

Dear fellow celebrant, dear listener, friend,

In ten years' time, on Estonia's one hundredth anniversary, somebody else will be standing here and taking a look at the past. In ten years, our present and even our near future will belong to the immediate past. In February 2018, the Estonian President will look back upon something quite different from today. What that "something quite different" will be, is up to us.

We wish that in ten years' time there would be much more of what is already going well. And much less of what is not. It is up to us to accomplish that. Up to me, us, our neighbours, our mothers and fathers, our fellow countrymen. And us only, no one else.

This is why in this talk, in this speech of mine, I turn to you, dear Estonian citizen, neighbour, companion in thought and on the path of life. To you, and no one else. Not to Ministers, not to Excellencies or other dignitaries. I turn to you. Because today is our day of celebration, and this is our talk. Our dialogue. Our Fatherland Speech.

Throughout centuries, we have spoken in very different places, whenever we had the chance – from the battlefield of St. Matthew's Day to the Hall of the Estonian Writers' Union. We said as much as we could and dared, we said what we needed to say. In difficult times, we talked about our love of our country in our language, in our own words, among those we could trust. And they understood.

When we were trampled into the dirt, we held on to the notion that we did not belong there. We belong to quite a different place. Among the giants, as Betti Alver wrote, on a boulder, on a slab of stone there is a book of stone, where there is also a chapter called Estonia.

This is the title of our story. Is it only "written by care" as the poet saw it? No, not at all. We, all of us, are the numerators of our works and days, alone and together. Today is the day when it is appropriate to do it together. This is a miraculous time – we can speak of the love of our country with calm and confidence, with warmth and without pomp. Look at the past, find ourselves in the present, envision tomorrow.

Our country is doing quite well today. We are better off today than we were before. Estonian homes comprise more square metres than before, and lately, a few more children have been born to fill those square metres. We have work, we have bread on the table.

The Estonian state is stronger now, in its sovereignty and the daily work of securing this sovereignty. Estonia is greater in the world than it used to be, because as a nation, we have assumed respectable responsibility in the family of nations – as it was stated already in our Manifesto of Independence. The Estonian economy can withstand the turbulences of the global economy better than it used to.

Our success can be measured in grains and gallons, in cents and centimetres.

But this, dear friend and companion in thought, is not the matter I wanted to take up today – although this, too, is of paramount importance. I want to talk about things that cannot be

measured. I want to tell you how it feels to be an Estonian. I want to tell you how I feel looking at my country and its future. I want to talk about freedom. About listening to others, about our regard for others. I want to talk about the love we feel for our country.

We think about tomorrow when there is love, when there is safety. Only then can we concentrate on deeds that allow us, in ten years' time, to look back without remorse and say: that was well done, that was right, we have acted with foresight. Only then can we approach matters still quite new to us. Not the ones we identified already ten years ago but have been unable to solve.

Dear friend,

A 90-year-old country is a young country. But still a mature adult, not a teenager any longer. Therefore it is natural that a citizen's relationship with his country also assumes a different nature. The longing expressed by the mid 19th century Estonian poet Lydia Koidula for her homeland evolves into the expectations and patriotic movement of the artists' group *Noor-Eesti* (Young Estonia). The appeals to decide for a Yes or a No become decisions that form the base of action.

Our relation to our country has been romantic. Ardent, as real love usually is. Just as a happy love affair is concluded by marriage – where there is room for reason and responsibility and not just for feelings – also the Estonian citizen's relationship to this country must change. Just like a family in their thirties will change their life.

Today's thirty-year-olds have lived the greater part of their conscious life in a free Estonia. Their education is good, or excellent. At the present time, they are the ones possessing the ultimate creative force, which will determine the direction and goals of Estonia for the next ten years. The present thirty-year-olds bear a heavier burden of responsibility, but are also supported by a sounder, well-founded self-assurance. Unlike their parents, they consider it natural to publish a book of poems in English, in Cambridge. Or to defend a doctoral thesis at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Or to sell the software they have written on the global market, not specified by any toponym.

We no longer say: let the rope (that binds us to the manor) trail, because it is our manor now, and our rope too. The foundations of the future we built 20 years ago are stronger than ever before. Perhaps then, we ought to look at it with a different eye?

An eye that no longer sees self-realisation in a car, a house, or holidays abroad, but in something more permanent. An adult – a person or a country – starts thinking about lasting values. Not things that make an impression. Concentrating on lasting values will let us see and differentiate between the important and the not-so-important.

What is important is life, and its continuation: family and children. This is our greatest concern: to have families, to have enough children. Indeed, in the last few years more children have been born to Estonian families than ten years ago. The number of children born in Estonia is above the European average. We are doing better than the rest of the new EU member states. This

gives us hope. But no more than that.

A recent study conducted by the Tartu University Women's Clinic tells us why nearly half of the childless women over 35 have no family. Not because they have been bent on a career or forced to place work before children for economic reasons. No. Those women have not met a partner, a husband, a man with whom they would have wished or been able to have a child.

Why? There are no men. Quite literally. Every year, more than five hundred men between the ages 20-39 perish. Among the younger population, the mortality of men exceeds the mortality of women by four to five times. A major part of those deaths were avoidable - they were caused by an accident, an injury, or poisoning.

In the first seven years of this century, we have lost nearly four and a half thousand young men. This is almost equal to the personnel of the Estonian Defence Forces. Over four thousand families that never were. Nearly ten thousand children never born, because there were no fathers.

If we were able, in the next ten years, to decrease drastically the number of such – mostly preventable – deaths, the Estonian President in 2008 might be able to speak with pride of the growing population of Estonia. This, too, is a problem we must solve by ourselves, not leave it to a state policy or some institution.

Traffic on our roads is still taking a cruel toll in lives. Often, we can literally speak of murder. Children are murdered on zebra crossings, law-abiding families lose their lives. They are murdered by reckless, selfish drivers.

Let us banish, from today, this stupid passivity feeding upon an illusion – the absurd phrase „swerved into the oncoming lane”, often a harbinger of death. A vehicle does not swerve of its own accord. There is always someone at the wheel – someone vexed by an inferiority complex, who speeds into a blind curve to pass the vehicle ahead of him. Playing the Russian roulette with his life – and the lives of other, conscientious people.

Let us, then, put a stop to this kind of self-abuse and remember the principle: freedom always means responsibility.

Dear friend!

We are free. The freedom to choose our profession, our faith or agnosticism, is part of our lives. We are free to travel anywhere in Europe. Free to celebrate the birthday of our country, and just as free to abstain from celebration.

At this instance we are also aware that freedom is not a gift from above, it depends on the duty of each citizen, of you and me, to stand up for it and defend it. And to make demands, if it seems to us that the state is passive in defending our freedom. And to realise that if someone makes a mess that no one wants to clean up, we will all suffer. It is only in the children's cartoon Lotte's Inventors' Village - that the President can change things single-handedly.

Let us not confuse independence with freedom. The world is full of independent countries. Countries where people are free – free to speak, think, believe what they desire, as we have been for seventeen years now – are unfortunately much rarer.

We are free. Freedom makes us great. Also other countries who respect freedom are with us, in shared solidarity. They are with us as long as we respect the fundamental freedoms that make us Europeans. This is the source of Estonia's greatness.

I hope, dear listener, that if you are listening – or perhaps speaking here – in ten years' time, we will no longer be speaking of Estonia's size. Not just because we will be larger in numbers, but also because we will be greater in spirit. And that the reference to our small numbers will no longer sound as an excuse for us not having accomplished more, or done better.

In the heyday of Ancient Greece, four or five hundred years before Christ, when the foundations of western philosophy were laid in Athens; when the art of theatre, the first records of history, and the principles of democracy were born and the supporting pillars of European culture erected, the polis of Athens had only forty thousand citizens. This amount of people could and can amount to much excellent wit and innumerable clever ideas. They only need to have the will and the skills. And the ability to listen.

In order to be greater, in order to be able to measure us with ancient Greeks, who lived at an earlier time and were a smaller group, we must be open-minded and tolerant of new and unusual ideas and thoughts.

We must have the greatness of mind to give new, extravagant ideas plenty of air and space to sprout and grow here. Today, when we no longer need to worry about the survival of our culture or solve acute problems in order to cope on a daily basis, it is time we focused on discovering new ways of doing things.

We should use the assets our work has earned to make new and clever things, not try to do the same things all over again. Cheap labour does not bring wealth. That's the long and the short of it. If we look at successful countries, we can always see the private sector's large contribution to innovation, research, new ideas and solutions. This is also true about other areas of life. If we are looking for less providence from the state and lower tax rates, we need to work harder ourselves.

If we want to be great, we must despise everything that is mean, vulgar or brutal. Everything that taunts and hurts and causes harm. A hooligan plundering shops and an anonymous assailant on the Internet are driven by the same urge. They get their satisfaction and reward from ruining the work, the morale, and the good name of others.

I am convinced that every society that sets impediments to the spreading of free thought will end up in a garbage bin. This has been the case so far. And those who maintain this policy today will come to the same end. If the dissidents refrain from speech – it is easier to remain silent than to speak your mind and get a thrashing – no good comes of that. Nothing comes of

that but mediocrity, and of that in its turn – nothing at all.

This is a choice each of us must make. Is it the Estonia of Lennart Meri, Jaan Kross, David Vseviiov, Jaan Einasto and Marju Lauristin that we want? Or do we want the vicious, murky and shallow Estonia of the yellow press?

Dear friend!

The demanding world around us will pose several important questions to us in the coming decade. It would be impossible to list them all, so I will limit myself to the vital ones.

The first and most vital of those is energy. Or rather, the question whether we shall have the energy to develop a "smart" economy, and take our own decisions about what to do and how to do it. We know today what our energy demand will be in ten years' time. We know what Estonia's choices are. We do not yet know which of those choices is best for Estonia. Today's answers are not convincing, and neither is the level of dispute. They fail to convince me or you, and many more besides. We need solutions that are technologically feasible and at the same time ecologically acceptable.

And yet the choices have to be made. If we want to be the ones who make them.

There is a multitude of such questions. The increasing shortage of skilled labour; the small number of students in the field of natural sciences; the need to improve our life environment to bring back our children, our brothers and sisters who have moved abroad.

These matters need to be solved. They call for a lot more creative thinking than the issues we were facing on Estonia's previous jubilee anniversary ten years ago. The time of simple and self-evident issues addressing our primary necessities is over. As I mentioned before: today we are facing the problems of a more mature country – a more mature nation, a more mature human being.

I am inviting you to discuss and deliberate. I encourage you to be brave in both ideas and action. It was courage that brought us the Republic of Estonia, that brought us freedom twice. It is this very courage, initiative and joint action that will bring us a better, worthier life in the future.

Dear friend,

We are not living in illusions. This day is real. 90 years of the Republic of Estonia is a reality. This is our world – for us, the best of all possible worlds. It is not perfect, but free and full of opportunities. Our reality – that is the freedom to choose the right things, not the wrong ones. The greatest freedom – that is our chance to shoulder responsibility.

We can easily shrug off our responsibility, go to the seaside and try to catch a magic golden fish that would grant our wishes. But in ten years, we would be standing there empty-handed and hungry. No, it does not pay to try to catch the golden fish. Even if some people believe it is called Nokia in Finnish. Golden fish belong to fairy-tales, and the sea of life is full of real fish.

Bigger and smaller, but all of them real and waiting to be caught. Well, let us catch them.

Dear friend,

I know that your works and days are full of everyday cares. The care of your duties at work. The care of your children growing, of bringing them up. The care for the well-being of your family, your home. And the care for your country. Your country is yours, just like your home, because it truly belongs to you.

In the evenings, in a brief moment before sleep, often bored and tired, you sit and stare at the computer screen, a magazine, a newspaper or a book, and think: is this it? Is this the life of my dreams, the Estonia of my dreams? No – because no one can deprive us of our dreams except ourselves. Nothing is impossible until the opposite has been proved. It is true – because there is such abundance of things we can call our own!

What a satisfaction it is to know that your child is doing well. Not just at school, but also in the world. What a bliss it is to know that the language you wept in, with tens of thousands of others, hoping against hope, singing „My fatherland, you are my love” – that this is the language you can use to do your business in Europe – proudly, and as a matter of course.

Open your eyes and you can see that your family needs and appreciates you. Open your eyes and you will see that your work is important and recognised. Open your eyes and you will see, in the light of lengthening days, a glimmer of the blueberry-forests of the coming summer. Open your eyes and you will see that everything you do today will give you a better Estonia in the next ten years.

And still this is just the beginning. At the beginning, it is always right and proper to muse and whisper and cheer;

at the beginning, it is right and proper to extend a hand to your companion, the one seated by your side, and to say: Long Live Estonia!