

President of the Republic, members of the Riigikogu, Prime Minister, Government of the Republic, constitutional officials, Excellencies. Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am opening the 4th session of the 15th Riigikogu.

Members of the Riigikogu, I firmly believe that each one of us, the 101 representatives elected by the citizens, know the preamble of our Constitution by heart. So I will not quote it here. Instead, I call your attention to another provision of the Constitution—section 59, which says “Legislative authority is vested in the Riigikogu”.

As we know, having power is a huge responsibility, but this should not paralyse us into inaction. On the contrary, an adequate sense of responsibility should be our guide to intense and constructive legislative work. Our citizens deserve a legislation that begets a solid rule of law.

It goes without saying that the Act on shaping next year’s state budget is a key piece of legislation for the whole Estonia. The government’s proposals this year are aimed at steering the budget towards better balance. The people also expect steps to boost the economy; many of these steps will be based on decisions made in this hall, and we, as MPs, will critically assess the goals. By voting in favour or against something, based on our reasoning. But no citizen of the Republic of Estonia wants the parliament to blankly block all the procedures, which is also known by the fancy name of obstruction. What is expected of us are results, meaningful debates, and considered decisions. Yes, the Supreme Court has said that obstruction is something we need to tolerate but not in a way that jeopardises the constitutional role of the Riigikogu; after all, our Constitution sets us a total of sixteen tasks as the legislator.

Of course, policies need to deal with the pressing problems that appear on the agenda. In many ways, the one-time British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, who was asked what was the greatest challenge for a statesman, was right when he wittily replied “Events, my dear boy, events.”

Events pop up every day. These are often unpredictable. But there is a whole host of events that we can predict and prepare accordingly as best we can. It is some of these that I would like to draw your attention to.

One of the many tasks of the parliament is to ensure that the legal acts governing our daily lives are effective and clear. Several legal acts are in definite need of unbiased review and further elaboration. Times have simply moved on and legal texts can fall behind. Recently, in a speech at the August 20th Club I mentioned certain important legal acts that have stood the test of time from the point of view of the spirit and provisions of the Constitution, but still need crucial amendments and clarifications. Among these was the President of the Republic Election Act, which needs to be updated to streamline and refine the election process and make it more inclusive for the public. Another one waiting for its turn is the Political Parties Act, which has remained on the back burner for years; we need to answer the question whether a political party that has been repeatedly convicted of a criminal offence should lose its allocation from the state budget. The current procedure still ensures even a bonus to repeat offenders.

The act on local elections adds another interesting aspect, which has been discussed in public since the start of Russia’s full-blown aggression against Ukraine. It is about the right to vote of citizens of warring states. Our duty is to find a solution to this problem, and pretty fast. After all, local elections take place next autumn. In a word, the elected members of rural municipality

and city councils also vote for the President, which creates a direct link between the presidential elections and the Municipal Council Election Act. Never mind that the next presidential elections only take place in 2026.

We need to ensure the clarity and efficiency of the rules of the game as soon as possible, particularly as the next local elections are scheduled to 13 months from now. It is my pleasure to quote the President of the Republic Alar Karis in his inaugural speech right here in this hall: “It is by far not pointless to discuss which form of presidential elections would make the most sense in Estonia today. Long forecasts, early adaptation to inevitable changes also show wisdom.”

Members of the Riigikogu,

I encourage you to consider a possible review of our Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act. It is a common practice in democratic parliaments to constantly review their own operating principles. Over the last eighteen months, many of its provisions have also been discussed in depth in the Supreme Court. In almost every single case, the Supreme Court has decided that the parliament enjoys a very broad right of self-organisation and that in cases of impasse it is the Board and committees of the parliament who can make sure that the work in the parliament continues. The comfortable solution would be to do nothing today and wait for the Board of the Riigikogu to resolve the unregulated situations. Rest assured, we are prepared for that and have also done this, in order to ensure the efficient work of the Riigikogu.

But it might be worth reflecting whether a comfortable solution is always the best for a functioning democracy. Democracy in its final definition is never synonymous with comfort. Because as Winston Churchill once said: “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.”

Personally, I invite all of you to discuss clarifications in the work of the committees but also the breaks for debate taken before voting. We should consider giving the chair of the sitting a certain disciplinary power. Not necessarily as extensive as in the European Parliament where the chair can remove a member from the sitting for repeated disruptions, but definitely something stronger than today. No voter has given any MP the mandate to bring a noise machine to the Riigikogu plenary hall.

Colleagues, please remember that we are in the same boat.

During the new session, we need to leave no stone unturned in our quest for savings. Our fate and status require us to regulate our own pay as well. True, only for the next Riigikogu. But the imperative need to balance Estonia’s revenues and expenses leads us to question what is our own contribution to a dramatic cut of the costs. And one of the very few options left to us by the law is deciding about the expense allowance. Every sergeant or schoolteacher knows that teaching is successful only when you lead by example. This is why I am asking you: what kind of role models we plan to be, and can we tighten our own belts even more?

I would like to conclude with my key point: our security, the corner stone of our independence. The Ukrainian nation is fighting a war of liberation against Russia for the third year running.

And they are not fighting for their own freedom alone but they are standing on the frontline of the democratic free world and thus fighting for the sake of all of us. We know that if Ukraine loses this war, Russia is ready to attack the next country because this is the only way Putin’s

criminal regime knows how to stay in power. Nine months ago, the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy said from this same rostrum: “We need to win this fight not only because the fate of our state is decided in it, and also the fate of all other states and nations that border on Russia. In this fight, it will be decided what will be the global attitude to freedom at present, and after us and our children and grandchildren. Freedom must know how to win by standing against tyranny.” Over the last three years, the parliaments of the free world have played a critical role in this fight. The same goes for the Riigikogu, which has made nine statements in support of Ukraine and its people during this war, as well as the pioneering decision to hand over Russia’s frozen assets to Ukraine as compensation for war damages.

And it goes without saying that Ukraine’s war for freedom compels us to focus on our own national defence. We are facing the task of ensuring Estonia’s primary defence and victory-oriented strategy. All of us, every member of the Riigikogu, must explain to our allies that the war against Russia cannot be won without turning the fire power against Russia. And it is clear that every one of us must accept that burden and allocate funding to the national defence.

Unity in foreign and security policy issues has been a more or less constant feature for us during the whole 21st century. Let us keep it that way.

Colleagues,

There is only 101 of us... In a nation of more than one million. But we have campaigned to get here, to make sure Estonia thrives and progresses. I believe that we can do more than so far, better than so far, and even more kindly than so far. I wish us all the strength we need to mould the democratic process into legislation.

Thank you. I declare the 4th session of the 15th Riigikogu open.