

Honorable members of the Constitutional Assembly and assistants of the assembly,
Representatives of constitutional institutions,
Dear fellow travelers,

Let us mentally transport ourselves back to Estonia in the summer of 1992.

Soviet dilapidation filled our towns and villages. Traveling abroad, unless it was to Latvia or Lithuania, required a visa.

Units of the occupying army would remain in place for another two years.

Most of the vehicles on our roads were "Made in the USSR" cars, and nearly five hundred people lost their lives on these roads each year.

Mafia-like criminal gangs acted according to their own arbitrary will. The whistling of mercenaries' bullets was a common sound. And bombs were planted under cars.

The fear of how to manage from one day to the next gnawed at the hope that hundreds of thousands of families had for the future.

Yet the people who had restored our independence were driven by the belief that soon enough everything would get better.

Substantial debates on politics took place on the radio, on TV, at the marketplace. The best people from all walks of life were restoring a free state and a free society, democracy.

We had just gotten our own money, the Estonian kroon.

Then came 28 June 1992. After heated arguments, in the midst of anxious, not to say troubled, times, the Estonian people established a new Constitution for themselves.

91.3% voted in favor and 8% voted against the Constitution, in addition to a handful of spoilt ballots.

The foundation for an independent Estonia had been laid. The Constitutional Assembly had completed a huge task. The people had come to an agreement.

Now let us look at ourselves today, twenty years later, 28 June 2012.

Already a fifth of the Estonian people were born under the new Constitution. Estonia has become stable. We are back on the world's political stage: in the EU and in NATO.

We have rule of law. Each of us has the right to express our opinion.

We have the right to be initiators or – for those who lack the energy or will – to whiningly drag our feet. Each according to his own ability. Freely.

What is important is that all the opportunities are there for Estonia to advance. The Constitution has created an apt framework for social order.

I would like to recognize the foresight and wisdom of the members of the Constitutional Assembly. In my opinion it is our constitution that has helped Estonia rebuild itself as a country.

It has kept us from making mistakes and from giving in to temptations that first lead to the withering of democracy and the rule of law, and ultimately to their ruin.

A number of intellectuals have analyzed the reasons why it has been possible to create free societies in some countries that were liberated from the yoke of Communism and totalitarianism, while in others – not to say in many or even most – things have gone differently and in general worse.

Dear friends,

What would I like to emphasize in praise of our Constitution?

A parliamentary democracy. Estonia has a strong Parliament and a government that is approved by it. Estonia has an independent judiciary. The President's role is to maintain balance and protect the rule of law.

Can you name a democratic country with a strong presidential system that belonged to the former so-called Eastern Bloc?

There isn't one. Estonia did not allow power to become concentrated in a single place.

By today, the choice of the Constitutional Assembly and the Estonian people – to prefer parliamentary democracy – has proved itself brilliantly.

A free society and its smart and conscientious citizens do not look for infallible truth, a history confirmed by the state, obligatory myths. Free peoples do not require an iron-fisted father.

In Estonia we have proportional representation, which, in contrast to the "winner-takes-all"

principle or majoritarianism, fosters coalition governments that include multiple political parties.

This compels us to seek co-operation and agreement. At least in critical matters, this allows one to expect a consistent policy.

True, with today's four parliamentary parties and a number of independent representatives, we have arrived at a critical minimum threshold for a system that encourages a plurality of opinion.

It is in the interests of healthy democracy in Estonia to avoid new measures, of whatever nature, that would decrease the future chances of new parties to join the decision-makers.

Do you remember how for years there were complaints about the large number of parliamentary fractions and disputes in the government? Demands were made to give more powers to the Prime Minister, and to make tough decisions without much debate. There is nothing else to say but "one learns from his mistakes".

A balanced form of government aimed at reaching agreements and consensus is better than a hardhanded President or Prime Minister.

Nobody ever agrees completely with the decisions made in such a way. But no one is entirely opposed to them either. Living together requires the ability to adapt, the ability to see others beside oneself.

If the opinions of citizens with different interests do not resonate in Parliament, then sooner or later these voices will be heard on the streets, in either a more subdued or a more ferocious way. Or, more in accordance with the Estonian mentality, people will vote with their feet or distance themselves from Estonian elections and political debates.

Neither of these is a good development for Estonia. For this reason, I call upon all citizens to act with the aim of enlivening debate on matters concerning society. Because don't we all want

what is best for Estonia and the people who live here?

How can this be achieved?

It is fairly simple to establish a consensus against power. It is much more difficult to set aims and start striving towards those goals. To take responsibility, to run in elections, to become an initiator.

With all my might I have supported Estonia's civil society, the development of the non-governmental sector. Be they community societies, professional associations, or world-view clubs. What is important is that each citizen stand for his or her interests. And speak out on what must be done or left undone and why.

Balanced and smart decisions – including laws and the budget – come into being only when the big picture is taken into account, when common interests are perceived, through knowledge and care.

The parliamentary party scandals that have rocked the ship of state in recent years have led us into dangerous waters. These scandals have undermined faith in the honesty of decisions that concern us all. Faith in the possibility of any honesty at all in politics.

The immoral competition that has arisen between political parties drives them to jointly cover up or deny dark deeds that they have in common, to jointly protect the sinners.

This is equivalent to cutting the branch that both those currently in power and all of Estonian society is sitting on.

I recently received a message from the non-governmental sector: he who wants to be honest and pure, cannot participate in political decision-making.

Or in other words: "we" are honest and pure citizens while they "up there" are dishonest and impure.

The fatality of such a division is frightening. Because this is almost equivalent to accepting the inevitability of vice, and it also means painting a gloomier picture of life than what actually is.

I, however, do not call for the creation of a new political party, the only common denominator of which would be opposition to everything that currently exists, or empty populist promises.

New political parties or electoral alliances – should they come into being – should bear a constructive message and compete fairly with current governing parties.

All citizens have the right and obligation to take part in deciding matters that concern society. The bearing of this burden must be appreciated, not condemned.

I am absolutely confident that Estonia's political culture, the ethics and style of making decisions, can and must be improved. But what must not be done is to brand everyone currently in a decision-making role with a sign of shame.

Let us as a people be fair towards our representatives. It is clear that those who are corrupt, who have knocked down the bar of political culture, low as it is already, must leave politics. This is required by our Constitution. And this is made possible by our Constitution.

Yet no-one may be condemned without just cause.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear mothers and fathers of the Estonian Constitution,

The Constitution demands fair governance in the interests of all. The Constitution is not, nor can it be, an ordinary law that is changed often and extensively. It is also not something we frequently discuss rewriting.

This, however, does not mean that we should disregard the need to make a few corrections or amendments.

Firstly, before long, we shall inevitably be confronted with the serious future concerns of an information society. The vast majority perhaps did not grasp the real meaning of the ACTA protests. Discontent at the lack of a debate that would have taken public concerns into account resulted in people folding hats and making masks.

The Internet has already provided and continues to provide us with ever new possibilities as it enriches our lives. At the same time we must answer the question of how to make the most of these opportunities while also protecting each individual, population, country or information system from new and growing threats and risks in cyber space.

Secondly, the EU and the eurozone. We cannot live in a dream. Estonia must always make the best choices for its people from among the options that are actually available.

To stay out of the EU and at the same time remain western, independent, free – this is an option Estonia never had and never will have. And the situation in which people were paid in kroons but took loans in euros was in no way better than what we have now.

Although resentment might make one disagree, being a member of the euro area is good for Estonia. It is clear that due to a legally confusing way of getting things done in the EU, member states are faced with constitutional questions. We too must ask these questions. Up to the point when one day we must once again consult the people.

Furthermore, the responsibility of Estonian representatives, ministers and officials is always to be among the real decision-makers in both the EU and the eurozone. Always to make Estonia's voice and interests resonate in those fora.

Thirdly, there is no escape from rethinking basic social rights. Most likely it is not necessary to change the Constitution in this aspect, but we certainly do need serious consultation on this matter.

How should we boost entrepreneurship, spur economic sensibility, encourage taking care of oneself and one's family? And how could we guarantee a sufficient level of support for those truly in need, while taking into account the fact that the population is aging and the labor market is changing?

Already it is difficult to get a job without a good education; and it is only becoming more difficult. Does Estonia have the courage to look reality in the eye and frankly discuss how we can guarantee everyone the minimum requirements to live a dignified life?

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chancellors of Justice, judges, and all Estonian Presidents have expressed their admiration for the formulators of our Constitution and its establisher – the people.

I myself, as head of state, have guarded the Constitution as is required by my office:

I have rejected laws approved by Parliament when, in my opinion, they have contradicted the Constitution.

I appreciate the fact that most of these vetoes have not resulted in long-drawn-out turf wars between Kadriorg and Toompea, the final battle of which takes place on Toomemägi.

The Constitution has served Estonia well. The Constitution demands the building of an Estonia that is a secure, beautiful, and a good home for our people. A home where people want to be

and where people want to come home to.

We have managed to do much in twenty years, and a great deal remains to be done.

I thank you all for the great job you have done for Estonia and will continue to do in the future.

Long live the Constitution!

Long live Estonia!