

Dear members of the Defence Forces and the Defence League,
dear fellow countrymen, good friends!

Today, 89 years ago, the army of the people of Estonia gained a victory in the Battle of Võnnu, helping to secure our independence and freedom. This victory allows us, the successors of those combatants, to proudly celebrate the 90th anniversary of our state this year.

The battles and activities of our forefathers as well as, more broadly speaking, the entire history of the independent Estonia puts before us the one and only question: "Where is freedom won and lost?"

We have to know and feel the answer to the first part of the question – "Where is freedom won?" – every day, at any moment: the victory of freedom is the victory of our will, our values and the victory of our love for our fatherland over the adversaries and enemies of freedom. If someone wants to take our freedom, we do not have time to think or argue in this critical moment.

There are many more answers to the question about losing freedom. In secure moments we can discuss them together. Allow me to do the same today.

Freedom is won by fighting for freedom – it is never awarded. Freedom may be lost by yielding to a stronger enemy, but also unnoticeably, in secret and without acting.

Every officer knows that a battle lost without resistance deprives one not only of freedom but also honour, and it brings humiliation. This takes the power from the people's spirit. Therefore, as a free state we have to pay an old debt of honour to the body of officers who have suffered due to repressions. The political and military leaders of the time did not give their officers the chance to fight and fall in a battle under our flag.

We do have a memorial church for fallen soldiers in Tori and war graves have been gradually restored. However, I find that one of the first duties of our Defence Forces and the Ministry of Defence is to preserve the memory of the repressed members of the Defence Forces.

Unlike our forefathers 89 years ago, the Estonian state and most of us do not have to stand up for our freedom on a battlefield, holding a gun, in an armoured train or trench. In the 21st century the battlefields of our freedom, our values and our democracy are at the same time thousands of kilometres from home and here in Estonia. The battle rages in our way of thinking and attitudes.

The present battlefield of our freedom does not have a clear line between our own battle and a battle alien to us. The fight for freedom and democracy means the fight for our values wherever we are needed and where we can make our contribution.

Dear people of Estonia,

It is unbearable to lose the best of our people. Our duty is to ensure that this unbearable pain

gives rise to fortitude and determination. The same determination that led us to victory in the War of Independence.

The smaller the nation, the larger the portion of the nation lost with each bearer of the language, culture and thought. Let us commemorate and remember Andres Nuiamägi, Arre Illenzeer, Kalle Torn, Jako Karuks and Ivar Brokk who fell for the security of Estonia and for a securer world in Iraq and Afghanistan as we commemorate and remember those who died in the War of Independence.

Let us support those we can support, the injured soldiers, and the families of those who have fallen. And let us support those mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, spouses and partners, sons and daughters whose loved ones are protecting our independence and freedom far from home today.

The Estonian Defence Forces do not participate in international military operations for the purpose of gaining more diverse training or proving their courage to someone. Estonian units generate security there. The security that we consume here in our cosy and secure Northern Europe. Our Defence Forces are as big as Estonia's allies.

Those who smirk at the seriousness of our alliance with NATO and oppose the principle of collective defence do not grasp the context of international relations, the powers of the world or the present Europe.

Article 5, which binds NATO states and nations, as well as other agreements mean one thing: Estonia keeps its promises, we fulfil everything that we have agreed on.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In our national epic the messenger bringing the first message of war announced that spies have stepped on Estonian soil.

In the present situation this refers to the existence of the battlefields of democracy in places that we have not thought of – for instance, cyberspace.

As you remember, following the events of last Year Estonia became the target of a cyber attack. As a state well-developed in information technology Estonia resisted it quite well.

Yet this attack as well as earlier and later cyber attacks against German, French and US state agencies showed that it is a long-term threat, which in the modern year may be as dangerous as a common war.

Let us imagine what could happen if in addition to state agencies, banks and newspapers these attacks focused on the state's energy and medical systems.

On Estonia's initiative and with active participation by our allies NATO has devised its cyber defence policy. This will bring NATO's new structural unit, the Cyber Defence Centre, to Estonia. Here, too, Estonia contributes to the increase of global security, cementing its position among the forefront of information technology states.

NATO has proven that it can react quickly and effectively. This showed that the word of a small state can have great weight among big allies. But this, my dear fellow countrymen, has its price as I just mentioned when speaking about our fallen ones.

When searching for an answer to the question of survival of freedom and other values that we hold dear we have to perceive the main battlefield inside us and in our immediate proximity.

How do we, free citizens of a democratic state, perceive and defend democratic values? And what do we do to fine-tune this perception so that it is set to react to each and every attempt to undermine the bases of our sovereignty?

Dear members of the Defence Forces and members of the Defence League,

Once again I would like to assure you that I trust your devotion and your skills. Your day-to-day work has filled my meetings with pride and gratitude.

When the leaders of foreign states or NATO have praised the courage and wisdom of the members of Estonian Defence Forces in complicated missions.

On the anniversary of the Republic, in Pärnu, when I proudly looked at the largest parade of the Defence Forces since the restoration of independence.

Whenever I meet with educated and capable officers and officials who know their field in depth and are able to associate it well with the world. And especially in Paldiski when I send another Estonian unit on a foreign mission. Convinced in my heart and hoping to meet them all again soon.

But serving the state, especially in the Defence Forces, does not mean allegiance solely to the state. This means allegiance to the rule of law and its democratic expression. Any deviations from and breaches of this principle, such as illegal surveillance and mindset control, cannot be tolerated or hushed up. This leads us to a secret path towards losing our freedom and voiceless surrender.

I am glad that the members of the present composition of the Riigikogu have approved the initiative to amend the national defence chapter of the Constitution so that it corresponds to the parliamentary state order. I hope that the members of the next composition of the Riigikogu will consolidate this amendment that cements civil control and clear management in the Estonian Constitution.

Last week an important gap in the legal space of Estonian national defence was filled when the Riigikogu adopted the Defence Forces Organisation Act. This unambiguously states that the Head of the Defence Forces reports to the Minister of Defence, which also contributes to strengthening civil control.

This autumn the calling of reservists to reserve training should become systematic as well.

Estonian national defence is based on the reservist army. But it does not matter whether the army consists of 16, 45 or 100 thousand men if they do not know what to do in a state of war and how to protect Estonia in the hour of need.

Over the year I have visited many units of the Defence League and met hundreds of inspired volunteers who want to contribute to the development of national defence. These meetings have strengthened my belief in the Estonian state and national defence.

Voluntarism is the power that states and people who do not understand the democratic organisation of society cannot perceive and therefore fear it.

Dear members of the Defence Forces,
dear people of Estonia,

Estonia has proven that it can recognise the location and character of the battles fought in the 21st century.

We know that we risk losing our freedom and independence when we lose our courage to fight for freedom in our values and in our world.

We know that we preserve our freedom by remaining on the side of freedom and democracy.

Happy Victory Day to you all!