

My dear fellow countrymen in this hall, at home and abroad,
Excellencies,
Dear ladies and gentlemen.

We have gathered here to celebrate the 89th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia in Tartu, where this year we also observe the 375th anniversary of Tartu University. Estonian statehood goes hand in hand with our intellectual awakening: the existence of the university and the birth of the republic cannot be considered separately. Without Estonian intellectuals, the idea of an independent, democratic nation state would never have grown beyond a nameless longing.

For a long time, Estonia was just an *idea*. An idea born in this city, among intellectuals, writers, and students. The idea began to strike root in organisations and societies: choir, library, orchestra, agricultural and temperance societies. The Learned Estonian Society was founded here in Tartu in 1838, and its activities resulted in the birth of our national epic. The Alexander Schools movement gathered momentum when Jakob Hurt, then a student at Tartu University, became Chairman – just as he became head of the Estonian Writers' Society later on.

Here, at the Vanemuine Society, Carl Robert Jakobson held his First Fatherland Speech in 1868. Also the first all-Estonian song festival took place in Tartu a year later. Without exaggeration it can be said that it was here, in Tartu, that a generic rural peasantry sang themselves into the Estonian nation.

Estonian theatre was born here, in Tartu. As was our blue, black and white flag, originally as the banner of the Estonian Student Society, sewn by Miina Härma, Emilie Beerman and Paula Hermann.

The idea that started to bud here in Tartu, primarily around the university, gave a dispersed rural peasantry, smothered under the arbitrary dictate of the Baltic landed gentry, an understanding that they need look up to no one – as some would prefer to do even today, it seems; and that their language was just like any other – an answer to the question posed by a

Tartu student almost 190 years ago: Ä

*Can the language of this land,
by rising up to the sky
in the wind of song,
not search for an eternity for itself?*

Today, the coherence that creates an intellectual foundation and structure among a people, and leads to the creation of a nation state, is called civic society. This phenomenon was noticed in the 19th century in the United States, by the Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, who concluded that civic society formed the basis of a successful and functioning democracy. The 19th century rulers of Estonia did not read de Tocqueville, but they, too, were worried about the abundance of peasant, student, and intellectual societies, their discussion nights and newspapers, carriers of the spirit of democracy.

Looking back at Estonian history today, we see it was here, in Tartu, that the foundation of our statehood was laid. This is where the Tartu Peace Treaty – the birth certificate of our nation, making us an equal among other nations – was signed in 1920. And this too is a reason – though not the only reason – why we are here in Tartu today.

What began as an idea, became reality, our state was born on a foundation laid by civic organisations – societies, congregations, choirs. Just as the restoration of independence in 1991 would have been unthinkable without the Estonian Heritage Society, student societies and fraternities, Citizens' Committees and the Popular Front in the late 1980s. All these were civic initiative, not a gift from somewhere. Not something received from above, but something that rose from amongst us, and from within us.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear fellow citizens,

We live in a cultural space where we consider it a given that we take our own decisions, not follow orders from above. This is also stipulated in our constitution: the supreme power of the state is vested in the people. And although we trust our authorised representatives in the Riigikogu and the Government to take the day to day decisions of governance for us, it is our right, every four years, to judge the work of our elected representatives. How did they do, were

they worthy of the trust, we, the citizens invested in them? Or did they abuse it? This is for each of us to decide, each of us can give his judgement.

I call upon you to judge by the right criteria. I want the voter to know: you get what you vote for. The wisdom and complexity of governing is greater than any slogans, any promises. Voting for a slogan, you will receive in exchange a policy not of governance, but of hoarding money for the next elections. I ask you: choose wisely, be demanding, weighing not promises but deeds.

Let us make use of democratic choice and create a country to our liking. Let us show we are not indifferent.

Yet let us admit that, unfortunately, the approach to the elections we have witnessed in the case of some politicians, reproduces indifference. Indeed, I too am troubled and saddened by the fact that our election campaign slogans and commercials, with their simple-minded claims, underestimate the voter rather than inform him. The issues and figures that have been dragged into the campaign have little in common with the serious questions that we face as a people and a country.

Our forefathers went to war to win the right to vote on their future. Not voting therefore shows contempt and disrespect not only for one's self, one's friends and family, but also to one's parents and forefathers. Not voting is also a personal loss: he who does not vote shall be voiceless for four years, with no right to pass judgement on the development of his country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is another, deeper reason, why we all need to go vote. Recently, I read in one sitting one of the best essays ever written on the impact of 50 years of foreign occupation on our lives: an essay, which in its precision belongs to the same Parnassus as the works of Czeslaw Milosz, Milan Kundera and Václav Havel. I speak of Enn Soosaar's essay "Father and Time", in which he writes:

"The election preferences of the last few years show eloquently that many East Europeans

consider the proliferation of double standards in politics and economy to be something self-evident ... (we) deceive ourselves if we refuse to see that the failures following the restoration of our freedom result from the delayed impact and burden of the past. The ideological manipulations that deepened people's cynicism and absolved them of moral responsibility, have left a permanent mark on the consciousness of a large number of people."

What do we conclude from this? I conclude that election day is the time and the place where each of us render our own judgment of cynicism and manipulations.

Therefore, let us rather ask – what is it that our election campaigns do not speak of?

Elsewhere in the world, analyses of the current economic situation in Estonia speak of the danger of over-heating, the current account deficit, that our economy produces insufficient added value. The election platforms and slogans of some political parties rather give the impression that economic cycles do not apply for Estonia.

I understand the purely human desire to spend more, to be well off, or at least better off. Especially after 15 years of efforts and difficult circumstances. Nonetheless, in spending we should not take risks that could jeopardise everyone's well-being were we to face some bleak or even grey scenario in the future.

One of the basic truths of the economy calls for decisions in wealthier times that would help us to manage in leaner circumstances later on. Do our entrepreneurs invest a sufficient share of their record profits in innovation, which, among other things, would help us with our labour deficit, increasingly a stumbling block to our development?

On a national level, the rising tax revenues could bring about political consensus and agreement on large scale investments. Shall we build a safe, four-lane north-south motorway, a bridge to Muhumaa, a network of wind energy parks on the North-West coast, or shall we invest in the modernisation of the health care system – all this is a matter of choice. But let us make our choices, because a better or more opportune time for making these choices may not come in the foreseeable future.

Poverty brings discord at home, old Estonians said. I wonder why rising state revenues have produced no agreement among our politicians?

Instead, year after year, we see the process of budget planning, where bluster over surpluses seems to be a logical part of the procedure. No attempts are made to conceal the fact that a surplus of billions of kroons is planned into the budget, yielding an effective political weapon in Estonia's everlasting election campaign. It is no secret that our supplementary budget reflects political preferences rather than rational needs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me take a closer look at a phenomenon that if continued, or worse, aggravated – may lead us to a dead-end and stagnation. Researchers who have studied the reasons for success and failure and East European and transition states have convincingly concluded that allowing public procurements to be made on a political basis halts the development of a country.

We know the phrase "kickback", where politicians procure orders or tenders for companies that in turn support the politicians who have helped them. Lately, this phenomenon has been given an even more pertinent name: "semukapitalism" (crony capitalism).

If market competition and best offers are replaced by party connections, a collapse is inevitable sooner or later. An oil refinery, landswaps, public institutions' leases, summer house deals, public parking arrangements, renovation of schoolhouses – all these keywords reek of corruption and untransparent machinations.

We could of course say – so what? Who suffers? ? It is the purposeful use of the taxpayer's money that is lost, fair competition, but more generally, for all the inhabitants of Estonia, the opportunities of our children and grandchildren in the future.

I repeat what I said when assuming office: Arbitrary or disguised preference of one or another group deceives our citizens; it violates the contract between citizens and the state. It undermines citizens' confidence in a just state. This would slowly but surely cut through the

supporting pillars of the rule of law.

We can see how these same cronies of the politicians begin to think of themselves as "the chosen ones", as "masters of life", who stand above and beyond the law and rules of society. The worst that can befall them is a small fine which they pay, accompanied by arrogant comments.

Throughout the centuries, Estonians have had to count pennies rather than pounds. This may be the root of the problem, lack of experience handling large sums of money. And it has always been a subject of ridicule, if we think of the classical works of Estonian literature.

Let us therefore think of Jaan Tõnisson, who has said, most truthfully: "The vices that are revealed in the life of our nation cannot be rectified by law or public authority, but only by the impact of virtue."

Dear people of Estonia!

The birth of the Republic of Estonia 89 years ago, the long-cherished idea that was shaped into our country, rescued the Estonian nation from peril of death. Considering the merciless annihilation of Estonians who lived in Soviet Russia in the 1930s, we may but imagine what the fate of our nation would have been at the high tide of the Stalinist repressions. We know what happened to our Finno-Ugric brethren at that time. We know, for example, what happened to nearly two hundred thousand Ingrians, of whom only a tenth survived to witness the collapse of the Soviet Union.

We Estonians were saved by our state.

During the first period of Estonian independence, most of the Russian Orthodox churches in the Soviet Union were demolished. The Petseri Monastery, on the other hand, which was situated in the territory of Estonia at the time, flourished and managed to see the present day. In a way, it is a monument to the independent and democratic Estonia. Just like the villages of the Old Believers on the coast of Lake Peipsi.

The atrocities committed in Estonia after our annexation and occupation have left a wound in the Estonian soul, a wound that has not healed even today. The research of Tartu University sociologists indicates that almost 65 per cent of Estonians lost at least one near relative during the occupation period. Sixty-five per cent, two thirds.

Therefore, the moral void that allows a state to consider the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany its own, and yet to shrug off the responsibility for the execution of thousands of Estonians and the deportation of tens of thousands Estonians, is particularly abhorrent. And that state – to the contrary – justifies and defends the murderers and the deporters. And taunts Estonians, calling them fascists.

Those accusations proceed from the fact that we have a democratic state!

Another man from Tartu, Artur Alliksaar, another of our poets deported to Siberia, wrote:Ä

*Käidi ja külvati varjude seemet,
sest valgus hakkas võrsuma*

*They came and sowed the seeds of shadows
For light had begun to sprout*

Indeed, they needed no law to demolish the cemeteries of fallen soldiers and our monuments of the War of Independence. But, my dear compatriots, let us again recall the advice of Marcus Aurelius: the best revenge is not to become like them.

A free, democratic Estonia, governed by the rule of law, where we enjoy freedom of speech and where the Constitution is not merely a meaningless fiction, is the best revenge for the grim tribulations of Estonia. We are democrats, in spite of all that has been done to us. We do not behave or speak like Soviets.

Let us recall Oskar Loorits' words from more than half a century ago, I quote: "We do not engage in history to become entangled in glamorising or bewailing the past, but rather in order to draw inspiration to maximally realise our potential in the present and certainly also to achieve optimally our goals in the future." End quote.

Our European outlook and dignity are our response to those who must qualify the term "democracy" with the qualifier "managed" or "sovereign". A state where democracy is incomplete, where justice depends either on wealth or connections with the powers-that-be, perforce fears democracy and freedom of speech on its borders. Thus fear of democracy becomes the engine of foreign policy.

This means also that Estonia cannot move forward, while fearfully glancing over her shoulder, shaping her political decisions proceeding from the injustices of the past. We must break free intellectually from that sphere of influence to which we were consigned against our will by two criminal regimes in 1939.

We have an alternative – our duty to secure and firmly root Estonia in Europe, in the European Union. We must begin to act as a European nation. This means that we no longer view Estonia's success separately from the success of the European Union. We are the most pro-European nation in the European Union. We know the possibilities this affords us.

Therefore, I recommend voters ask the political parties running for office in the Riigikogu for explanations. For instance, why are we unable to adopt the Euro? Are we to adopt the Euro only after our economy has been caught in a crisis?

The Estonian voter expects the next government to have a clear and transparent approach to the issues of the European Union. The childish question – what will the European Union think of us in connection with a bronze statue? – must be replaced by a much more important question: what is Estonia doing in Europe? Let us rather find an answer to that.

Dear people of Estonia,

It is our duty to maintain and carry on the legacy of our parents: the idea of the Estonian state. Our strength is in our values, in our ideals, in our character and our moral attitudes. Without those, we are powerless. We, after all have no oil or gold resources, no super-weapons.

A small nation must keep together. And rejoice over our small, everyday successes and heroic deeds. We must pat each other on the back, praise honestly, but if necessary, also calmly point out what has gone awry.

The Republic of Estonia was born of the common aspirations and efforts of educated Estonians. So too, the continued development and well-being of Estonia is dependent above all on proper education. This is what leads me to turn toward the entire nation, to parents and pupils, to ask you to think critically about the future of the educational system of Estonia.

Our universities are producing a multitude of experts in fields whose utility is sometimes hard to grasp. Today, the success of a country is no longer dependent on the existence or non-existence of natural resources, on cheap or expensive labour. The success of Estonia will be determined by the share of people specialising in the sciences and engineering in our society.

No one will make discoveries, become an inventor, a scientist or a researcher, if they have no contact with mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology. Our society is neither large nor rich enough to offer our youth an unchallenging education that follows the path of least resistance. So that if mathematics and science are too much, then let's give them higher education in a field that, if times become harder, would leave them without a job or sustenance.

A society that considers a university degree to be a value in itself, and concentrates on marketing and business management, will not, in my opinion go far. In the highly competitive world economy, Estonia will be propelled forward by people who are able to create new medicines, write computer programs or contribute to the creation of new sources of energy. Our success depends on having many scientists. We need people with a technical education, we must value vocational skills, professionalism and inventiveness.

This is a challenge from which there is no escape. And part of this challenge must be taken up by Tartu, Estonia's leading university and science city, which for several years now has also been the home of our Ministry of Education and Research.

Dear people of Estonia,

We have reasons to be proud and happy. Our small nation, on the edge of the Western European civilisation, has despite our inherent critical-mindedness and scepticism retained its competitiveness and vigour.

The recent Grammy Award confirmed internationally what we have all known for a long time: maestro Arvo Pärt and the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir represent the absolute top in music. The accomplishments of our athletes last year are the envy of much larger nations. Estonians are the creators of Skype, the Internet telephone system. Bookshops in Estonia are no longer replaced by fashion boutiques, but instead expand. Young Estonian film-makers surprise us with new, clever and original creations.

More and more children are born in Estonia. Our homes and villages are becoming more and more beautiful, schools more and more student-friendly. Travel around Estonia and you will see. If this does not prove that we are brave as a nation, what does? We believe in the future, and that we will endure. Despite all tribulations and setbacks.

Today is our country's birthday. A country that indeed is our fortune and our joy – we love our country unconditionally, as a parent loves a child. We grumble and scold, because actually we worry about our country's well-being. We take offence, deeply, if someone says so much as a bad or unfair word about Estonia. We take the criticism to our hearts if there is even a grain of truth in it.

We are not indifferent. We are guided by our faith that this country, brought forth by our forefathers and –mothers, will persevere, grow and flourish. We feel responsibility, and the will to learn. We feel obligation to speak out loud and clear, or through the written word. Let us do so, for example, as part of the national essay competition announced yesterday.

Having a secure place – the securest place we have ever had, throughout centuries – in Europe, in the European Union and in NATO, the safeguards of basic western values – we can say that we have no enemy beyond our borders, no enemy, at least, whom we need fear. If Estonia has enemies, they are to be found within us: indifference, callousness towards fellow human beings, arrogance, a parvenu mentality, lack of consideration of fellow citizens. Our enemies are mendacity, corruption and cronyism. Hatred, unwarranted slander, envy and egotism are the enemies of Estonia's well-being.

These enemies can be overcome if we keep together, preserving the beauty of our country.

As another Tartu man, the poet Hando Runnel once said:

*Ilus on ikka isamaa pale
kui sellelt pühkida kõik mis on vale.*

*Beautiful nonetheless is our fatherland's face
If we wipe from it all the grime in its place*

Yet Runnel asked, in his collection of poems that was suddenly forbidden when it was due to appear:

*Valet me tunneme, tõesti kõik teame
Ent kas just meie-need pühkima peame.*

*We all know the lies, to the point of weeping
But need it be we who must do the sweeping*

Now, in the Republic of Estonia in 2007, we are again free to decide on our own. The Light is stronger than shadows. Let us then sweep away the lies we know. Let the light grow, and weave our triumphal wreath.

These tasks are for no one but us, who live here.

Let us retain these feelings, this faith. Let us cherish the beauty of Estonia. Happy birthday, dear Estonia!