

Your Excellencies Speaker of the Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia
Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia - esteemed members of the August 20th
Club, honoured members of parliament, distinguished guests.

25 years is a short time in the context of history, yet long enough in the
minds of man to be a period of distant memory. For large parts of the
populations of our countries - the younger generation - the events of 1991 in
Estonia happened before their births and are thus quite distant historical events.

I have not forgotten the historical events of 1991, and I never will. As a
newly elected member of parliament I was proud of my government's actions, led
by Prime Minister Oddsson and Foreign Minister Hannibalsson, strongly
supporting Estonia's claim for independence and being the first to acknowledge
your independence. The news from Tallinn and the scenes of brave Estonians
defending the Parliament and the Tallinn TV Tower will forever be forged in my
memory

It is, in my opinion, of vital importance to keep the memory alive and learn
from history. Let us never forget how the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany led to
the oppression of the freedom of the relatively new Baltic Republics with the
Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. You had to live almost half a century under Soviet
oppression and occupation and in the early 90's the West was at first hesitant to
support your rightful claim of regained independence, with a few important
exceptions!

Thus, the younger generation must be aware how important and valuable
independence, democracy and freedom is, and how frail it can be. As democracy
and its ideals are deep rooted in Western societies, we tend not to give its true
value much thought on day-to-day basis. But sovereign rights of nations, respect
for international law and territorial integrity is not a situation to be taken for
granted in this new century, not even in Europe; as recent examples illustrate!

Estonia has, in the 25 years that have passed since regaining its
independence, managed to undo the damage of the Soviet occupation and
become an established parliamentary democracy. It is admirable to witness the
success of Estonia's transformation from communism to a market based
economy. You have also, during this time, become fully and actively involved in
the Euro-Atlantic Integration and taken your rightful place amongst the nations
of Europe, *primus inter pares* in many fields such as IT and cyber security.

In an increasingly globalized and interlinked world some claim that the
voice of the small is hard to hear. I am personally of the opinion that it's not the
size of a country that determines its importance; it is the size and content of its
ideas and values that is the determining factor.

I also believe that it is of great importance for smaller nations to keep together as our voice is indeed stronger when spoken together in solidarity. The strong bonds and the close cooperation of Baltic and Nordic countries is a proof of that and is vital for all of us.

On this important occasion, celebrating quarter of a century of regained independence of the Republic of Estonia, I convey the greetings of Althingi, the Parliament of Iceland, wishing Estonia and its people continued success in the future. The bonds of friendship between Iceland and Estonia are deep-rooted and true, as indeed with the other Baltic states. We supported you in the difficult times in 1991 and you can rely on our continued support!