

**Welcome by the President of the Riigikogu at the Conference of
the Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of
the Member States of the European Union in Tallinn on 20 October
2017**

Dear distinguished guests,

The Riigikogu, the Parliament of the Republic of Estonia has the honour of being your host, and I hope you will have a successful meeting. I know that the topics to be discussed are serious and up to date.

Next year, the Republic of Estonia will be one hundred years old. Unfortunately, all that time we have not been able to rely on democracy and its integral part, the independence of judicial power. In occupied Estonia, this was our dream.

Today, dear guests, I can assure you of the following. I am the longest-standing member of the parliament in the history of Estonia, and during the last 25 years, I have seen all kinds of debates here. When the basis for judicial power was created twenty years ago, there were also disputes. But never on the question whether the judicial power should be independent or not. We argued over how it would be the best to ensure that independence. And if necessary, we can continue this discussion even now.

Today, seeing how complicated and difficult it is to establish independent judicial power in several young democracies, I often wonder why it was somehow natural and generally understandable with us. And to be honest, I do not know the answer.

But I can see that in several democratic countries, the independence of judicial power has been put under question by the deputies elected by the people. And unfortunately I also have to admit that, for the first time in 25 years, we also have a group of MPs, fortunately a small group, who essentially attack the independent judicial power. Their number is small, but they exist. I am sure that they will never achieve enough influence in Estonia to carry out their silly ideas. I am totally sure of that. But somebody has elected them. And in some other country, their representation is so numerous that it is necessary to protect the independence of courts.

Such movements rely on voters who do not feel safe in this new open, integrated and globalised world. They do not know what to do, and the populists are immediately ready to offer them solutions in the name of power. These solutions are simple, understandable and always wrong.

I apologise for this maybe not very traditional introduction. But as political small talk has never been one of my favourite activities, you have to make do with it.

I wish you success. Today, there is no alternative to democracy and the open world. And there is also no alternative to the independence of courts.