

Dear future diplomats and foreign policy leaders.

I am honored but a bit uneasy to speak here today. After all, I am long-term practitioner of diplomacy yet one lacking formal education in the area. Self-made, as it were, and self-made men's tales can be tedious.

Yet, in the case of Eastern and Central Europe, 25 years ago, re-surfacing after a half century of totalitarian rule, when it came to diplomats in a country unshackled, there really wasn't much a of choice: either the dubious diplomats of the ancien regime; or enthusiastic democrats with few qualifications other than perhaps having foreign languages.

There we were in Estonia, with a freshly-minted foreign ministry with no money, made up largely of 20-somethings with no experience but motivated by will and hope.

If you've seen the movie Jefferson in Paris, you get the picture. The author of the Declaration of Independence takes a sledgehammer to a wall to renovate the US Paris Embassy; he rides horseback to Brussels to borrow money for Lafayette's wounded French veterans the U.S. Government was too broke to pay. Even the U.S. Foreign service once had to start from scratch.

I was one of those asked to help. I had been at Radio Free Europe for almost a decade, first as an analyst, later as head of the Estonian Service.

One day Estonia's President called. He asked I give up my job, my US Citizenship, to become ambassador to Washington. I couldn't refuse.

Today, the beginning seems unreal. Sometimes we didn't get paid, and lived off our credit cards. Our bank was kind enough to patiently await delayed transfers to cover the embassy rent. To get additional diplomatic staff I gave up a driver and drove myself.

My task was to get the US to help Estonia to get the 40 thousand or so Russian troops still stationed in an independent country to withdraw. In the evenings I thought long and hard on what my small and poor – and thanks to 5 decades of communist misrule – backward country had to do to survive in this Fukuyaman post-historical world.

I reached two conclusions. One - to compete, we had to digitize Estonian society. The other - we had to do whatever possible to join the EU and, hopefully, NATO.

The first idea came from learning to program as a teenager, the second my conviction that history had not ended and all we had just gained – freedom, independence, democracy – might turn out to be temporary. Both were considered bizarre ideas at home.

Digitization was outlandish, and I was considered a kook to propose it. To join the EU, to jump "from one union to another" as the anti-EU slogan went, was similarly outlandish, the last thing anyone thought of in the middle 90s. Given Estonia's history, people wanted only to join NATO. The ambassador was a nut.

Of course, the ideas weren't that crazy. Estonia had a long history of technological prowess and a will to leapfrog development. Our neighbor across the Gulf, Finland, was a tech powerhouse. NATO membership for us was opposed by many Allies. Yet formally at least, by the EU's Copenhagen criteria of membership, we were eligible to join Europe. It would be one way to re-integrate into the West.

It was all new. I grew up in the cold war. We thought the Soviet Union and a divided Europe were forever. Yet in a span of two years the edifice collapsed, the glacies evaporated. Everything was possible.

Replaced by a quarter century of the End of History, it was the inexorable neo-hegelian triumph of liberal democracy. These were, I believe, among the most optimistic 25 years of Western history. Democracy had won for good. We had a peace dividend; military spending was slashed. NATO had to go "out of area or out of business"; Europe – East and West – would unite... Russia was our friend. It was peace, love and Woodstock, at least for the Western

World, for liberal democracy and market economies.

So when the President some years later asked me to cut short my ambassadorship temporarily to become foreign minister, a post I ended up holding for some five years, I was in a position to turn what I had been mulling and writing about, into policy. That's what I did.

Against all odds, but with intense effort, we managed to be among the first six post-communist countries invited to begin EU accession negotiations. As a member of the cabinet, I was able to push for the groundwork for what today people call E-Estonia, among the most digitized countries anywhere.

I could stop there, but that would be wrong.

For, Ladies and Gentlemen, things change. They can fall apart. Including post-cold-war orders and international organizations. Digital societies can be hacked. Nothing stays the same. Moore's law tells us that the digital world is accelerating at an exponential rate. We know from history that change is inevitable, yet we all believe that what we live in today will last eternally, changelessly.

Today, a quarter century after the end of the Cold War on my home continent, Europe, and perhaps here as well, we are amidst transformational change. Amidst transformational change to which we do not know yet how to respond to. The only analogy I can think of is the period from the end of World War II, when the West thought the victory over Nazism had ushered in a new peace. But it hadn't and in a few short years it was necessary for the West to create NATO.

In the post-Cold War era, though, we became accustomed to the post-historical status quo, to the end of history.

History however is creeping back. Optimism has been replaced by fear, a loss of direction; mainstream parties in Europe fear to be swept aside by a populist flood and make compromises on the core values of Europe. Voters fear to lose the economic gains of the post-war era. Extremists offer solutions where basic human rights, constitutional protections, even liberal

democracy are deemed secondary. Opinion polls evermore support the extremes. Liberal democracy perhaps hadn't triumphed after all.

Russia has gone rogue, occupying foreign territory and buzzing US ships in international waters; the post WWII treaty basis of the trans-Atlantic security order: The UN charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter after the Anschluss of Crimea lie in smoulders and we are unsure what to do.

The continent is reeling from massive migration through porous external borders, leading to a closing of borders within. Horrific terrorism has hit Paris and Brussels. Narrowly averting the collapse of Greece, we face a possible exit of the UK. If successful, it will spur further fissiparous trends.

Against that background, the success of a small and once backward East European country that is now Europe's leader in digitization of society seems irrelevant. We in Estonia may be doing great things, but what goes on around us makes us worried.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Things change. When our surroundings change, we must adapt and change too. What passed for leadership in less turbulent times is no longer enough.

The leadership required in politics as well as policy no longer can consist of promising a bigger paycheck or tax-break than the other guy. Dialogue is not enough for a foreign policy. Defense has to be paid for. And someone has to convince everyone we need to do this.

All this requires a different kind of leadership.

And a different kind of diplomacy.

Leaders to take a stand even if it threatens re-election. Not the pseudo-leadership of demagogues who exploit the current refugee crisis. As they exploited the economic crisis, they exploit voters' dissatisfaction with the anodyne and milquetoast resolve of European leaders.

Citizens await decisive responses to crises. When traditional parties do not provide them, they look for those whose rhetoric sounds decisive, yet carries within it the "decisiveness" of reaction, of simple, illiberal solutions the EU was created to rid Europe of forever.

When we abandon our core values or compromise with values antithetical to liberal democracy, we end up back in a Hobbesian world, a war of all against all.

This is where domestic politics runs into foreign policy: when you abandon liberal democratic ideals at home, an idealistic or liberal foreign policy becomes meaningless. If a trade deal is more important than international rules of the game, then that latter falls apart. Realpolitik rules, we are back to the Thucydides' Melian dialogues, where the strong do what they will and weak do what they must.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In 1795, shortly after Jefferson was borrowing money to pay Lafayette's veterans, Immanuel Kant wrote a short work, *Perpetual Peace*, arguing that peace is possible only between republics in a federation. Today we say more or less the same – that democracies do not go to war with each other.

The European Union was conceived as a Kantian federation of democracies. As such it has been wildly successful. As has been NATO, where membership is predicated on democracy and common core values.

Until the world changed: today some members of these Kantian federations appear to be slipping from their democratic roots, from their core conception as projects for peace and for

defense of liberty. Nor do we in our post-cold war complacency know how to deal with countries or entities that are not democracies.

This, I submit is the task you – the graduates here – will face as you begin your diplomatic careers. To maintain or even establish peace in a world more Hobbesian than we have seen in decades, where the old rules and assumptions may no longer hold. While you may enter a foreign service with an old and established tradition, diplomacy as we have come to know it will have to re-invent itself. You will have to be the ones to re-invent it.

You step as practitioners into a world as changed from the past quarter century as the 1989 differed from the Cold War.

Today NATO must be back in area if it wants to remain in business. War has come to Europe. The US and Europe are wavering on Trans-Atlantic issues. The peace dividend has been long spent even as we keep borrowing on it. Borders and walls are going back up. Conflict has become ever more hybrid. Bits and lines of code can take down critical infrastructure.

We must be more open therefore with the public about what we are trying to do and how it impacts on their lives. We must explain the current crises, the security environment and the utility of defense in meeting present and future threats without scare tactics or demagoguery.

We are all starting from scratch in this new world of international relations, where the old rules, the old truths may no longer hold, not even at home. You will have to do better. It's going to be your task.

In an era where, to quote William Butler Yeats, The best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity, you, the best, will need to be full of passionate conviction. The future of our children will be in your hands. And we are all starting, again, from scratch.

Good luck. You can do it. You better.