

Dear Chairman of the Riigikogu,
Dear Members of Parliament,
Prime Minister, members of the Government,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a pleasure for me, as Head of State, to follow the tradition of opening the first meeting of this working session of the Riigikogu.

Yet to me it seems even more important that this is the fourth time I am standing before the XI Riigikogu that embarked on its work five brief months ago. Close working relations between the President, as well as other senior officials, and the Riigikogu emphasise the strength of our parliamentary public order.

This way, the representatives of the people are placed at the centre of the public order. In reality, not just ceremonially or symbolically.

I hope that our Parliament will have the insight to perform this central role with dignity and represent the interests of all the inhabitants of Estonia. I hope you will have the wisdom to take advantage of all the opportunities that the opening political season is offering to our Parliament and the Government it has elected to office.

It is still much longer than a year and a half to the next elections, I mean the elections to the European Parliament – this period is long enough for the factions and committees of the Riigikogu to concentrate on actual work.

This is a time for co-operation and compromise, and among other things, for improving our political culture and the reputation of our Parliament.

Today, our Parliament need no longer tackle the problems of creating and building up the legal space that is an existential necessity for an independent state. In the past fifteen years, a great deal of this work has been completed.

Today, it is the Parliament's task to function as a representative body of a normal democratic state, where each new law or amendment act is the result of a discussion between all concerned.

Haste is not justified when it jeopardises democracy and with it, the people's faith in the Estonian state.

It is your task to strengthen the Estonian state and our civic society, and to help the people of Estonia to improve their living standards. The efficiency of a Parliament cannot be measured by the hours spent in session or the number of laws passed.

Only if your decisions today and tomorrow help Estonia to solve successfully the problems that have already risen or are rising on the horizon, can the voters be satisfied with your work.

This is why I see addressing the issues whose solutions are going to affect the well-being of Estonia and her people in 15-20 years as the central task of the Riigikogu this year. I mean, above all, education and research policy, population and health policy, integration and energy policy. Success in these areas will ensure the people's increased sense of security and with it, the stable development of Estonia.

All this can be accomplished only on the precondition that the laws and development plans you are devising will survive the mandate of the present Riigikogu by a long time. It is pointless to waste time and paper on development plans if the next government is going to question their feasibility or leave your work unfinished. In such cases, it is your right as employer to call the Government to order.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Enduring development plans are also a question of political culture, more specifically, a question of communication between the political parties represented in the Parliament. Therefore, I advise the leaders of Riigikogu factions – and why not also party leaders – to seek opportunities for regular consultations in the future.

I am not labouring under the artless notion that discussions between the parties in power and the opposition would necessarily lead to friendship or disappearance of differences in outlook. But they would mean a serious attempt to attain long-term solutions.

This would also improve the reputation of the Riigikogu and politicians; there would perhaps be fewer political intrigues and fewer unnecessarily harsh words spoken in this hall.

Already in the near future the Riigikogu has to decide – presuming, of course, that you will receive such a proposal from the Government – whether Estonian defence forces shall continue their participation on the international missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Balkans.

We know that according to opinion polls, the majority of Estonians have an unfavourable attitude towards continuing the mission in Iraq. At the same time, we also know that Estonia's credibility as a partner is going to be tested in situations where Estonia contributes to the solution of geographically distant problems.

International credibility and reliability are priceless for Estonia, as we could see this spring when our partners were a real pillar of support.

Perhaps, in this matter, all political parties could try to see eye to eye – so far, this has been a good practice when matters of foreign or security policy are concerned. Naturally, I invite you to respect the memory of soldiers killed on foreign missions. Please keep the fallen soldiers, and the bereavement of their families, apart from politics.

Especially as it is our duty first and foremost to address causes of death and bereavement in our homes and on our streets. On 1 September, the Day of Knowledge, I invited all our fellow citizens to purposeful action against violators of traffic regulations. The regrettable state of traffic

culture in Estonia is a direct threat to our people's future.

In the morning of the first school day, I visited Abja Secondary School. I handed over primers to 27 first form pupils, and wished them diligence in their studies, so that they would grow up to be wise citizens, the joy and pride of their parents and Estonia.

On the same day, we learned that in August alone, 31 people had been killed on Estonian roads. The same number of lives – and a few more still – as there were first-form children in Abja Secondary School.

When we consider the casualty rates for traffic accidents, as well as fires, drowning and accidents at work for the last 16 years in Estonia, the figures are devastating.

They become even more horrifying when we add the numbers for manslaughter and alcohol-related deaths. We can see thousands and thousands of lives that have come to an unacceptably early end. Lives that could have continued, if we had been more caring, and wiser.

In recent years, Estonian families have brought good news to birth statistics. More and more children are born. Yet so far, premature deaths have cruelly crushed our hope that the Estonian population might start increasing instead of decreasing.

I invite you, dear members of the Riigikogu and Government, to concentrate your spiritual strength on solutions that would help us to diminish drastically the number of premature deaths.

Shortage of resources is no longer an excuse for the Estonian state. Human life has no price. This principle is paramount in the developed world when the construction of safe roads, as well as other measures for accident prevention, are discussed.

Ladies and gentlemen!

The events of April and May demonstrated beyond all doubt – to us and also to the rest of the world – that the application of the latest information technology in everyday life comprises also unknown risks. A massive attack was launched against Estonian state authorities, information channels, banks and many other facilities that have become part of our everyday life. This was the first time when an attack via Internet was launched against an independent nation.

Estonia fended off the attack. In the months that followed, almost the whole world, but especially our partners, have carried out a thorough research in the field of cyber-security. Furthermore, it has become apparent that the European Union has an insufficient legal basis for fighting cyber crime and cyber terrorism.

Here, beside risks, I see an opportunity – why shouldn't Estonia become the spokesperson of this field in the whole world? The decision to choose Estonia as the location for NATO's cyber defence centre is well under way.

In quite the same way, the Estonian Government, in co-operation with our Parliament, might take the initiative in drafting the legislation concerning international cyber-defence. Addressing the problems of tomorrow is a sign of a mature state.

Dear Riigikogu!

Finally, let me address two issues that lead to the closest contacts in the work of the Parliament and the President. I wish to thank the Riigikogu for the matter-of-fact discussion that has followed the Constitution Amendment Act which I proposed this spring. I sincerely hope that our co-operation continues, so that the sections of the Constitution concerning national defence could be brought to accordance with the traditions of civilian control in Western societies.

Second – soon we have to find worthy candidates to fill the posts of the Chancellor of Justice, the Auditor General, and the Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Eesti Pank. I hope we will all of us be able to stand above stubbornness, partisan interests, and convenience in this matter.

Two of those three senior public servants – in fact, constitutional authorities – are directly or indirectly also keeping an eye on the activities of the Parliament and the President. Justice and honesty, transparency and impartiality, experience and statesmanship – those are the words that can and must characterise the work of the Chancellor of Justice and the Auditor General.

I wish you wise choices and meaningful work. Only by respect towards your office and your colleagues can you respect your voters and the Estonian state.

Thank you!