

Distinguished top graduates,
ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

Last Friday my Lithuanian counterpart and I made a completely unscheduled stop at the University of Tartu commencement ceremony.

During my term in office, I have been to the University's auditorium several dozen times for various functions.

But this was a special visit. Not because I was there with my guest from Lithuania. The hallowed halls of the University building have been graced before by high officials on state visits, with or without me.

This time there was a special energy in the air. You could sense a message being sent out, to everyone in attendance, to the world:

“Here we are, here we come! We're coming now, and we bring the energy and idealism of youth.”

I hope this idealism and expectation, the optimism, which I sense in the air here as well, will not be blunted against the grey wall of apathy, despair and cynicism.

I hope that youthful confidence will not dissipate upon encountering the proverbial signs that sometimes seem to be everywhere: “it's done”, “no vacancies”, “no access”.

Dear friends,

Each generation creates its own place to live, its own Estonia.

The men and women two generations ahead of you laid the preparations for freedom to return.

The generation that came directly before yours built the Estonian state up again.

Your job will be to make Estonia an open and tolerant place, a place that rewards intellectual curiosity and the quest for knowledge.

Your duty is also to try to understand the fatigue and a certain jadedness that affects your predecessors.

Remember that in a few scant decades they have had to restore statehood, and discover the world. They have had to comply with hundreds of criteria set for Estonia at the expense of frequent belt-tightening. They have had to suffer all of the inevitable childhood illnesses that a young society goes through, and to learn from their own mistakes, not those of others.

They have simultaneously built homes, raised children and provided for their parents. In doing so, they have constantly had to alter their plans and adapt to often quite radical changes in nearly all walks of life.

And, as you know, sociologists call them a generation of winners.

The reason being that they reached adulthood, and graduated from secondary school and university just as the old regime was being replaced with the new government. At a time when many things had to be started from scratch with completely new people. When successful

businesses were started.

Their triumph is considered the fact that their generation, which left the nest several decades ago, has conquered the summit of society's pyramid and many have no intention of abandoning it, at least not in the next generation.

I do not deny the logic in this line of reasoning or the fact that it makes the situation of newcomers – your situation – truly challenging.

But, ladies and gentlemen, if you think about it carefully or consider it from another angle, *you* are actually the winners.

Both as people and tomorrow's top performers, you are free in the truest, most complete meaning of the word.

You are free to make your own choices for the future. You are free to stay, or to go and come back later.

And you are free to be amazed over it all, at why things are the way they are in Estonia and not different in some way.

You have to ask the hard questions and to be dissatisfied if you are offered easy answers or primitive, outdated solutions.

You cannot -- you must not -- be satisfied with the answer "because that is the way it has always been", or that there is someone with the truth and the solution.

Your duty is to come up with and express an alternative, and ask yourselves what your Estonia

and your world is. You must point the way to fresh, different solutions for people whose own Estonia has become too much to bear, for people who are tired, apathetic or cynical.

Your task is to set higher expectations regarding yourselves and others. That is what Estonia badly needs.

You will be the ones responsible for crafting an Estonia that is appealing, tolerant and friendly, a country where people consider it an honour and privilege to live and work.

I wish you fortitude and energy for working toward this goal. And thank you for what you have done and accomplished so far. Don't forget that it is just the beginning.

Thank you.