

Dear President of the Republic of Finland,
Mr. Chancellor,
Mr. Rector,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address you here between the columns of the University of Helsinki. And to do it in Estonian.

This is remarkable for three reasons.

First, the first author who ever wrote in Estonian, Kristjan Jaak Peterson, was born today, on 14 March, 206 years ago – and in Estonia we celebrate this day as the day of our mother tongue.

Second, the affinity of our countries – Finland is the only country where the President of Estonia can exchange ideas with a colleague in Estonian.

And third, I consider it an honour and most appropriate that I have the opportunity to speak here today, on the anniversary of the death of doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Helsinki and the grand old man of Estonian-Finnish relations, President Lennart Meri.

The last of my three reasons is certainly not a cause for celebration.

Today, at this university, it is still a valid reason – both academically and philosophically. To be more exact, it is valid even ontologically. Because Lennart Meri was one of those who, throughout the hardest decades, reminded Estonia of who Estonia was, what she was. Lennart Meri's capability to inhabit, in his ideas, an Estonia quite different from the world that

surrounded him those days, is the reason why the Estonia of his ideas, today, is the reality of my country at its best, free and ingenious.

To recognise ourselves, we need to compare ourselves to someone. For Rousseau, the moment when we see our own shadow meant the awakening of our humanity. For a nation, this moment of self-recognition usually comes with seeing another nation beside itself. Or, at the time of the birth of a nation, behind its back.

Just like Matias Castrén a hundred years before him, President Meri went as far as Siberia on his quest of our common ontological "other". I believe that their quest will be repeated another hundred years from now. I just hope that even then, people of Finno-Ugric descent, and not merely oil rigs are to be found at the destination.

And yet, for Estonians, just as for Lennart Meri, this "other" could always be found even much nearer. I mean here, on the other side of the gulf of Finland, which he has described with rare precision: "The boundless womb of the sea, hostile and easy, repellent and compelling, more mysterious than the forest, more familiar than the starry skies, the end of one world and the beginning of a much greater one."

I do not know how far back our ties go in time. Our related languages and the fact that before their assimilation or annihilation, the area of the Baltic-Finnic peoples stretched all around the Gulf of Finland, certainly refer to our common roots. The Finnish historian Matti Klinge even believes that once upon a time, we formed a common maritime state.

But even when divided into Estonia and Finland, we recognise each other, we recognise each other in ourselves. We have the same trochaic tetrametric folk verse, which we call runic verse, and you call the Kalevala verse. No deep literary instinct is needed to recognise the common motives in Kalevipoeg and Antero Vipunen. We share the ancient customs of midsummer celebration and sauna. We have been conquered by the same foreign powers. We have belonged to both Russia and Sweden.

And if cultures spring from the same root as the idea that it is possible to become a nation in one's mother tongue, it is natural that throughout the years, we have given each other support, understanding, assistance, and alliance. First, in collecting and studying that very same folk

tradition – you had Elias Lönnroth, we had Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald; two physicians, two scholars assisting each other, building a foundation for the nation, which was a necessary precondition for the birth of our two Baltic-Finnic nation states.

And in 1816, when the former city architect of Tallinn, Carl Ludvig Engel, arrived in Helsinki to design the new capital of the Grand Duchy, he brought with him from Estonia a new building material – limestone. Also the floor tiles of the University's main building are made of limestone. All the best things find their way over the Gulf of Finland.

Also the relations between our two Finno-Ugric nations today are self-explanatory, without ceremony or propaganda. There are 22,500 Estonians living in Finland, and more than 3,500 Finns have chosen the southern side of the Gulf of Finland as their permanent home. Every day, they give their best to the people of their country of residence – their unique skills, traditions worth following, their various life experiences – thus enriching the Estonian and Finnish societies that surround them. Furthermore, they enhance the tolerance of those societies. They make us both better.

But this is no novelty. 24 kilometres from my home, in South Estonia, Viljandi County, Mulgimaa, is the native home of Ella Murrik, later known as Hella Wuolijoki. Today, her grandson is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Finland. In my own farm, my grandfather's elder brother Hans Rebane, once the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia was born, and in 1931-1937, serving as Ambassador to Finland, he founded the building of the Estonian Embassy in Helsinki, where Estonia returned after the end of the Soviet occupation.

This takes me to the geographical location of our two countries, two nations. Europe – yes. In the third quarter of the 12th century, when the first crusade to Finland was launched from Sweden, the merchants of Lübeck found their way to the mouth of the Sound, to the heart of Livonia. Ever since then, the European civilisation has been our home, both mentally and physically.

Therefore, it is misleading and even dangerous to say about a journey to Brussels: I am going to Europe. Or: I have been in Europe. The eastern coast of the Baltic Sea has been part of Europe for 800 years, even at the time when political Europe had to withdraw from there for a brief sad time.

Books written on the subject of perceiving what is "known" and "unknown", "familiar" and "alien" and the relations between them would cover several walls. It has been pointed out correctly that what is "familiar" is most clearly perceived in comparison with the "alien" For Estonians and Finns, the "alien" has been close. We are neighbours with the big, alien, often frightening Russia. In the bear's embrace, as the Finns put it.

Throughout history, our neighbour has sometimes been aggressive, and sometimes struggled with problems within her own borders. Sometimes, she turns her attention towards south or east, and sometimes it seems that it is the western neighbour who – consider our size! – presents the greatest problem and peril to the security of this permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations.

Absurd, or at least verging on the absurd, you say? Yes, but this neighbourhood has had an impact on us, it has forced us to identify ourselves through that neighbour, to reach a self-definition through negation. You remember: *Ruotsalaisia emme ole, venäläisiksi emme halua tulla* (We are not Swedes, and we do not want to become Russians.)

The great neighbour has had an impact on our societies, a greater one than we would have liked. In his essay "Father and Time", the Estonian scholar Enn Soosaar describes the Soviet legacy with rare precision:

"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."

The key expression here is "to absolve from moral responsibility". Just listen to the excuses that the underlings of the Soviet regime, or the conformists, make to justify their deeds in retrospect. *I had orders. I had no choice. Had it not been me, it would have been someone else, worse still. Everybody did that. You had to follow their rules if you wanted to accomplish something. You had to suppress your real self when dealing with Moscow.* And so on.

In a one-party system, joining the party requires mendacity above average, the Nobel laureate Jossif Brodski has written. It is through such a moral prism that we have to view the choices of

the bitter decades of the 20th century. Knowledge of good and evil, retaining one's integrity or accepting mendacity are the ethical choices of every human being. The reasoning: *someone else would have done it anyway is not valid. Neither is the justification: the others did the same.*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Some Estonians I know call Finland an ideal state, where they too would like to live. Why? Because Finland still has an ample store of what Estonia, just as any other country, needs to have more of. I mean sense of identity, unconditional love of one's country, solidarity, safety.

Finland, the country of four winds, that had a civil war – the Winter War and the Continuation War – in the last century, is busy with its history. The injustices have not been forgotten, the past has not been used as a weapon. Rather as a textbook. Risto Ryti, a man with a tragic fate, who was the President of Finland in the most difficult years, was a couple of years ago elected the second most popular Finn of all times, after Marshal Mannerheim.

Seppo Zetterberg, a Finnish historian, has said that a historian must have the ethics of a physician. This is true. And yet, there are countries in the world, and not too far from our borders, who dare not even glimpse at their patient, or their history, or are prepared to give a deliberately false diagnosis without so much as looking at the patient. Figuratively, such behaviour can be called hiding from one's past, and less figuratively, a moral void.

We, Estonians and Finns, are not like that. There can hardly be another warrior in the world or even in world literature, who would think as Sergeant Lahtinen did when crossing the old border: *Our justice ended here.*

Ladies and gentlemen.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Estonia and Finland were like a chapter in a history book, written to illustrate what the neutrality of small countries was worth in World War II. Our neutrality was worthless, twisted and trampled underfoot by the great powers.

Estonia, where the regime of the years preceding 1940 is called the silent era, proved especially weak in this respect. It is with embarrassment that I read from the memoirs of Endel Kingo, messenger of the Estonian Embassy, how the Estonian Ambassador to Finland Aleksander Warma, standing before a map on the last day of the Winter War, said that Estonia had been very wise when concluding the military bases agreement with Russia, as we had not lost as much land as Finland.

A view that proved as short-lived as it was short-sighted!

And I feel even more embarrassed when thinking of the airfields allotted to the Soviet Union by the Estonian Government – for example, Kuusiku – from where the bombers with red five-pointed stars on their wings lifted on their way to bomb southern and western Finland.

It is a painful lesson that it was the pre-war Estonia itself who made the first compromises with democracy, and that this was the reason why we were deprived of our freedom so fast and so totally. I am sad that Estonia, at that time, was so weak, and had no chance to stand side by side with Finland, a country defending itself with dignity.

At the same time I am proud of those 60 Estonians who defied their government and joined the Winter War, as well as of those 3,500 Estonian volunteers who were in the Finnish army during the Continuation War. They constituted 10% of the Finnish Navy and the whole of the 200th Infantry Regiment. At least 180 of them were killed in the Continuation War, and most of the others returned to the Estonian front.

And yet – some of the men who stayed in Finland were after the war extradited to the Soviet Union, where they fell victim to repressions. In those times, politics was based on geography, to quote Paasikivi, and this remained so for half a century.

What can we learn from a neutrality that was twisted and trampled underfoot? Estonia's answer is our membership in the European Union and NATO. Estonia's answer is a quest for allies and a joint contribution to the creation of common security.

We in Estonia, making these choices, have decided not to let Siberia be our teacher, we make our own and different decisions. I do not mean the lesson of Siberia that was sought by Matias Castrén and Lennart Meri, I mean the lesson learned by tens of thousands of Estonian people after the last World War. This lesson has one message only: fear. But fear is a bad guide, and when recognising fear, the people of Estonia also recognised the truth: once afraid, always afraid. We did not and do not want this kind of life.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Lord Palmerston has uttered a famous, much-repeated saying: "Nations have no permanent friends, only interests." At the time when the British Empire prospered, its foreign policy leader could perhaps afford such cynicism. But let us take a closer look and ask ourselves: is this relevant for Finland and Estonia? Is this relevant for the member states of the European Union today?

It is the horizon of the European Union that we, Estonia and Finland, have to follow with especially keen eyes. We have to watch, preserve and develop with especial care everything that is important to us in our common European home.

Let us admit that Europe has got stuck. Expansion of the European Union – our best and most efficient means for expanding democracy, for expanding the principles and practice of the rule of law – seems to have come to a temporary halt. We, Estonians, know from our own experience what lack of democracy means: non-existent freedom of speech, non-existent rule of law. We know only too well how these values can be undermined, and what it means if they are not part of our everyday life.

Contrary to the widespread conventional truth that the European Union is “an elitist project”, I assure you that Europe is what peoples suffering from lack of democracy want. What better chance would Europe have to project its “soft power” outside its own borders, than the wish of Eastern European peoples to live in democracy, under the rule of law? What could present a greater threat to oligarchy and authoritarian regimes than European values?

How could we presume that we have any foreign policy means to solve e.g. the problem of Kosovo, if we tell the Serbians that Ahtisaari's plan is necessary for Europe as the only reasonable solution, but there is nothing in it for them?

We can see straggling even within Europe. Estonia and Finland, with 16 other member states, have ratified the EU Constitution Treaty. The European Union, with its 27 members, can no longer function by the rules that applied to 6 member states. The problems of the Constitution Treaty have become a "Ding an sich": Europe cannot agree upon a procedure for agreement.

Here, I would like to reiterate and emphasise Estonia's strong support to Germany's efforts to find a way out of this bottleneck and give new life to the European Constitution.

It is clear that the European Union – half a billion inhabitants, 27 states – cannot retain its present decision mechanism. And it will not. The procedures that fitted the six founding members of the loose and unattached free trade zone are no longer practicable in a big and powerful political union. Policy choices based on the agreement of a small group of Prime Ministers are no longer functional.

The paralysis resulting from indecision will inevitably become unacceptable, no matter whether it concerns energy issues or liberalisation of the market of services. Something will certainly be done. For half a century already, the European Union has been too important for its members on the economic plane to afford stagnation; for more than ten years, it has been too successful as a political union to get stuck in indecision. The question is just what is to be done.

There are, as we know, alternatives to the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. There is the Europe of big member states, or the *Directoire*, which quite recently was recommended by Günther Verheugen, Vice President of the European Commission, and which is already functioning at the meetings preceding the G-6 council in some fields, for instance in internal affairs and judicial matters. Here, the big member states meet to take decisions before the rest join the discussion.

There are other possibilities for Europe. In his book *The United States of Europe*, the Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt argues for a two-speed Europe, on the basis of the Euro Zone. In itself, it is a logical idea that a group of states standing on a strong foundation – a common

currency – could enhance their co-operation also in other fields.

We can imagine the next very logical step – a common taxation policy created on the basis of common currency. But if a separate common security policy or foreign policy, or a dimension of separate energy security should be created or adopted in the Euro Zone, that zone would acquire a dimension of security policy. Certainly, and especially for those who remain outside the Euro Zone.

At the time when the Maastricht criteria are looking into the inflation levels of the whole European Union to decide who shall and who shall not accede, this is quite an unpleasant prospect for countries like Estonia. Essentially, the European Union is a universal humanist project, with the common market and the basic freedoms as its means, not vice versa.

The European Union, let us be frank, has become more and more oblivious of the truth that seemed so clear 50 years ago, that national interests, seen in a longer perspective, not from the viewpoint of fast profit, are much better protected if we consider Europe, and everything that strengthens Europe, to be our perpetual national good.

Or, to put it as a paradox: it is by the ability to give up our interests that we serve our interests best. How could a state of our size, of our geographical position, do otherwise? Robert Cooper, a well-known radical interpreter of Europe, has said: for the post-modern state, sovereignty is a seat at the table.

This is why I highly appreciate Finland's and Estonia's co-operation within the European Union, and call for its continuation. Even if we are competitors in some matters, our common interests outweigh any easy profit. And we do not need to look far to see the price of easy profit, when plans are not being shared even with partners in the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Europe has also a very important local, that is, Northern European dimension. After 2004, the Baltic Sea has almost become an internal sea of Europe, it is the *mare nostrum* of the 21st

century, and has ceased to be a sea that separates. It is an internal sea also by its very sensitive ecological nature: it takes thirty years for the ocean's circulation to renew the waters of the Baltic Sea through the narrow Danish sounds.

The recent Helsinki Commission thematic assessment on impacts of climate change in the Baltic Sea area states that the general warming of the climate brings unpredictable changes to the basin of our common sea. Some species of fish may disappear, the increase of eutrophication that has been noticeable in recent years, will continue. The effects on our whole lifestyle so far may be considerable and not of the pleasantest kind. It is clear that something must be done immediately.

Yet the grim forecasts of the Helcom report proceed from the overall climate change. There are threats to our sea, our *mare nostrum*, also on a local plane. Recently, you read in *Helsingin Sanomat* that our eastern neighbour intends to increase the number of its submarines in the Baltic Sea to ten. And that in a peaceful area, where only a few per cent of the coast does not belong to the European Union.

And how is the situation in the other Baltic Sea states? Finland has no submarines. The three Baltic States have no submarines. Denmark gave up hers a while ago, and Poland has two old Kilo Class vessels. The German submarines are intended for long voyages, and are most of the time outside the Baltic Sea. That leaves only three Swedish submarines.

So why does Russia need ten submarines in the Baltic Sea? To thwart what threat?

At the same time, the Russian government informed recently that Russia intends to make the Baltic Sea its oil transit corridor, and to transport 150 million tons of oil and oil products annually from Primorsk. 70 million tons annually goes e.g. through Bosphorus. We remember what happened to the Spanish coast when the oil tanker Prestige that had begun its voyage from a Latvian port, sunk 200 kilometres from the Spanish coast. What would happen to our sea if a similar disaster occurred here? Or if another kind of accident were caused by the denser traffic? Let us not forget that the ferry traffic between Helsinki and Tallinn, and the increasing traffic between Kotka and Sillamäe, means millions of people at sea, whose security must be guaranteed at any price.

In the light of the Baltic Sea being an internal sea of the European Union, we must address these issues together in the European Union. There are several forums and means to do that. In renewing the Nordic Dimension, should we not give more attention especially to the issues concerning the whole Baltic Sea region? Do the current activities of the Council of the Baltic Sea States really reflect the expansion of the EU in 2004 and the current needs of the region? Do the Baltic Sea strategies of the European Parliament contain feasible recommendations, deserving to be put into practice? Does the idea of a regional brand, or identity, initiated by the Baltic Development Forum have a future? The Nordic countries without borders, something that the Nordic Council has worked so hard for, could perhaps be an example for a Baltic Sea region without borders?

Let us put these questions to ourselves, to the governments of the Baltic Sea region and the Nordic countries, let us put them to the European Commission.

Ladies and gentlemen.

I am concluding my speech in the same spirit of gratitude as I began it. I am glad to hold a speech at this very square, and in this venerable building, the university. It is probably so deeply ingrained in the nature of both Estonia and Finland to set high value on academic life and academic exchange of thought that it can really and truly be considered a common trait of character.

Let us recall Tartu University, where President Urho Kaleva Kekkonen held one of his most unconventional presidential speeches ever – almost exactly 43 years ago, on 12 March 1964. And it was in the assembly hall of Tartu University that Tarja Halonen, the President of Finland, said to us, forty years later: "Tere tulemast Euroopa Liitu!" in Estonian.

I am proud to state, here and today, that Helsinki University no longer belongs to Finland's cultural history only. In the last two decades, this university has been a home, a generous host, to hundreds of Estonians who have studied or worked here, this university has already written itself into the history of Estonian science and culture, into the history of Estonian life. For this, I praise you!

We live in a world where time is changing everything around us faster than ever before. The

best we can do is to receive our future with open arms, endowed with a good education, a clean environment, and a selfless understanding of our cultural essence and our security needs, or briefly – an understanding of who we are today. And I am glad that Estonia, in Finland, still continues to have “the other” in whom we see so much likeness, and so many small heart-warming differences.

Thank you.