

## **New Year Address by the President of the Riigikogu Lauri Hussar on 1 January 2024**

My fellow countrymen,

Together we have stepped into a new year. The door of the old year has closed behind us and a new one has opened. A new year means new beginnings, new hopes, and new opportunities.

The world around us changes at break-neck speed, and even to stay still, we have to run as fast as we can. We know that to arrive somewhere we need to move twice as fast. I am sure you remember the childhood book where this idea comes from.

The quicker the development, the more significant its connection to the past, the more crucial it is to understand that we are parties to the events ourselves and that history is being reborn every moment. The end of a year and the beginning of a new one is the moment where we hold the past and the future on the palm of our hand for a fleeting moment. We can pass our judgement on the past year and set expectations to the new one.

Our biggest hope from last year sadly failed – the war between Ukraine and Russia did not end. We can only hope that the brand new year will bring peace in the shape of Ukraine's victory, or at least under the conditions worded by President Zelenskyy. Until this has happened, we will be unable to shake off the shadow of war that walks beside us.

We are realists and put our money where our mouth is when it comes to our security policy. Estonia is buying weapons and ammunition because the only way to prevent a war is to prepare for it. Our neighbourhood is a historical inevitability and although ethnicity and culture have no price tag, national defence must be paid for according to the invoices submitted to the society.

Have we been successful? Yes, we have been successful and Estonia is stronger today than ever before thanks to our common efforts and the contribution of our allies.

The greatest challenges of the new year for us are linked to the objective set out in the preamble of the Estonian Constitution to preserve our language and culture. I believe in the strength of the Estonian language and culture – the Estonian language is growing in importance, the language that our nation is based upon will become the national language of the whole Estonia as a result of the current processes.

The Estonians are a modern nation and finally we are able to do something that every self-respecting European nation has done long ago – our education system will transfer wholesale to the official language. The actual beginning of the reform of the language of instruction will be one of the key steps of this year. This step will take years and all the results will only appear decades from now.

Language skills are communication skills – they build a bridge between people. The many Ukrainians who have come to Estonia have shown by their example what can be accomplished when there is the will to learn the language, the need to understand and be understood. The will is the key to nearly everything. Along with the language, the schools convey values and give everyone the opportunity to self-realisation as carriers of the Estonian culture and members of our society.

In factual terms, transfer to a common Estonian school helps to dispel the illusion that people who are physically living side by side live on different planets culturally. This has been a major misconception of the last decades in Estonia.

Similarly, politics in Estonia have artificially kept up the perception that there are several different Estonias that rotate on closed orbits and only rarely meet, unable to politely agree or disagree when they do. We only have one Estonia, and it is up to every one of us to treasure it.

Furthermore, in addition to Estonia celebrating 20 years as a member of the European Union, we will have the European Parliament elections this spring. One key topic of these elections will be the debate on the environment and energy. I hope that this will be based on scientific facts, will adequately assess the state of our ever more rapidly warming planet, and propose solutions for the future.

The new year must also bring along a plan for the Estonian economy, which would give our businesses the freedom and the opportunity to succeed. The Estonian economy is as strong as are our businesses, as attractive as is our business environment, and as quick as is our progress through innovation. In the end, we all depend on the well-being of the Estonian economy.

In the words of the writer Jaan Kaplinski:

“A hammer beating somewhere, all is linked to all.  
To keep us bound together, sweet smelling grass in hand.”

I wish all my compatriots the courage and open-mindedness to embody these ideas and to take these values forward through their thoughts, words, and actions. This helps everyone to carry on this mindset, beginning with yourself and your nearest and dearest, and ending with retail workers or passing acquaintances you happen to meet.

Be constructive yourselves because in the end our society does not stand only on our shared values but also on mutual respect, as well as forgiveness and sometimes the acknowledgement of our own weaknesses. Only by understanding one another do we reach harmony and solidarity. And the recognition that the concerns of individuals are the concerns of the society.

Happy New Year to everyone! Happy New Year, my dear Estonia!