

Dear fellow countrymen!

Ninety years ago, it was a cold and snowy winter day in Pärnu. Women wrapped in thick scarves, men wearing fur caps – that is what we can see on the old photograph of the people who had gathered here, at the Endla Society Building, to listen to the Manifesto of Independence.

In these faces we can see – with great clarity – an expression of anticipation, perhaps also anxiety and doubt. But the anticipation is predominant.

It is pleasant to think now, that it was the anticipation of their country's birth. Anticipation of being free as a nation.

Today, 90 years later, I invite you once again to read carefully the Manifesto of Independence that was read for the first time in the light of flaming torches from the balcony of the Endla Society Building by Hugo Kuusner, a member of the Estonian Land Council.

It is a very modern text, and relevant in a modern sense. A text that speaks of a civic state standing on the threshold of a hopeful future, a state of equal citizens. It speaks of the rule of law, as a contrast to the Russian Empire.

All citizens of the Republic of Estonia shall enjoy equal protection under the law and courts of justice of the Republic ... All ethnic minorities shall be guaranteed the right to their cultural autonomy... All civic freedoms shall be irrefutably effective within the territory of the Estonian Republic ... The Provisional Government will be charged with the immediate organization of the courts of justice to protect the security of the citizens ...

These are the principles that the Republic of Estonia shall always rest upon. These are the freedoms and rights that we have to provide today and tomorrow, every day. Not for a moment can we yield to the temptation to take an easy way out by waiving some freedom or right enlisted in the Manifesto of Independence.

We must preserve and protect this opportunity to live in a home where order and justice prevail.

Because essentially, the Manifesto of Independence proclaimed principles that can be summarised by a single word – democracy. Looking at the world next to us and farther away, we can see that not all peoples are enjoying democracy. We can see democracy abandoned, and we know what will happen next. This is a sad view, and threatening.

Restoring her independence 17 years ago, Estonia made her choice. The Republic of Estonia has remained true to the ideas of the Manifesto of Independence, which were for the first time pronounced here, on the balcony of the Endla Society Building.

Let us now, unveiling the monument to the proclamation of our country, acknowledge those statesmen 90 years ago who dared to dream of a democratic Estonia and had the strength and

the skills to make their dream a reality. Our duty is to take good care of our country.

Long live the independent democratic Republic of Estonia!