

Speech by President of the Riigikogu Lauri Hussar

People of Estonia!

Congratulations on Independence Day!

In February 1918, the members of the Estonian Salvation Committee – Konstantin Päts, Jüri Vilms, and Konstantin Konik – proclaimed the Estonian Declaration of Independence. This is the foundation on which our independent and democratic Republic of Estonia stands today.

But let us try to imagine, on this early morning hour when our blue, black and white flag has been raised on the Tall Hermann Tower, how they must have felt.

I would compare it to the mission of Christopher Columbus – to sail westward with three ships, on a journey into the unknown. He believed that somewhere out there must be India – wealth, spices, new opportunities. The freedom to go west, and along with that freedom, the hope for a better life.

Päts, Vilms, and Konik knew about the right of nations to self-determination. They could rely on the principles of US President Woodrow Wilson, who spoke of the right of nations to determine their own destiny. This right came from the West.

But realising this right required courage. Not to fear the whims of the great powers or rely on chance, but to set sail, take action, and declare Estonia's independence.

Just as Columbus could not know there was a new continent, the members of the Salvation Committee could not know what the journey ahead would bring. They did not know about the war that would break out soon, nor about the Tartu Peace Treaty that would be signed two years later. They certainly could not imagine that 19 years later, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact would attempt to annul that peace treaty.

However, one thing was clear – they had to act, not wait.

Allow me to dwell for a moment on the word “peace”. Today, the whole Europe needs peace. The world needs it. First of all, Ukraine needs it, having fought a war of freedom against imperialist Russia for four full years.

The lessons of the Tartu Peace Treaty are clear to all of us. A just peace is achieved when the cost of aggression becomes unbearable. This requires international pressure on the aggressor, isolation, and sanctions. But the most important thing is the people's own will to defend themselves, and their readiness to protect their freedom, and, of course, the existence of allies.

In the Estonian War of Independence, we drove the enemy out of our borders. Only then did the serious negotiations begin. At first, the demands were outrageous. But we resisted. And a just peace was born – a peace that recognized the right of a small nation to be the master of its own land.

These principles are still valid today. Support for Ukraine, comprehensive isolation of the aggressor, enforcement of international law – this is the way to peace.

Friends,

Our historical choice was to move to the West. To anchor ourselves in the European Union and NATO. Our world is not perfect, and Europe is not without its problems, but these alliances are absolutely the best forms of international cooperation for the future of our country and our people.

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves once used the American children's story "The Little Engine That Could" to give Estonia a motto: "We can!" We are small but we can! Together with our allies – be they Denmark, the Netherlands, or Malta – we can do more! We can make Europe stronger!

Europe must free itself from fear of the future. We must believe in our strength. In our ability to become much more capable in economic and military terms. Just like Columbus made the world bigger, Estonia is making it bigger and stronger with its actions and values. Our reputation is far greater than our size and population would suggest. In exactly the same way, Henry Sildaru, representing a small country and its people, broke through to the podium at the Milan-Cortina Olympic Games, while countries many times larger than ours did not have that joy. This is a kind of miracle.

But let's take a moment to look around us.

What a beautiful Estonian winter! The lakes are frozen, the sea is covered with ice. The days are already a little longer.

This beauty cannot be taken for granted. Just like freedom can never be taken for granted.

Let us remember the founders of the Republic of Estonia today. Let us acknowledge those who restored it. And let us carry within ourselves a simple but powerful thought: thanks to our joint efforts, we live in a free, beautiful, and dignified country.

Long live Estonia!