

Dear friends.

Welcome once again to Kadriorg, this time to the temple of Estonian visual art.

Just like a year ago, I have invited you today because you are the architects of the restoration of Estonia's independence. Just as the people of Estonia have been the makers of our freedom and the builders of our home.

With your wisdom and skills, you refined the people's craving into a rational and feasible endeavour for freedom. You did it with all the eloquence that the artists and intellectuals have at their disposal – with songs and writings, by creating the civic society and proclaiming the historical truth.

Setting our resolve, intellect and ethics against brutal force and Realpolitik was in fact the essence of our endeavour for freedom.

That triumph of reason is by no means smaller than our triumph in the War of Freedom. Thank you for that!

Dear guests.

Exactly a year ago, at this very spot, I said looking you into the eyes that our freedom, our being part of Europe and our participation in world culture does not mean that we could take refuge in the narrow tower of our own personal worries, interests and pleasures. Our civic freedoms, and especially our artist's independence, must be defended every day, every moment.

In Estonia today, moreover – in the world today – I can explain in much closer detail what I meant with my appeal a year ago. To put it simply, and to express the expectations that your people, or rather, our people, your audience, are vesting in you: they expect courage, and the Estonian language.

Art and creation are the translators of our wishes and the reflection of our dark side. An artist – and I am using the word in the widest possible sense – is translating to us the language and the world that we cannot know but may divine. The courage of an artist and an intellectual is essentially the freedom to create that encompasses all: from the artist's honesty to the freedom of his environment, his country. It is the artist's task to fill that space of freedom with his works, his voice. To show its boundaries and its nature.

And yet, an artist should be just as skilful, just as loud in voicing his opinion when what he wishes to express has not been refined into the form of art. The artist's voice should still reverberate all over the country, all over the continent as Émile Zola's „J'accuse” or the plenary meeting of the Estonian Creative Artists' Unions 20 years ago.

With certain bewilderment I must admit that during this closing summer, we heard the voices of our cultural public calling loudly and in unison – addressing the issue of cultural funds and the

Cultural Endowment of Estonia.

The Estonian state has made quite an extraordinary arrangement and allocated part of the tax money, of which it is common for the state to dispose of, directly to culture and cultural workers. The decision was good and correct, but it cannot be seen as a self-evident privilege that is beyond criticism.

But this is not the cause of my bewilderment. My bewilderment was caused by the fact that the prolonged tragedy in Georgia was accompanied by a resounding and eloquent silence on behalf of the cultural public of Estonia ...

We have some few public-spirited intellectuals who have taken the trouble to explain what is happening. And still, our feelings have not been expressed in any form that would allow us to take a stand together: there have been no support concerts, no joint appeals from authors, etc.

I do not presume to dictate anyone what to think of the actual causes of the disaster in Georgia. My opinion, and the opinion of the Estonian state, is clear and well known.

But homelessness of citizens, violence, and deprivation of freedom – all this must be universal. Are those, as such, really alien, faraway incidents that fail to merit a response from our creative artists?

I do not believe it – yesterday, I saw the entire Song Festival Ground, crowded with people, resounding with their response!

From that silence, fortunately broken by last night's tremendous event, I come to my second wish – the Estonian language. Language in the broadest sense of the word, as the star-crossed poet Juhan Liiv once put it: "My political party is the Estonian language".

On the one hand, I would like to say like Viivi Luik that "without language, blood has little value". The richness of our existence is expressed in our language, in the Estonian-language art.

And yet, during our restored independence, we have expediently got used to Anglicisms like *d elete'ima, kopima, forward'ima, hängima, tšillima*, as well as to sending curt SMS messages. Our "service of words" – as Betti Alver put it – is diminishing. Its colourful nuances are fading.

I guess I need not ask where the treasures of our language, our thought, our spiritual wealth are. A brief glance around me will suffice.

Dear guests.

Finally, I would like to ask your attention for another brief moment, but not for myself.

We know that it was loyalty to the principles of freedom and democracy that made us free as a people and a nation.

Loyalty to our nature, or courage. And this is what I expect from the makers of this free nation also today and tomorrow.

Courage, and loyalty to one's nature, may also be manifest in a human life in a most miraculous way, making it a metaphor of the destiny of the nation. And this metaphor tells us that besides courage, we need a big heart.

Yes, dear Lagle, it is to you I wish to dedicate the last words of my speech. Loyalty to principles at the time when noncommittal "survival" was the easiest way brought you both severe ordeals and elevation.

Loyalty to our hard-won triumph brought you to the tough apprenticeship of building the nation when everything was still new and uncertain. Loyalty to the vibrant chime that is, that must be filling your heart, has finally and logically brought you to your present life.

To care about a nation and a people is to care about a human being, in a simple, practical sense. And this is what you have shown us with your miraculous life. Thank you for that.

Dear friends.

I wish you all, us all, a beautiful Independence Restoration Day. Long live Estonia!