

Dear people,

The year 2012 has now come to an end.

I see it as a year during which Estonia visibly matured.

We are no longer satisfied with what has been achieved. Even if this means things that Estonia is right to be proud of.

This year witnessed a number of strikes. We saw demonstrations, discontent with Estonian politics. This is natural in a mature democracy. Instead, the lack of all this should surprise us.

In a vibrant democracy everyone is not always happy with all the decisions. Discontent drives us forward.

If a large enough group has had to agree to swift and unavoidable decisions for long enough, and if they have suppressed their discontent for long enough, then eventually it is only natural that at some point they can no longer approve of it.

This is what we saw in 2012. We took another step towards the normality in which we no longer suffer with gritted teeth just because we have to, just because we have become used to doing so.

Politicians who either have or have not lied can be found both in Vastseliina and Vienna, from Lääne-Virumaa to West-Virginia. The relationship between money and politics breeds disappointment in every western democracy.

Instead, you should worry if one day these topics are no longer discussed. A strike, as I have said long ago, is nothing but the continuation of pay negotiations by other means, means that are entirely legal.

In democratic countries, manifestations receive heightened media attention only once they become violent. Or when milk is publicly poured onto streets.

It pleases me that our citizens feel the need to emphasize that they have the right to participate in politics more often than only once every four years. Governments at both the state and local level must learn to take part in this exchange of ideas.

Elections are a contract between the voters and those elected, not merely a one-off transaction. An election victory does not mean that one can steamroll over all opposition by referring to one's mandate.

Democracy means constantly working for our future. This right and obligation cannot be delegated to anyone.

Already in a week's time, on January 7th, it will be possible in the online environment of the Rahvakogu to propose changes to the election law and the law on political parties.

Please use this opportunity. Actively and with full responsibility.

Dear compatriots,

The central topic of the census year has been migration and population decline. Some declare this to be the beginning of the downfall for both the state and the people.

I too am worried. But let us recall that Estonia has fought for the free movement of our people for years. Voters have always supported visa-free regimes with other countries, voters have supported the right to free movement, to live and work abroad. They have seen this as a means to achieve the goal of self-realisation.

Emigration is the other side of the same coin. During the decade after World War II Finland lost more than half a million people to Sweden. More than a hundred thousand Swedes currently work in Norway. And do you know why? Because the wages are better in Norway than in Sweden.

This fact is not meant to console, but to explain. People also emigrate from much richer countries than our own.

Of course, we cannot acquiesce to this. Instead, we must concentrate on making life in Estonia better.

Around twenty years ago, an Estonian living abroad complained to me about why things in Estonia are done this way or that way, but not the way he'd like them to be done. I replied that in Estonia we do things the way those people want them to be done who also wish to live here.

Dear Estonian people,

In a little more than twenty years we have integrated into the West. In February, our independent country will turn 95 years old.

A month after that there will arrive the day when our current period of independence will have de facto lasted longer than last time, before the war.

We recall the pessimism that followed the restoration of our independence, don't we? People asked: "Can we pull it off?" We have. We've done it. The European Union, NATO, and the euro are three convincing proofs.

And hence my last point today: in 2013, let us focus on Estonia and those people who want to live here.

We know that a less stratified society generally tends to be more successful and happy. Differences will never be completely erased; life in the countryside and in the city is different everywhere.

However, state institutions do not have to be concentrated in the capital. Roads and other infrastructure should be developed more vigorously outside the capital. Electricity and other essential means for life should be more affordable in the countryside. People must feel that the police and rescue services are near everywhere.

In a successful and developed country, the quality of life does not depend on proximity to the capital.

The only goal of optimizing can be to provide the best and most sensible services for our citizens, not the reduction of costs at the cost of our people's wellbeing.

We created our state to live here. Where we want to. Everywhere in Estonia.

This also connects with the topic of security. Our new National Defence Plan relies to a large extent on the Estonian Defence League. But if the country is empty, there can be no Defence League there.

Dear compatriots,

There are few of us here in Estonia. This means that each and every one of us is valuable. But it also means that we are more tightly bound to each other than people in a larger country.

This is an advantage because people who think alike quickly find one another. And help promptly reaches those in need.

But this small and flexible society can only flourish if we behave in a civil and tolerant manner. If we take care of one another. If we have calm debates instead of invective and threats. Let us hate less and listen more to each other.

For invective will leave a nagging feeling and will remain a hindrance long after its cause is forgotten.

And with this I wish you all a happy new year, during which we will do our best to make life in Estonia better.

Happy New Year, Estonia!