

Honorable Estonian people and Members of the Riigikogu elected by them. Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have the agreeable opportunity to again thank all the citizens of the Republic of Estonia at home and away, who used their right at the beginning of March to direct the development of our nation during the next four years. The people, as the highest power in the land, have made their decision. More actively than on several earlier occasions.

A democratic state is built on the concept that the citizens authorize their representatives to make the most important decisions regarding community life. Estonia belongs to a cultural space where the parliament answers only to the people. Not to anything or anyone else.

This distinguishes European national representation from pseudo-parliaments that function as an appendage to executive power. Estonians do not have to look far in time or space to find examples of this.

Now it is your turn, honorable Members of the Riigikogu. It is within your power, and only your power, to function so that the civil activism that is a mark of a mature democracy does not subside. That the desire of our fellow citizens to participate in politics, and thereby to feel they contribute to the formation of Estonia's future, does not diminish. Every day and every week. Not only in the months leading up to the election, when the political parties reach out to the people and exploit the public-spiritedness of the electorate.

Let me acknowledge the members of the 10th Riigikogu and express my thanks for their accomplishments. To good colleagues, if you permit, because I was one of them for slightly over a year. The term of the previous parliament will certainly be remembered, among other things, for Estonia becoming a member of the European Union and NATO. This was the conclusion of a long-term and collective effort. At the same time, it was also a new beginning, a new path on which the parliament being sworn in today and the government soon to take office will continue.

I also thank the members of the Government of the Republic and its Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip, for what they have done during their almost two years in office. The future will make its own historical assessment of the activities of the Government. As we know, the assessment given by the electorate to the political parties that participated in the Government was rather positive.

Honorable Riigikogu.

For a long time, the productivity of Riigikogu work has not been measured by the quantity of laws and resolutions that have been passed. The work of building a legal framework for the country has been completed to a great extent. Therefore, I think the time has arrived to start discussions on a possible new emphasis for parliamentary work.

I feel that the Riigikogu could become an effective intermediary that monitors and controls the conformity of the government's policies to the needs of real life. However, this presupposes that every Member of Parliament, along with having extensive insight, is constantly informed about the background of the draft legislation that is sent to the parliament for decision.

This year marks 15 years since the parliamentary system of government was restored in Estonia and the constitutional Riigikogu started its work. During this time, a large number of practices have developed. The best of these definitely deserve preservation, the worst repudiation.

Whether you like it or not – the everyday routine of parliamentary work, the core of your next four years, seldom exceeds the news threshold for the media. This may be unfair and provide food for thought for our journalists, but nevertheless to a great extent, it is inevitable.

I sincerely hope that the public, with the help of the media, will start to increasingly understand that the contribution of the members of parliament cannot be measured by the percentage of their participation at sessions in the great hall or their expense account reimbursements. Instead, let's investigate how the work is conducted in the Riigikogu Commissions, where the laws are actually created. What are the arguments heard there and at meetings held with

non-governmental organizations?

Who represents the Riigikogu and Estonia in international parliamentary organizations and how is it represented? Do the people's representatives introduce their ideas from the parliamentary rostrum, at meetings with the electorate and the press, and how do they do this?

We know that the voters are often not satisfied with the indecorous choice of words of their representatives and the narrow-mindedness of party politics. This evenly smears the face of the entire Riigikogu, even the members that behave impeccably.

Moreover, one more thing the electorate refuses to forgive—the Riigikogu abandoning the obligations placed on it, and I emphasize, by the constitution of a parliamentary republic, and reducing itself to the role of an obedient and impassive executor of the will of the coalition parties.

Let me remind you—we ourselves have chosen a parliamentary form of government for Estonia, as have the majority of Europe's democracies. Your voters expect independent thinking and conscientious voting from you. Actually, this means no less than the Riigikogu seizing the power assigned to it by the law.

Honorable members of the Riigikogu.

Only you can increase the role of the Riigikogu and improve the image of legislative power. In this connection, I have some requests for you.

Firstly, you will soon take the oath of office as a Member of the Riigikogu and undertake to remain true to the constitutional order of the Republic of Estonia. This is an oath to the Estonian State, not to your political party. The wording, meaning, and goal of this oath are exactly the same for members of the ruling coalition as for opposition representatives.

This oath of office is valid tomorrow, after a month and after a year, and also a few weeks before the next elections. Do not give in to the temptation to make this honorable institution into an election campaign tool. This is not easy, but it is not impossible. If in no other way than by completing your work a month or two, not a week, before the next elections.

The representative body of the Estonian people does not have the right to make a fool of itself. Therefore, resolutions that are consciously unconstitutional, similar to the one we saw in the final weeks of the last Riigikogu, must be precluded.

Secondly, the Estonian people will not forgive the parliament being transformed into a marketplace, where interest groups can tilt the law in their favor through monetary contributions. The Estonian judicial space is not for sale. One cannot trade with the trustworthiness and transparency of resolutions.

Thirdly, it is wrong to look at everyone and everything related to party politics with clouded glasses. For instance, if the Chancellor of Justice or Auditor General has made proposals to you, they proceed from the law and their duties. Let's be honest—accusing them of partisan leanings generally indicates that their criticism has hit the mark.

In the time that has been spent trying to ascertain the non-existent political preferences of the Chancellor of Justice, both party financing and the management of state-owned businesses could have been made more transparent.

During the three months of this year, over forty of our fellow citizens have died in fires. Already last year, the Auditor General made a proposal to immediately enact a mandatory requirement for smoke detectors. Unfortunately, the decision makers are still discussing whether smoke detectors should be installed next year or the year after.

People's lives and health are not just nice election campaign slogans. This is your everyday work and responsibility.

Fourthly, the Parliament is the place to explain and defend your positions. In the parliamentary

hall, it is not permissible to justify one's actions by saying that what's specified in the coalition agreement. Is this sufficient justification for those who voted for you? The Riigikogu must not become a rubber stamp for the decisions of the Government.

Every Member of the Riigikogu is an employer of the Government soon to take office, not its servant. You should demand explanations and you have the right to get substantive and exhaustive answers to your questions. Demand answers and reprimand those who do not want to answer.

Especially important is the role of the opposition in parliament. Without an opposition, there can be no democracy. Therefore, the time spent in opposition cannot be treated as wasted time. This is laudable work, on which ultimately the level of political discussion and transparency of governance depends. I expect the ruling coalition to respect its opponents, because only in this way does everyone respect themselves and the choices of the Estonian people.

Fifthly, defend the continuity of the Riigikogu and the decisions made by your predecessors. Many strategic development plans have been passed in this hall with deadlines of 2013, 2015, or even 2030. These are valid source documents on which everything in the future could be based.

I hope you take a long-term statesmanlike view. I am sure that you want the work you do in the Riigikogu to affect the development of Estonia in the long term and not to become insignificant a day after your authority ends.

Good Riigikogu.

I am convinced that your work during the next four years will be intensive. I am sure that you will perform your duties with conviction and the Estonian people will have reason to be proud of you. For my part, I hope that you devote your attention to some questions, the solution of which requires foresight, consensus, and wisdom.

Firstly, do not let yourself be lulled by our economic success and seemingly ever-increasing

state budget. Dark clouds have already risen on our economic horizon. The Baltic countries are portrayed as an economically risky area by the international press and analysts. Of course, we can tell ourselves that all the foreign analyses are wrong. However, even if they are wrong, foreign investors read these same analyses and make their decisions based thereon. Regardless of whether we believe them or not.

Our main economic problems are well known. The large current account deficit, the gap between productivity indicators and salary increases, the general lag in innovativeness in respect to the rest of Europe, and the shortage of skilled labor. The simultaneous interaction of these influences may be accompanied by tough times for companies and families that have overextended their borrowing, as well as for fellow citizens that have trouble coping financially.

We know that economies never move only upward. Therefore, we speak about economic cycles and of the accompanying possibility that this Riigikogu and the Government soon to take office will have to deal with a changed economic situation.

Therefore, it may happen that the country's economic situation will not enable all the beautiful and expensive promises that were made to the voters during the last three to four months to be realized. In that case, please make decisions that would prevent, or at least moderate, possible setbacks. Always place the interests of the people above the egotism of party politics and optimistic self-confidence.

Secondly, do not let yourself be lulled by the supposed impasse in the European Union. Yes, the future of the European Union Constitutional Treaty and the future agenda of Europe are currently unclear. However, the inability to decide and the resulting paralysis will become intolerable at some point. Something will be undertaken. The European Union will not stall or falter. The question is only what will be undertaken.

The question for Estonia is whether we are prepared for possible developments. Productive work as a European Union member presumes the coordinated activity of the government and parliament. All the ministries must conduct one and the same European policy, not operate as competitive principalities. I continue to expect continued professionalism from the Riigikogu Commission on European Affairs in the development of Estonia's European policies.

Thirdly – Estonia's joining the Eurozone. Here Estonia's economic development intertwines with our ability to be involved in all the significant processes of the European Union. This is not just a question of financial or economic policies. This is also the question of Estonia's security. Base your activities on the knowledge that the unlimited delay in the adoption of the euro will start to threaten the welfare of all of us sooner or later.

Fourthly, I call upon you to pay special attention to the field of activity on which the survival of Estonia as a country and people depends. I will emphasize three key phrases—family policies, education policies, and healthcare policies. This means numerous children in families that feel secure and happy; the opportunity to receive a good education everywhere in Estonia; and a people concerned about their health along with the availability of quality healthcare.

This can all be summarized by one well-known concept – quality of life. It is within your power to make Estonia into a country that will have positive natural population growth after four years, and where an increase in well-being will reach all the people.

Honorable Riigikogu members taking office.

The Estonian Constitution has stood the test of time. It has only been adjusted and amended on a few occasions. These have been correct and necessary changes.

However, there is at least one area of activity for which the ambiguities in the regulative standards of our Constitution have caused confusion for years and which should therefore be rectified. This is the issue of the procedure for appointing the Commander of the Defence Forces.

In the NATO member states, it is unequivocally and entirely clear that the defence forces are subordinated to executive power. Moreover it is important that the executive power also be accountable for the defence forces.

The sum of this subordination and accountability is significant to civil control or civil management, whichever expression one prefers.

From this, we reach the logical conclusion that the appointment of officials of executive power in a parliamentary state cannot be within the competence of the parliament or president. This can only be done by the government.

In Estonia, the Commander of the Defence Forces is appointed by the Riigikogu, based on the proposal of the President. Today, this structure, adopted from the 1938 Constitution, is a ceremonial solution that has no rational basis.

In addition, this ceremonial solution blurs the precision of civil control and authority over the defence forces. Unfortunately, during the last 15 years, we have seen what this blurring can lead to on more than one occasion.

The members of the Defence Forces know that the chain of command must be clear and not cause uncertainty. Therefore, there also can be no question about whether the Commander of the Defence Forces is subordinated to the Prime Minister, the President, the Minister of Defence, or the Chairman of the Riigikogu, or all of them at once. Let's finally change the chain of command to make it clear and unambiguous.

Therefore, I plan to use the authority granted to me by the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia to initiate a draft amendment to the Constitution. The purpose will be to eliminate the reference to the institution of the Commander of the Defence Forces from the Constitution.

However, before taking this step I would like to hear the positions of the Riigikogu factions and the Council of National Defence. Already today, I hope that the discussions about this proposal will evolve smoothly and objectively. None of the political parties have anything to lose or gain from this, the question is about parliamentarianism and civil control.

In conclusion, in the customary Estonian manner, let me wish you "Jõudu tööle!"

I hereby officially open the first session of the 11th Riigikogu.