

Address by President of the European Parliament David Sassoli at the Special Sitting of the 14th Riigikogu and the August 20th Club on 20 August 2021

Dear guests, dear colleagues, dear people of Estonia,

I am very happy to be here today and celebrate with you the anniversary of the restoration of your country independence.

Thirty years ago you have shown no fear but only the thirst for freedom and democracy. I know that your road for freedom has begun much earlier, hundred years before and continued with small steps of extraordinary people, as well as with big leaps of democracy such as the Baltic way. Your dream of freedom endured through the years of occupation, mass deportations and oppression. Those deportations, the confiscation of properties, deaths and the life in fear for those that managed to survive and return have left deep wound on the soul of the entire region and the humankind. Your move from the darkness to the light as Estonian poet Gustav Suits had put it, became a manifestation of the will of liberty, that inspires many nations today.

Today people working on building their own democracies look up to you. Your experience has shown that progress was nor easy neither quick. Democratic transformation takes years as so does the establishment of new institutions, procedures and the change of habits and mentality. You have done a remarkable thing, with tough reforms which surely impacted all in last 3 decades, you have become the most wired country on Earth and took leadership in e-government. I truly admire this transformation.

Many of you still remember the difference between freedom and its absence, there are many more however that take it today for granted. It is very hard to build democracy as you know from your country experience but also its very easy to lose it if we don't take care of it, as many world examples show us today. The nature of freedom and democracy has not changed, as its characteristics are universal and eternal, but to the old threats of freedom many new are added, and so we have to face huge challenges when defending it.

The nature of democracy is founded on trust, trust in institutions, trust in free media, trust in politicians, trust in the state and those that protect it. This trust needs to be renewed every day, grown as capital and cared for as the best investment. We all are responsible for fostering the dialogue that is a building stone of global democracy.

I fear for democracy today, and I insist we all invest in it even more than hundred or thirty years ago. Today I want to celebrate your democracy and wish it to be eternal and provide an everlasting example to all others.