

Good evening,

I didn't really understand New Year's Eve when I was a child. Christmas was over and the crayons I got as a gift were already broken. What was there to celebrate? But the adults were all expecting something new and better, and the children started feeling it, too.

The last minutes of the year are the time when we look back. The moment when we store everything that was beautiful and good in the year that just ended. And we leave behind the things that were difficult, painful or ugly.

In 2013 we found out that our, that is Estonian children, were among the most educated in the world. They excelled in areas that promised success in the future – reading, mathematics and science. Such a high level of education gives us reassurance about the future. I read the headlines, from Australia to the United States and the United Kingdom, which spoke of disbelief that "even in Estonia" children did better than in their countries – a sign of certain ignorance, as Estonian children shared first place in Europe with Finland.

It is understandable that Estonia is not known everywhere – we have no reason to believe that a country of just one million people would be well known in the world. Above all, these derogative remarks are a sign of stupidity. But don't we also keep falling into the same trap? We speak badly about our own country without knowing what we're talking about and think that it's better elsewhere. However, more and more people are finding out that it's not really better at all.

In addition to the talent of our children, we also "discovered" this year that we have created something unique that other countries want as well. The e-solutions of our country, the things we consider normal and are so used to – such as electronic banking, e-school, e-Tax Board, e-elections, digital prescriptions – are still regarded as miracles or impossible achievements elsewhere. And considered so unique that our neighbours also want to start using the solutions created in Estonia.

Soon, we will have been a member of the European Union for ten years. The trees we planted

when Estonia joined the European Union are now taller than us. That's also a big thing. Not all of the countries that declared independence at the same time as us have managed to keep up. 22 years have passed and they are still split by the struggle to make the right choices. Many have gone backwards in their freedom when compared to the 1990s, both at the level of the state and individuals. Estonia has always known where it's going.

This is why we should stop and think when we make our big gestures and speak about the wolf in a country that is enjoying increasingly more freedoms. Let us recall: when the wolf really tried to eat the boy, the people in the village no longer listened to him.

We are already concerned about the general tendency of not listening to each other. We think that we're smarter than everyone else. All of us, from Abja-Paluoja to Toompea, should stop and think: are we really always right or should we pay more attention to the opinions of others. This is not possible unless we speak politely and instead offer alternative solutions and make suggestions that others can also criticise. We should compete with our ideas, not try to dismiss others.

Like a growing tree, a state also needs nurturing and attention. Only we can make everything right in Estonia. Estonia's present and future depend on us. People themselves have a much bigger influence on our daily lives than the Riigikogu. Let's take the situation on our roads as an example. It's not the state, the government or a bad coincidence that hits you head-on from the opposite direction – it's another person who has decided to ignore the rules and the right of others to live.

The duty of the government, the Riigikogu and also the President is to create the conditions for a dignified life, to protect rights and keep our living environment safe. But we cannot, and must not, interfere with daily life. Daily life is something we all create together.

Dear Estonian people,

The real Estonia is in every Estonian home and family, in every person. In schoolchildren and teachers, whose knowledge and hard work make us proud. The wisdom of the next generation is the best vaccine against rudeness, arrogance and indifference. The real Estonia is in enterprising people and the civil society, who create a bigger, better Estonia. And the real

Estonia can also be found in our creators.

In order to be better in the New Year, we should not succumb to boredom and tiredness, which turn to bitterness and then anger, poisoning everyone around us. Estonia will never be big enough to allow us to be angry with our fellow citizens, i.e. ourselves, our country. And in their eighth year in office, our governors must be just as attentive and sharp as they were on the first day. Or as they are two days before elections.

Dear compatriots,

I remember an ordinary morning of 1 January from my childhood. I woke up and wanted to start doing something, but all the adults were still asleep. My brother and I waited impatiently for them to get up.

So, let's wake up earlier and notice those around us.

There are not many of us. Everyone is important. Everyone is appreciated. Let's care about each other and protect each other. Every person, including politicians, should do that.

The New Year gives each and every one of us the chance at a new beginning. Let's take that chance.

Happy New Year, dear Estonia!