

Ladies and gentlemen,

"There can hardly be any Estonian whose heart won't start beating faster when they hear the words: the Republic of Estonia."

Thus wrote Ain Kaalep in the dark days of 1943, on the 25th anniversary of Estonian independence, hoping that just like the first occupation, the second one would similarly withdraw and the Republic could once again become free.

Recalling this 56 years and many historical events later, Kaalep asked: "Are the words, the Republic of Estonia, still words that cause an ache as they used to?"

And added: "Well, they should be."

Back in 1999, Ain Kaalep was worried that deriving from a sense of self-evidence, a certain state-fatigue – the kind that had first plagued Estonia in the 1930s – was returning now that liberty had been restored. I wonder whether it's any different today.

*

We who are alive today have witnessed the making of history. People who have experienced different political regimes know how ephemeral freedom was the first time around. He who at the age of 20 witnessed the establishment of our own state saw, at the age of 42, its demise. He, who at 37 saw freedom, watched foreign armies march in before celebrating his 60th birthday. Just think about it. Most of us here saw the second coming of independence. Today, we are still free.

Our ability to start anew when we got the chance demonstrates our strength.

Estonia's success has always been based on starting again. And in learning fast.

The right to purchase farms that was introduced some 150 years ago. The farms, the people, and Estonia gained new lease of life, so to speak. A new beginning.

In the previous century, the establishment of the Republic of Estonia. And its restoration. A double miracle.

During the financial crisis, bankrupt businesses and redundancies. Yet once again, there are those who start something completely new. A new education. A new profession.

We are free; there is always a second chance to be had. In this sense, we are eternal revolutionaries.

If we no longer can or wish to continue as we did, we can do something else. The art of knowing how to start anew is the key to our success.

If the state can do this, i.e. make a comeback, why shouldn't any one of us be capable of doing so?

The state-fatigue that they talked about in the 1930s, and that Ain Kaalep touched on – the feeling that everything is already in place; in abeyance, stagnated, hopeless – is dangerous, but also deceptive. Even today, we can start afresh, create something new and better. Each and every one in their own lives. In business. In art. Standing for election, and by voting. Let us not deny ourselves and others this chance. Let us not dwell on the ruins of past mistakes, complaining about our problems or gloating over the misfortunes of others.

*

Dear Estonian people,

Before we had a state of our own, we survived for centuries as a community. We had something in common that kept us alive, and together. This something is always there, somewhere.

We aren't many, but we have different stories to tell. Because of our galloping history – that has run a race alongside human generations – the experiences of today's Estonians are influenced by the point in time when they arrived here. For none of us was asked when we wanted to come.

Let us look at our people. People who were born in the same country, among the same people, maybe even into the same family, but ended up in separate worlds.

For instance, Linda. She was born in 1926 and lived her youth in a free Estonia. This life was interrupted by war. Memories of deported relatives, red propaganda, fear and distrust were seared into her mind. Little by little the fear receded as a small country house, an orchard and grandchildren brought solace into her everyday life. But peace of mind only settled in with the rebirth of our state. Her pension is small and inflation has devoured her meagre savings, but at least the foreign tanks and soldiers are gone for good.

Or Jaan, born in 1953. For him, the scars of war were merely the memories of older people. At school with his friends he secretly celebrated the anniversary of Estonian independence. Some of them got into trouble for having expressed their free thoughts too loudly. In his youth, intellectual freedom was meant to remain under ground. Nonetheless, with the arrival of regained liberty, Jaan managed to get back on his feet.

Mart, born in 1969, recalls the period of occupation vividly, but was still young and vigorous when freedom came. He dropped out of university because there were other more tempting opportunities, even without a degree. During the boom years, everything was possible. Business flourished; there was plenty of time for hobbies and creative work. Until the bust put an end to it all. After that, everything somehow makes him feel angry. What next? And who's to blame?

Viktoria was born in 1984, and she doesn't really remember anything else apart from a free Estonia. With a good education and foreign language skills she could do anything. But there are no agreeable jobs on offer. And nothing else would satisfy her. That's when she becomes interested in the criticism of capitalism. A better world is possible! But which one?

And Sirel, born in 2013. She has a comfortable buggy, her parents like organic food, they have a pleasant district society. What will one day become of her education and life? Will she in 2043 still read Estonian fairy tales to her children?

What do these people who come from such different worlds have in common? How can we today integrate our countless stories into a cosy community? All those different generations and various social backgrounds?

What connects us all is our own free state. A state where the rule of law applies. The Estonian language and culture. But also a long winter and a GDP that still remains below the European average. On the other hand, a sense of ownership, care for our surroundings. The landscape of Estonian life is constantly being tidied up.

*

The secret to fast learning is the courage to start something new. Many of us are forced to learn something new, even if we would prefer not to. Because old ways no longer work in a changing world. Not only in Estonia, but in the whole world. Beginnings, as we know, can be difficult.

Public discourse – how we talk to each other – can also be started anew. Here, the key lies first and foremost with the creators of our cultural landscape, many of whom are gathered here today. Our public discourse is getting carried further and further from what is civilised. Who else, if not the artisans of communication, should comprehend that a word is a deed. A word has weight and power.

We should recall, as a warning, what happened in real life when people were called rats, vermin, bourgeois, snakes and cockroaches. And we should remember who it was who came to liberate us from the rule of the "clique, the people's enemy", from the yoke of "capitalists and bloodsuckers". Even today, we live too close to a world where the right to hate and revile others has transformed into a right to exercise violence upon them with impunity.

Freedom is also an opportunity to sensibly express one's worries. Lest the art of doing so be terminally lost, we need your support, the support of our cultural elite. Please, help us. So that our discourse may once again become civilised.

*

Dear compatriots,

Let us continue the creation of what is new; there is no reason to stagnate or tire. Let us criticise what is wrong, for criticism is the foundation of all development. But let us not forget to prize what is valuable.

The Republic of Estonia. Are these still magic words, even today?

In order to answer, let us think what the alternatives would be.

Long live Estonia!