

Dear President of the Riigikogu,  
Prime Minister,  
Dear Members of Parliament and Government,  
Commander of the Defence Forces,  
Excellencies,  
Members of the Defence Forces and the Defence League,  
Friends!

Let us ask ourselves, what is the significance of Victory Day today? Do we realise that on this day, 88 years ago, Estonia's freedom was won? That the existence of our country, and the freedom and welfare it brings, was won for us by Estonian soldiers? Or is this just Midsummer Eve, Estonians' millennia-long tradition to celebrate the shortest, lightest night of the year? Or is it just another day off?

Victory Day is the day when we acknowledge our military, men and women in uniform; we organise a parade to show that we too have an army. Indeed, compared to most countries, we have a small army. For years, we have been asked the question whether it is feasible at all for us to defend ourselves, if some other countries have armies that equal the number of inhabitants of Estonia? How long can we fight back, can we put up any resistance at all, when things come to a head? And moreover – we are living in a peaceful era, in prospering welfare, where defence forces and military service seem to be an anachronism.

In my opinion, the events of the past year have shown that we have no reason for pacifist complacency. Or rather, we have no reason to believe that the perils which have threatened Estonians for so long have disappeared after the restoration of our independence.

Up to this April, I observed a mentality among my fellow citizens that is also noticeable in the Estonian literature of the late 1930s. We were overcome by a lulling sense of safety; a feeling that now, after our accession to the European Union, our joining NATO, there was obviously no reason for us to worry.

It is true that the support of the European Union and NATO in April and May this year was considerable, and a great help to us. But to ensure this support also in the future, our politicians, military and diplomats must work constantly and systematically. If we are not active ourselves, our allies and friends cannot do much for us in times of crisis.

The recent months have shown that Estonia's independence is not to everyone's liking. Our democratic order, rule of law, freedom of speech, tolerance, and the Estonians' desire to live our lives our own way seem, for some, to be something that is to be undermined and weakened. For this purpose, devices have been used which, in the Western notion, are not part of the conventions of civilisation.

This spring, Estonia was hit by a serious onslaught. True, no howitzers were used and we could track no traces of Polonium. But our Embassy and our diplomats were attacked, and thus also the principles of the Vienna Convention ignored.

Worse still, our IT-infrastructure, which aspires to be on the top of the world, was assaulted in such a manner that NATO deemed it necessary to send its leading experts over to support our own top team and learn from their experience. Estonia was attacked with a weapon and in a manner whose full significance is just beginning to dawn on the whole world in the 21st century. Our banks, our newspapers, our public institutions were under attack. Those attacks were directed against Estonia, paying no heed to the nationality, political values or mother tongue of our inhabitants.

Ladies and gentlemen!

From the above, I allow myself to draw one main conclusion – freedom, democracy and independence here in Estonia are not to be taken for granted. Our freedom does not exist of its own accord, absolutely and for evermore.

How are we to behave in this situation? Once, Estonia has succumbed. We all know what that meant: barbarity, ruthless violence, for which we can expect no remorse, no repentance. For us, it meant five decades of retardation, which we, as a state and a nation, are still trying to overcome.

If we shall not pull ourselves together, if we shall not stand more efficiently on guard of our hard-won success, it may all vanish once again. This time, perhaps, without bayonets, or shots in the back of the head, or cattle cars with barred windows, but by means of stealthy destabilisation and subversion, poisoning of the tolerant atmosphere of our country.

Today, on Victory Day, each and every one of us must realise that our country must be able to defend itself when necessary. But that is not enough. Estonia must act to secure her democratic civil order and independence. During my more than eight months as President, I have noticed several areas where Estonia needs to act with more resolve.

First, cyber defence. As one of the most advanced users of information technology in the world, Estonia must address the security of cyberspace profoundly and consistently. I do not mean just technical solutions. The European Union legislation on cyber security, cyber crimes and cyber terrorism is dangerously and unaccountably deficient. Estonia could and should assume the role of initiator to improve the situation both in the context of the EU and NATO. If we have, for many years, been racking our brains to find areas where we could be forerunners and contributors, recent events have certainly revealed one such goal to us.

Second, energy and energy security. We must consider whether installation of gas pipelines in Harju County, at Jõgeva and in East Viru County is well grounded. Do we need to increase our dependence on gas deliveries, while well aware that the supplier of the gas has proclaimed energy issues to be a way of reaching its foreign policy goals? We must ask ourselves whether the separation of the Estonian power system from the North-West Russian network is not rather more than a merely economic issue. This is, however, a concern of the whole Estonian population and not just a single state-owned company.

Third, if we limit security to military defence, we are setting limits to ourselves. Security also means that Estonians need not fear for their country or themselves. Security means that Estonians need not doubt their safety in the streets of their home town, nor need they doubt their country's future. Let us call the absence of such fears the psychological defence of our fellow citizens.

Security also means the political responsibility for uniting different parts of the society, and the politicians' commitment to enhancing our sense of security in the broadest meaning of the word.

Security as one of the keys to the continuity of a democratic country means tolerance of different opinions, discussions and disputes. All this is not to be feared but encouraged.

Fourth, national defence and the Constitution. I have initiated a Draft Act for amending the Constitution in order to rectify the state of affairs, inappropriate for a democratic state, where the civilian control over the defence forces is diffuse and leaves opportunities for evading actual control.

The absence of a Defence Forces Organisation Act – even 15 years after the Constitution has entered into force – is a case in point. As well as the regrettable fact, recently brought to public notice, that some military have been investigating the views of civilians – an activity that is against every democratic principle. The legislative basis for preventing such incidents is too weak, and clever minds can still, against sound judgement, argue that if the military have not *ex pressis verbis* been forbidden to spy on civilians, they are allowed to do it.

I would really like to hope that the Riigikogu, in co-operation with the Government and the military, will fill these gaps in the near future. Also that the defence forces are capable to rid themselves of officers who have no respect for rules of democracy.

Fifth, the structure of our defence forces, or the home reserve. In Estonia, the pros and cons of a professional army and general military service have been debated for years. We have proceeded from the premise that an army of conscripts already exists. In fact, this is not the case. Our defence forces are organised on the principle that after an average eight months of military training, the conscript is released to reserve. And if necessary, the reserve shall be called to active service. Unfortunately, the efficiency of this model has never been tested to a reasonable extent. I call the defence forces to address this issue as one of paramount importance.

And sixth, the Defence League, with its membership of nearly ten thousand, is another prop to our security. Consider hundreds of volunteers who, a couple of weeks ago, rushed to the rescue services' help to extinguish the fire in Elliste bog. And be reminded of the hundreds of Defence Leaguers who joined the ranks of assistant policemen in April and May.

Thank you! As history has shown us, a country – be it Finland, Switzerland, Israel, the United States of America or our own experience 88 years ago – a country whose citizens voluntarily come to its defence is not to be defeated. Voluntary action is often something beyond the adversary's comprehension, and therefore frightening.

If our forefathers, many of them still schoolboys at the time, had not recognised the need to found their own country and to defend it, we would not be standing here today. It is our duty to celebrate the victory of 23 June 1919, to reflect upon this victory, and to hold on to it.

Thank you!