

Address by President of the Signatories of the Independence Act Club of Lithuania Birute Valionyte at the Special Sitting of the 14th Riigikogu and the August 20th Club on 20 August 2021

Your Excellency President of the Republic of Estonia, President and members of the Riigikogu, Prime Minister and ministers, diplomats, members of the Estonian Supreme Council, honoured guests,

Ladies and gentlemen, I am extremely happy to take the floor to congratulate the proud Estonian nation on the Day of Restoration of Independence. I am saying this on behalf of the Signatories of the Independence Act Club of Lithuania. On behalf of the people who restored the Lithuanian state on 11 March 1990, gave it back the name of the Republic of Lithuania, and announced to the world and to the Kremlin that the independent state of Lithuania had been restored. The old coat of arms was reinstated – VYTIS commemorates the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. A provisional Constitution was passed, the leaders of the Republic were elected, and we embarked on creating the second Republic of Lithuania. The occupation army left the Lithuanian territory on 31 August 1993. What Lithuania did 31 years ago feels like a miracle today. But we achieved that miracle because the three Baltic sisters worked together. Our common actions bore fruit.

Lithuania looked on with envy as Estonia established the Popular Front on 13 April 1988. In 1989, at the Baltic Assembly right here in Tallinn, we agreed on the specific details of the Baltic Way. Together, the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians effectively turned their faces towards the west and transformed themselves into a human chain from Vilnius to Tallinn, turning their backs towards Moscow in unison. The participants of the Baltic Way felt responsible for the fate of their countries and their nations. This served as a demonstration, to themselves and the entire world, of their determination and resolve to build an independent life for their nations. This peaceful act was witnessed around the world, although Moscow called it general hysteria. Everyone in the Baltic Way felt that unity equalled power. Probably the crowning achievement of the cooperation between the Lithuanian Sąjūdis, the Estonian Popular Front, and the Latvian Tautas Fronte was the annulment of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union. This meant that the Soviet Union admitted the occupation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, something it had always consistently denied. It inspired the forces for independence to intensify and coordinate their activities in the Baltic states.

On 16 November 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR decisively adopted the Declaration on the Sovereignty of the Estonian SSR, the Resolution on the Treaty of the Union, and the Act on Amendments to the Constitution of the Estonia SSR. This was the first legal step at the level of the Soviet Union to show that the Estonian nation ran its own country. It was agreed that Lithuania would pass similar resolutions in support of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR; however, the Lithuanian Communist Party refused to support the

proposals of Sajūdis. This caused a storm of discontent in Lithuania. Estonia was left alone and the Chairman of the Estonian Supreme Soviet Arnold Rüütel was called to the carpet in the Kremlin. The authorities of the Lithuanian SSR did not support Estonia, but the Lithuanian people was with you. We were proud of you. We envied your new way of thinking and your determination. Your example bound the Lithuanians even closer together.

From 16 November 1988 until the independence was restored on 20 August 1991, Estonia walked a difficult path that required great unity from your people. After the failure of the attempted coup in the Soviet Union on 20 August 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia rushed to affirm the independence of Estonia and called for the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Estonia. Latvia decided the same on 21 August 1991. On 22 August 1991, the Republic of Lithuania resumed diplomatic relations with Estonia and Latvia. On 17 September 1991, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were admitted into the United Nations. Today, it feels incredible how much we have achieved in a short time. How the three Baltic states who were small and yet had never lost their hope for freedom played a key role in destroying the Soviet empire and thus redrawing the map of the world.

Today, our countries are part of the strongest defence alliance – NATO – and the European Union. It is a journey that we have completed together, shoulder to shoulder, supporting each other. Lithuania is still trying to catch up with Estonia's statistical indicators, but we live in hope of one day surpassing you. It is a brotherly race, an excellent incentive for progress.

Over the last 30 years, Estonia has seen a dramatic change and you are now living your own life. It is crucial for Estonians to believe in the future of their country, and feel like the true masters of Estonia. Allow me to present the August 20th Club a symbolic drop of amber that is still being washed ashore by our Baltic Sea which unites us, instilling us with trust and responsibility for our land – something that is more relevant now than ever before. Congratulations, dear friends!