

Speech by President of the August 20th Club Ants Veetõusme at the Special Sitting of the 14th Riigikogu and the August 20th Club on 20 August 2021

Compatriots,

First, I would like to extend my special thanks to everyone who was ready to fight till the end for the actual restoration of the Republic of Estonia 30 years ago. It is only together with the people of Estonia and thanks to their firm support that we won the fight for the independence of Estonia.

President of the Republic of Estonia, President Arnold Rüütel,

President of the Riigikogu, speakers of the Nordic parliaments, Prime Minister, ministers, guests from Latvia, Lithuania, and elsewhere,

colleagues from the Riigikogu and the August 20th Club,

Excellencies,

It has been thirty years from the memorable day when the Supreme Council of the Republic of Estonia made the decision to fully restore the independence of the Republic of Estonia. We saw the materialisation of what almost the entire Estonian nation had worked for over the previous years. 30 years ago, you could feel the expectations and the anxiousness in the corridors and offices of Toompea Castle. Nobody knew how the day would end outside the walls of the castle. And yet it was clear to everyone that this was the very day when the Supreme Soviet (because there was no other body with the same authority) needed to restore the independence of the Republic of Estonia, because this is what the nation had given us a mandate for.

And when the gavel strike of Ülo Nugis confirmed that the resolution on the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Estonia had been passed, the people who had gathered on the square in front of Toompea Castle greeted it with jubilation. This feeling of unity between the people and the members of the parliament can emerge only in these rare moments in the history of a country when the vital decisions that the people have waited and longed for are passed.

During its entire existence, the Supreme Soviet held a steady course – to restore the actual independence of the Republic of Estonia. History has proven that the Supreme Soviet did excellent work during its lifespan, laying a solid legal platform for the Republic to stand on its own feet.

We should also acknowledge the work of the staff of the Supreme Council, many of whom were the top specialists in their fields and who were also instrumental in ensuring that the passed legal acts were formulated correctly and practically flawlessly. This was a shining example of how the political will of the MPs was carried out in a way that resulted in correctly formulated legal acts, and how cooperation should be organised between the MPs and the staff.

One of the greatest achievements in solidifying Estonia's independence was definitely our monetary reform and the reintroduction of the Estonian *kroon*. The preparations for monetary reform were carried out when Estonia was still only moving towards independence, but was not yet truly independent.

During the preparation period, the Soviet Union did not recognise Estonia's right to its own currency, and therefore many Western countries simply did not believe in it and urged us to give up the idea of monetary reform. But we did it, and not badly at all. As usual, we heard all the arguments in favour and against the reform, and made the decision that to our best knowledge seemed the suit Estonia and also be feasible.

The 1939 Bases Treaty was proof of the Soviet intentions, and the additional Soviet troops that marched into Estonia on 17 June 1940 removed the last arguments supporting the staged legitimacy of the consecutive change of regime and voluntary accession to the Soviet Union. The 12th Supreme Soviet confirmed in its resolution that the occupation of the Republic of Estonia by the Soviet Union had not interrupted the *de jure* existence of the Republic of Estonia and that the Estonian SSR existed on the territory of the Republic of Estonia, which had been occupied by the Soviet Union. Yet even this year certain people in Russia have repeated the claim that on the 6 August 1940 the Estonian leaders had requested that Estonia be admitted into the Soviet Union, to which the Soviet leaders, headed by Stalin, had accommodatingly responded positively and had indeed admitted Estonia into the Union.

The glimmers of democracy we saw in Russia thirty years ago faded away a good twenty years ago, and every year brings us closer to the restoration of the Soviet Union in its former dimensions. The front line is approaching us at great speed, having already reached Lithuania and Latvia. What is happening in Lithuania and Latvia is by far not linked to the problems of migrants, it is a test of the new military power and using it against our neighbours. Today, we must show solidarity to our neighbours not only in words but also actions. If we fail to demonstrate the unity and cooperation of the three Baltic states, this might one day lead to tragic consequences. As a member of NATO and the UN Security Council, this is our great opportunity and duty to help our neighbours, forcing our friends in great nations to respond accordingly and take action in real life.

This leads us to another triggering issue – to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact whose secret protocols practically divided up Europe even before World War II started. The Estonian representatives in the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union did a gargantuan job when the topic of the pact was raised there. On 24 December 1989, the Congress declared the secret protocols legally void, and invalid from the moment they had been signed.

This was only possible thanks to the masterful efforts of the Estonian members of the Congress in countering the falsifiers of history. We are at a point where the Russian State Duma wants to bring the issue back on the table, to repeal the historical decision from 24 December 1989. We

could choose to ignore this but seeing the events in the world and Europe, this would be a crime against the independent Estonia. We must regularly remind the Western countries and their leaders that it was the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that took the three Baltic states into the Soviet Union, not the free will of our nations. And if we do not keep talking about it in the European Union and the UN, the history might repeat itself.

Today is a perfect day to quote the Chairman of the Supreme Council Ülo Nugis in that the feeling of being in charge of our destiny is something we must not forget. When deciding whom to elect to the parliament, the voter should start by asking themselves whether they have any actual way of influencing the decisions made on Toompea. Or are they simply being reduced to a faceless crowd that can be manipulated when forcing through the agreements made in the back rooms of politics.

Politics start where ideas and ways to implement these compete among themselves, instead of the ambitions for power that individuals might have, or their eagerness to please the party leaders. Politics is an art of compromises, achieving results while keeping one's dignity, allowing the losers to retract gracefully and the winners to show their greatness of spirit by hearing out the differing opinions.

It is the rapidly changing circumstances that force us to be prepared for each new challenge. Without new challenges we would degenerate into a vacuous small country that can be exploited by others for their own interests.

Ask yourselves every morning – what can I do for myself and my country? And every day, do something for yourselves, your loved ones, your colleagues, your friends, and for Estonia. And when you have done that, your day has been a success and life in Estonia has improved.

Today we can say with certainty – we have won and made our dreams come true. Let us keep this victory alive. Let us keep the Republic of Estonia safe.

Thank you.

Ants Veetõusme, Tallinn, 20 August 2021