

Honourable President of the Riigikogu,  
Members of the Riigikogu,  
Honourable Mr. Prime Minister and members of the cabinet,  
ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

Repetition may be the mother of learning, but sometimes repeating yourself is the best way to wear out your welcome. Thus I will not repeat my opinion about adopting legislation in package form, deficient legislation, deliberate flouting of the Constitution and bending laws to serve business interests. I will only reaffirm that my opinion on these matters remains the same.

Today let us focus on the future.

Dear members of the Riigikogu and the cabinet of ministers.

A year and a half ago in Jõhvi, I indicated that I would evaluate the work of government and parliament on the basis of whether Estonia succeeds in complying with the Maastricht criteria necessary for the changeover to the euro; whether Estonia becomes a member of the Eurozone in the beginning of 2011. This was the bar we had to clear to show others and ourselves whether we had done enough, and whether we did it at the right time.

Today I thank the members of the Riigikogu and acknowledge your effort. The objective has been achieved.

We cleared the bar. I praise the government's resolve and unanimity, because I know that it is not easy either politically or emotionally to keep budget deficits in check and introduce cuts during a recession, while remaining accountable to the people.

I acknowledge the sense of responsibility displayed by all of the factions in the Riigikogu, and especially by the MPs in the opposition. This spared Estonia from pointless internal strife on topics lie beyond party politics, in the realm of national policy.

I hope that, as the crisis eases, all parties and all voters will be able to start dealing in depth with the causes of the crisis – the ones that are Estonia's to control. Only in this manner can we avoid or lessen the impact of harsh future setbacks. As we know, the scope of the downturn, the shrivelling of our tax receipts, rise in unemployment and the consumer credit crunch were all to some extent hard-coded into the very being of our boom-era economic, financial, educational and social policy.

Honourable Riigikogu.

Estonia's changeover to the euro marks the beginning of an entirely new stage in Estonian domestic and foreign policy. We have arrived at our destination. Estonia's nearly 20-year-long journey back to Europe's fold has, at least in the formal and institutional sense, ended. Stated in the simplest terms, Estonia's transition period is over, and the pretexts and excuses which we sought from our difficult past are no longer acceptable.

From now on, no one else will set rules or objectives for us. We fulfil our promises and obligations to our allies and partners. As co-decision-makers we express our common goals.

Expressing our aims and setting new hurdles is for the most part ours to do. Who do we want to be as a society and a state? Who should we be, what to aspire to? What is our ideal? And the most important thing – will the new phase in our development phase require changes in how we think and act?

During the election campaign about to get under way, the Estonian people, together with political parties, will have to consider whether the implements of our rebuilding process – a good eye, spade and shovel – will be adequate for what lies ahead. Or would it be wiser to take up precision measurement instruments and polishing tools – if just for the sake of making more efficient use of material?

Certainly we must agree that no country or people's long-term welfare is served by a roller-coaster ride between peaks and valleys. Life is not a juvenile athletic competition. No normal country really wants the title of champion in budgetary cuts, for instance.

By the same token, a mature society and its political leadership does not see unemployment as a statistical curve that moves up and down, but rather as a tragedy that affects every man and woman laid off during the recession and their families. A roof blown off by a violent thunderstorm should not always set off a search for the culprit. The human dimension of a damaged building is a family sitting in the rain, and it is their plight that must be addressed first. The thing that will lead Estonia forward from now on is the ability to hear the half-tones, to translate decisions on the macro level into impacts on the micro level.

Ladies and gentlemen.

I call on parliament to vigorously fulfil its duty as champion and conscience of social processes. I acknowledge the Riigikogu for its public discussion on the human development report and issues such as unemployment that affect all of society. None of Estonia's social problems can be solved with one simple decision or turn of phrase. No solution will ever be seen by everyone as the right one.

In a country that has reached adulthood, the effectiveness of parliament is not measured by the number of words enshrined in legislation. The primary task of the representative body will remain passing legislation and calibrating existing laws. Yet the professionalism of the Riigikogu is demonstrated by the willingness of its members to discuss general problems facing society, to look for solutions and to negotiate. To go forward, Estonia needs thorough, public and forthright discussion, in which every citizen can recognize his or her own positions.

The second important role of the Riigikogu is supervisory. The closer we are to the 1st of January, the greater the fear of rising prices. At least in part, these fears are justified, as we should not underestimate the desire on the part of merchants to hide their hunger for profit behind the banknotes.. But neither it is not possible to remain ambivalent if politicians deliberately embark on sowing fear of a potential price rise.

And thus I encourage the people's representatives, and in particular consumer protection and civil society, to act as mature citizens of a mature country. There can be no cooperation with extortionists.

There can be no buying their goods and services. And no voting for fear mongers on election day.

Ladies and gentlemen!

The preamble to the Constitution says, poetically and powerfully: "The (Estonian state) ... shall protect internal and external peace, and is a pledge to present and future generations for their social progress and welfare."

I call on all political forces to focus on society in this new stage of our development. The Constitution obliges us to make Estonia a strong bastion for Estonian language and culture, a safe and tolerant place, a good place to live.

I am not thinking only the state and its institutions. Estonia is enriched by great formats for volunteer work -- such as the Defence League, community and village movements, and folk culture organizations. We have to support them more than we have. We should be much quicker to involve them in achieving our common goals.

The concerns that arose while we were on the way to Europe will require an additional generation of attention. It is hard to provide rapid assistance to fellow citizens if their unemployment or exclusion was caused by poor education and learned helplessness. This is especially so if instead of aid, lies are dangled before these people; if those in need are reduced to the standing of beggars for alms; if their problems become grist for the mill of a populist politician.

The Estonian people is small in number, and the destiny of no one should be written off. One of the complicated questions we face is how to reduce the number of those who feel that they lost out during the transition period. Words like "administrative reform" and "educational reform" are

not good enough. Estonia is not tired of reforms and changes, as it is sometimes claimed. What Estonia is tired of is an approach where triumph of rationalism and common benefits are subsumed by a brand of resistance that is based on emotional arguments and loserism.

Estonia continues to require administrative reforms and substantive restructuring in the educational landscape.

What we do not need are big words and foolish experiments, which will only serve to diminish the state's credibility.

Honourable Riigikogu.

The most important job ahead of you is the 2011 budget and negotiations with the people regarding the country's agenda for the next four years. I join you in rejoicing over the fact that the worst part of the downturn appears to be behind us. Let us hope for the best, yet remain prepared for the possibility that the crisis will not vanish entirely from our economy, which is dependent on international markets. This is why it is extremely important that next year's budget be characterized by prudence rather than optimism. Let the budget be your legacy to the new Riigikogu, which will convene here in March, and to the new government that will take office thereafter. Let it be a signal that we need a sense of responsibility in the future as well, next year and in the decades to come.

A few words about the Constitution. The Constitution is not merely a legal text. It is the basic contract that keeps society cohesive. The Estonian people adopted the Constitution in 1992 at referendum and added an amendment to it in 2003 for European accession. Thus far the Constitution has kept Estonia on the right path.

Have we now reached a situation where the people need a completely new covenant to continue moving forward, a new Constitution? I do not sense such a need right now, nor do I detect any such urgent desire from the Estonian citizenry.

The academic discussion about the meaning and interpretation of and need for amending the

Constitution is as old as the Constitution itself. It is a discussion that is undoubtedly necessary. And it is possible that at some point, a new national basic document will come into existence, stating the aims of the state and the people and ways of achieving those aims. But ladies and gentlemen, a Constitution is no longer a basic law if it is amended on a whim, or due to a need that may not be there tomorrow. Every article of the Constitution must be approved by consensus. Only then will it serve the welfare of the present and future generations.

This is all the more so considering that we have many more urgent questions to which we should be looking for answers in the coming election campaign.

Elections. Yes, the election season and debate has already started. Both politicians and various interest groups are both tabling ideas on how to make life in Estonia better.

A “manifesto” unveiled by the employers a few weeks ago has been much talked about. Speaking as a citizen, I do not share many of the positions in that document, as they simply are not compatible with reality in a functional, open, post-transition European society.

But I do not like to see proponents of any ideas denounced by their opponents. Estonia needs an exchange of ideas and constructive debate. Criticism is not enough if no alternatives and competing ideas are proposed. Let us not aspire to a hypocritical, pedantically political correct society where we say one thing to curry favour while thinking something else. We do not have a surplus of ideas and viewpoints – we have too few of them.

Thus people should be encouraged to dispute and discuss; they should not be driven away from the public forum. The result of an attack aimed at the participants in a public discussion is that economic and ethical interests will be pushed through covertly.

If we are to move on to a substantive discussion, everyone who cares about Estonia must step up, boldly and without fear of humiliation, right alongside the political parties, and express their ideas and wishes. Only in this manner will we find a new viewpoint for visualizing our problems and assessing what we have achieved so far. Only in this way will the decisions taken by the Riigikogu here benefit everyone and everything that goes by the common name of Estonia.

Dear members of the Riigikogu.

This is the opening session of the last parliamentary season of the 11th Riigikogu. In slightly less than six months, the citizens of the Republic of Estonia will pass judgment on your work. They will decide whom to sign to a new four-year contract and which contracts not to extend. I would like to impress on you the idea that the proximity of elections does not place a moratorium on the Constitution. Just because elections are around the corner, your responsibility for forthcoming decisions does not diminish. I sincerely wish you productive, efficacious work, responsibility and success.

The Riigikogu is capable of rising to the occasion, as we have repeatedly seen both this year and in the past. Jõudu tööle. Thank you.