

Dear people of Estonia!

Dear representatives of the people!

Today 90 years ago, the first democratically elected body of representatives in our history – the Provisional Land Council of the Estonian Province – declared itself the supreme power in Estonia. The historic meeting took place in the White Hall of the Toompea Castle in Tallinn.

As we know, the meeting was brief. The Bolshevik coup, which had broken out in Russia a little earlier, had brought turbulence also to Estonia. Gangs of the so-called soldiers and workers were rioting in the streets of Tallinn. They succeeded in interfering with the work of the Land Council and dispersing it.

As a state abiding by the rule of law, Estonia has never lacked violent adversaries. A democratic state is by definition a reproach to those who are not equal to the time- and energy-consuming task of building up democracy and the rule of law.

Ladies and gentlemen.

After the declaration of the Land Council today 90 years ago, only a few steps remained to be taken to the sovereign statehood of Estonia. Still, the definite option for independence in February 1918 was eclipsed by the final tumult of World War I.

Late autumn the same year, the War of Freedom broke out and lasted till early 1920, finally bringing the people of Estonia the independence that had remained no more than a dream for previous generations.

Our state has been the guarantee of our continuity. Our state has enabled us to live in the Estonian language.

In the 20th century, we have proved twice – above all to ourselves, but also to the whole world – that a small independent nation can be successful. Very successful in fact.

Throughout the coming year, we will be celebrating the jubilee of our 90-years-old state. Celebrating as a state, with solemn dignity. Above all, we will be celebrating in our hearts, with our families, in our homes, villages and cities.

None of us knows – fortunately – what would have become of the people of Estonia, the Estonian language, our country and our culture, if our predecessors had not made use of the historic opportunity of Estonia's independence.

Yet we know what it meant for the people of Estonia to live under an alien, hostile, and undemocratic power. The tragedy of the loss of our statehood united us – in Estonia and all over the world – and gave us strength, in 1991, to recapture the freedom that we had been bereft of nearly half a century earlier.

We cherish our country. We love our country. We are proud of it. We carry Estonia in our hearts, and as Jaan Kaplinski has said:

Kord me ju tuleme tagasi  
Kord meie tuleme kõik.

We will be coming back one day  
Coming back all of us.

The coming year is a year of celebration. We begin the celebration today. And close it on 28 November 2008, when the monument to the War of Freedom is to be inaugurated in the heart of Tallinn.

At the same time, the coming year is full of ordinary, day-to-day work. In festivities, we must not forget to take care of ourselves and our statehood. The citizens' faith in our statehood and care for our state is what makes this country strong, and her future safe.

I wish you strength in all this, and declare open the year of the 90th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia!