

Respected Speaker of the *Riigikogu*,
dear members of the *Riigikogu* and the Government,
my ladies and gentlemen.

Today, I am giving the last speech of my current term in office to the *Riigikogu*. On the one hand, five years is a short period in the life of a state. On the other hand, this time represents more than a quarter of the 19 years since the restoration of constitutional order. It would be naive to assume that many changes have not taken place, the activities of the *Riigikogu* included. Quite often, we probably do not even sense the depth and nature of such changes.

We tend – and this has become more notable recently – to primarily see the development of a country in terms of economic rises and falls. Changes that are smaller yet more important in the long-term often fail to receive appropriate recognition. However, I have had the pleasure of noticing many discussions, such as those held in the European Union Affairs Committee, becoming more and more substantial, bit by bit, and beginning to reach the level that we see in Finland, Sweden and Denmark.

The questions that the 12th *Riigikogu* must face are very much different now. We no longer have to fulfil requirements that have been established by someone else. However, we also cannot use external requirements as an excuse in cases where we have neglected an issue that is of importance for Estonia. The number of questions that directly fall within the competence of a parliament of a responsible, democratic state based on the rule of law is quite large. Now that we have put twenty years of our grand re-entrance and integration with Europe behind us – and have become a normal European country – it is appropriate to apply this understanding to the work of the parliament.

Respected *Riigikogu*.

We still have to put the economic problems behind us. Confusion is affecting clarity in both

Europe and Estonia. We have been able to maintain the balance between expenditures and revenues; we have done what we have had to do and what many others have either not wanted or been unable to do. But whether doing the right things is enough, as we consider the general European context, is today beyond the knowledge of any economic expert. The general macro-economic situation is quite good in Estonia at present and for that, both the Estonian parliament and government deserve some credit. But we all know that we do not live in isolation.

As we look at the everyday subsistence level of people, the picture we see is much more diversified. I am concerned about both those who have been unemployed for a long time and families whose earnings have considerably dropped due to wage cuts and price increases. The headlines telling us that 16 per cent of children suffer from regular hunger are misleading; however, this may easily become another 'evil constant'. We should still ask: have all the children going to school eaten a proper meal? Those who know the best are teachers in kindergartens and schools. We can talk to them about the condition of children in Estonia.

Therefore, I invite you, dear members of the *Riigikogu*, to ask questions, be concerned and interested and by doing this, establish yourselves, even more, as people who are shaping life in Estonia. Do this with the utmost responsibility and openness. Do not forget for a moment that resolutions in governance and social matters are adopted by the

Riigikogu

– the representative office elected directly by the people – and by nobody else.

We need substantial discussions in both the meeting hall of the *Riigikogu* and in committees, discussions that focus on the problems and interests of the Estonian people with a cross-section of our society present around the table. Therefore, the entire population should speak up – using the mouths of their representatives – in this hall.

According to the Constitution, a member of the *Riigikogu* is not linked to his/her mandate. This does not only give one the right to contradict and question the decision of your political party. It also means that each member has the courage to ask the minister of your political party, in public, why he/she has submitted a specific proposal, and not a different one, to parliament. You need the courage to ask whether the law that has been sent to parliament is necessary in the first place, or was it simply drafted just to fulfil some sort of a working plan.

A law can never be an objective in itself. Changes in Estonian society must be the objective; a

law must make all of our lives better. A law is just a tool to achieve the desired changes. This is why you could, in the future, reject the draft laws that only attempt to organise, beautify, add or subtract. We have not yet reached a level at which we have nothing to do but polish cutlery. Legislative drafting of this kind is just an expensive aside, nothing else.

Today, I want to invite you, dear members of the *Riigikogu*, to assert yourself with full responsibility as people who are shaping Estonian life and the welfare of the people living here. The people have given you a direct mandate for this – and for this only.

My ladies and gentlemen.

I find myself in a difficult position as President, when you bring laws for the amendment of different laws to Kadriorg as a package deal. If a single amendment is in conflict with the Constitution, the President can, as we know, only reject the cluster of amendments as a complete package. And this means that the legal provisions that are in line with the Constitution are also not adopted. It is not appropriate to process law amendments that serve a different purpose as a common cluster. I ask you to take the time to discuss different spheres separately.

I also ask you, respected members of the *Riigikogu*, to allot a reasonable period of time between the adoption and enforcement of any law. If you really want to make a positive impact in people's lives, you must also give some time for people to learn the law, accept it and get ready to enforce this law. The allegation so often used to justify the rush – some directives need to be adopted by a specific date – is usually an untruth.

Sufficient time is always given for the adoption of the European Union directives, so that even the slowest countries will manage. And if our own Government or the parliament has been slow or unobservant and missed a date, should the people really suffer the consequences?

This gives the impression that completely different issues are linked to the directives to avoid the parliamentary discussion of some other important issue by using the threat of fines that the European Union may impose. A situation in which a draft law arrives at the *Riigikogu* today, is adopted tomorrow and will become effective the day after is absolutely unwarranted in a state based on the rule of law. Every time you push the voting button you influence the fate of people. This will affect the social success and general advantage of present and future generations, as

is stated in the Constitution.

Those people have the right to know about the changes they are about to encounter and express their opinion on this matter. Now, in a mature state, we have the time to do that. This means that every new law must be discussed with the representatives of civic society. The *Riigikogu*, and not the government, is responsible for laws. And every member of the *Riigikogu* is responsible for the decisions that he/she takes. Each member of the *Riigikogu* must be capable of explaining and justifying the adopted laws.

Respected peoples' representatives.

I think that if we get tangled in the old patterns or patterns that duplicate the worst examples in Europe, parliament will reduce itself to a machine instead of becoming a representative body of people. We have the opportunity to belong among the best in Europe instead of saying 'this is what others also do'. Let us imagine what would have happened if Estonia had used the code of conduct of others as justification in solving financial problems.

The parliament must be the place where the matters of Estonian life, Europe's future and global issues are discussed honestly and freely, according to your mandate. Each delegate must keep asking: has one or other law that has previously been adopted in this hall really worked, and has it changed Estonian life for the better? If not, the law must be amended or repealed altogether. Our Constitution says that the government organises the implementation of laws. And the Constitution also provides that the *Riigikogu* supervises the work of the government.

I also wish to achieve a situation in which laws that serve the main purpose of promoting some specific business will no longer be adopted in this hall. Such behaviour has a name – it is called corruption. We have every right to be proud of the Estonian business environment, which is much more liberal and fairer than in many other developed countries; however, we would be naive to believe that special interests are not looking for solutions that are 'mutually beneficial' – in our political parties, parliament and the government. Such attempts must be recognised and any offers rejected.

Predicting the effect of laws and the evaluation of their consequences needs time. And from now on, you must take this time – every time.

Respected members of the *Riigikogu*,

I believe that you all agree with me when I say that the relationship between a state and local power and the mutual organisation of work, distribution of tasks and the amount of money made available for the fulfilment of duties are loaded with questions and conflicts.

The revenues of towns and rural municipalities have been cut, through the proposal of government and at the approval of the parliament – this is a fact. However, the Supreme Court has, by its ruling, demanded the determination of the tasks of the state and local governments and the calculation and allocation of expenses that are required for their fulfilment. I do repeat: there is a ruling by the Supreme Court. And we do live in a state based on a rule of law. Good members of the parliament, have you asked yourselves: in a couple of months, whether the parliament will be capable of adopting a state budget for 2012, while also fulfilling the ruling of the Supreme Court?

Dear friends, local government is not just an extended form of an authority of the state. According to the Constitution and common European understanding, the government of local communities is intended to secure democracy and ensure that decisions are taken at a level of authority that is as close to people as possible. Local governments have been established to prevent the concentration of authorities under a central regime. It is for reliable people who are well aware of the interests of the local community, so they may shape the future with local interests in mind.

Indeed, this will immediately take our thoughts to administrative reform and the question to what extent a town of a population of one hundred or even four hundred thousand people is a local government unit. Do the transparency requirements that are prescribed by law to a rural municipality with 900 inhabitants also work in a town with a population that constitutes one third of the whole population of the state, and where is it impossible to say that the decisions reflect the interests of local people? Or do we need new solutions instead, where 'local community' stands for town districts or even settlements?

These topics that consider the possible special regulation for the capital city can only be based upon determining the real nature of a local government.

Respected *Riigikogu*.

To date, Estonia has done reasonably well; this is also confirmed by the human development report. However, we can still sense revolutionary undercurrents – the desire to demolish. Building in harmony is much more difficult than demolishing. We now need to make our restored state stronger. We must smooth over and cover up the traces of any rushed work; we must fill in the gaps and joints that were left hollow.

Every member of the *Riigikogu* plays an important role in this. The good reputation of the *Riigikogu* is important for me, as it is important for everyone who values a democratic state based on a rule of law. Whether our people will finally embrace the democratic, balanced governance model or not will also be dependent on its reputation.

The promiscuous badmouthing of the representatives of people, elected leaders and officials, which is common in Europe and America, has, regrettably, also found its way to Estonia. Of course, it is simple to encourage anger with political parties, members of the *Riigikogu* and one or another social group in general, by focusing on matters of dispute instead of solutions to complicated questions. Obviously, some people take this path out of stupidity, yet some do so for malicious reasons.

Personal popularity may taste sweet, but statesmen – and women – are distinguished from blabbermouths in that they deal first and foremost with the interests of Estonia. The people of Estonia, in evaluating the situation with common sense and a rational approach, deserve a President, Parliament and Government that treat the population as adults, honestly, openly and with full respect, at the level of both state and local authority.

I wish you strength in improving the welfare of our people – for strengthening Estonia.

Thank you.