

Dear Minister of Defence.

Dear Commander of the Defence Forces and members of the Defence Forces.

Dear Friends.

It is a great pleasure to participate in the inauguration of the second construction stage of the Kuperyanov Battalion. With this construction work, Estonia shows its commitment to national defence, to the soldiers and officers.

The total cost of the buildings delivered today is 240 million kroons. This is the largest national defence infrastructure project ever since the restoration of Estonia's independence. I wish to thank you all for your contribution that has made it possible for us to be here today.

Dear friends.

I am very glad to see that Estonia, both the state and the people, has always considered national defence important. The past weeks have poignantly demonstrated that we need a strong national defence. We are convinced that those who believed in the end of history and the beginning of a thousand years of peace in Europe were sadly mistaken.

Russia's aggression in Georgia changed our accustomed paradigm of security politics. The times when we believed in the definitive end of the Cold War as well as the passing of the great ideological opposition, are past.

Ever since late 1940s, international relations, security and defence politics and military planning have been based on the knowledge that the Soviet Union is an aggressive state. A force that may at any moment attack the West or any other spot in the world.

This presumption was well grounded. There were many examples to prove it so. Direct military interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. Massive military presence in Eastern Europe, the Cuba crisis. Direct or indirect participation in the wars in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Gorbachov's new policy enabled the satellite countries – Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania – escape the Soviet sphere of influence in 1989.

The diminished threat changed the priorities of the West. The West harboured a notion that although Russia is a country with certain growth difficulties, it is still only a question of time when it will become a France or a Great Britain – just another liberal, democratic nation with a market economy.

In the light of those hopes, miscalculations were made and blind eyes turned when things went terribly wrong. The West admitted that Russia might be up to anything in domestic politics, but would still balk from an armed attack on independent nations.

This illusion was cruelly busted on 8 August this year, when Russia attacked Georgia; Russia

is still occupying a considerable part of the territory of that independent nation. The lies and threats accompanying the aggression are a clear reminder of the era which many already believed to be history.

Dear friends.

This new security policy paradigm is setting new tasks to Estonia. We must contribute more and more to the national defence. I am glad to see that at the present time, which is not quite carefree economically, our Government has the statesmanship to increase the national defence expenditure.

The war in Georgia clearly proves that for a small state, it is extremely difficult to fight an aggressor tens and hundreds of times its own size. This demonstrates the importance of collective defence and Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. It is also obvious that in this new situation, it is necessary to review Article 5 and provide it with a more detailed content.

In military sense, NATO and Russia today are no longer equal adversaries as NATO and the Warsaw Pact were at the time of the Cold War. NATO today, as a whole, is many times stronger than Russia. But Russia is still mightier than several of its neighbours.

All this poses new tasks to our diplomats, defence officials and officers. Within NATO, a solution for neutralising the above security risk must be reached.

Let such decisions be left to military planners – whether the risks are to be abolished by drawing up detailed defence plans, increasing the presence of NATO, or applying all those measures. It is certain that the changed situation calls for serious discussion between NATO allies, as well as definite action.

As I mentioned before, we have gathered here today to celebrate the completion of Estonia's largest national defence infrastructure project so far. It is symbolic that, in a few years, the second construction stage of the Kuperyanov Battalion is going to lose that denomination to the construction of the runway of Ämari airfield. For Article 5 of the Northern Atlantic Treaty to function, we must be able to receive our allies in a speedy and efficient manner. And Ämari will play a major role here.

Finally. The changed world expects us to bear the responsibility of guaranteeing our national security. This also means that co-operation between the structures responsible for Estonia's security – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Forces and other structures – is to be beyond reproach. We have no moral right, nor the time or resources, for rivalry or duplication. What we need is stability, commitment, and placing national interests before personal and departmental gain.

We need to have faith in ourselves, and in Estonia's success. Just as Julius Kuperyanov and his brothers-in-arms did.