

Today's meeting serves two purposes. First of all, yet another fraud scandal within the Reform Party has clearly exceeded all limits of tolerance. I am pleased that this time the circumstances were established and the culprits were swiftly punished.

In this case, only the party and its members were cheated and so we could say that there were no other victims.

The scandal within the Reform Party will give others the opportunity to undermine the trustworthiness of our election system in general and will damage Estonia's reputation.

I would like to emphasise that internal elections within a party and Estonia's e-elections are, both substantially and technically, two completely different and separate things. We must make this distinction.

If we cheat our own and no longer care for Estonia's credibility, we must ask: how would we do by others and our enemies?

The answer is the following: abuse public resources, acquire illegal support, politicise state and local government systems, drive tanks over those who have an opinion that is different from ours, ridicule, marginalise etc., etc.

Of course, each and every party will now say that none of this is their problem. Really? Seriously?

The "winning at all costs" mentality spawns young people with perverse minds, who are ready to cheat to demonstrate their worth as development managers. This is because capable developers may find themselves in ministries after the next elections and may be given a good ranking in the election list in the next stage. Then the next generation will be cheating.

This is not only about the Reform Party and all the party leaders know this full well. I want you to understand: the expectation and attention of the Estonian people regarding your actions are higher than ever. And this is good.

You all know about the butterfly effect. It is quite possible that a snowball is rolling here instead.

And this is where we come to face yet another deeper and even bigger problem.

Many would wish me to limit myself to condemning the Reform Party. However, this would mean taking the easy way out. This would mean me saying that the problem we are discussing now only represents the internal problem of one party that we can sit back and relish: this will take us out of the spotlight and tomorrow it will be already be forgotten.

I do not think it will pass by. We must learn from the events of recent years and emerge from the maelstrom of problems, cleaner than ever.

Internal democracy within parties demands fundamental changes towards openness and integrity. And these changes can only be controlled by the parties that are represented in the Riigikogu

Distrust of the electorate and ridiculing the parties will affect each and every one of you, no matter what you were caught doing, red-handed. All the frontline politicians and all the political parties represented in the Parliament are under fire, and this involves the system of representative democracy of Estonia. I am sure that we all know enough about Estonian history to be aware of how it ended the last time the ridiculing of parties caused them to be discredited and ended in a loss of democracy. Even if we don't know our own history well enough, those observing the processes in Europe should be aware of the stagnancy of whole countries that has been caused by the discrediting of political parties. Which of you wants this to happen? I do believe that none of you does.

I can see a number of risks posed by the current situation:

First of all, this will damage the reputation of the Republic of Estonia for its citizens and will reduce the credibility of the Republic of Estonia and the parliament, including the credibility of decisions adopted and the ability to explain the decision to the people in a clear way.

Once again, I emphasise, I have nothing against new parties. The political landscape must be open for competition. This was the central position of the People's Assembly initiative.

However, when parliamentary parties are no longer trusted, this means that we do not trust our laws, we start to listen to slogans and maybe also elect powers that understand democracy in a way that is much different from what we would want.

As I already said: we have already seen this happening in Estonia. We can see this trend emerging today in other places in Europe. And I will not even get started by suggesting countries outside the European Union as an example.

Secondly, the inadmissibly low reputation of politicians and parties, often due to their own negligence, will turn responsible and principled people off active politics. The words "politician" and "party" will so become – and have already become – dirty words. I have already heard from a number of people – good and smart people who stand for principles – that they do not want to become involved in anything as dirty as politics, to say nothing of giving the media the opportunity to fling mud at them. In other words, the best among us have started to avoid politics.

In a parliamentary democracy, this is quite inadmissible. This will lead us to decline and degradation, a loss of democratic value, to a Leninist "who will beat who" competition and ultimately, to a Leninist country.

We must change our attitude to prevent this from happening. A party as an organisation that distributes an ideology is the key to the running of a democratic system.

Businesslike discussion and respecting one's opponents are, apart from competition, inherent components of such a system. Taking the arguments of others into consideration and adjusting our own, where necessary.

And what do we see in reality? Our political parties are almost like religions sects that promote the infallibility of their positions and rule out any alternatives. We hear bragging and self-glorification from the parties that hold power, whether it be at state or town level, and can observe a total lack of self-criticism or justification like "but the others do the same". The opposition, in turn, will respond by stamping everything into the ground. Lambasting their competitors, barely hiding the desire to merely destroy everything they have built, everything that we hear about the parties and politicians on a daily, weekly, and yearly basis – or read from internet comments that are written, supported by the party or even administrative resources – will result in the state and its people being deprived of attention.

And at the same time: what is the difference between an internet commentator who gets his wages from the city and a high-level government official that contributes to the falsification of a party's internal election results?

Let me remind you that before the People's Assembly all the political parties represented in the Parliament confirmed that they could independently manage the internal democracy issues of their respective parties and that there were no problems.

That we all have our own habits and culture. Today, this is no longer credible. The inability to convince the electorate about democracy and transparency is the end of the political landscape as we know it today.

Of course, I do agree that no one from outside can tell you how to make your internal democracy work in an honest and sensible way.

Therefore, I am only going to raise some problems, formulated as questions: is the race for the number of party members really reasonable? Why do we not use reliable election systems, such as the national ones?

And to conclude – the "the winner takes it all, loser standing small" ideology will rule out any opportunity for finding solutions that are sustainable and the best for Estonia. We need ideas about how to give all the children an equally strong educational platform, how to reduce economic gaps, how to promote entrepreneurship, how to make Estonia function in the best possible way? Why is criticism, regardless of its form, or even suggestions interpreted as a personal attack?

Or why do we not admit that Estonia's success is based on smart decisions – or refuse to admit that many things have been done well? My experiences with politicians from countries that we wish to follow or aspire to become is quite different: they are willing to admit that the opposition has done some good things and that they have made some mistakes themselves.

I am sincerely asking you – without wanting to take the role of the scolding father of a nation that does not match up to being a developed, parliamentary state, although some seem to pine for it, for some reason – I implore you to take things seriously. Very, very seriously.

Let us leave the personal frictions and antagonism between the coalition and the opposition aside and focus on solutions. The solutions must come quick and be clear for everyone, meaning clarity and comprehension.

I ask you to make the required changes to emerge from this crisis with democracy intact.