

Respected Chairman of the Riigikogu,
honourable members of the Riigikogu,
prime minister and members of the government, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Chancellor
of Justice and Auditor General,

The 12th Riigikogu has crossed the equator. (I am not talking about travelling around the world.)
More than half of the working period of the Riigikogu elected in 2011 has now passed.

The period with which the powers of the 12th Riigikogu have coincided has been one of
upheaval for the entire world: Occupy Wall Street and Snowden; the economic splintering of a
number of Member States of the European Union; and the Arab spring and fighting in Egypt,
Syria and elsewhere, whose outcome is unforeseeable. Something fundamental has changed,
across the board – whether it be for better or worse, or simply different.

It has also been a time of upheaval for Estonia. Our country has emerged from the recession.
Economic development has crossed a line from which people's values and goals in life are no
longer merely about surviving and more about realising their potential. As such, people are
becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo. Take a look at the Estonian Human
Development Report for 2012/2013 and compare the changes in people's values and attitudes.

We have seen strikes and protests. We see and we feel that people are demanding more. An
active, influential civil society is of great value. This is something we have sought. Bolstering
civil society and making it visible and influential have been goals of my time as president since
the first speech I made upon assuming office, right here on this very spot in 2006.

The Riigikogu and the government have the opportunity and the responsibility to meet the
increased expectations of the people. This is no easy task when one group theoretically extols
the virtues of Marxism, another believes blindly in market forces and a third, like the country's
freedom fighters in their time, reviles political parties and awaits the imposition of hard-line rule.

Scientists and thinkers, present your preferred choices therefore in a concrete and

comprehensible way. Explain how they can be achieved. Only in this way can we take the debate further.

The same can be said of state governance. One group demands direct democracy without answering the question as to whether every change to the law should be put electronically to a referendum. The other group continues haughtily to ignore any expectation of change, pursuing the same rigid, partisan, elitist politics.

The majority of opinions fall somewhere between the two.

What I want for Estonia is smart, highly competitive governance. But how can that be achieved?

In a recent article in Postimees Ilmar Raag made the apposite observation that the fuelling of unreal expectations and the disappointment that inevitably results are programmed into democracy. True, both history and life have shown us that people's demands do not diminish if their expectations are met: new expectations – and new risks of disappointment – take their place. This is the progress we wonder at.

But it is up to us to set an example in Estonia. With fair-minded agreement it should be possible for us to abstain from making promises that can never be kept, and from engendering ill-feeling. Our ideal should be for parties and election coalitions to offer objectives that can be met and for voters to turn their backs on candidates who mislead, and stir, and speak in the language of slogans and sound bites.

People want to be involved in things, and want to publicly express balanced views. The People's Assembly reflected this. We saw it at the Opinion Festival.

At the same time, division of labour inevitably evolves in every society. That is why I would continue to argue with those who demand pure, direct democracy. In order to grasp the objectives of the People's Assembly I would recommend reading up on the ideas of Professor James Fishkin, who visited us this summer, regarding deliberative democracy. But to understand our own deep-rooted parliamentary traditions I recommend reading, for example,

Ilmar Tõnisson's thoughts in his 1931 essay *Parlamentarismi eeldused* /The prerequisites of parliamentarism/.

I would likewise continue to argue with those who feel that decisions should be made by a select few behind closed doors – which is not what parliamentarism means. On the contrary: people must have the information they need to form opinions, and people must be listened to in making decisions.

Only a few months remain to debate the proposals put forward at the People's Assembly and to make the necessary changes to the law. I applaud the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu for its willingness to sketch out changes on this basis. Honourable members of the Riigikogu, please do not disappoint us.

Likeminded colleagues,

Against the backdrop of local government and education reforms I would like to emphasise the need for small state philosophy. Estonia has neither the numbers nor the means to mimic the administrative models of larger countries or to waste time doing things for the sake of doing something, rather than because they need to be done. Our country has a unique opportunity to be flexible, innovative, simple and logical; to clearly define its problems, search for the most effective solutions to them and implement the changes with confidence.

Small countries have big advantages. We can reach out to every single person, if we want to. So make more room for enterprise, in the broadest sense of the word. Don't stifle enthusiasm with homogenisation, over-organisation and centralisation. These are approaches taken by large countries; they are not for us. We have to be far more demanding and far more economically circumspect. What has brought us success to date is good, common sense and logic, and daring to be innovative. We need solutions that are for Estonia, based on our people and on our country.

For our innovation plans to produce the results we want them to, we all have to contribute to them. Don't be afraid of change, but at the same time don't hope for an outcome that is impossible to achieve. And don't be afraid to fine-tune decisions that the knowledge we have today tells us were wrong. The proximity of elections should not be allowed to hinder the

implementation of reforms.

Ladies and gentleman,

This Saturday, 14 September, marks the 10th anniversary of the referendum on Estonia joining the European Union. We are a member of NATO. Our leaders sit at the same table as world leaders – and not merely as some self-effacing silent partner.

It worries me that among ordinary Estonians you still encounter the attitude that defending human rights is not up to us. Do we really have the moral right to waive support for humanity, to consider someone less worthy, to close our eyes and hold our tongues when people are subjected to state-sanctioned victimisation? I say we do not, especially given the experiences we ourselves lived through in the 20th century. We know what repression is. Our paragon must be the recognition of human dignity all over the world and the honouring of international agreements.

This is not purely idealism. The principled defence of values is the right path for us; a path we need to take. It is the same with the intellectual defence of our society. We cannot allow ourselves to be crippled by illusions or fears of the past. Nor can we afford to wallow in pessimism or self-interest, or ourselves contribute to disdain for our country. Every one of us is an ambassador for Estonia. Every one of us helps shape the view that people take of us, and in creating and promoting that which makes Estonia so special.

On my recent visit to the United States I had it confirmed for me yet again that Estonia is taken very seriously elsewhere in the world. As President Obama said: we are living proof that one country can emerge from a situation which to another seems insurmountable. We can believe in ourselves and clearly support human and civil rights whose absence still concerns us – in some places ever more so.

Finally, dear colleagues,

The faces of Riigikogu members and ministers standing in the local government elections look

down on voters from posters the length and breadth of the country. Some of them have no intention of working in local government. Advertising from which we know that those standing will not take up their posts if elected leads directly to the discrediting of our party political system. It is hypocritical and alienating. It fosters the attitude that we hear and read about in the media every day. You all know that this is the case.

Dear colleagues, be honest with your electorate. There are two options.

The Riigikogu could reinstate members' right to serve on local councils. In this case the constitutionality of such a situation would need to be thoroughly argued, although that is not something to be afraid of.

The other option is to fulfil the objectives of the law we have. In this case city and municipal councils should be the domain of local leaders. And it should be they who take the limelight in the run-up to elections. This is a matter of the reputation of the Riigikogu – which is to say the reputation of representative democracy in Estonia.

I wish you all, representatives of the people, a very productive session.

Thank you.