

Dear Krista Aru, Director of the Estonian National Museum,
Dear Rector of the University of Tartu, the Chairman of the Riigikogu, good friends!

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to congratulate the Estonian National Museum on its 100th anniversary, unfortunately not in its own building yet, but in the respectable assembly hall of our national university.

Nothing durable can emerge in an empty spot. The idea of having a museum of the Estonian people has been growing in the heads and activities of some of our best people for a long time.

This idea kept growing alongside our national self-awareness and the number of educated people and reached from the establishment of our own museum to the creation of our own state. The national and linguistic survival of the Estonian people has been a matter close to the hearts of our leaders.

Forty years before the creation of the Estonian National Museum, Jakob Hurt asked this very question here in Tartu, at the first Estonian Song Festival, and I quote: "How do we find a way to use this precious freedom in a really useful manner?"

This question reflected the concern of a young educated Estonian, almost 30 years old, about his country. He set three main tasks: Growing the feeling of togetherness in people, loyalty to our nation and developing education in the Estonian language.

Hurt spoke about the identity of Estonia and defining the national idea. He knew back then, just like we know almost 140 years later, that only people who are educated and love their country know how to use freedom wisely.

The Estonian National Museum grew from the wish to develop our national culture. This museum was founded by those who fought alongside Jakob Hurt to commemorate his life's work.

Establishment of the Estonian National Museum became one of the most outstanding nationwide projects of the national movement, just as building the Vanemuine and Estonia society buildings had been.

It also became a monument to the founders of the museum and on a wider scale to the self-awareness and independence of the Estonian people.

Collection of spiritual and material heritage led to the understanding that the culture of Estonia is old and valuable. Our self-awareness could stand on this wealth. Language and culture grew from indicators of social affiliation into the foundations of the Estonian identity.

The founders of the museum did not allow us to blend into the other nations. They established our very own museum and valued our unique heritage.

The founders of the museum did not want to record Estonia and Estonians as a sign of times

gone by, as an exhibit. Instead, they saw the museum's role as something that helps to understand the future of the nation.

They were helped by the understanding that Estonians only have a future as a cultural nation that keeps up with the times. They were right. Today, we all know that in a century the Estonian National Museum has become one of the strongest foundations of our independence from which people sought and found support even in the toughest times.

Similarly to the founders of the museum, we also have to see the role of the museum as something more than a reflector of things that happened in the past. Director of the Museum Krista Aru wrote in the last special issue of the Sirp newspaper that the museum must raise and resolve the problems faced by the state and people of Estonia and I agree with her.

A good museum is a source of creation of culture, a modern centre of research, a bridge between yesterday and tomorrow.

Thinking like this makes the following question really sound ridiculous: Should we build a building for the Estonian National Museum or not?

Decision-makers should not let themselves be led astray by the fact that the museum has been working in temporary or adapted premises for a hundred years. That this work has always been motivated by enthusiasm and a sense of mission rather than high salaries, comfortable premises and national acknowledgement.

The building of the Estonian National Museum is another debt of the Estonian state and people that needs to be paid for independence and survival. As soon as possible and as quickly as possible.

Until then, dear museum people: Hang on to this idea, be patient and consistent. And then your dreams, or really the dreams of all of us, will come true.

Thank you and congratulations!