

Dear President,  
Members of the Riigikogu and the Government,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear people of Estonia!

Today I come to you filled with respect and awe. I comprehend that in my work I will have to carry on my worthy predecessors' cause and the spirit of the republic. A duty to preserve and carry forward the Republic of Estonia, founded in 1918, is a responsibility you have entrusted me with for the next five years.

Dear audience,

Eighty eight years ago our ancestors founded the Republic of Estonia. They achieved this by fighting in the War of Independence and a new state entered the map of the world. This made the people of Estonia great, greater than we were ever expected to become.

The people who have gained the right to live in their own state as a safe home of the people are fortunate. The home of the people of Estonia existed de facto merely twenty years. Only one generation was born and grew up in independent Estonia.

However, one generation sufficed to have a concept of the democratic Republic of Estonia, a common dream of our own state, carry our people through long years of occupation, through countless sufferings, injustice and evil. The idea of a democratic Estonia allowed us to restore our independence.

A miracle was born. We are grateful to our then leaders, creators and bearers of our national culture, in particular to hundreds of thousands of people for it. It was their unanimity, a strong

will and common efforts which returned the state to the people of Estonia.

We realised soon that independence in itself is not enough. There are many independent states in the world with people cherishing only one dream – to leave or flee. We are also aware of successful economies with governments not adhering to principles of the rule of law.

Today, fifteen years after the restoration of independence, I dare to formulate a task and obligation: in five years we should hand over to the first generation brought up in newly independent Estonia a state, which will look and perform as if there had never been any occupation.

Naturally, we cannot abolish fifty years of occupation. However, a generation – twenty years – is a period for us to judge whether we coped or not? Have we made Estonia greater, better, safer and more homelike?

The generation born and brought up in the Republic of Estonia will not have to hear and understand excuses that their parents had no other choice that we really wanted... but there was nothing but “water and bleak cliffs”. We have no right to excuse us any longer by saying “restored independence”. The new generation will not understand the word “restored”. So be it!

I have never really liked the question “is this the kind of Estonia we wanted?!” This question expresses powerless surrender. The Republic of Estonia is not an outcome of a wish or a will but rather of our actions. At any given moment our country is a work of art created by us, citizens, not by Moscow, Brussels or the International Monetary Fund. No private individual, government, party or company has founded our country. It is we ourselves, each and every one of us, every day that boldly and surely have to shape Estonia.

We should rather ask: “What kind of Estonia would we like to leave our children?” This approach outlines our task and goal: how to move forward?

Dear people of Estonia,

Englishman John Locke and later Frenchman Jean-Jacques Rousseau said as early as 300 years ago that the state was a citizens' agreement on who governed and how. The social contract they wrote about presupposed that the state belonged to the people. The rulers have the right to decide what the state would do as long as the citizens agree to it.

Such an approach will oblige all of us vested with the people's trust to lead and bear responsibility, act in the name of citizens and of nothing else. If a politician justifies a dubious deed saying that "no losses were incurred to the state!" it means he does not understand the concept of the state. Arbitrary or disguised preference of one or another group deceives citizens; it violates the contract between the citizens and the state. This would undermine citizens' confidence in a just state. This would slowly but surely cut the supporting pillars of the rule of law.

While talking about the citizens and the citizens' state, I mean the civil society, not the Citizenship Act. If in five years we would like everybody in Estonia to be proud of living in Estonia and not anywhere else, we should think of all our fellow countrymen, regardless of their nationality, origin and faith.

However, we are also obliged to stand for those who suffered during the years of occupation as well as be reconciled with those who hurt them during the occupation. We cannot continue with mutual execration and accusations. This does not mean that we should forget the past as we are so often recommended from the East.

If we would like to leave to the generation born in independent Estonia a mentally healthy state, we should not apply the past as a cudgel. The past itself cannot punish or impeach anybody if the past is transparent, known and disclosed.

The time has come to turn a new page and think about the future. However, we should do more than just ask the others to apologise and the others to forgive. If we would like Estonia to be great and generous, we should offer everybody living here something unique, exclusively Estonian and attractive. We should provide a reason that would keep the young in Estonia and would return the tens of thousands who have left Estonia during the last fifteen years.

The new page Estonia has turned presupposes that we are positively transforming: that we will not accuse, that we will neither intimidate nor threaten, neither retaliate nor insult. We should start behaving the way we would like others to treat us. Other people and other states.

The alternative would be harsh. This would be a state struggling for existence, a state with winners and losers. In the relationship between states, the large would win the small and brutal force would determine the outcome. We would like Estonia – as small as it is – to be treated equally. To enjoy the same rules everywhere, which we apply to others. However, it means that also internally we should behave in such a way.

Dear friends,

Let us be honest – recently we have done well as a state and as a nation. Our economy is recovering, wages and pensions are increasing, the living standard is improving. Estonia belongs to NATO and the European Union. As a state and as a nation we have reached targets, which merely a generation ago, in 1986, were fiction never to be published.

There has been complaints that after the accession to NATO and the European Union, Estonia has no goal. Just like a student we have worked hard for more than ten years, successfully graduated from a university and achieved everything we intended to while growing up. In a way we are at a loss now: what to do now as an adult. What kind of targets to set; what kind of responsibility to assume as an adult state?

However, while setting targets let us ask ourselves and ask honestly: have the people and the state internally done equally well?

What has happened to our dreamland, to the democratic Republic of Estonia if its citizens are afraid to freely express their opinion; if the citizens have become scared and frustrated to act as citizens, to implement the duty of citizen and follow one's conscience?

Plans to mine phosphorite, which once enkindled our independence movement, have transformed into our own businessmen's plan to open new oil-shale mines. Is the threat to

Estonia's nature now really less significant? Should the people in Virumaa take it more calmly now that the potential environmental catastrophe will be caused not by decision-makers in Moscow but in Tallinn?

Could we be proud and be satisfied with a situation in which regional development depends on partisan obedience of local decision-makers and not on the needs of the local people. Is it reasonable that public offices and even hospital managements are manned by partisan membership, not competency?

In my heart the Republic of Estonia is enshrined in the idea from the Manifesto of Independence I would like to quote "All citizens of Estonia, regardless of their faith, nation and political views, are equally protected by Estonia's legislation and courts". This idea has been the underlying concept of the citizens' Estonia from the very beginning.

Dear fellow-countrymen here as well as at television screens, radio sets and computers!

Having become an independent sovereign state with successful economy, I would like to reiterate our key task: to deliver in five years such a Republic of Estonia, which is led by its people and not by a handful of people. The state is not a politicians' club with a membership card as an entrance pass. The democratic state is what we are obliged to stick to and work with. These are the goals we are to stick to.

The people of Estonia should sense that Estonia cares; that they live in a state, which takes care of them. If we would like Estonia to rank high in the economic growth and welfare, not in suicides and depressed people, we have to care.

The people of Estonia should realise that this is their state. It is then that they look at the world and conclude that although Estonia is small, it is much greater than one would guess by its population.

Estonia has proved that it can deliver. Accession to the European Union and NATO as well as the Tiger Leap would have remained glorious plans if we had not pulled ourselves together and

acted jointly.

We will also be able to reach new targets. My predecessors, President Lennart Meri and President Arnold Rüütel whose work I recognise and respect, quoted at their inauguration speeches a line from our Manifesto of Independence: "Estonia, you are standing on the threshold of a hopeful future!"

The people of Estonia have created their future and crossed the threshold. This is why I commence my term of office with a call to all fellow-citizens: this is your state, its future is in your hands. Only you enjoy the privilege as well as the duty to decide how we shall move forward and what kind of Estonia we will leave to our children.

Will it be the kind of Estonia, which cares for others, be it a new neighbour of the European Union or your own neighbour? Or maybe an Estonia where we will not notice anybody but us? Will we hold the past against our fellow-citizens or will we be looking together for new solutions? Will we be alienated from the state or will we win with love and care so that for all of us our fatherland will be a source of joy and delight?

Let us make Estonia greater! This is an appeal to you, dear people, to the Riigikogu and Government, to myself – to all of us.