

Dear members of the Defense League.

Dear allies.

Dear Estonian people.

During the last few years, all of us have probably felt that the security situation surrounding us is very different than before.

Our concerns are based on our basic questions:

What will become of us?

What will become of Estonia?

What will become of Europe?

People want to believe that the present will last forever. No matter whether they are satisfied, or more often, unsatisfied, with the slow pace of improvement. However, we seldom think that the present can rapidly change and change completely.

Estonia is not longer proceeding along the peaceful road familiar to us from the last few decades. Europe is changing. The world is changing.

History is filled with cautionary examples of decision-making based on the present. In our own case, the most glaring example is the blind hope in 1939 that Estonia would not be affected by the rest of the world, perhaps understandable when viewed through the narrow perspective of the present day, but as we know as exact scientists of retrospect – actually it is disastrous.

However, belief in the continuation of the present was shared by the English in the spring of 1914, the Brezhnev-era Communists in the Soviet Union, the Poles before World War II and the Ukrainians before Maidan.

Unfortunately, and in some cases fortunately, they were all mistaken.

The task of maintaining Estonian security during the last quarter century has been to ensure that we do not err again, that the wish to live as free people in a free land does not turn out to be an empty dream.

Freedom and peaceful development has become the status quo in Estonia. Everything that is terrible and threatening has occurred "somewhere else".

For many in the West, the year 1989 signified the "End of History" when liberal democracy and the market economy had achieved final victory of its competitors. The belief in the end of history turned the 300,000 U.S. soldiers who protected West Germany into only a few thousand.

The East European countries that had quickly reformed themselves joined the European Union and NATO. And in the case of the latter, in an atmosphere where no one imagined that Russia posed a threat to Europe. On the contrary, for almost 20 years an attitude prevailed that NATO should deal with others areas of the world, and if they could not, they should pack up and go home. According to this view, Europe was ready, free, complete, and ... finally living in peace.

Even nine years ago, when a politically motivated attack was mounted against the Estonian internet or when Russia occupied the Georgian cities of Gori and Poti in August 2008, most of Europe saw no reason to deal with defending its own territory. The problem was "elsewhere". Defense spending just kept decreasing.

We must now recognize that the era that started more or less when the Berlin Wall fell has quietly ended. Many do not want to admit this, but perhaps we here in the border countries have a better perception of what has happened.

What should we do in this situation?

Firstly, we need leaders, in the government as well as the opposition, who lead and have the courage to decide. Great, even critical times require great deeds and people who will and know how to take responsibility. While realizing that words of thanks come afterwards. If at all.

Europe needs leaders that have the courage to accept responsibility for explaining the current crisis and truly leading – leading Europe, and their own countries – and not relying on the latest popularity polls. One cannot lead while holding on to one's chair.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This fall Estonia will get a new President of the Republic. The Constitution assigns two important tasks to the president – to be the supreme commander of the national defense of Estonia and to represent Estonia internationally.

Seeing what has happened around us these last few years, especially since February 27, 2014, when the old European security architecture collapsed with the annexation of Crimea and realizing that we are not a solitary island in the middle of a secure sea, the new head of state must know how to accept these responsibilities. How to stand for national defense and international relations.

I also agree that the head of state should intervene when the Constitution is violated or flagrant injustices exist. The head of state should understand domestic problems and concerns. Know and perceive Estonia. But the head of state cannot replace the government or assume the role of parliament.

However foreign and security policy and national defense must – that's right, must – be the most important items on the president's desk. I repeat. These are the assignments conferred on the head of state by the Constitution, the performance of which is a part of Estonia's defense and international security.

Secondly, and viewing foreign and security policy more broadly, today's diplomats are faced with a rough landscape checkered with crises. The former rules and agreements, old truths and hopes need not apply. In this new era – amid rapid changes and many simultaneous crises – diplomacy must reinvent itself, in relations between countries as well as by calmly justifying the government's decisions related to foreign and security policy.

Then people will understand. Will understand that the secure present will not continue by itself, we need allies, and allied relations presuppose cooperation and an understanding of each others' concerns, as well as solidarity in finding the solutions and alleviating these problems. That's how simple, but actually complicated, the world really is, where international crises – for instance, the migration crisis, spread of terrorism – often affect the domestic policy of states that may seem faraway.

But the heads of state and politicians also have the right to say to the voters that they too have a responsibility, and should comprehend the weight of the decisions they make at the ballot box and the consequences of these decisions.

Dear listeners,

The events in Ukraine in February 2014 brought an end to the rosy and peaceful idyll of the post-Cold War era. Everything that Estonia has done after joining NATO has been a balanced reaction to Russia's unexpected moves. After 2014, the democratic West can no longer be sure of or rely on the international agreements on which peace in Europe has been based after World War II. Because we have seen how a state can conquer the territory of another state in today's Europe.

Thereby resulting in the steps that have been taken by Estonia and our allies.

It was only after the occupation and annexation of Crimea, and the sharp increase in Russian military flights with their flight transponders turned off that the first NATO air policing unit came to the Ämari airfield to guard our airspace.

It was not until 2015 that NATO started organizing exercises for the movement of heavy equipment across the borders of its East European allies.

This was only last year. Until 2009 something as elementary as a NATO defense plan for Estonia did not even exist. That is, there was nothing on paper telling NATO what to do if something should happen here.

Thus, I am at quite a loss when I read the stories, motivated by domestic politics, about "war hysteria" or "saber-rattling" on the part of NATO in Estonia or elsewhere in Europe.

Let's be honest, war hysteria goes hand-in-hand with the recently escalating military activity directed at the West in our part of the world. To accuse NATO of saber-rattling because of necessary exercises and rotating allied units – at the very least this reflects naiveté if nothing more.

For two years we have read hundred of naïve articles about possible "little green men" in Estonia and Latvia, and the ill-informed questions of armchair analysts: "Is Narva next?" – "Kas Narva on järgmine?"

These approaches ignore the fact that the success in Crimea was based on surprise – no one believed that anyone would do such a thing. But they did. It was not believed that international agreements could be so ruthlessly violated in Europe.

This would no longer succeed. Because after a single success the entire West is ready for this move.

But we cannot prepare only for the last time. We must generally be ready for more.

And the basis for Estonia's defense and security is that, we, all of NATO, can no longer allow ourselves to calmly believe that nothing bad can happen. Most of all, we must not proceed from

the assumption that since nothing bad had happened to us in 25 years, this will also be true in the future.

Thanks to daring decision-makers in the 1990s that rapidly made the correct choices, we are one of the safest, most innovative and increasingly successful European countries. Estonia has coped successfully with the responsibility of being a NATO member. Regrettably we are one of the few who contribute the agreed-upon 2% of GDP to our national defense. And now many NATO allies understand the necessity of increasing defense spending.

In the international picture, Estonia has been laudably responsible in regard to national defense. Our defensive will is strong, which is also apparent at this Victory Day parade where we see the members of the Defense League lined up in formation. The members of the Defense League, Estonians diplomats and security officials are of the highest quality; our national credibility is a fixed currency.

Perhaps, especially during the past few years, we have paid too little attention to the success of our foreign and security policymakers in convincing Estonia's friends about the true security picture in the Baltic Sea Region and how important it is to constantly keep it on the allies' radar screen. The Estonian representatives have also steadfastly helped to shape and maintain the united position of the European Union that sanctions against Russia must be continued until the Minsk agreement is adhered to – above all the restoration of the truce and removal of heavy armament from the conflict region.

Today, on June 23rd, the eyes of Europe are on Great Britain. To be or not be – this decision by the Brits will certainly have a great economic and political impact on the European Union. But in any case, we want the European Union to be united and influential. This is a job for all of us.

Compatriots,

Neither Estonia nor our NATO allies have threatened anyone's independence or occupied anyone.

Neither we nor the European Union nor NATO are interested in conflict.

The decisions and actions of Estonia, as well as the rest of NATO, are only directed at deterrence, which is the outpost of defense. So that if anything should happen, NATO would respond. And Estonia, whose defense forces have become an estimable force in the last 25 years, would defend its state, its people.

But deterrence is not limited to soldiers, equipment and weaponry.

Deterrence also means strong allied relations and the knowledge that we are steadfast partners for others, and they for us. That we are not cut off from the rest of the West, as we were in 1939 and 1940. This in turn means that we are an open, democratic, and cooperative state.

Deterrence means successful, inventive and believable diplomacy, that we have positions and we are taken seriously, and that we are present at important forums.

Deterrence is a united European Union, which is actually part of diplomacy that, for instance, in the name of better trading conditions, we do not take the path of international injustice. We never agree to bargain with the fates of other countries.

However, our most important deterrent is a strong Estonian society. A society that does not take the path of populism or turn toward isolationism. A society that is not guided by the denigration and trouncing of each other. A society that is strong enough to make the important decisions that will decide the future of Estonia.

Dear friends,

Estonia's security starts with our own wisdom.

History has not ended. All of us and each of us individually are participating in the shaping of the future.

It is up to us to preserve today's Estonia in order to bequeath it as a free nation to our children.

Let's preserve and protect Estonia.

Long live Estonia.