

Good people of Estonia.

Today, we look back over the past year as it comes to an end and all weigh up its positives and negatives in our own minds; and we will all come to our own conclusions. In the end, I sincerely hope that our shared joys and successes will outweigh any adversities. Therefore, on the whole we may describe the year that has been as one to remember, rather than one to forget.

Last year, at this time, I said that a shaft of light shines beyond skies that are darkened by troubles; we can sense that the downturn in our economy and our prosperity is about to end and our recuperation is about to begin. This is how it is. And we should not feel ashamed. The crisis did not evolve into a catastrophe because when things became difficult – and even before the lean times began – we mostly took the right steps.

However, many of us have yet to find work even under these improving economic conditions. The year, which we are about to welcome in, will not necessarily bring relief to everyone in this regard. But it is our shared responsibility to avoid making unemployment a career and isolation a lifestyle.

We must have both the will and ability to ask for help and to give it. But, above all, we must have the will to emerge from this difficult situation. To learn again and to lead. To stand up and start again.

Estonian entrepreneurs and employees must look for business and employment from spheres that are yet to exist, in which products and services are not yet available. This may sound impossible. However, it is through such pursuits – and such pursuits only – that mankind, Estonia included, enjoys its success today. Such pursuits can only be conducted through school and education.

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During the credit crunch, we have found comfort in realising that the basic truths we have presumed and known about ourselves are still valid. That the only credible measure, in good times or bad, is to be in charge of our country and our actions, not mere objects subject to circumstances.

Secondly, tough times allow us to calmly reflect on how we manage our country and measure our progress. Twenty years have already passed since Estonia restored its independence. We have changed our lives considerably – all by ourselves. We are now better educated and more prosperous. We are aware of our strengths and realise our weaknesses. All of this knowledge must now be used to establish new goals.

It always puzzles me when I hear someone moan that Estonia no longer has a common goal for which to strive. And we can also observe this attitude from certain quarters in Estonia. We should not cling to the dogmas of the past and believe that the solutions we once found will continue to work forever.

And we must consider of all this – my dear fellow countrymen – on 6th March, when the political parties and independent candidates who are running for Parliament offer us the alternatives to be faced in the coming years. What are we going to do? How are we going to do it? And – most importantly – what do we want?

Here, the people, as the highest adjudicators, must decide what is permitted in politics and what is not. Democracy is not for sale. Respect cannot be bought. This must be ruled out completely, if we want to remain in control of our own country.

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This time, the beginning of the New Year is different. In a few seconds, the euro will become the currency in Estonia – the currency that is used by most European countries.

In a moment, Tallinn will receive the title of Cultural Capital of Europe. I do hope that we will use this opportunity to become more cultural and European, within ourselves. That we will realise how culture is supporting us, not vice versa. That our top orchestras and conductors and writers and museums and more are invaluable. Without them there would be no Estonia, but rather something completely different.

Dear fellow countrymen.

Our ancestors have left their footprints on this country through several thousands of years. People have left this country and returned; there have been times when the footsteps made by Estonians were rare and reticent.

Today, we can say with full confidence that we are on our way. We are on our way towards the future; Estonia is on its way towards the future! Let us support each other, as we walk this way together. Let us have love, understanding, and caring for our fellow travellers on this journey.

A happy tomorrow! A happy New Year!

Long live Estonia!