

Ladies and gentlemen,
good friends!

We are living in an era of great change. The last year and a half has seen the wealth of the world diminished by trillions of dollars. Therefore, a considerable amount of kroons, amounting to several millions, has vanished from the record books of the Estonian economy.

Today, being less wealthy than yesterday, we spend and consume less. Saving and frugality have become an issue for everyone: the state, entrepreneurs, every family.

I love the idea that was expressed by Obama's Chief of Staff in January: "Never waste a good crisis." In other words, behind every crisis and problem are new opportunities.

We grow stronger when we overcome difficulties; we have the opportunity to turn a new page in the development of our country and companies by emerging from the recession. We, ourselves, have the opportunity to write a new chapter in our stories.

For this, we must change the way we think. We must break away from our comfort zone and phoney success rhetoric and instead make choices, which show that the hard times have taught us something.

Remarkable inventions have always been preceded by frustration, brought about by current solutions having exhausted themselves.

Estonia's economy needs encouraging messages and actions that give it new impetus. To move forward, we can only do so together, and climb the mountain, propelled by our joint effort. We must encourage those who have the guts to think, regenerate, and innovate.

Learning, new choices, and change all require knowledge and thinking, based on that knowledge. Better information and better knowledge will help people make better choices: in business, politics, and across the board.

We must help those who desire to learn and develop, as their new solutions and innovations will give birth to the new knowledge we require for development and a changing Estonia.

Innovation or innovative solutions are not just born out of merely good will or magic words, skilfully assembled. Innovation is neither magic nor witchcraft but a symbiosis, derived from practical pre-requisites.

The state of Estonia has the necessary resources and assets that are required to provide these pre-requisites today.

Ingenuity and courage need to be supported – a fortiori because the loan sources, which have funded previous growth, have dried up. Therefore, I am satisfied that the investment of one billion Estonian kroons, the largest to date by the state to facilitate entrepreneurship, will be channelled into development centres right now.

The development centres we are supporting today represent the best platform for co-operation between education and business. It is not important whether it will be nano or food processing technology, software development or infertility diagnostics; the co-operation will be beneficial for both the researchers, who focus on the real problems faced by enterprises, and the entrepreneurs, who will launch new products to meet our new demands.

Today, we know that the bigger the number of smart entrepreneurs who assemble together the more attractive this place will become for other people with similar ways of thinking. Innovative entrepreneurs will converge on places where the development of technology is supported, where creativity is valued, and where the focus is on the individual and his/her quality of life rather than ideology.

Innovation is not just an issue that concerns investment and a favourable taxation environment, but is, above all, an issue concerning the culture and living environment. This is what has made the Silicon Valley, Tokyo, San Francisco, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Houston, Seattle, and also Haifa, Stuttgart, Munich, and Stockholm a success.

I can see no obstacles why Estonia couldn't, wouldn't, or mustn't grow, if supported by ambitious programmes, to become the gravitational centre of European innovation. Our weaknesses during the crisis – openness to the world outside and its draughts and our smallness – will become strengths within the new context. We can amplify these strengths by pursuing politics wisely and demonstrating a prudent attitude towards our home country.

Right now, the Estonian economy needs positive messages and I am glad that these hundred enterprises we are acknowledging today can now start to implement some big deeds.

Lao Zi, a Chinese philosopher, once said that a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. I do believe that one of the first steps of our journey to success will be taken today.

I look forward to hearing messages of your success soon! Thank you!