

People of Estonia! I wish you all a particularly hopeful and joyful New Year!

I am sending my best new year wishes to you from the centre of our book culture, from the National Library of Estonia. Those more observant among you certainly know that the real home of our 'book Mecca' at Tõnismäe has been under renovation for some time now. However, soon the book culture promoters will be able to move our literary treasures from their temporary shelter back to this stately house again.

"A nation begins with a book," a verse by poet Hando Runnel, has been chosen as the motto of the Year of the Estonian Book, which starts today. But Runnel has also said: "Books have shaped individual people, books have shaped nations. Books in the mother tongue have rallied nations to establish their own states. The book is the home of words that reach out to touch the very core of our human nature. The book is the most protecting home of the living word."

These deep and brave words come from the heart of a great poet of a small nation. And we all know the English proverb 'my home is my castle'. The strength of a castle, however, comes from confidence. The height of the Tall Hermann Tower or the girth of the Fat Margret Tower are not the indicators that give us peace of mind and security. More important is our inner confidence, the conviction that our home, our culture and our way of life need protecting. Because we are on the right path.

And the latter, confidence, can be built on several components. The key component is a secure development environment that takes into account the needs of all of us. Political and economic stability, numerous friendship and allied relations, energy independence and, last and perhaps the most important – effective educational life – these are the cornerstones of Estonia's growth and prosperity.

People of Estonia! Last year we made the final transition to the Estonian-language education. And we eliminated the last big relict of the Soviet occupation in our society. This is how today we can build a united Estonian school where no one is left behind, where the talented are helped towards even greater heights, and where the average are given knowledge that ranks far above the global average. This is the kind of system that could be at the heart of our self-confidence and inner peace. Of course, ensuring such a situation does not require just a well-organised school network and well-paid teachers. Much more is needed – most of all the will. Here I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those who have been working for this long-awaited change!

In energy independence, we still have the final step to take and to desynchronise ourselves from Russia's power grids. And we are going to take this is a step in February to celebrate the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia. Without any hesitation! And in spite of the fact that the vessels of Russia's shadow fleet are once again trying to provoke us into submissiveness by dragging their anchors to cut the cables connecting us with our allies. This action will also be stopped this year by a resolute response. Finland is a good example and partner for us here.

Unfortunately, we have to say that, last year, too, our greatest hope was not fulfilled, and Ukraine did not achieve victory against Russia, which is waging a war of aggression. Therefore, it will also be our duty this year to stand beside Ukraine who is waging a war of liberation. To support them in every way we can, to persuade our partners to do the same, and to do all this until the victorious end of the war and the coming of peace. A peace that will be

concluded on the terms formulated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Only such a solution will give us the confidence that Russia's imperialist desire to dominate over other countries and peoples will come to a permanent end. Until this has happened, the shadow of war will be walking beside us.

Today, Estonia is strong and confident. We know how to manage difficult situations, and we know how to make bold and forward-looking decisions. May our will, wisdom, wit and tactfulness be the keywords for us to follow as we are building our home this year, in 2025. As everyone of us is building their home, and all of us are building our country together.

And let us not forget that, in this work, we can get help from books, including the book called the Constitution. And in this year, our Parliament, the Riigikogu, will have to write an additional new line in it. In this way, we will make our home even more secure and we will be able to overcome all the difficulties that may come our way.

A Happy New Year to you, book people!