

Distinguished Mrs. President,
Doctor McAleese,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dia daoibh!
Tere õhtust!

Distinguished Mrs. President, I thank you for your kind words, and I thank the people of Ireland for the heart-warming reception you have given us. It is my sincere pleasure and honour to be on this historic visit to Ireland.

Although this is our first state visit to the Republic of Ireland, relations between our two countries go far back in time. A native of Limerick, Count George von Browne, played an important role in Estonia's history. In the 18th century, he was the Governor-General of Livonia, then a Province of the Tsarist Empire. Count von Browne, a son of Ireland, was well-known for his calm and gentlemanly demeanour. A true Enlightenment-era citizen of the world, Browne greatly improved the educational opportunities of the local peasants, and implemented reforms that later led to the freeing of the Estonian serfs.

Looking at more recent history, we are thankful that Ireland never recognised the illegal annexation of Estonia by the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

We will never forget John McEvoy, Estonia's honorary consul in Dublin from 1938 to 1960. Among other things, one of his good deeds was helping to protect the interests of the Estonian shipowners who had stayed here during the difficult years.

President McAleese, you have stated that we are the representatives of a privileged generation, whose national treasures have emerged out of the darkness and shine so brightly in the light of freedom, that it justifies all the sacrifices of the past.

We realise that, in the twisted byways of our history, justice and kindness have not always triumphed. But this is why we treasure these achievements all the more today. Relations between Estonia and Ireland have never been closer than now. And I mean that relations are not just good at a high political level, but also in the realm of culture and civil society—on a level that touches peoples' everyday lives.

Thus, we are united by the wonderful co-operation between Estonia's historic University of Tartu and your oldest university, Trinity College, as well as by a very successful partnership in educational exchange programmes. Irish folk musicians have performed at the folk music festival in Viljandi every year, just as Estonian folk musicians have helped to introduce their homeland at many an Irish festival. Our renowned composer Arvo Pärt has been warmly received in Ireland, and the works of Irish authors are some of the most popular productions in the Estonian theatre repertoire. I hope that this visit will also add strength and dynamic energy to our bilateral economic contacts.

Ireland was one of the first countries to open its labour market to Estonia when we first joined the European Union. This gesture held great symbolic significance for the people of our country.

Ireland truly is one of the most open nations in the whole world. Among donor states, Ireland is one of the most outstanding in terms of contributions per capita.

And your interactive information centre on O'Connell Street is a remarkable step towards increasing the general public's awareness and appreciation of the importance of international development aid.

Ireland's own development is impressive. Ireland is, justifiably, regarded as a country with one of the highest living standards, since you have successfully adopted the assets of modernisation, while still remaining true to yourself. Here in Dublin one can enjoy your pleasant Old Town, which you have preserved very well, and where it is possible to see "how the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening".

There are some words of wisdom that aptly characterise your economic growth: "the high tide lifts all boats." These words apply to Estonia as well. Over the last ten years, our GDP per capita has tripled. Estonia has the good fortune of being located in the Baltic Sea Region, which is one of the fastest developing regions in the world. All of this has made us a very optimistic nation in the European Union, which opinion polls have repeatedly demonstrated.

Our value to the European Union can be measured by our activities and what we contribute to Europe. Estonia and Ireland both help to increase the European Union's competitiveness with their openness. Our efforts are directed towards the establishment of the rule of law and the promotion of democracy, both in the European Union's neighbourhood, as well as further abroad.

To ensure peace and security, we are participating side-by-side in the EU's crisis management missions.

Irish peacekeepers are serving with distinction all over the world, solving very dangerous situations with courage and resolution. Estonian Defence Forces and Defence League personnel belong to the European Union's Nordic Battle Group along with Irish military personnel. We are helping to reinforce stability and welfare in the Balkan region by participating in peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Over the centuries, educated minds not only in Europe but over the whole world have been most significantly influenced by Irish literature—grandiose, brilliant, and poetic; based upon strong traditions and possessing captivating and inspiring images. And now, being here in Ireland, I can fully comprehend it all. I can see all the pictures that the words in those books have formed in my mind. As one of my favourite writers, William Butler Yeats, wrote, "We must laugh and we must sing/ we are blest by everything/ everything we look upon is blest."

Distinguished President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow my wife and I to wish your glorious country, Ireland, all the best—may it always

be the enchanting emerald of Europe.