

Dear Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Friends from Hungary and Estonia!

When the Estonian Ambassador Karl Tofer presented his credentials in Budapest in 1928, he gave the following account: „The warm and cordial welcome I received from both the official and unofficial Hungary shows that here in Hungary, the Estonian Ambassador is *persona gratissima* .“ Eighty years later, as Estonian Head of State, I am aware of the same warmth and cordiality, by no means diminished by passing decades.

Notwithstanding the ambitions of bigger and more powerful neighbours, the path between our two nations, although a bit overgrown for a while, was never completely obliterated, because we are of the same blood – *veri* in Estonian, *ver* in Hungarian.

History knows dozens and hundreds of contact points between the two peoples – Magyars and Estonians. Allow me tonight to highlight two events from our more recent past, still vivid in the memory of both our nations. In Hungary, this August there was a widespread celebration of the Pan-European Picnic and the resolution to open the borders of Austria to East Germans. In Estonia, we were at the same time reminiscing the Baltic Chain – 20 years ago, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians linked hands in order to jointly protest the historical injustice of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and the imperialist hegemony of the Soviet Union. These events actuated the development that eventually led to the advent of a fresh dawn in Eastern Europe and the democratic union of Europe.

Imre Kertesz, laureate of the Nobel Prize in literature, has described the grievous experience of „reclaiming his life from History“ in deeply tragic personal aspect. Our two countries have undergone a similar revival. Despite the ordeals of the past – or perhaps as a result of those very ordeals – we have never failed to believe in our future or work for a better tomorrow.

A similar striving towards common goals characterises the relations of Estonia and Hungary as partners in the European Union and NATO. Unanimity in several EU policy issues, such as enlargement, the East Partnership and the Lisbon Strategy, is a further incentive to our joint actions.

Mr. President,

Allow me to wish Hungary every success in preparation for your first EU presidency, now advancing rapidly. Although there is some time left before 2011, Hungary is already demonstrating considerable involvement in setting Presidency goals and suggesting new ideas, such as the Danube Strategy. The efforts of Estonia and Hungary in initiating and implementing the European Union’s macroregional initiatives, including the Baltic Sea Strategy and the Danube Strategy, show the wish of both our countries to put our shared freedoms into maximum use. The lessons that we both have learned from history make this attitude imperative. For the same reason, we both support the widening of the sphere of democracy and freedoms to peoples and countries that are keeping this course and maturing towards it.

As allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, we participate in the missions reinforcing our common security. For this purpose, we have joined forces on the mission in Afghanistan, and are also participating in NATO's Strategic Air Transport Initiative, which has one of its key sites – the home base of the C-17 transport planes – in Hungary, near Papa, as of this summer. I am truly pleased that participate together in this initiative that is of paramount importance to Hungary, Estonia, and the entire NATO, and that we also share the costs necessary for the success of that enterprise. This is an example of co-operation possible only in a closely united family.

And still, integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures has not only furthered our political and defence co-operation, but also fortified our linguistic and cultural sovereignty more than ever before. Our position in the 21st century Europe enables us to support other Finno-Ugric peoples elsewhere, especially in the Russian Federation, in their efforts of preserving their identity.

In Hungary, Collegium Fenno-Ugricum has been founded to support the language and culture of Finno-Ugric peoples, and in Estonia there is the NPO Fenno-Ugria, as well as the Kindred Peoples Programme, which has enabled nearly fifty students of Finno-Ugric origins to study in Estonian universities this year.

Considering the intense linguistic and cultural relations between Estonia and Hungary, dating back as far as to the middle of the 19th century, it is commendable that also political relations have acquired the same momentum.

It has become a laudable tradition that the Presidents of both countries at least once during their Presidency find their way to their kin nation in the festive attire of a state visit, bringing a prominent delegation.

Mr. President Sólyom, I wish you success and happiness on behalf of the Republic of Estonia, as well as everyone present here today, including myself.