

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends.

We all know the saying about nothing being as permanent as a provisional solution. This can indeed be true about quotidian trivialities. Things that one can somehow manage without.

This is certainly not true about the Estonian Provisional Government. Those men assumed the role of leaders at the time when Estonia's destiny was still unknown. They and their sympathisers – our intellectual and political elite – were aware of their responsibility to Estonia.

These men – just like Otto Tief's Government 26 years later and just like the men who started the restoration of our independence at the end of the 1980s – were aware of a slight possibility. They saw the door our endeavours had opened. And realised they had to get a foot in before it closed again.

We know examples from other countries, where politicians who came to power provisionally in troubled times did everything in their might to perpetuate their status.

In Estonia, things were different. The members of our Provisional Government were aware that their official position was indeed provisional. They were prepared to act until time was ripe for other solutions, proper for a democratic state.

And soon, the time was ripe. Perhaps sooner than anyone had dared to hope. When the Constituent Assembly was formed in May 1919, Estonia was provided with the first real government. Despite the war and all other uncertainties. The Republic of Estonia had taken the first opportunity to settle for democracy.

I wish to thank the Bank of Estonia who is steadfast in perpetuating the memory of individuals and events important for Estonian statehood, and bringing them into public vision.

Today, there are four busts here: Konstantin Päts, Jüri Vilms, Jaan Poska and Juhan Kukk. Three of them are the supporting pillars of Estonian statehood. Known to us all.

Therefore, for the sake of truth, I wish to recite the names of all the members of the Provisional Government. The fact that the Government was forced to go underground to hide from the German occupying powers already on the day after its formation does not deprive it of its historic role. They were the first.

In these names, we can hear the most genuine echo of the complex and eventful history of the Estonian people and Estonian state.

Here they are:

Konstantin Päts, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Internal Affairs. Later State Elder and President. The symbol of the silent, autocratic Estonia, whose role and activities are even today interpreted in very different light by different historians. Imprisoned and deported.

Jüri Vilms, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Minister of Courts. One of the most talented Estonian politicians, killed by the Germans in Finland in April 1918.

Jaan Poska, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Father of Estonian diplomacy and the architect of Tartu Peace Treaty.

Juhan Kukk, Minister of Finance and State Assets. Financier, later also State Elder. Died in imprisonment in Siberia in 1942.

Jaan Raamot, Minister of Food and Agriculture. Member of the Russian Duma, general leader of the Estonian Land Council.

Andres Larka, Minister of War. A man whose star was rising in the days of the War of Freedom and once again at the beginning of the 1930s. A man who was wiped out by the coup of 1934 and the silent era that followed, and who died in a prison camp in Siberia.

Villem Maasik, Minister of Work and Social Affairs. A trade union activist whose fate took a tragic turn in 1919, when he joined the adversaries of Estonian state and met his death at Irboska.

Ferdinand Peterson, Minister of Roads. A construction engineer and one of the organisers of the Estonian Land Reform – he lived to be 92 years old, although the last 35 years were spent in exile in the USA.

Peeter Põld, Minister of Education. One of the leading promoters of education in Estonia, founder and headmaster of the first Estonian language secondary school. One of the so-called founding fathers of the Estonian National University.

To resume my talk. Those men took upon themselves the responsibility to keep alive the pledge to the people of Estonia made the day before on the balcony of the Pärnu Theatre. We have occasion to remember them, and this exhibition provides a good opportunity to do that.