

Dear Captain Eero Kinnunen, Commander of Estcoy-5,
Dear members of the Defence Forces, and your families!

It is prudent for us to start with a question: how to maintain our freedom in the 21st century, when no country can boast total security?

Membership in the European Union and NATO immediately enhanced Estonia's security screen. These organisations of democratic countries support and protect their members. Today, this is best illustrated by NATO fighters patrolling Estonian air space – they are based in Lithuania and the pilots are Portuguese. Soon, it will be visible also in the NATO centre of cyber defence that is to be established in Estonia; the governments of four countries – including, for instance, Germany and the United States of America – have already announced their participation.

But let us not get carried away. The screen of security over Estonia cannot exist without our contribution. It is we that have to maintain it. Should we prove weak, should our commitment waver, then also the entire security screen will falter at the same moment.

Countries that understand their duties and their rights, and have a caring attitude, can feel safe. Security is caring, both domestically and in foreign policy. Just as a country must be consistent in enhancing the welfare of its people and developing its defence capability, we must also be steadfast in helping those who need our assistance and whom we have the ability and skills to help.

To say that there are, in the world today, distant countries that do not concern us, is to misunderstand the world today.

This is the reason why Estonian defence forces are serving in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq and the Balkans. We wish those places to become stable, no longer pose a threat in the form of terror attack planners or drug shipments. Afghanistan's share in the world market of opiates is today rated to be more than 93 per cent.

Our soldiers are brave and mettlesome, good comrades appreciated by their allies. They are fulfilling a dangerous and dignified duty to Estonia, her partners, and the local inhabitants who are longing for peace and stability.

I am glad that finally – at last! – Cicero's work *De officiis (On Duties)* was published also in Estonian. Everyone can read there that "... it is in the observance of duty that lies all the honor of life, in its neglect, all the shame."

Now I come to my second subject, even that related to duty. I mean a country's duty to take care of its soldiers deployed in crisis areas.

Above all, it is the moral duty of the Estonian state when sending her soldiers to war, to take

care of these men and women.

Secondly, international military operations on foreign territories are more dangerous than service in Estonia.

Thirdly, recruiting staff for dangerous foreign missions is a complicated task, several possible candidates have been hampered by worries about social guarantees, and several have given up foreign missions for this very reason. Members of the Defence Forces opting for Afghanistan or Iraq must be certain that their country shall not leave them or their families carelessly to the mercy of their fate or a chance.

I know that today, you have no certainty in this respect.

Social guarantees for members of the Defence Forces and their families in case the soldiers are wounded or injured, lose capacity for future work or perish, must be revised comprehensively, and unambiguously improved.

These ideas are shared by the leaders of the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff of the Defence Forces, with whom I have had several conversations on the subject of social guarantees. Soon, I hope, the relevant amendments of the Defence Forces Service Act are to be submitted to the Riigikogu for discussion and adoption.

This year in Afghanistan has been hard for Estonia and her Defence Forces. We have lost two brave soldiers – Jako Karuks and Kalle Torn – several have been wounded, some very severely. Our sorrow is still fresh, and not all wounds have healed yet.

And still I am standing in front of you today, and in a week you will fly to the front, to Afghanistan. You are soldiers, you are doing this for a more peaceful world and enhanced security in Estonia.

Soldier's luck to all of you! And to your families – patience to wait!