afraid that the current refugee crisis may end with the disintegration of the European Union – one of the pillars of Estonia's safety and security.

The Italian prime minister recently warned publicly that the East European countries that do not help solve the refugee crisis risk having their grants from the EU Structural Funds reduced.

This is not an empty threat, because the same topic has been brought up by other countries in conversations in the corridors of power. These are the countries whose contributions make up the Structural Funds.

The same applies to NATO. If Italy and Germany guarantee and, out of solidarity, pay for keeping our sovereign airspace safe, it is reasonable that they will take measure of Estonia's activities in the places where we could and should demonstrate solidarity.

U.S. soldiers are in Estonia to protect us, and if necessary, to fight for our freedom. For this, they deserve respect, at the very least.

Not the recommendation made by a local politician that Afro-American soldiers should wear their uniforms at all times in order to avoid confrontations.

The understanding behind this attitude that Estonia can be a mini-Switzerland alongside Russia is absurd. How does anyone create such a self-deception?

Self-centeredness and ignoring the concerns of others is considered pettiness. If we are petty, we are smaller. When we are smaller, we are of less concern to those who are helping to defend our freedom. Therefore, we have to be greater. Spiritually greater.

Dear listeners.

This morning in his sermon at the Tallinn Cathedral, Archbishop Viilma talked about Christian, and actually Estonian, values, which require more of us than just tolerance; which presume our involvement, consideration and love. Each one of us counts, and we must care about everyone's fate. We must not reconcile ourselves to a single lost individual. Every successfully completed course in the Estonian language, every access created for a disabled person, every successfully retrained person who gets a job is a victory for all of us.

If Estonia does not pay attention to important things, we will gradually drown in the mire of substitute activities. For those who have been given and who have accepted responsibility for the future of Estonia, such blundering is indefensible.

Therefore, I am also concerned about all the hours that have been wasted for the second year on the arguments about how two adults should organize or be allowed to organize their private lives.

This leaves little time to discuss the working poor, the future of education, the Estonia tax system, investments in research and development, and the European Union policies that are essential for Estonia.

Hopefully, I am speaking on behalf of many people, when I ask the government and Riigikogu to deal with constructive ideas rather than trying to put each other in their place. There is no need to seek justification by alluding to a political inevitability born of the latest expression of the voters' will. Which, as I have heard politicians say, has empowered the only possible alliance.

However, this stalemate must not result in a situation where we avoid making the necessary decisions, and justify ourselves by saying that there are not, and will never be, any other alternatives.

Endeavoring to achieve a consensus befits a coalition government, but this does not need to be the rule. Why can't decisions be voted on if necessary? This is logical and prescribed by the Government of the Republic Act. The current method has inexcusably slowed down and weakened the government's work, and made decision-making almost impossible. Instead, calculating more typical of a chess game is occurring. If you do this, we will do that.

However, the Riigikogu tends to act rigidly rather than talking, having substantive discussions or endeavoring to find as many suitable solutions as possible.

Dear compatriots,

In the current troubled times, Estonia had make use of its small size, flexibility and agility. By making decisions and finding solutions. Critical times provide opportunities for the smart and daring. Just like 25 years ago, and almost 100 years ago.

So, let's not just see the current turbulence as a looming misfortune and danger. Maybe it is actually an opportunity to make the next leap, which would mean new and modern jobs, a successful and capable Estonia, where it is better and more secure for everyone to live.

Good birthday celebrators.

There are times when I would like to draw something or play an instrument. I imagine how it will look or sound. But, unfortunately, the picture or tune never comes out the way I want.

Each of us looks at Estonia in this way. Me and you, we have our own idea of the Estonia of our dreams, but in reality something is always lacking. The more fantastic our idea, the greater our disappointment.

By honestly evaluating how I draw or play an instrument, I have realized that I should have drawn more when I was young and not skipped so many piano lessons. Or I can console myself with the realization that I am not talented enough.

However, why is it that when Estonia does not come out the way we want, someone else is at fault. The president, government, opposition, businessmen, Russia or the European Union. Someone else is always at fault, but never us.

We are constantly composing our state, throughout time and together. No one has the right to accuse anyone else if we do not look in the mirror ourselves.

The Estonian state is not unfathomable, distant or strange for us. We care and we worry; and we are not afraid to show our fears.

We have been masters of our land for another 25 years. We have free and honest elections. Everyone can realize themselves here if they have the skill and initiative. Yes, you have to make the effort, be it with your studies, at work, in associations or when starting your own business. Nothing is served to you on a silver platter. And besides, do we really appreciate that is served to us on a platter?

Of course, we can find justifications for today's problems in serfdom and the occupation. Many countries are doing just that. We too are in danger of getting stuck in the past, and consoling ourselves with the timeless wisdom that those who don't remember the past have no future.

But I do not want the image of a Communist East European or an ex-Communist country to follow us. And we must not amplify this image ourselves.

If we think back on Estonia's last quarter century, we see that we have primarily achieved success when we have dared to do something in a new or different way. Rapid and decisive reforms, implementation of modern technology, and during the last decade, the powerful rise of a civil society that is impacting social development.

So, let's not lose this boldness, because in a changing economic environment and labor market, those who are daring, fast and flexible will be the winners. As they have been during the last quarter century in Estonia. Or as mathematician and bank director Robert Kitt has said, and I quote: "Our economy is broad-based and decentralized – the Estonian Nokia is that we don't have our own Nokia."

And the decisions that were unpopular at one time, starting with ownership and pension reform and ending with the cuts made during the financial crisis, later turned out to be the steps that differentiate Estonia today and based on which we are moving forward despite all the difficulties.

Now is the time to pull ourselves together and make decisions that conform to Estonia's current needs and future expectations. It is time for statesmanship.

The main thing is not be afraid. And there is no reason. We have dared, been able and acted. Several times and well. We have conquered our fears, picked ourselves up after stumbling and pressed forward.

Good Estonian people, we have been capable. Each of the more than a million of us.

On today's day of celebration each of us should ask ourselves a question and formulate the answer: Are we shutting ourselves off or opening ourselves up? Are we fearful or daring?

Estonia became free almost a century ago because people believed and dared. As a nation, not as politicians. After all, at that time we did not even have our own institutions.

We became free again, by believing in our ability to do better, by working together, and overcoming past disagreements. We were free in our decisions, seeing and seizing opportunities. And we have continued doing this since that time. We have discerned freedom as an opportunity and not a burden.

During the past few weeks, videos have appeared on the internet in which people from other countries speak about Estonia, and these have been especially inspiring for me. We see and hear how people who have come from other countries find opportunities to work in Estonia, to realize their dreams and to feel safe. They derive peace and a sense of balance from our nature and don't notice the grey skies or cold weather. They have learned our language. They want to live here. They are also convincing us – yes us! – that Estonia continues to be a land of opportunity.

When I think about Estonia, I see freedom realizing itself here. Through exertion and self-confidence. This is a land where freedom has not been a relic for a long time, not to say the last one.

I am already seeing how Estonia is pulling and pushing the rest of Europe into the 21st century based on its example and its efforts, and thereby helping our united Europe compete in a rapidly changing world.

This is the Estonia we want to live in, and the best in the world want to come here. Because there are opportunities here that do not exist elsewhere.

We will arrive at such an Estonia when we start treating our success stories as lessons from the past, instead of focusing on the narrow historical injustices and the suffering experienced by our people. When we start to use this to learn where and how Estonia has managed better than the others. Innovative and creative thinking, the courage to act. From the visions we have actually carried out, and not from vision conferences.

Openness makes Estonia greater, pettiness makes it smaller.

We are not small. We can manage being great. We can cope. We will survive. The main thing is not to be afraid, not to doubt oneself, and not to cling to the past.

Only we can make the choice between courage and fear, greatness and smallness, the future and the past.

Happy Independence Day!

Long Live Estonia!