

Your Majesty Queen Beatrix,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the House of the Brotherhood of Blackheads – a location that pays testimony to the richness of our common cultural history. In every ornament here you can discern the signature of the distinguished 16th century Dutch builder and sculptor, Arent Passer. This building has been a source of inspiration for the designs of many facades and reliefs that characterise Tallinn's Old Town.

Your Majesty, although your visit to Estonia has just begun, you have already left a lasting impression on all of our hearts.

As I greet all of you gathered here today, I am pleased to recall the long-standing ties between Estonia and the Netherlands, which go all the way back to the days of the Hanseatic League. Estonians have always thought of the Dutch as people who create and build and trade. Hundreds of years ago, the Netherlands and Estonia and Livonia worked together within the Hanseatic League; today, in a spirit continuing in the same tradition, we are building a united Europe together, free of borders and open to trade. Within the European Union we are among the proponents of a liberal economy and a competitive Europe.

We are also united by a desire to look beyond the horizon. Everyone knows of the great Dutch who named New Zealand, Tasmania, and Cape Horn. The day after tomorrow you'll visit Saaremaa, the home county of one of our many explorers, Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, who explored Alaska and Antarctica. And every sailor in Estonia knows that our maritime vocabulary ultimately derives from your own terminology. You could even say that every Estonian knows a little bit of the Dutch language, because what Estonian doesn't know the meaning of the words *kroonlühter* (chandelier) or *kammerkoor* (chamber choir), *raad* (town council) or *münt* (coin), *kaart* (chart) or *klooster* (cloister). Not to mention one of the best-known towers in Tallinn, *Kiek in de Kōk*.

But the Netherlands have a remarkable influence on modern-day Estonian culture as well. Some of the comically awkward and sometimes unexpectedly explosive characters in new Estonia cinema could have stepped straight out of an Alex van Warmerdam film. The future generation of Estonian graphic designers is studying at the best graphic design school in the world, the Gerrit Rietveld Academy. Neeme Järvi, as the lead conductor of the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague, and Daniel Reuss, as the lead conductor of a chamber choir in Tallinn, are two of the best ambassadors Holland and Estonia could hope for.

We are connected, however, by more than just the power of art and music. Today we are

bound, first and foremost, by our responsibility for tomorrow. The defence forces of Estonia and the Holland are ensuring security in the southern part of Afghanistan, while also helping to build up the region. Estonia genuinely appreciates our bilateral defence co-operation as well as the opportunities for engaging in joint military training.

Your role in consolidating European co-operation, and in protecting freedom and human rights across the globe, is invaluable. Sixty years ago in May, a unique event took place in The Hague that changed the course of European history – the European Congress – which led to the birth of the European Council and thereafter the European Community. Today The Hague is the legal capital of the world, a centre of the theory and practice of international law. This wondrous city makes an invaluable contribution to the promotion of peace and freedom all over the world.

I want to give my most heartfelt thanks to the Dutch people for the assistance that you gave us in the 1990s. You helped to develop Estonia through various joint projects, from legal co-operation to environmental protection. I'm especially grateful for the co-operation that has significantly improved Estonia's social environment, as well as for the efforts of the Estonia-Holland Charity Fund, which have given a boost to the development of philanthropy here in Estonia.

Vincent van Gogh once said, "Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together." This historic visit, Your Majesty, is a great and long-awaited occasion for Estonia. And I hope that the future will bring to our relations many more "small" possibilities that will then become great events.

I wish the people of the Netherlands happiness and success. I invite everyone to join me now in a toast: To the health of the Queen of the Netherlands, and to the honour of the Dutch people. May our co-operation flourish!