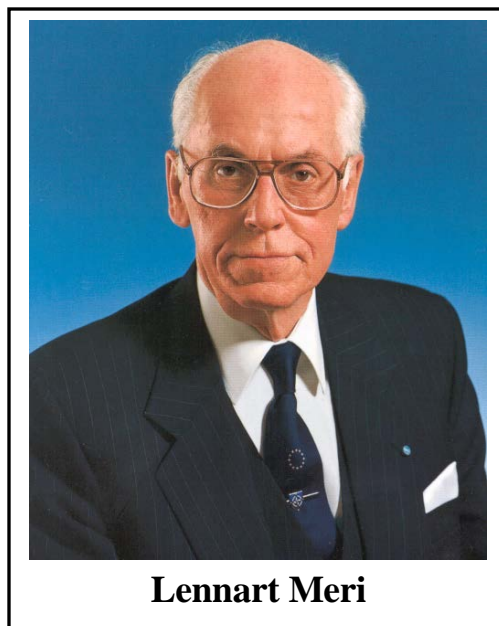




Freedom Through Democracy, Security, and Unity in Diversity

**Memorable Words of Lennart Meri,
President of the Republic of Estonia,
From His Speeches 1992–2001**



Compiled and edited by M. Merrick Yamamoto

Visual Tutor Company, 2016

From the President's New Year's Eve Message, December 31, 1999

Dear fellow countrymen! Today, we are all one big family. Today, in my mind, I shake hands with all of you, look everybody in the eye, and ask: how are you? Today's New Year is so different from all that have been and all those still to come. It is mysterious, at least in our imagination. Round numbers have a powerful influence on our mind and on our behaviour, especially when the New Year is also connected to the beginning of a new century, a new millennium. A friend of mine even asked me for an interview concerning the third millennium. I asked him: What could a tiller or a fisherman from Rävala or Saaremaa have said about the second millennium in the year 999? On the New Year, there will be no change in the constellation of stars, in the movement of the Sun or the Earth. For an ancient Estonian, the flow of time was constant and indivisible, like the peaceful flow of a river. We toast the new millennium, fill the sky with fireworks and celebrate today, because we are part of the Christian culture. The year 2000 is a year of advent, the year of transition, taking us to the third millennium after the birth of Christ. And as we are impatient, we celebrate the beginning of the new century and the new millennium already now. Together, as a big family, we are drawn to that invisible line, behind which, it seems to us, the future begins—new, mysterious, and certainly better. The sense of future, the discovery of the future is perhaps the principal characteristic of man, which makes the distinction between him and the rest of nature.

How clearly are we able to see the future? Remember: The deeper we manage to look into the past, the farther can we see into the future. In 1899, in the year's last issue, the Tartu *Postimees* states that the 19th century had overcome "the huge distances on earth," as human labour and natural products "have become objects of sale and purchase all over the world, and the markets of separate nations and states have become the world market"; and even the tiger leap was not unknown to *Postimees*. *Postimees* wrote: "Paper and electricity carry the human thought and word from one end of the world to the other, connect the words and minds of peoples, illuminate mankind spiritually and physically."

Closing the chronicle of the 20th century, let us admit that we have fulfilled the greatest aspiration, or vision, of all the previous generations: we have founded our independent state. The Republic of Estonia is not something that we have just because other nations, smaller and bigger, have their own states. The Estonian state is the means for the Estonian citizens to attain their goals, the measure for protecting the citizens of Estonia and their interests, for preserving our language, our national culture, our traditions.

The world changes, and we change with it, in any case. Just like a growing plant, a state also needs care; it is a political plant that we have to water and feed. But the state is not a pot-flower, grown for purely aesthetic pleasures. By caring for and developing our state, we promote and protect our own interests. Just as every human being has to act for his whole life—not only act, of course, everyone also has to learn throughout his life, in order to be able to act also ten or twenty-five or fifty years later—also the Estonian state will never be fully complete, because it is in the interests of us all to attain our goals in the changing world.

Our homes and our families are our strength. Our home and our family support us in hardships, from which we are never completely sheltered. For the sake of Estonia's future, we have to help the young Estonians to stand on their own feet, to create their own homes.

Today, I just wanted to look you in the eye and encourage you. To say what seldom gets said: we have done well, and we will do even better tomorrow—on the condition that there will be less words and more action. And now it is time to wish you more power to your elbow, and a Happy New Year, a Happy New Year, wherever you all may be. Happy New Year, dear fellow countrymen! Happy New Year, my dear little Republic of Estonia!

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Preface

In this book President Lennart Meri talks to you about freedom, democracy, and security; about unity and diversity; and education, success, and home. President Meri led Estonia during the post–Cold War period, a very difficult time for Estonia and many other countries in Europe trying to adopt democracy and the market economy.

The choices that the Estonian people made during the early post–Cold War period demonstrate how a nation can peacefully resolve problems, problems that included the potential for interethnic tensions to lead to conflict. After regaining independence in 1991, the people of Estonia restored democratic laws and institutions; reestablished a market economy; and instituted measures that helped many of its noncitizen residents adapt to Estonian independence and participate fully in Estonian society. The Republic of Estonia received international recognition for these and other achievements, including an early invitation to join the European Union.

President Meri’s leadership was key to Estonia’s success, and his thoughts reflect many of the reasons for this success. You can use his thoughts to help solve many problems in the present and the future. As he said, “Human beings live in the name of the future, in the name of a better and happier future for their children and grandchildren.”

The quotations in this book were drawn from the speeches and letters of President Lennart Meri as on the Estonian government’s website in 1999 and 2015. In a number of cases, minor editorial changes have been made, and italics and underlying have been added in some cases to mark particularly important thoughts.

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I. Freedom Through Democracy

Democracy and the State

Democracy is an atmosphere that gives every individual the opportunity to realise himself or herself as a citizen according to his or her best abilities. It is not a simple political system; it may be the most complicated one, and it is, in any case, a system that must, day after day, also reproduce the certainty, the security that the system will prevail. –*Opening of the Exhibition at the National Library, April 3, 2001*

The essence of security is in democracy. Democracy is not an island, which can remain wealthy and apart in an ocean of poverty. Democracy has a mission. It must expand, its rays must alight hope in peoples, give them a belief in the world of man. Democracy in its entire demanding form has to be reborn every single day. I believe that we have to sharpen our swords and to sharpen our moral obligations. The first takes little time, the second in turn will take all the centuries of this millennium. –*Sofia Summit 2001, October 5, 2001*

What is democracy after all; how does this commonly used word materialise itself in our daily life? Democracy is a continuous facing of choices, and freedom of choice is the crown of life. –*Electoral Body, September 20, 1996, and Receiving the Coudenhove-Kalergi Europe Award, September 11, 1996*

The state has been called to serve the people, not the other way around. During the Russification years we have learned to look after our people; let us now learn to look after the state as well. Any one of you can hold an umbrella. The state is the people's umbrella. We are all responsible for our country as a whole and every one of us individually. The windmills of democracy work slowly, but they do produce. That is the source of my optimism. –*79th Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1997*

A couple of hours ago, the Emmaste County Council decided to rename the motor sailboat, *Alar*, a ship with a beautiful, dramatic maritime history, to *Ernst*

Jaakson. This ship has sailed both under the Estonian flag and under the Stars and Stripes of the United States. It is also with symbols that we ensure the continuity of the Republic of Estonia. What would have been the message of Ernst Jaakson to us today? I believe that he would have quoted his favourite, Benjamin Franklin: "We have given you a republic, if you can keep it." This question, this demand should be kept in sight (and in mind) day by day. –*Opening of the VIII Riigikogu (Parliament), September 14, 1998*

What is Estonia's strength? Estonia's strength is Estonia's democracy. It is our understanding of what we do; and we should see more than one year ahead. So that we know what we need to do in five or ten years' time. This is the path of a democratic country. –*Estonia Remembers: Rakvere Oak Wood, June 6, 2001*

[In some cases] there is no single answer to the question WHY, and there hardly will be any. But there is an answer to the question WHAT NEXT. –*Banquet Given by Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia in Honour of President Lennart Meri and Mrs. Helle Meri, September 11, 1995*

Dear ninth Riigikogu, I congratulate you and wish you a strong will to work and a sharp statesman's eye that would see much farther than the coming four years. The people have bought you a ticket for four years, but the Estonian train has a much longer ride ahead. Those who do not understand this will get off at the next whistle-stop. –*Opening the IX Riigikogu, March 18, 1999*

Each country, each city, each career-driven official is stuck with a biblical temptation to say: before me "the Earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep with a divine wind sweeping over the waters." It sounds beautiful but it is not true. –*Conference, "750 Years of the Lübeck Charter," May 16, 1998*

Politics is a profession that requires high professional skills and similarly high professional ethics. Politics must never be a business idea for the politician. Everybody who wants to run a business, please step

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aside. Finish with your business and then return if you wish. –*79th Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1997*

Time has given us a strong ally—the Estonian media. Trust the media with the hardest tasks we are facing, and I am certain that you will find the media a reliable ally in fortifying the democratic and spiritual values in our country. Estonian journalism is looking back at the tradition of two and a half centuries. Its self-image is not that of a profitable enterprise, oriented towards market, hedonism, and horror stories—rather, the Estonian media have always been the vanguard that even at the most difficult times has brought to the country the notion of the inevitability of the Estonian state. If we want our state to last, and to stay strong, it must rest on trust, which means dialogue, cooperation, and transparency. –*Opening the IX Riigikogu, March 18, 1999*

Where does trust come from? It is born of work, of acting together. The international trustworthiness of the Republic of Estonia depends on our own trust of our state and Constitution. Trust the Constitution, because this is the anchor that keeps us from running upon dangerous rocks. –*Closing of ESTO '96 Song Festival, August 10, 1996*

Trust needs to be renewed every single morning, restored every day, grown as capital and cared for as starting capital. Domestic trust feeds trust among foreign countries in their policies towards Estonia, which in turn help to cultivate and consolidate Estonia's well-being. Estonia's well-being is, above all, the well-being of the Estonian citizen, the well-being of the Estonian family, the well-being of the Estonian community and state. It is first of all you, the citizens of the Republic of Estonia, who create trust in your country. Trust in Estonia is also created in a slightly different but as valuable a way by every Estonian embassy and every Estonian newspaper. Trust is the key factor in national security. Estonia's deed must not dissent from Estonia's word. It is the resolve, the integrity of the people, that I value. –*79th Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1997; Defence Forces Parade in Tartu, June 23, 1993; and Estonia Remembers: Rapla County, June 12, 2001*

Trust is based on an honest dialogue. At nights, I have been sitting at my computer, trying to answer your

letters. All kinds of letters have arrived at the Kadrioru homepage, from all the counties of Estonia and all parts of the world. Some people have doubted that I write the answers myself. A young politician Jaan from Tallinn, a Euro-Skeptic, as he introduced himself, sent me a book and later on checked if I had read it and whether I answered your letters myself. I do indeed, why shouldn't I? No one else even has access to my homepage. And above all, I need this dialogue with you. This straightforward talk at the kitchen table, where we neither try to conceal our troubles nor just find fault with life, but call everything by its rightful name, be it good or bad. I am grateful to you for this trusting dialogue, and for all our meetings: they give strength. As you see, this is the second time I mention the strength springing from trust. And we do need strength. We need the united strength of Estonia. –*New Year 1999*

The well-being of the Estonian state and that of its citizens are two sides of the same coin. The Estonian state can't be doing better than you, its citizens—and the other way around. We can count on success in planning our next moves together only if we are conscious of ourselves and our possibilities and stay honest about it. Only if we place the common interests of the state and the people above the interests of circles of friends and political parties. Alone we can do little: together we can do a lot more. –*New Year's Message of the President of Estonia, December 31, 1995, and Address on the Threshold of His Second Year in Office, October 7, 1993*

Goodneighbourly relations are underpinned by trust. Trust will appear when one can be sure that the other parties' benchmarks are the same values, the same credo. Freedom of speech and free development of civil society in the wider meaning is one of these integral components of democracy that many of us have had to learn or to relearn. Without recognising the supremacy of democracy there are no grounds for cross-frontier trust to appear, there is no guarantee for security and stability. We wish to believe that at long last we will succeed in building up a Europe where the next door neighbour will not be one's deadly enemy. –*International Conference, Vilnius, September 5, 1997*

History does not repeat itself. Fortunately. But what does repeat itself is mistakes. Unfortunately. A mistake

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is like a chameleon: every time a different colour, so it is not recognized; and every time too expensive to be repeated. Nonetheless hesitations and aspirations do recur; again and again the balance wavers between procrastination and principles. What breakdowns of empires mean in the first place is not so much new political maps as a new way of thinking: acceptance of freedom of choice and rejection of dictates and ultimatums. Europe is not about geography. Europe is about the unity of principles and adherence to principles. It's principles that mould geography: it's not geography that moulds principles. Only on such premises can we bequeath the 21st century hopefully to our children. –*Reception in Honour of the President of the Italian Republic, May 22, 1997*

If a situation seems wrong from a moral point of view, then it will probably turn out to be a problem from a political and security point of view as well, albeit in the longer term. Principles cannot be for sale. This seemingly moralising message is by no means naive. It is, if you prefer, a piece of realpolitik wisdom. A betrayal of principles can provide success and survival for one day, but the next day or the next generation will have to pay the price many times over. –To the Members of the Althingi, Reykjavik, September 14, 1999, and Turku University, May 17, 1995

You cannot fight evil in league with evil. As French President François Mitterrand said, “Europe has conquered itself.” This is true, insofar that for the first time a large part of Europe has joined in the defence of the bulk of European values. Evil is always ripe to exploit victims and sorrow to its own advantage. Let us resist this temptation. –*Turku University, May 17, 1995, and Memorial Service for the Ship, Estonia, Stockholm, October 2, 1994*

Goodwill alone is not enough. You have to know how to make the right decisions. An educated outlook is the most important means for succeeding in competition. The stimulation of creativity, and through this the making of right decisions, will remain the most important task of higher education.

We have to change together with our surroundings and we have to change faster than the environment and the world that surrounds us. If we want to catch the tram, we have to run faster than the tram. –*Economic Conference of Hansabank, May 18, 2000*

There is always a need to go into the past...because we need the past to understand the present. We must learn from history to forestall mistakes. –*Interview, Washington Times, April 30, 2001, and Opening of the Pro Baltica Forum Conference, September 11, 1993*

The baton of the Head of the Estonian state was passed to me on October 8, 1992, by Heinrich Mark, the Prime Minister in duties of the President. I received it with respect and reverence, and will hand it over with the same respect and reverence to the President of the Republic Arnold Rüütel, who has been elected through fair democratic elections by your own electoral body.

What is there to say about the Presidency? It was not an easy job. First, you ask yourself whether you are doing too little. Then you wonder whether you are perhaps doing too much. And when looking around a little, hearing what television, radio, or media had said, it seemed they always had some reproach to make, no matter on what, but there had to be a reproach. Strange as it may sound, one becomes used to that. One becomes used to that when hearing your voices; seeing your eyes; and feeling your support, trust, and love.

In our parliamentary Republic, the President's job is different from that of the Parliament and that of the government of the Republic. The two latter ones are connected to a different logic—their thoughts extend from elections to elections. This is so everywhere. It is so everywhere that the Head of State embodies the continuity of the state, the ability to look far beyond the elections, beyond several governments, and ask himself what it is that the people need, that the state needs. This will inevitably be the duty of the Head of State, who stands outside all political parties and governments.

The most beautiful time of my presidential years was the time of the Broken Cornflower, during which time I visited all the counties of Estonia and could shake hands with so many that are still alive [after having been deported to Siberia] and carry in their hearts the ever-burning flame of the Republic of Estonia. I shook hands with very young people born in Siberia, and with very old people, who came in wheelchairs or supported themselves on crutches.

Thank you, dear fellow countrymen, from all my heart for the beautiful time when we were dragging our cart uphill together. We shall always be meeting each other. –*On Estonian Television, October 7, 2001*

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Totalitarianism has many faces and a talent for disguises. Freedom and free thinking only have one face. You only need to recognise it once, and it will never disappear. –*St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, April 6, 2000*

Democracy, the beautiful bird. –*Estonia Remembers: Pärnu Vallikäär, May 28, 2001*

Democracy and Elections

Elections are a test of democracy and independence. They are also an assay of the gold of independent thinking, of the independent will that enables each one of you to shape the society, to formulate our common interests and to pose the tasks for the government. Do not fail to use your opportunity and your rights. Do not elect an air bubble. Ask yourselves how you would like to see Estonia in four, ten, or fifty years' time. And then elect the man or woman who would honestly and unselfishly represent our common interests in a statesmanly way. Believe me—the people who really want to build up Estonia are among us. It is our duty as electors to find these people and to summon them to work. –*New Year 1999*

Elections give pith and marrow to the sentence from our Constitution stating that the supreme power of the state is vested in the people—you, my dear compatriots, your families, your neighbours, the people next door. First and foremost, you should evaluate the last four years in the Republic of Estonia. From there, you should proceed to decide which powers are to govern Estonia for the next four years. They may gorge you with promises like spoonfuls of sweet porridge. Be precise: remember that the pre-election period is first and foremost a time for dialogue. It is your right and your obligation to ask who are the candidate ministers of one or another party. Pose your questions calmly and fastidiously, and you will get answers that you can consider and assess. The Estonian citizen can only elect with discretion if his or her decisions are based on information, on genuine information. The Estonian press also has a great responsibility here. So, it is time for conclusions, for the evaluation of the leading team of the last four years, and for the decision if we continue with the old team or elect a new one. The power belongs to you, dear electors, and now it is the

time to think and to act. Afterwards, it will be too late to complain.

Elections are no longer a mere formality as they were in the Soviet times. Now, elections mean choice, a choice between two or more objectives, political programs, political solutions. Elections do not mean voting for the leader you know from television screens—it is the deeds you must believe, not the words. I hope to see an election campaign where young people will join the elders, will join my generation. The older generation carries the memory of the hard-working Republic of Estonia, our pride and joy. On this memory, the young generations will build their own vision of Estonia, which they will have to make true. The face of the future Estonia depends on the will and actions of you both, of both your generations. –*Declaration of the Elections of the Ninth Riigikogu, December 1, 1998*

During the fifty years of Soviet occupation there were elections. What was the prime message of these mock polls? Everybody knew that there was no connection whatsoever between the act of voting and the election results. It was a one-horse race, and the horse belonged to an alien state. The blue-black-white flag has not always flown above Estonia. What especially you younger voters take for granted was once a dangerous dream for your mothers and fathers. When you go to the polls, you help to defend our flag. –*Interview, Postimees, March 6, 1999*

An election day is the day when the exercise of the supreme state power is directly vested in the people: it is on an election day that the people manifest their political will. It is precisely at such instants that the quality of democracy is revealed, in how smoothly the power passes into the hands of the people, how free and how large is the turnout of the people to take part in making all of the most important decisions concerning the state, how strong and sturdy is the democratic establishment of the state to match the spirit and tradition of our people. The votes cast in the election themselves speak for the will of the Estonian people to improve and strengthen their state. For this work, for the forthcoming long period of composed work for the good of our state I wish you all and everybody a hot heart, cool judgment, a maximum of willingness to cooperate, and good Estonian grit. –*Before the VIIIth Riigikogu, March 21, 1995*

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Participation in elections is the most powerful means for a citizen to forge the fate of the state and the government, to say nothing of his own. Those who confine themselves to criticism instead of participating in the elections should ask themselves: why was criticism, at least to a certain extent, tolerated in the Russian times, during which there was never a possibility of real elections? If no party is 100 percent acceptable, let us elect the one whose policies seem most advantageous to the progress of Estonia. Let us remember that in a democratic country it is the citizens who decide the development of the society, and it is the people who know the solutions, not the political bureau or the party secretary. On election day we will speak our minds. I would like to remind especially the young electors that on that day we have more power in our hands than is in any ministerial portfolio. —*81st Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1999*

Power is never an aim but a means for guaranteeing the security, welfare, and development of citizens and the nation. Elections are not an aim but a democratic means. Elections wind up the clockspring of democracy that keeps the clock ticking. If during elections we lose the understanding of this metaphor, if we lose our sense of time and space, it means the spring has been overwound. The clock will stop. We have progressed rapidly macroeconomically, leaving us with little time for glancing at the horizon and thinking strategically. Yet a long-term perspective is just as important for every person and family as is a blueprint for a builder. Such a perspective creates stability and order, encourages creativity and spirituality, nurtures realism, and shuts the door on populist rhetoric. It is not a campaign, for thinking cannot be a campaign. It is a method of coexistence between the state powers and the citizen. This is what “national thinking” is about. The absence or inadequacy of “national thinking” leads to vagueness on every level: career and family planning, regional development planning, industrial and commercial business plans all suffer. —*78th Independence Day Celebrations, February 24, 1996*

The Soviet totalitarian regime commanded not so much the economy, but people’s ability to think, the creativity of people. A society in which critical thinking is a crime against the state has lost its ability to create and is slated to survive only by spending the intellectual and technological capital created by

previous generations. The most tragic result of this was the complete and final liberation of people, the liberation of people from their heaviest burden—the obligation to think, to make independent decisions, and to bear the responsibility of their decisions. In restoring our nation and economy, we must also simultaneously restore the citizen who thinks and voluntarily takes responsibility, because democracy can only be based on such a citizen. Do not underestimate the temptation to get free from the responsibility of thinking! —*Estonia Concert Hall, February 24, 1994; Royal Institute of International Relations, Brussels, November 26, 1992; and Meeting of the Forum of Central and Eastern European Newspaper Publisher Associations, September 18, 1993*

What is a state? A state is an entirety. An entirety consisting of the young and the old. An entirety of differences. On election day, take each others’ hands and think of the words of an ancient sage: *A whole is always greater than the sum of its parts.* With this feeling in your hearts your choice will be firm—and the Republic of Estonia will firmly step into the new century. —*81st Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1999*

Guarding Against Authoritarianism

The danger of authoritarianism is always present in Estonia, as it is in every other normal state. It is dangerous to imagine that the times of Stalins and Hitlers are eternally over. Democracy has to be reproduced daily. —*Interview, Postimees, March 6, 1999*

We are increasingly aware of the truth that evil must be and can be confronted; we must not let evil grow powerful and make whole nations groan helplessly under it. Europe has had to pay too dearly for its patience and naiveté. The Greek spirit, the wisdom of centuries, also says here that resolution has to be tied with democracy, a situation where every voice can be heard. —*Festive Dinner in the Castle of the President of the Hellenic Republic, May 24, 1999*

I would like to warn you of the politicians using authoritarian and undemocratic means. The changing times have sown uncertainty in the minds of people. They seek encouragement in strict rule and sweet

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promises. The authoritarian politicians take advantage of this, but have no real confidence in the people or even their own party members—they are first and foremost driven by their craving for power. Such politicians would make trouble in both the foreign and domestic policy of Estonia. How to recognise them? I will repeat: judge politicians by their deeds, not by their words. —*81st Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1999*

Power has to be divided in such a way that nobody should have too much of it in their hands, and each should hold the end of a different rope of power: the legislator, or Riigikogu, shall keep hold of the legislative power; the government shall have the executive power; the judicial system shall have the power to administer justice. The president shall hold the balance of power. And the people shall have the highest power of all, for the people will choose, directly or indirectly, whom they will trust with one or another kind of power. —*Address on the Threshold of His Second Year in Office, October 7, 1993*

International law has had a central role in the moulding of the fate of Estonia. It was the basis of the policy of the Western countries known as the non-recognition policy: the democratic world never recognized the incorporation of the Baltic countries into the Soviet Union following their military occupation. In other words, international law kept alive the continuity of Estonian statehood through the grim years of Soviet occupation. —*VIIIth ESTO Festival, August 4, 1996*

The true sign of a winner is magnanimity, and magnanimity in turn is manifested by readiness to forgive. Estonians have won. Today, we have once again been able to admire our flag and sing our national anthem, for which so many have had to shed their blood. We can forgive the perpetrators but not the system. It is not wrath that lives in our hearts, but justice and love. But to forget would mean to repeat the past once more, and that we shall never do. —*83rd Anniversary Speech, February 24, 2001*

Europe has learnt since the 20th century that *the idea of force confronts the force of the idea*. The idea of the European Union and Europe as a united space with the rule of law dates back to the times of Charlemagne. But I am concerned about the slow expansion of the island

of democracy; I am concerned that Europe and the world have even today still so many crisis centres; I am concerned that when the polycentric structure of the world is discussed it too often includes the familiar idea about force as a moral argument, and that the imperial way of thinking seems to be continuous and militant. However, our advantage and our strength is that we know the terrible price of carelessness. —*Gala Dinner Given by the President of the Republic of Poland and Mrs. Kwasniewski in Honour of the President of the Republic of Estonia and Mrs. Helle Meri, April 28, 1998*

Extremist worldviews are born of the same source, the drive to seize power. [However] it is the technical side and the propaganda for seizing power that should interest us much more in the future, because these threats have not disappeared from the world. Today, extremism has more power in the world than it had five or ten years ago. And I suppose this resolution to confront everything that is hostile towards democracy is a welcome one, but welcome only on the condition that it is directed precisely against extremism. And I am a little perturbed by the fact that we are dividing extremism in two: one of them is called leftism, and the other is called rightism; and then saying that rightism is dangerous, while leftism is not. The historical experience of Estonia can state with iron certainty that these two are not two different sides of the same coin—they are two similar sides of the same coin. *Extremism will in the future be the greatest enemy of mankind, because extremism is an enemy of democracy*. —*Presentation of the Estonian Translation of “The Black Book of Communism,” December 12, 2000*

The Effects of Authoritarianism

You know very well the meaning of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact or Hitler-Stalin pact, when two cruel dictators tried to divide the world with their red pencil. This red pencil went right through our destinies and our souls. A huge number of our people fell victim to it. And yet we have been stronger than our destiny.

As a result of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Republic of Estonia was caught in World War II and under totalitarian occupation. Those were the times when our tongue had to be silent and give way to Russian,

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when our Northern individualistic way of thinking had to give way to the obedience of *homo sovieticus*, and our artists received precise instructions from the Kremlin on what to paint and how. Those were the times when Europe was forced to forget Estonia, but it proved impossible to force Estonia to forget Europe. This was the Estonian Résistance, and we are proud of it. —*Estonia Remembers: Tallinn Song Festival Grounds, June 13, 2001, and Presentation of the Exhibition of Estonian Paintings in Paris, August 30, 2001*

The secret deal between Stalin's Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany cut off Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well as several other Central European countries from Europe for over fifty years. Yet even in those times the yearning kept alive in the souls of the Estonian people for their own statehood and for the European culture and way of life germane to it. —*International Conference, "Estonia and the European Union," November 3, 1994*

The Broken Cornflower Day should be the day when we look into the past to pay tribute to all those who are no longer with us, but we only do this so that we can take a firm step into the future where those atrocities must never recur, where the rule of the law has been guaranteed to us, where we can work in the modern way, so that Estonia will regain her past prosperity; where we will manage to rise to the status of a country known not only for her difficult past, but also for her present and future accomplishments. This is the reason why I have always held on to the belief that the common ties that bind us to Europe are above all in our work, in our values—in everything that is the foundation of the European Union. —*Estonia Remembers: Rapla County, June 12, 2001*

We have gathered here today so that we can draw strength and trust from each other's company. We are not looking into the past to have tears in our eyes. Our hearts are weeping as it is—we will never forget all those who were left there far away [in Siberia], but still we are looking into the past, first of all because we want to prevent such atrocities from happening in Estonia ever again, so that our spirit, our will to resist will be stronger also at times when fortune is not too friendly to us. And above all, we have gathered here today to be proud that so many of us are still here, despite everything. And to rejoice that the feeling that

has brought us together today is so strong here under beautiful old pine trees, and to look into the future. To look into the future where Estonia is and shall be independent, and where today's Estonia, which is not too wealthy, will be just as wealthy and proud as the Estonia that faced its destiny in 1938, in 1939, unaware that the path of destiny was taking our people into World War II. That the frontline, which is a war in itself, would go over Estonia twice, and that those battles on the frontline would not be the real war against the people of Estonia; the real war was the one held at peacetime, at night, when the rest of the world was safely asleep in their beds—this war was held stealthily, fearfully, and had to remain secret.

Dear friends, each and every one of you has his or her memories, and I am infinitely grateful that these memories are alive in you. I would like to evoke these memories, to commit them to paper, to make them into beautiful sentences and pages, so that we could tell the people of Estonia about our tough experiences; and not only that—we could then also tell about it to all the other peoples.

We are mindful of all those who never returned from Siberia. We think of them with reverence and love. But the idea that has brought us together today must also compel us to work and hope also in their name, that we must see Estonia's opportunities, glorious opportunities. —*Estonia Remembers: Põlva, June 1, 2001*

[A Viljandi County girl wrote thus about her grandmother, who had been deported]: "Of course, Grandmother had taken something with her to remind us of our home country. She had managed to bring with her a small ball of silk thread, about the size of an egg. When the children got older, she said that the ball was to be well guarded, because it contained history. And yet, one day my grandmother and her sister unwound the ball of thread, and inside it, they found the blue, black, and white flag of Estonia, in the size of a small table flag. They wound the thread back around the flag, and actually brought it back to Estonia." —*Estonia Remembers: Viljandi Song Festival Ground, May 30, 2001*

This is the day when we commemorate all those, whose life was severed, but who still live among us with their hopes and their deeds. As well as those who returned to us, and especially those who never

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did. Those who rest far away from home, in nameless graveyards that are still Estonian graveyards, just like the tombs of our heroes. We will never forget these victims, and they were many—110,000 people of a nation of one million. And yet we can look into the past and into the future with pride today. The Republic of Estonia is not wealthy today. But the Republic of Estonia is free today. And today we can already see the life that will bear fruit in the future.

Cornflower has been the national flower of Estonia, the symbol of Estonia. Attempts have been made to break it, but it is not broken; it still blossoms in Estonia, it still blossoms in your hearts. —*Estonia Remembers: Valga City Park, May 29, 2001*

The Broken Cornflower is meant as a symbol that Estonia survived the attempts to delete the Republic of Estonia not only from the political map of the world, but also from the memory of the people of Estonia, from your consciousness.

We commemorate all those who never found their way home to their families from Siberia and faraway battlefields. Above all, we commemorate the resolve that compelled people to fight for Estonia even when it was almost impossible. We can only bow deeply to all those who sacrificed their lives for Estonia. —*Estonia Remembers: Haapsalu Bishopric Castle, June 9, 2001; Palamuse Song Festival Stage, June 2, 2001; and Rapla County, June 12, 2001*

What happened to Estonia, also happened in Latvia and in Lithuania. Let us remember that these three small nations were caught between the heavy grindstones of the two totalitarian regimes of the time—Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Here in Estonia, like in Latvia and Lithuania, the war was not directed against the state, it was first and foremost directed against the people: our families, our language, our children; and above all, its aim was to deprive us forever from the possibility to build up our state again; this is why the leaders of our state were among the first to be arrested.

We think of all those who are no longer with us, who were left in Siberia, who died in the Soviet prison camps. We must remember them—not out of fear, but because we trust ourselves, our future, the Republic of Estonia, the security system that Estonia will hopefully become part of, when accepted to NATO and the European Union. We trust the holy

ground of Estonia, and a wealthier future than the present that we see around us today. This is the meaning of our gathering [of the Broken Cornflower]; we draw force from it. We have prevailed, we have won, and they have lost. Let this be the crucial meaning of today's gathering, and I would like to thank everybody who has come here today, and to shake hands with all of you. —*Estonia Remembers: Võru, May 31, 2001*

Resisting Authoritarianism

The Second World War reduced Estonians by a quarter. The survivors were scattered all over the world, eastward and westward. The Republic of Estonia was swept from the map. Where could one hear Estonian spoken? Where could one see the Estonian flag flying? Where was the Republic of Estonia? Did it exist at all, or had independent Estonia been nothing but an episode in world history? A death into oblivion awaited Estonia. ESTO was born of yearning. Estonians who had wound up scattered over the Free World came together, as if to the gates of Eden. But unlike Adam and Eve they did not feel naked: they suddenly saw that Estonians were a multitude. The will, and the skill to cooperate, something Estonians had learnt through their song festivals, had turned the small fragment of a people into a big one. ESTO raised hopes, instilled confidence, set new aims. —*VIIth ESTO Festival, August 4, 1996*

The Max Schmidheiny Foundation for the Prize of Freedom (Freiheitspreis) this time went to the head of one of the smallest states of Europe. The company of your previous laureates is most honourable. I was very glad that in 1990, the laureate of your prize was Radio Free Europe. I gladly admit that as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia in 1992, I nominated this trumpet of freedom for the Nobel Prize for peace. In the decades of communist dictatorship, penetrating the Iron Curtain and the noise of Soviet jammers, it brought Estonia messages from another planet, the planet of Freedom. We heard its voice like you heard Armstrong's voice from the moon. The message was the same: there is life out here! Of course, Estonia knew this anyway, as did Latvia and Lithuania. Yet the repetition of simple truths is most important in everyday life. I am happy,

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and grateful to you, ladies and gentlemen, for inviting me to the company to which we have, through the hardest decades, been bound by common ideals and, what is even more important, a strong conviction that we will also carry these common ideals to life in our country, in Estonia. —*Symposium at the St. Gallen University, Zurich, May 19, 2001*

The Soviet totalitarian regime was doomed much faster than the Western democracies believed. A totalitarian regime may effectively produce rockets, euphemistically called sputniks, but this only prolongs her agony. A totalitarian regime is unable to reproduce itself. Estonians considered Soviet totalitarianism to be temporary. True, it was cruel and dangerous, we lost one quarter of our citizens; the regime was feared, but even more, it was ridiculed. At no other time in history has Estonia produced such a mass of beautiful sarcastic anecdotes—and the world’s greatest nuclear power was defenseless. Witch hunts, which already in the middle ages accounted for more deaths than war and in the former Soviet Union accounted for the deaths of more than sixty million people, were of no use. The root of the Estonians’ desperate yet confident optimism lay in our accurate sense of coordinates: we used the coordinates of Europe. —*Budapest Economic University, May 14, 1997*

Today I am addressing you as President of the Republic of Estonia, to continue the dialogue that began in the half-light of early history and has been going on over and through the Iron Curtain till today. In my previous life I used to write books and make films. Some of my books have been published in Hungarian; some of the films have been shown to your public. A film called “The Winds of the Milky Way” was born in collaboration between Hungary, Finland, and Estonia, which was quite unusual in its time, and was banned by Moscow on the very day it was first shown in Helsinki. Don’t ask me how we managed to make it. That curtain was never made of rustproof iron. The books and the films bear evidence of the continuation of the dialogue even in the hardest years. Politicians were muzzled. So much the greater share of work fell to the lot of writers, filmmakers, composers. We discovered Petöfi for ourselves. My schooltime classmate and deskmate, the composer Eino Tamberg also discovered Petöfi for himself, in the translation of the Estonian poetess Ellen Niit. We then sang Petöfi at Tartu University as if he were our own bard of

students. In the tragic year 1956 the floor stood up when the famous Estonian singer Tiit Kuusik flung at the audience the poet’s oath of liberation from slavery. Of course, a skeptic might see that as a fruitless game of a narrow circle of intellectuals. The skeptic is wrong. A book by Edgar Rajandi published in Brezhnev’s time—a statistical survey of the frequency of Estonian first names—indicates that in late 1956 and in 1957 the popularity curves of Hungarian first names in Estonia jumped up abruptly. What could be more beautiful than a spontaneous ballot of Estonians for Hungary by means of their new-born sons and daughters? No, we couldn’t do much more, but we couldn’t have done less. —*Hungarian Parliament, May 13, 1997*

Paradoxically, the Soviet Union was confronted with the conflicting need to perpetuate her colonial system within her borders and to fight the colonial systems outside her borders. The only strategy she could use was the destruction of national identities, which she intended to achieve through total Russification, a complete suppression of both national history and national languages. As always, it had an opposite result. The “Killing of History” gave in Estonia a tremendous boost to both our historical consciousness and to linguistics. Everything connected with the past became a value in itself. Small village museums sprang up like mushrooms after an August rain. I remember visiting such a museum, a small barn belonging to a fisherman with old tools, newspapers, books, and furniture. The owner was especially proud of a box of pre-war cigarettes and a box of pre-war matches. As a patriotic gesture I was allowed to smoke one of the cigarettes. It was something the fisherman felt he was obliged to do to preserve Estonia. —*St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, April 6, 2000*

In one way or another, we knew already then that totalitarian states are temporary. What we did not know was how to get out of this pickle. Neither could I possibly know that one day, I would be addressing you as the President of Estonia. In those faraway times, our goals were clear, but the ways to reach them were obscure, as we in Estonia had no political tools at our disposal. All we had was the cultural tools—the song festivals, music, theatre, visual arts, film, preservation of antiquities, and above all, books. Sometime in the future, when history will be written by historians, not politicians, they will award the

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laurel wreath for Estonia's self-preservation to the Estonian culture, the only crack through which the nation bent under the deadly yoke of Sovietisation could manifest their political preferences. —*Opening of ESTO in Toronto, July 8, 2000*

Estonians are known as a singing nation. And in fact singing has helped us in hard times to preserve our hopes, and singing has broken the ice for the big ship of the Republic of Estonia, if we recall the Singing Revolution. —*Handing over the Home Decoration Awards in Haapsalu, June 23, 2000*

Estonia is a country on the coast of the Baltic Sea, a country whose lot it has been to live in the crosswinds of history. For thousands of years, Estonians have ploughed their fields, sailed their seas, and raised their children. Again and again, they have been able to withstand the evils of war and foreign imperial domination. Our most important record of past times is our folklore—more than one million pages of it were written down during the great national campaign at the end of the 19th century. This was the awakening of an Estonian national consciousness. And this in turn led us to the birth of the Republic of Estonia in 1918. —*Toast in Honour of the President of the Republic of India His Excellency Kicheril Raman Narayanan at the State Banquet in New Delhi, February 5, 1999*

Midsummer Eve is our Victory Day, and the midsummer bonfire is the flame of Estonia's victory. Four weeks ago I started my Broken Cornflower tour to all Estonian counties here in Pärnu, our jubilee city. We commemorated the victims of World War II. Victory Day, which brought together 20,000 people, and enabled me to shake hands with thousands of victims and to hear from their mouths and see from the look in their eyes that the totalitarian occupations had not broken the people of Estonia; that the people of Estonia have cast off the totalitarian twins of Nazism and communism, and concentrated on building our country's democracy and the defence of our independence. —*Victory Day in Pärnu, June 23, 2001*

My dear fellow countrymen, I am glad that you [survivors of deportation] are so many! What strength, what courage and what confidence my meetings in all the counties of Estonia have given me! I know that not everybody is wealthy, that there are

also those who live in poverty. I often asked about this, and all those who have come through those heavy grindstones looked at me and said: the Estonian flag is flying over us again, and as long as we are shaping our own fate with our own hands and with our own will under our own flag, all hardships can only be temporary. We all have left those hard years behind us. This is the reason for our beautiful meeting today. Dear friends, I want to thank you for your faith and your loyalty. I know how hard it has been. I would like to shake hands with all of you, and to say: with your help, Estonia will bravely go ahead. —*Estonia Remembers: Tallinn Song Festival Grounds, June 13, 2001*

Resisting Authoritarianism by Faith in Democracy

Since regaining independence in 1991 Estonia has had to cover all the way from a totalitarian lifestyle in an occupied country to European-style politics, economy, and culture. Indeed, in our minds we were ready for this struggle. For half a century a very intensive process of brainwashing had been going on, aimed at making Estonians forget. Estonians did not forget. And neither did the nations of the world who maintained that Estonia had never ceased to be, that tyranny never brings forth new justice or new consequences in international law. That is why next year the Republic of Estonia will be able to celebrate its 80th birthday. —*Receiving the Annual Award of the Crans Montana Foundation, June 27, 1997*

Estonia's strength is our common sense, our aptitude for learning, and our will to act. Estonia's small size can be an asset if we are able to apply this property intelligently. Even our underwater diving record—fifty years in the murky depths of Soviet occupation, arriving ashore gasping for breath, with liberty, equality, and fraternity still clenched between our teeth—is an asset. The resilience of our independence, democracy, and statehood is a unique attribute if we are able to, and want to, draw the right conclusions. —*78th Independence Day Celebrations, February 24, 1996*

[During the Soviet occupation of Estonia, I once] savoured hope in Slovenia. The Slovenian PEN-Club had on that occasion invited writers to Lake Bled to speak about George Orwell. Just as Orwell, we too had woven allegory into our texts, and behind it was an

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understanding that the irrational world could not continue endlessly. Our texts, our hints, our glances carried a message of hope and mutual support—and lo, here we are today. –*Ceremonial Dinner Hosted by the President of Slovenia, May 16, 1997*

Estonians value freedom. If for fifty years you cannot do what you want, or if you do you are deported to Siberia, as I was as a child; if for fifty years writing the wrong words or selling for a profit can lead to a jail term, you face the restoration of freedom in one of two ways. [One way is that] people devote themselves to work with the passion of discovering a long-lost love. The thrill of being the master of your own house, along with the realization that if your house is not in order, it is now only your own fault, is a joy and a challenge people who have always enjoyed freedom can only imagine. We love, cherish, and hold our freedom. –*Fundraising Dinner for the Baltic Studies Center, University of Washington, October 31, 1995*

Before World War II, Estonia was a confident, hardworking, upright country, and so proud of her accomplishments. They came the hard way, with work, but they were there, and they were visible. And we may have neglected our relations with Europe, our relations with the democratic side of Europe. We were so convinced that the independence we had gained in the War of Liberty was final and permanent, that we were leading a secluded life in Europe. I guess this is where we should look for our mistakes, and those mistakes are only important to us so that we can avoid repeating them ever again.

We have accomplished so incredibly much, and fulfilled also the dreams of those who never made it back home. What were those dreams? The freedom of our country; our own flag; our own language; and security for us, for our children and grandchildren. It has been a powerful feeling, and I am grateful to all of you that you have remained true to it. Today's meeting should not be called a mourning day, because all in all, it is still a day of victory. Look how many [survivors of deportation] we are! And it has been very moving sometimes to shake hands with someone, then look into his or her face, and then ask—how is it that you are so young? Think how many of us have been born in different parts of Siberia and in the environment where children could

perhaps only speak Estonian to their mothers, and yet they came back as Estonians and have remained loyal to Estonia. Thank you for this loyalty.

It is time for us to forgive, but never to forget, because forgetting leads to the recurrence of such crimes, such injustice; and the Broken Cornflower behind me is the appeal that you should feel that you have won. A winner is always magnanimous, a winner can forgive, but we do not intend ever to forget these crimes.

We have known both communists and Nazis, it is not our task today to compare them, it is our task to struggle for taking both communism and Nazism permanently off the agenda in Europe. This is our historical experience: Estonians have been killed for this, they have died in the forests and frozen to death in the tundra—and this is why you have returned here, to your mother tongue, to your country; this is why our young people are today studying national defence; this is why, my dear fellow countrymen, we are here together; and now, I would like to exchange a cordial and reverent handshake with all of you. –*Estonia Remembers: Elva Sound Festival Ground, June 8, 2001*

Democracies must be willing to stand by the principles upon which their states and societies are based. Democracy and the protection of human rights are not static in quality, but constitute a dynamic process. We must fight for these freedoms every day and everywhere. –*Columbia University, October 23, 1995, and Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, April 25, 1995*

My father, George Meri, was a diplomat. But he was also a translator of great literature into the Estonian language. After he was released for the third time from a Soviet prison, he devoted the rest of his life to translating. Among others, he translated Shakespeare, making the works of the bard available for Estonians in seven beautiful volumes. He was short, of course, of modern commentaries. So he wrote to Blackwell's bookshop in Oxford proposing a deal: he was to send copies of Russian classics in return for modern editions of Shakespeare. He got a brief negative reply from Blackwell's. But some days later, a private letter arrived from an employee of Blackwell's, Mr. Shaw. What was impossible officially, was possible privately. I have read the postcard correspondence about this

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arrangement, with exact figures of calculated cost. You see, anything more sophisticated, any thought would have never passed the Soviet censorship. Somehow it has caused me to ponder the significance of seemingly insignificant encounters. It has made me wonder about the hidden ties that bind diplomats and literati and ordinary readers. –*European Affairs Society, Oxford University, February 27, 1998*

Differences can bear good fruit and giving due consideration to differences may improve the quality of life. Provided that we mind how we speak to each other, how we behave towards each other, and what our political atmosphere will look like. We belong together like basses and sopranos in a Song Festival choir, whose voices do not drown each other, but sound in unison as the voice of the entire country. [Sometimes] there is a longing for a strong leader. Dear fellow countrymen, this is a threat to Estonian democracy, but luckily, we have a warning experience from the time before World War II. – *December 31, 2000 and January 1, 2001*

We must know everything about the mechanism of [state terror] that turns citizens into subjects. Democracy requires work, it requires intellectual work, it requires remembering. Not necessarily for retaliation, but for avoiding the errors that we have already made. Our historical experience includes both the communist and the Nazi dictatorships. Sometimes it seems to me that the Estonian public is tired of the past, tired of crimes that every normal human being would want to leave behind. Now we will leave them behind, but only on the condition that we shall remember the malice, the evil, the mechanism that produced the terror.

We know that freedom can be destroyed with guns and tanks, but even more efficiently with words and falsehoods. For this last reason, we have to remember the past, the distant past and the near past, in order to avoid [previous] errors.

The exhibition that is going to be opened in this building at this very hour, and for which I am deeply grateful to the Federal Republic of Germany, will give you an idea of the workings of the terror machine in the so-called German Democratic Republic, where there was no republic, no democracy, and no German culture, but a totalitarian power machine. I wish that we all would have time to

remember, in order to prevent the errors and never to repeat them. So that the island of democracy and the island of the independent Estonian state could be secured to our children and grandchildren today, and as it is said in church, forever after. –*“KGB & STASI—Tools of Totalitarian Power,” Opening of the Exhibition at the National Library, April 3, 2001*

The CSCE [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe] holds a very special place in the hearts and minds of all Estonians, and for me personally.* The inaugural Helsinki summit in 1975 lit a flame that we could see clear across the Gulf of Finland, a flame that grew to be a beacon of hope through the long, dark, and cold years behind the Iron Curtain. If we wish to strengthen the CSCE, then we must also strengthen adherence to the underlying values. – *CSCE Summit, Budapest, December 5–6, 1994* *In 1995 the CSCE became the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

[Our day of mourning must also] contain our loyalty to the democratic system, to the system that shall guarantee Estonia’s independence, Estonia’s good relations with the international community, Estonia’s confidence in the future and that would, and above all, guarantee that such crimes against humanity would never again be perpetrated in Estonia, near Estonia, in Europe, or in the world.

We must learn from the past [but] this does not mean revenge. We are not fighting any ways of thinking, but a totalitarian system that evokes evil and opens the way to it. This is also our duty to all those who never returned from the frosts of Siberia, [that] we should today see the hope that good, justice, and order would prevail in the world. –*Estonia Remembers: Viljandi Song Festival Ground, May 30, 2001*



II. Freedom Through Security

The Indivisibility of Security

Security is not milk you pour from one mug into another so that one will contain increasingly less and the other will brim over. *You can't heat just one corner of a room.* We aim—all of us—to a level and stable balance that ensures the security of all. —*International Security Conference, February 19, 1997, Hungarian Parliament, May 13, 1997*

Security has been compared to oxygen, the absence of which is noticed only when we are suffocating. As we know, it may be too late then. Europe is not a mere geographical concept. Europe means an endlessly expanding process of shared values. Let it be compared to Fred Hoyle's expanding universe. Standstill is stagnation, it's indecision. This is no longer called stability, its name is collapse. We have a narrow choice: either we shape the future, or the future will be shaped by totalitarianism. There is no compromise, for there is no standstill future. —*Dinner in Honour of NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana, April 16, 1996*

Security is indivisible wealth and must be cultivated in the spirit of close regional concord. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have the task to ensure, to the best of their ability, the security of the Baltic region, which is a necessary precondition to stability in Europe. Such a future can be shaped in cooperation with our neighbours, provided that we have the will to do it. —*Baltic Defence College Opening, February 25, 1999*

If there has been anything at all for Europe to learn from this century, for sure it is the wisdom that the security and well-being of this fragile continent can only be forged if we have our mind on all Europe, on Europe as a whole. The security of any particular, isolated corner of Europe is sheer illusion. A crisis in one or another European region is a crisis of the entire Europe. —*Ceremonial Dinner Hosted by the President of Slovenia, May 16, 1997*

We know the price of security and we know even better the price of lack of security. We seek to

contribute to the security environment in which we live. Security is indivisible, and not only is it indivisible in the Baltic states, but also around the Baltic Sea, in Europe, and in the world. Security on the coasts of the Baltic Sea can be guaranteed only through multilateral cooperation. —*Graduation of the First Course of the Baltic Defence College, June 22, 2000*

The process of increasing security in the Baltic Sea region is precisely that—a process, with its developments and phases. It is like a river having its source and mouth as well as numerous tributaries. However, the law of nature that eventually every drop of water inevitably makes it to the sea by itself unfortunately does not hold true here. We cannot entrust our security to the laws of nature. Not even if we philosophically see the inevitability of democracy, if we see the future of the world as a democratic future.

Estonia also wants to be a producer of security rather than its consumer. There must not be any regions of a higher and a lower degree of security in Europe. The only possible objective is a band of stable democratic countries from the Baltic to the Adriatic. The Baltic countries are the very touchstone by which history will assess Europe's ability to avoid, jointly with the United States and Russia, the mistakes of the past. The achievement of security and stability in this region is a necessity, indispensable for building a living and lasting *Pax Europae* to take us into the new millennium. —*Hungarian Parliament, May 13, 1997*

The world of our century has stood witness to two world wars. Both blazed up in Europe; both blazed up on the same axis. Among the many causes of World War II, I'll point out one that should exhort Europe to learn a better lesson from history. To wit: the great war of the generation of our fathers and partly of my own broke out because the consequences of the previous war had not been eliminated. Apparently it is a vicious circle: each war begets a new one. Provided that its consequences have not been eliminated. [We must have] enough moral strength to break out of this vicious circle. —*Hungarian Parliament, May 13, 1997*

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NATO, the EU, and Transatlantic Security

Estonia as a whole must be firmly secured in the world community's fold. That means membership in both the European Union and in NATO. These are our paramount, our essential goals for the future. Both require our commitment and perseverance.

The guarantee of the survival of Estonia lies in the integration of our country with European and Atlantic structures. This is a lesson our own historical experience has taught us. And history will not run extra rehearsals. —*Second meeting of the Estonian Honorary Consuls, September 14, 2000, and VIIIth ESTO Festival, August 4, 1996*

Estonia wishes to join NATO for the same reasons that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was founded and for the same reasons that the United States and other Allies remain committed to it. It is not simply about being behind the strong back of the United States. It is about common values. It is about standing together. That is why NATO today is as vital as it has ever been; why the United States presence in Europe is today as vital as it has ever been. The history of the last century has shown that whenever there is a conflict in Europe the United States will be involved, sooner or later. This is a sign of our close economic ties, but it is more importantly, and I believe above all, a sign of the convictions and values we share on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

The transatlantic link provides the best—no, the only means of achieving security for the continent. NATO: the guarantor of freedom and peace in Europe for over 40 years. —*Aspen Institute Conference on U.S.-Russia Relations, August 25, 2001; Royal United Services Institute, March 10, 2000; and Address to the Diplomatic Corps, May 17, 1994*

For four days, along with my two colleagues from Riga and Vilnius, we have been having high-level meetings including President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of Defense William Perry, a number of ranking Senate and House members, not to mention journalists and observers of the region such as yourselves. You are probably wondering what we talked about at these meetings. Well, I'll tell you: security, security, and more security. My job as president of Estonia is to make sure my people can live and prosper in a safe environment, so it makes sense that one of my priorities in talks here in Washington is

to discuss how to enhance the security of the Baltic states in what is admittedly a rather tricky international arena. If the *leitmotiv* of our talks here has been security, then the symbol of that is NATO. —*Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 27, 1996*

NATO's decision to announce the Partnership for Peace (PfP) was a bold one and one that history books will see as a visionary way to open NATO to new members from Central Europe. We continue to be active participants in NATO's NACC (North Atlantic Cooperation Council) forum and the Partnership for Peace. The centerpiece of our PfP involvement is peacekeeping. Along with our Latvian and Lithuanian neighbours, we have formed a joint Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion which has captured the imagination of alliance planners. —*Address to the Diplomatic Corps, May 17, 1994, and Plenary Meeting of the Trilateral Commission, Copenhagen, April 22, 1995*

Estonia's main diplomatic issue at the turn of the century is integration into European and global structures, accession to the European Union and NATO. This is the inevitable continuation of liberation from the residues of occupation, an axiomatic return to the European home, to a democratic world. We have been publicly declaring this everywhere. If you mount a camel, don't try to remain invisible, as says the Turkish proverb. I am glad to note that Turkey, as well as Estonia, is on principle a supporter of open doors, free choice for countries, and equal bases for choice. This is political ethics; this is ethical politics. —*Ceremonial Dinner in Honour of His Excellency Süleyman Demirel, President of Turkey, June 3, 1997*

An expanded area of democracy and freedom increases stability. And stability in turn is a catalyst for economic development, which increases trade, and so on. We must continue to work together to strengthen and expand the still all-too-narrow area where democracy rules and human rights are respected. It is right of the United States to want its European partners to contribute more and it is right of the Europeans to strengthen common defence capacities. Yet all this means is that we are restructuring a successful and vital relationship. We are not—and we must not—alter the fundamental principles on which this cooperation is based, and

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these principles are caught up in one word: NATO. NATO is today and will remain for the foreseeable future the only organisation capable of ensuring a safe and secure Euro-Atlantic region. This is also an answer to those who would ask us why we wish to join NATO if we are already joining the EU, why we are not satisfied with one without the other. We wish to be part of the most successful defence and security cooperation in history. I would like to stress—enlargement, not expansion of NATO, as it is not a strategic acquisition of territory, but enlarging the membership of an alliance of shared values. —*Aspen Institute Conference on U.S.-Russia Relations, August 25, 2001*

We cannot afford to deal with disasters only after they have happened. We know the price in human lives. We have an obligation to practice preventive diplomacy to avoid disasters to avoid having to manage them later on. —*Members of the Althingi, Reykjavik, September 14, 1999*

At the end of World War I it seemed that an era of democracy had dawned. Estonia, as well as other Eastern European nations, got the chance to build a nation-state. And yet the fault line between East and West, where the Baltic countries were situated, did not disappear. The world was thrown into another war, and it was only in 1991 that the Baltic states got the opportunity to restore our nation-states once again. I do not know whether the world is any wiser today. But I believe that today, Estonia has made wiser, more mature decisions in securing her sovereignty than she made sixty or eighty years ago. We thought that countries can live their own lives all by themselves, in seclusion. It was a mistake.

Of course we wish to ensure our security by integrating into Western structures. The two aims of our foreign policy are full membership in both the European Union and NATO. At the same time we wish to remain the bridge between East and West and to offer Russia mutually beneficial relations as a stable and peaceful Western neighbour with considerable economic potential. It has been clear to us from the very beginning that this independence, this stability, can only be achieved by means of rapid economic development and extensive, efficient reforms. We started out two years later than the rest of Central Europe, and from a less favourable position, as the grip

of the Soviet colonial empire had been stronger. But today, we have made up for the delay. —*Bilkent University, Ankara, October 16, 1998*

For us the European Union and NATO are two sides of the same coin. They stand for the same values, the same principles, the same ideals. That is why Estonia, like the other Central European countries aspiring to NATO membership, also wishes to become a member of the European Union. The perception of leaving a zone of instability and entering a zone of stability, democracy, and prosperity virtually guarantees that the countries admitted to NATO membership will concentrate on issues of the future, rather than on the wounds of the past. Reconciliation through security as Zbigniew Brzezinski calls it, and nobody can say it better. —*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, March 15, 1999*

The European Union must not be a United States of Europe, but a united Europe of states. The strength of the European Union depends on the strength of the identity of its member states and their regions. I believe that Estonia can set an example [by] showing how a small, purposeful nation can overcome the inheritance of the past and integrate to the Estonian citizenry our minority. —*School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, March 8, 2000*

This is a window of opportunity. Right now, European states face an historic opportunity to prop open this window to consolidate the gains of 1989 and to ensure that this continent never again has to shiver in cold winds. The attraction that the European Union and NATO now have exerts a stabilizing and consolidating influence on the entire continent. NATO's new members will establish platforms of security and stability in the regions which were formerly considered to be under Soviet influence. For this reason it is crucial to look to both North and South when contemplating the next round of NATO enlargement. It is true that the mere existence of neighbours who are NATO members may not help, if we take a look at the events of Kosovo [the Kosovo crisis]. At the same time, it is clear by now, that nothing else except NATO would help either. —*Plenary Meeting of the Trilateral Commission, Copenhagen, April 22, 1995; Hungarian Parliament, May 13, 1997; and Bilkent University, Ankara, October 16, 1998*

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To overcome the historical divisions of the Cold War one has to assume a proactive stance and to move forward. We sometimes hear statements which reflect the irony of history: moving NATO close to the Russian borders would be to humiliate the former enemy and present friend. While I can understand the emotional feelings of Cold-War fighters, it seems that they often forget why the Cold War was fought in the first place. It was to protect the democratic system of government and its way of life. NATO never sought dominion over anyone. Thus it is fallacious today to say that NATO enlargement is a way to humiliate Russia. It is not. It is a means to safeguard the values which underlie our entire civilisation. –*Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, March 3, 1998*

There is a constant need to move forward, to change, to evolve, because standing still means to stagnate. The impending enlargement has certainly contributed to a speeding up of internal EU reforms. Likewise, it has helped focus minds on the need to change financing patterns in European Union policies and helped push the member states to make the Union better prepared to face the challenges of the new century. The future members have, by their very presence outside the doors of the Union, transferred a sense of urgency into the negotiating rooms in Brussels. This is all for the good. The challenge now, for us, but above all for the present EU and NATO members, is to make use of this positive energy. Change is a positive factor and it must be seen as such. Neither a change in decisionmaking and financing policies, nor an enlargement of the Union is something to be feared and to be pushed into the future, but an opportunity to be grasped and to be made use of today.

This is our mission, the mission of the Central European countries, the mission of *Mitteleuropa*. We bring with us an idealism and a historic experience which are important, indeed essential, for Europe. We know the value of time. We know that now is not the time to slow down, but to speed up. That is what we bring to Europe and that is why Europe needs us. – *Address on receiving a medal from the Charles University in Prague, May 31, 2000*

Under President Boris Yeltsin's leadership, Russia's democracy and economy have had the chance to

develop. While I pray that those who come after Yeltsin would also have a democratic vision of Russia's future, as a pragmatist I also acknowledge that they might have a different one. It is our job to design the European security system in such a fashion that it does not rely on the good will of any leader, either in the East or in the West. –*Bilkent University, Ankara, October 16, 1998*

Just a month ago in Vilnius nine nations from Central and Eastern Europe presented western decisionmakers a new reality, a new vision for NATO. Worried that the need to secure the Cold War victory was dropping out of the allies' agenda and that NATO was turning to new challenges, they issued a joint appeal, which called for a decision to invite all of them into the alliance in 2002. We should always remind ourselves that the enlargement of NATO is not a beauty contest. It is about a centuries-old dream of the completion of Europe, it is about the core values of democracy and freedom, stability and collective security. As Dean Acheson said at the Harvard Alumni Association five decades ago, “[NATO] has advanced international cooperation to maintain the peace, to advance human rights, to raise standards of living, and to promote respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.” This is what I believe NATO enlargement is all about. –*Reception Honouring 60 Years of United States Commitment to Baltic Independence, Washington, DC, June 14, 2000*

It is often said that NATO cannot enlarge to include the Baltic states because those states are part of an age-old Russian sphere-of-influence. It is anachronistic, if not also politically incorrect, to speak in terms of sphere-of-influence, historic territories, and such. –*Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 27, 1996*

We often speak of NATO's enlarging or expanding as though the Alliance were some sort of exotic, and, to the Russia leadership, a somewhat contagious amoeba. I would point out that one does not join NATO, one is asked to become a member. Unlike Groucho Marx, I believe that this is a club I would like to join. –*Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 27, 1996*

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European Unity and the North-South Dimension

Trade has always been intensive on the Baltic coasts. The Hanseatic League traded for centuries with pre-imperial Russia, and of the trade routes that originated in Tallinn, one has always led to East, to Baghdad, crossing the Volga and the Caspian Sea. The artificial geography of the Cold War divided the parts of the world into good and bad, trying to wipe the concept of meridians out of our minds. And yet our common political meridian crosses Finland, Turkey, and Ukraine, and allows us to use the Baltic Sea, “the Mediterranean of the North,” and the real Mediterranean as the connected vessels of integration and security. –*Bilkent University, Ankara, October 16, 1998*

Like in many European capitals, the castle of Tallinn hold is on the top of a hill and the Market is at its foot. Our historical Marketplace is a small square at the crossing of three streets. Facades have changed, patricians’ houses have been turned into cafes and department stores, whereas the three streets are still winding along ancient roads and former trade routes: the shortest street would take you to the port and along the Baltic Sea and on to France. The second street beginning from the marketplace takes you across the continent to Vienna, in other words to Rome, and the third to the East, to the springs of large rivers and further on along the Volga River and the Caspian Sea to Baghdad. –*Jagiellonian University, Krakow, April 30, 1998*

Through St. Olaf we have, for almost a thousand years already, bound our fate to the part of the world called the Occident or Europe. A monk called Nigul, or Nikolaus, was the first Estonian to bring European literacy to our country—he had been educated in Nidaros, today’s Trondheim, and Stavanger, and came to spread Occidental knowledge here in Estonia, and also in Tallinn. We have St. Olaf’s Church here to symbolise his activities—this was once the highest building in Europe and the “glory and pride” of the city, as we say in our folk songs. It seems pertinent to add that the glory and pride of the Estonians have always been of the practical kind. When we built the highest church tower in Europe here in the Far North, we also considered its practical value: the tower helped the sailors at sea to find their way. –*Festive Dinner in*

Honour of King Harald V of Norway and Queen Sonja, August 31, 1998

When one walks about the Old Town of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, one can feel Europeanness radiating from the architecture, from every medieval house and every church steeple. Not only was Tallinn one of the most notable Hanseatic cities: in the present state of affairs it is one of the best-preserved cities of the whole merchant league. The poetry of stone perpetuates history. –*University of Washington, Seattle, October 31, 1995*

The effectiveness of a state depends on the accuracy of its political time and space. When the meridian was measured between Torneo—a river in the Finnish Arctic—and the Danube last century, the geodesists used the Astronomic Observatory in Helsinki, *Tähtitornimäki*, “the mountain of the star tower,” and the Church of St. Nicholas in Tallinn as points of reference. One capital was mapped in relation to the other capital and the location of both, in relation to the rest of the world, was defined more accurately. The gold cross of St. Nicholas, calculated with an accuracy within 30 centimetres in relation to Washington, Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, provided during peacetime greater accuracy for shipping and, consequently, in relations; during the Estonian War of Independence, the cross guaranteed more accurate cannon fire and, consequently, independence. Even after the great age of the Hanseatic League, the roads from Western Europe to the Middle East passed through Tallinn. Just to remind you: the Hanseatic League, uniting Tallinn with Lübeck, London, Bergen, and Novgorod through common economic interests, and developing a common legal system to protect her economic interests, should be regarded as a distant forerunner of the European Union. The Hanseatic League developed her own structure and played a central part in Northern Europe for more than three centuries. –*Budapest Economic University, May 14, 1997*

Man only records facts and events he thinks to be noteworthy, worthy of perpetuation. Facts and events he deems necessary to record. Nineteen hundred years ago, in the year 98, the Roman politician Tacitus deemed it necessary to record Estonia and to describe the people of Estonia, *Aestiorum gentes*, their customs, clothing, and their unfamiliar language. This tells us

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that the North, including Estonia, was important enough for Rome at the time. Hence we may conclude that this was not where the union of Estonia and Europe began—by that time, this process had already acquired the intensity that made recording a must. The North was, for a long time, Europe's supplier of furs and amber. Estonia was the northernmost agricultural region in the world. In Central Europe, Spain, and Italy, the Livonian kiln-dried and smoke-seasoned and infection-free grain became famous. Unlike the European grain, it retained germinative capacity for years. Maybe this should be seen as Estonia's greatest contribution to the common culture of Europe: in lean years, Estonia provided the seed grain for Europe. Tacitus did not discover the Nordic Dimension of Europe. He was the first chronicler of the already functioning dimension.

The economically and culturally uniting role of the Mediterranean Sea in the South is also characteristic to the Baltic Sea, or "the Mediterranean of the North." The Baltic Sea was put to most excellent use as a regional means of communication already at the time of the Hanseatic League. Now, the Baltic Sea is reassuming its natural position as an internal waterway of the European Union, as an internal sea of the European Union.

One of the reasons why medieval Europe functioned in the East-West direction was the states' striving to the sea. A country without a sea border could not exist. This was changed during the Cold War when air transport added another dimension to the previously two-dimensional world. Today, we no longer know landlocked states that have no access to the sea. Thus, the reasons that caused conflicts during the Middle Ages and later, when countries have sought access to sea, without which the body of the state was unable to exist, have been eliminated.

In today's three-dimensional, converging, and shrinking world, the meridianic contacts have finally assumed their proper position beside East-West communication. They are, in fact, just as self-evident and relevant for the normal functioning of the world, but were suppressed by the geopolitical arguments of the total confrontation between East and West during the Cold War period. We here, for instance, are linked by a meridian that extends from the Helsinki Observatory to the old meridian mark used by Struve on the field of the Simuna Rectory, or the Tartu Observatory, and goes on to Istanbul, to the Strait of

Bosporus. This is the line of contact between the European Union and Russia. And thus we have reached the concept of the Nordic Dimension, initiated by my colleague Martti Ahtisaari. Today, Europe is a composition of countries and regions where governmental and grassroot-level contacts intertwine. The countries situated along this meridian have recently engaged in arranging their relations with Russia (and vice versa). It is in our interest to have a stable and democratic Russia prospering behind our border. And it is our duty to support this development as much as it is in our might. This would probably summarise the idea of the Nordic Dimension of Europe. The idea that was, however briefly, first outlined in "Germania" by Tacitus. —*Seminar, "By the Will of Tacitus," November 12, 1998*

Baltic Contributions to Transatlantic Security

The NATO Alliance is fairly justified to inquire what contribution could small countries offer to smooth its operations. Apart from political and symbolic value, there are practical issues where we can help. Small countries are sometimes crucial in mustering political consensus by adding their voices to the chorus. It is well-known how important the Benelux countries have been in keeping the European Union up and running. Today, one is better off having members whose security depends vitally on having a strong, prestigious, and active Alliance.

Possible conflicts and internal divisions might potentially be a problem when you look at the big powers of the Alliance. The presence of Slovenia, Estonia, or Lithuania could encourage rather than discourage a consensus.

Recent experience with India and Pakistan shows us how important it is that countries are included in a wider system of security. Denationalization of defence, emphasizing the collective will rather than independent defence interests, is an important part of providing security in the new Europe, in the continent, where ferocious wars have usually begun—wars which have expanded far beyond the borders of this continent.

In addition, small members of the Alliance play a crucial role in avoiding non-traditional risks like the proliferation of nuclear materials, and chemical and bacteriological materials, and relevant expertise. Coupled with the resources of the Alliance, small

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countries might make a crucial difference in solving these problems. Various forms of terrorism, including modern cyberterrorism, will also find powerful opponents with new members of the Alliance.

As small countries, the Baltic states should boldly assess in which branches of warfare they could offer some qualitatively new aspects to NATO. While it would be difficult to use our popular army for NATO tasks beyond our borders, it would be equally difficult to keep large amounts of infantry in total readiness. So for example, in Estonia we might think about the experience of Luxembourg in providing reconnaissance and special forces support for the Alliance. In those tasks, even a smaller force can make a considerable difference. Balts are reliable allies when it comes to conflict-solving. They have done well in training exercises, in Bosnia and anywhere else where they have been given a chance to show themselves. Granted, they cannot muster the defence forces of Poland. But there is no doubt that they would fiercely oppose any attempts to subject them to a foreign rule. Whenever one believes the task of occupying the Baltic states to be easy, one makes a classical mistake of discounting the defence, based on popular determination. It is based on a principle: “You can destroy us, but you can never conquer us.”

The unification of Europe is and remains the key issue. NATO has a crucial role here, since it offers the highest form of interdependency, interdependency in possible conflicts. Article 5 is the strongest statement of unity which the Western community can give, demanding in return sensible, low-profile behaviour, logical for a member of the defence union. This is what the stability in Europe is all about. –*NATO XVth Workshop, Vienna, June 22, 1998*

The enlargement of NATO is a historic opportunity that would connect our security to the great democratic powers of the West, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, and such states as Poland, Denmark, or Norway. An attack or threat to our security would mean an attack or threat against them. Such crucial moments are rare in history. At the end of last year, I sent a letter to all the parties of the Riigikogu, urging them to come to agreement in terms of national defence. The objective of this agreement would be the gradual increase of defence expenditure to 2 percent of the gross domestic product. This is not an end in itself. This is an actual

demonstration of the will of the Estonian politicians—and through this, the will of the whole nation—to increase the defence expenditure in order to ensure the means for the accomplishment of our national defence policy objectives. There is no sense in having defence forces that lack the means to defend the nation. In 1997, the average defence expenditure of the European NATO members was 2.2 percent of GNP. The level of our defence expenditure is a measure of our readiness to accede to the North Atlantic Alliance. This shows the commitment of the politicians and the nation to this important objective of Estonian foreign policy. –*81st Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, February 24, 1999*

Paradoxically, a highly sophisticated and well-controlled border is a precondition for furthering open and active cooperation with Russia. This seemingly paradoxical situation has a simple explanation. Our common border can be regarded as part of the general framework of Confidence Building and Security Measures. The peaceful, stable, and economically booming nature of the Nordic-Baltic region is an important part of building the new Europe. The well-being of the Baltic states is a vital part of Europe’s stability. –*Opening of Estonian’s Border Control Center, June 25, 1998*

Baltic Military Strength and the Will to Defend

From the political classics of Europe, we know the sentence that foreign policy is the extension of each country’s domestic policy. This sentence does not pertain to small countries. *For small countries, the foreign policy is simply and brutally determined by Hamlet’s question: To be or not to be.* –*Festive Dinner in Honour of His Excellency Milan Kucan, President of the Republic of Slovenia, and Mrs. Štefka Kucan, November 24, 1998*

We should not underestimate the will of small countries to defend themselves. While an enemy can inflict damage upon the Baltic states, a complete occupation of these countries would even today be an extremely complicated task. Let us, after all, remember that it was the Baltic countries, which already in 1988 declared their sovereignty and thus put the whole Soviet system under pressure to prove its legitimacy. We took risks

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which few others were prepared to take. Remember the Baltic human chain which stretched from Tallinn to Vilnius with close to two million people standing next to each other, hand in hand! –*Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies, March 3, 1998*

The stronger the people's will to deepen its security through international cooperation, the more convincing the state and its people are in proving our will for security and our ability to achieve security, the stronger our national security will be.

The Republic of Estonia had to start creating its defence army not from scratch but still lower, from the line of water. We preserved the legal continuity of the Republic of Estonia, but the continuity of defence forces born in the War of Independence was intercepted for a long time. We had to start by getting rid of the totalitarian way of thinking.

Defence weaponry, no matter how modern, is dead iron if trusted to unskilled teams. The mightiest weapon, the key factor in any branch of the army, in any democratic state is, first and foremost, a soldier. A human being and his will. A human being and her ability. A human being and his or her ability to implement the will to defend efficiently in the name of the state. The soldier and his training, the soldier and his will to defend, the soldier and his undeniable obedience to discipline, command, and legislation of the Republic of Estonia—this is the foundation on which we build the defence capacity of Estonia today and tomorrow. –*Arrival of mine layers Kaley and Olev to home port and the visit of German mine squadron to the Port of Tallinn, September 18, 1997*

In today's world there are no countries whose rights are greater just because the country itself is big, and vice versa: there are no countries whose rights are small or non-existent just because the country is small. *There are greater and smaller politicians, but there is no great or small justice in the rule of law.* The world has changed, it has learned from its sufferings and emerged wiser. Today's world is safe and secure for all countries who know their rights and obligations under the rule of law. The world is safe for the Republic of Estonia on the condition that she upholds the rule of law and acknowledges her obligations alongside her rights. This acknowledgement, this balance between rights and obligations, this civic consciousness, this civic responsibility that is the foundation of democracy, is

the key to our security today. In a newspaper interview NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana said that no key is needed to open the door of NATO, and he was right: no key is needed, because Estonia is holding the key. So is Latvia. So is Lithuania. On the condition that we understand our own rights and our obligations and fulfil them reasonably. That we understand the need to develop our defence forces, even if this means tightening the belt. Our country was born in the War of Liberation, in other words, it was born of our will to defend ourselves. Our state, our nation, our language, and our culture will endure and develop only if this will to defend endures and develops. Tell this to your MP candidates, dear fellow-countrymen. A country without arms is like an orchestra without instruments. –*Victory Day, June 23, 1998*

In a few moments the town of Võru is sending off our victory flame. A torch with the victory flame will be taken to each county by Estonian servicemen. Victory Day is the holiday of Estonian servicemen. Their flame will light our thousand-year-old Midsummer Night bonfire. In its light we do not lower our flag. *Once a year, on Midsummer Night, our flag flies above every Estonian home from dusk to dawn.* This is the way it has been, and this is the way it will be. –*Victory Day, June 23, 1997*

The Midsummer Eve is our Victory Day and the midsummer bonfire is older than the Republic of Estonia. *Tonight, on the shortest night, dawn and dusk join hands. What does this mean? It means that we, the entire nation, join hands with light, hope, and a safe future, and light our sacred bonfires all over the country as a token of this.*

We have a song that says: “the dawn of our hopes.” What does it mean? This means a hope for a safe family, a safe home, a secure future, internal and external security. This is much more than singing and dancing around the midsummer bonfire. Our future is secure only if we take it into our own hands, hold it in our hands, and defend it if need be. This is the victory that fosters the Victory Day, and its flame will blaze in our midsummer bonfires tonight.

From now on, the Victory Day is also the Home Defence Day. The Home Defence Day is above all the day of the Defence League, a day when the entire nation demonstrates its will to defend. This is why I have sent the midsummer flame—the flame of victory

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of the Republic of Estonia—all over the country from different counties every year.

Our Estonian persistence has helped us to overcome the difficulties. We are much stronger today than we could even have imagined ten years ago. Estonia's will to defend and defence capacity are powerfully evident, as well as Estonia's good repute among our partner states, with whom we share the supreme task: to guarantee here, on the coasts of the Baltic Sea, the calm self-confidence that would yield a safe future to our children and grandchildren. – *Victory Day, Haapsalu, June 23, 2000*

The integral policy of all Estonian governments has been to strengthen Estonia's security and economic life. We must understand that we can have our differences, but not in this most crucial matter—the protection of our country and our future. –*Estonia Remembers: Haapsalu Bishopric Castle, June 9, 2001*

Transatlantic Unity and the United States

Over the past forty years, Estonia has looked to the United States as a symbol of hope. Your country was one of the few to never officially recognise the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, and this policy of non-recognition was a beacon of hope for us during the darkest days of Brezhnevian despair. Now, although Estonia is once again independent, our eyes are still on America. We believe that with courage, dedication, and determination—that rare combination of qualities that made America great—we, too, can achieve our full potential as a nation. –*Ambassador Trivimi Velliste on behalf of Mr. Lennart Meri at the IEWS-Citibank Baltic Investors Forum, New York, June 25, 1996*

United States policy towards the Baltic states, as towards European security in general, has been defined by a remarkable sense of vision. Successive administrations have initiated and pursued principled policies that have safeguarded security and prosperity in Europe. The non-recognition policy was one example, as was the creation of NATO. –*Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 15, 2000*

I thank everybody for proving that the Baltic states are not alone. The political support from the United States has been unceasing. I would like to thank the US

Armed Forces who are the most numerous here today, for their readiness to put this support into practice, and I am especially glad to see here so many representatives of the State of Maryland where assistance to the Estonian Defence Forces has obviously been taken to heart. But specially I would like to thank Lithuania for the organisation of the exercise, and salute all the participants. –*Closing Ceremony of the Baltic Challenge '98 Exercise, Klaipeda, July 25, 1998*

There is an old saying that one recognizes a true friend in times of need. With its bipartisan support for the non-recognition policy, America was a true friend of the Baltics in a time of need, acting as a beacon of hope throughout the long, dark, and cold years of the Soviet occupation. You, Mr. President, [Bill Clinton], were a true friend when, four years ago, you personally contributed to making sure that the occupation would end and the foreign troops would be withdrawn. This principled behavior is one quality of US foreign policy that we greatly admire. The fact that morals play a major role in American foreign policy is what defines the US as the world's remaining superpower. –*Signing of the U.S.-Baltic Charter, The White House, Washington, DC, January 16, 1998*

On a beautiful summer day fifty-nine years ago—I was a boy of twelve—I started in a boxcar a long journey from my native Estonia to Siberia. You don't start a trip in a boxcar to enjoy the landscapes of that immense territory. I was deported by the Soviets who considered my father, like several hundred thousands of other Estonians, or Latvians, or Lithuanians, a threat to the totalitarian regime. We were taken out of our beds at night; we were separated at night.

However, there was some light in the endless darkness of despair and terror which followed. A year before we were deported by the Red Army, US Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles made a brief statement after Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were occupied by the Soviet armed forces. Sumner Welles said that the United States did not recognize the Soviet annexation of the three independent Baltic states.

Was this an idealistic step? Would it have been wiser to accept the *fait accompli*? The answer is simple: the policy of non-recognition, introduced through this historic statement, was a decision of

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principle and reflected the underlying values of American society. Your commitment to the captive peoples of Europe was our light of hope during the darkest period of our history.

Fifty years later your policy of non-recognition provided us with the legal foundation to restore our common democratic values, which led to the restoration of our independence and the downfall of the Communist empire. *—Reception Honouring 60 Years of United States Commitment to Baltic Independence, Washington, DC, June 14, 2000*

The first Estonian who sacrificed his life in World War II did it defending Narvik—a small Norwegian town—defending it against Nazi aggression. He died as a volunteer on May 20, 1940, and his name was Arnold Soinla. The first American to do the same was Henry Antheil. He was killed here, in Estonia, June 14, 1940, on the very first day when the ally of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, invaded and occupied Estonia. It seems to be a small detail, but: can human life, can the supreme sacrifice of your life be just a detail? In this case it's rather a symbol. And, symbolically, Henry Antheil's sacrifice [has never been forgotten] in Estonia. *—Tallinn, July 9, 1996*

The [September 11, 2001] attack on the United States has shown the need for allies and the need to improve our cooperation. All of us in this room count ourselves as allies of the United States, whether we have a formal treaty relationship or not. But formal relationships are less important today than the very fact that countries that share the common values of open societies—values such as freedom of speech and religion and freedom of movement—work together. This is what Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is all about. Working together to protect our values, if need be by force.

In these changed circumstances, where the war to protect our security is fought not in large battles but behind computers and through the use of intelligence networks, the size of a particular country is much less relevant. What counts much more is a country's commitment to stamping out this evil. Estonia is committed to this fight, because it is a fight for the survival of our way of life.

It has been said before but I believe that it is worth retelling. We must push international terrorism back into the hole where it belongs. We cannot retreat. As

soon as we start retreating by travelling less, by restricting the freedoms of our citizens, then we will have lost. *The island of democracy and prosperity is one that is continually under threat. It either expands or shrinks, like the universe of Fred Hoyle; it is not static. We must work to expand this island so that one day the sea of instability will be dry.* That day may indeed never come, but we must work, biblically, in that direction.

Which is why fighting terrorism is not enough. We must work to preempt it. That means supporting democratic governments and rejecting undemocratic ones, rewarding behaviour that respects the sanctity of human life and gives equal access to education and putting governments under pressure that do not do so. It also means, in addition to providing development aid, opening up our markets so that developing countries can sell their products—including agricultural goods—in the countries of Europe and North America.

Terrorists live off poverty, they live off the impression that some countries aim to exploit others. They most certainly thrive in circumstances where people have no rights. Fighting terrorism means fighting it from all sides, by destroying the terrorists, strengthening our own defences, forcing governments to stop harbouring terrorists, pushing rulers to practice good governance, and finally by offering the carrot of political and economic inclusion to those governments that do join our ranks.

We show solidarity in the “War against Terror.” This is also stated in today's declaration where we say that we consider the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington “to be an attack on all of us.” *—Sofia Summit 2001, October 5, 2001*



III. Freedom Through Unity in Diversity

The Diversity of Nations

The real wealth of the world is in its diversity, and the wealth of its component parts depends on their capability to partake of that diversity, to embrace it without capturing it. *States draw their life from the people living and acting there.* And people are gradually coming to realize that the spiritual and material wealth of a country is not at all proportional to its area. Never in its history has humankind been so rich in the colours, customs, and languages of different cultures. —*Receiving the Coudenhove-Kalergi Europe Award, September 11, 1996, and Opening Session of the Riigikogu, September 11, 2000*

The interaction of different cultures, attitudes, and ways of life is the source of European creativity. Technologies are standardised, but cultures individualise. Between differences there is no apprehension but attraction. And stability and security are its most valuable by-products. —*Bilkent University, Ankara, October 16, 1998*

There are geographical poles at the ends of the axis of Central Europe reaching from the Baltic to the Adriatic. The edge of that zone has been marked for a thousand years by an essential cultural boundary separating the West from the East, from the Byzantine sphere of influence. In history the cultural boundary has more often than not turned into a simultaneous political wall of partition. Wars have been waged to shift that wall. Its materialized relics, witnesses of bygone times, can still be seen by tourists in the center of the city of Berlin. The dividing lines on the map of Europe, however, have ceased to be realities of today. When we speak of Europe today, we first and foremost mean our common home.

The most important criteria of a European home are its cultural diversity, with the policy of levelling and intrusion ruled out, as well as its openness, receptivity, and respect for the peculiarities of other cultures. The very existence of Europe in the true sense of the word can only be meaningful as long as we can speak of the separate cultural existence of its parts which blend to

produce a certain harmony. European harmony consists of a number of ethnic-cum-cultural units. Most of these units are small, but together they add up to that large multidimensional aggregate which indeed represents the essential strength of European culture. This variegated European fabric, or palette, has its own historical logic behind it.

In order to maintain the European mosaic, we must, paradoxically, integrate! Indeed we can only speak of integration if the mosaic is preserved, otherwise we would speak of cultural destruction or assimilation. As we all know, without our own states our peoples have no future. At the same time we must recognize that our states do not have a future outside of unions of states. The nations in today's world generally face the two *forces majeures*—the world becoming increasingly mosaic on the one hand, and processes of integration on the other—and our task is to keep these two tendencies in balance. Let us remain colored pebbles in this European program [of integration], and disseminate the understanding that the inner diversity, multiformity of Europe bears no inherent conflict. And let us look hopefully to the future. —*Opening of the European Cultural Month, Ljubljana, May 15, 1997*

Characteristic for the current world are powerful integration processes. There is nothing fundamentally novel in that. What is new is that in today's integration it is possible for one to retain one's identity; it is possible to withhold from violence. Today's world can respect and must respect the free will of the countries of the world to belong to just such international communities that befit the given nation's history and cultural heritage. —*International Conference, Vilnius, September 5, 1997*

A day will come...when all the nations of the Continent, preserving their differences and multicoloured characters, will assemble into a superior unity, a European fraternity. A day will come when the United States and Europe will be seen reaching each other a hand across the seas. —*Victor Hugo, quoted in President Meri's New Year address, December 31, 1997*

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It is the different interests of individuals, social groups, regions, even whole countries, that keep the wheels of democracy going and without which there would be no market economy nor any sense in international development. —*Receiving the Annual Award of the Crans Montana Foundation, June 27, 1997*

A unified standard of bolts and nuts provides a footing for the hunger after, and appreciation of, dissimilarities in cultures, poetry, music, architecture, landscapes. Electricity is generated from opposite poles. The field of tension between opposite poles will generate new ideas. —*Opening of the Pro Baltica Forum Conference, September 11, 1993*

The Russification of the outskirts of the continuously expanding empire was one of the priorities of the foreign and domestic policies of both Imperial Russia and its successor, the Soviet Union. The consequences of these policies were twofold. First, the impoverishment of the interior provinces of Russia in comparison to the outskirts, where the Russian administration invested considerably more to promote an influx of Russian workers and thereby to achieve a majority-Russian population. Second—in a paradoxical way, the Russification policies of the 19th century politicized the national movement in Estonia, which culminated with the enactment of the right of self-determination in 1918, and the successful defence of the proclaimed Republic against the Red Army.

I had just begun my university studies when the occupying powers discussed the substitution of the Latin alphabet with the Cyrillic—a change that was in fact already completed in Moldova. You understand, obviously, that the paradoxical effect of such pressure was the strengthening of the Estonian national identity—Finno-Ugric studies, ethnography, even archaeology influenced our music, literature, visual arts, and theatre to a much greater extent than in England or any other normal country. The situation was similar to a steam boiler heated up to the extreme. What does it mean: to the extreme? As soon as we had eliminated Soviet power and its censorship, the Estonian market was flooded—not with dissident literature but with dictionaries. In Estonian history,

you find no decade so abundant with dictionaries than the years 1990–2000. Hence, I have the daring to conclude the following: the smaller a culture is in numbers and the more vulnerable it is, the more it is aware of its mother tongue as the main bearer of its identity. —*School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, March 8, 2000*

I have never known how to explain to myself, for example, the differences in the cultures of Estonia and Latvia. These are two very small areas located in the same climatic zone, sharing the same sea, a similar history, and the same kings and emperors. And still the folklore, literature, music, theatre, painted art are amazingly different. They are so different that they are drawn to each other. This is not a fatal difference, but rather the kind of difference that deepens with the aid of each other, that deepens from the wish to be different. Anyway, we inherited the kind of Europe where we are different next to each other; every one of us is somewhat peculiar. And therein lies the strength of Europe. There are big nations with their all-embracing cultures who design the main features of world politics today. And there are numerous small nations and those that may be called tiny, who also do not lack the will to express themselves. In Europe, this will has found a solution and become reality.

It is not often that we think about the smallness of Europe. For instance, that the entire population of Scandinavia barely equals the population of the city of Los Angeles. Or that there are less people in the three Baltic states altogether than in Moscow, or that Brazil is five times bigger than the area of Germany, Italy, France, and Spain combined. *Europe does not worship quantity, but quality. “Big is beautiful” is alien to Europe, maybe because Europe itself is small and its greatness is first and foremost spiritual. The sum of the cultural nations and states of our tiny continent creates the miracle that we call Europe.*

Therefore, the cultural diversity of Europe is completed by cultural tolerance, which is what makes the existence of such multitude actually possible. The absence of tolerance brings about upheavals that decrease the opportunities of small nations to express themselves and during which the potential of entire Europe is inhibited. —*University of Turku, May 25, 2000*

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The Value and Contributions of “Small”

Small is beautiful. Far be it from me to over-idealize the beauty of being small. But being small has its ethical and social advantages. The social advantages of being small mean that many political steps, many reforms, which would take decades in bigger structures, can in our cases be executed much more rapidly. A small society may, if it so desires, respond with considerable dynamics to both outside influences and internal compulsions, thus determining its own fate and influencing the world around it. The ethical imperative of being small is the necessity to think very clearly. Our opinions can never be announced vociferously to the world, for our voice is small. And yet if our positions are novel, original, logical, and ethical, the world cannot afford to ignore them. Close contacts make it possible for small countries to do a great deal to shape the world around them. And our being small often causes similar attitudes. *Every country has brought something new to the world.* –*Festive Dinner in Honour of the Presidential Couple of Iceland, June 9, 1998, and Best High School Graduates, June 17, 1999*

As a member of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE, Estonia has shown that the size of a state is less important than its readiness to make a constructive contribution for the common good. –*A high official of the European Union, quoted by President Meri, Council of Europe Summit, October 11, 1997*

A great power, a big nation, can hardly make such a colossal mistake as would jeopardize its existence. But a small country like Estonia can easily make a mistake that will remain its last. In the long run the obligatory vigilance may of course make one nervous, but we cannot afford even being nervous. We have to be calm, friendly, resolute. All the time. It is a recommendation which is easier to give than to follow. However, I will not cease to stress the other side of the coin: a small country may have existential concerns unknown to a great power, but it has a great many companions in fortune and misfortune. Moreover, small countries form an overwhelming majority among the countries of the world. In fact the world cannot exist without small countries; small countries are like mortar binding bigger blocks together to make a smooth wall. Take a look at old Tallinn’s limestone buildings, walls, and

towers. With time the mortar between the stones has consolidated to become harder than the stones are. Small countries are an inseparable part of the political architecture of Europe and the whole world. We want to erect a building that will be safe to live in and behind. And safety—security—is a value that is the primary common interest of all countries, and especially of all people. –*Receiving the Coudenhove-Kalergi Europe Award, September 11, 1996*

We are one of the smallest countries in Europe, with a population of one million and a half and a territory of forty-five thousand square kilometers. Being so small presents problems, but it has also a number of virtues we are only now becoming conscious of. Our success is partly due to our smallness—and to our historical experience. A supertanker needs miles to change her course. Estonia, on the contrary, is like an Eskimo kayak, able to change her course on the spot. That explains our success in restructuring our economy and society from a colonial command economy to a modern free market economy and to an open society. –*St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, April 6, 2000*

I hope that the doors of this Neeme Järvi Estonian Music Academy will remain open to all talents, and that our shared dream could become true through music. That through music, the Estonian soul will become purer, stronger. Art does not know great and small countries. Art only knows great talents. Art is the universal language of the world, the world’s strongest cement. –*Opening of the New Building of the Music Academy, September 12, 1999*

It is we, small nations, small peoples, that give the world its diversity and variegation. Just give a little thought to the world’s genetic resources, and it becomes obvious that the role of the small ones has to be carefully kept an eye on. Or, returning to a more ancient expression: We have not been created into this world for nothing. –*Ceremonial Dinner Hosted by the President of Slovenia, May 16, 1997*

Our smallness should not prevent our voice from being heard. Small states have the majority in today’s world. The increasing role of this “silent majority” can be felt in the world, in the design of international

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politics, and we should also know how to take such tasks—as future members of the European Union. And in the choir of small states, Latvia and Estonia are singing the same song. For this purpose, we have to stand back-to-back and give an actual content to our cooperation: we have common foreign political goals—in becoming full members of the European Union and NATO—we are not competitors, but the most active supporters of each other's strivings. We have been given the chance to learn from history. Let us use it. —*Festive Dinner in Honour of the President of the Republic of Latvia and Mr. Imants Freiberg, May 2, 2000*

The totalitarian outlook of the world—together with the secret pacts of Hitler and Stalin from 1939—tore Europe apart, and with the help of the Iron Curtain pushed many Central European states off the road of free development. The temptations of totalitarianism are big: it gives a fast lead in situations of crisis [but] therein lies the tragedy of totalitarianism—it bends people under one way of thinking and one objective. A levelled way of thinking destroys creativity. Are we now able to draw the right conclusions from this and to understand that the democracy of Europe and the development potential of Europe depend on the diversity of Europe? This means that I have to ask what small states mean and what is their role in the world today. I have focused on small nations twice when I have been speaking in the UN General Assembly. In current world politics, dominated by big states, people tend to forget that small states form the majority in the world. But true enough—a silent majority.

Due to the expansion of the European Union, the issue of small states has become a new value. There are big member states in the European Union, such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and then there are small ones such as Denmark, Belgium, Holland. The big ones need the small ones in order to maintain the balance in Europe that drives it further, because there are always certain conflicts between the big ones and the presence of the small ones is needed to overcome them. Small states are the lubricating oil of Europe and the mortar of Europe.

The survival and development of small nations is the key issue of the future of Europe. Europe needs small nations as much as we need Europe. Because

the strength of the European Union does not lie in its size—the strength of Europe comes from its diversity. The need to preserve cultural diversity is a global problem that is as topical as the threats associated with the warming climate in environmental protection, the need to avoid nuclear war, the problems caused by over-population in developing countries, etc.

I see a challenge to small states whose politics have to be ethical in order to succeed in the modern world. The ethical imperative of the European Union is in the fact that the common denominator on its diverse cultural palette consists of common values of democracy, one common goal, but every state will find its own way to achieve these goals and principles. —*University of Turku, May 25, 2000*

Majorities and Minorities

The end of the century is full of paradoxes. Year in, year out, it is getting easier and easier to embrace, to enfold the world; distances are vanishing; the information society is shaping an entirely new turn of mind. This is a way to unity. But along with that—parallel with that—there still survives, develops, and gathers momentum an intense need to preserve differences, to preserve distinctiveness and singularity, to guard and protect small nations and cultures, since they are unique in this world and a world without them would be poorer. *The fate of humankind depends on whether it sees a threat or a wealth in the difference between cultures, languages, ways of thinking.* —*Reception for Finno-Ugric Writers, August 29, 1996*

There is no such creature as the nation-state anymore. We all live in multiethnic societies, Estonia included. During Soviet rule, hundreds of thousands of Russians were brought into Estonia as part of a centrally organized Russification campaign. As Vice President Al Gore said last year when he visited Tallinn, Estonia is a model for other states in the successful integration of non-indigenous peoples into society. The ethnic composition of one or another state should hardly affect that state's responsibility to assure safety for all its inhabitants, regardless of race, colour, creed, or what language a child happened to learn at the breakfast table at home. —*Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, June 27, 1996*

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Estonia is a natural gateway; a gateway between East and West, between North and South. For centuries it has been a place where cultures, traditions, and languages meet and intermingle. It has always been a place where Estonians have lived together with Germans, Swedes, Russians, Jews, and other peoples. Estonia has always been a part of the world community—except for fifty years, when an Iron Curtain cut us off from our natural environment of the Baltic Sea nations. Today once again Estonia is able to fully integrate herself again in the community of Baltic Sea nations, which stretches from Denmark and Northern Germany to Finland and also includes Norway and Iceland. We wish to play a full and active part and that is why we also wish to become members of NATO, which unites North America with Europe, and of the European Union, which in turn unites Europe. —*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, March 15, 1999*

In 1925 Estonia passed Europe's first law on cultural autonomy. But if anyone still has doubts about the present day of Estonia, let it be known to them that on this January 30, 1997, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe decided to close the monitoring procedure pertaining to the respect for human rights in Estonia. By that time, sixteen reports by independent observers had been dispatched from Estonia. Without a single exception they all confirmed that there were no violations of human rights in Estonia, that Estonia was setting an example to Europe. —*Hungarian Parliament, May 13, 1997*

For Estonia, as for our neighbours to the south, Latvia and Lithuania, the Second World War ended in the beginning of the 1990s. We were then able to liberate ourselves from the Soviet occupation that originated from the days when the Wehrmacht occupied Paris. Thus the Soviet military occupation lasted from June 1940 until August 1991 and the last troops were withdrawn from East Germany and Estonia the same day, August 31, 1994. The percentage of Russian speakers before the occupation was 10 percent: after the occupation 40 percent. A number of workers in the former Soviet military-industrial complex, as well as retired officers, preferred to remain in Estonia and were encouraged to do so by the Soviet government that was interested in creating in Estonia a Russian

majority. Despite the official Soviet policy, the Russian minority supported the restoration of Estonia's independence. We have not had any interethnic violence in Estonia. Estonia gave those sent to colonise Estonia the right to continue residing here and gave them the right to social security benefits and to apply for Estonian citizenship. I am proud that former Vice President Al Gore, visiting us, called Estonia an example to the world.

People, businessmen, and agencies see the need for concrete practical cooperation. Russian businesses export their goods through Estonian ports; Estonian products are still to be found in Russian stores. Estonian theatre companies perform at Russian festivals, and Russian performers appear here. The cooperation between the Estonian and Russian borderguards can only be called exemplary. Thus whereas official, political Russia may remain barricaded behind ideological lines drawn up in the propaganda of the 1940s, life on the ground—between the Estonian and Russian people, businessmen, and institutions—flourishes. This is not something one hears about often when Estonian-Russian ties are discussed, but it is essential that this development be recognised, as it paints quite a different picture from the one presented by official Moscow. —*Aspen Institute Conference on U.S.-Russia Relations, August 25, 2001*

I took office as the President of Estonia on the 6th of October, 1992. Back then, in my first TV address, I said: "Lots of people live in Estonia who are not citizens of the Republic of Estonia. I come to all of you today with an outstretched hand and assure you that the Republic of Estonia upholds the rule of law. The President of the Republic of Estonia is a just president to everybody, including all those who are not citizens of Estonia. The Republic of Estonia grants all people human rights as stipulated by the international conventions of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. The Estonian legislature, our Riigikogu, goes by them. I assure you all that Estonia upholds the rule of law." In 1992 many regarded that assurance with doubt. The interim years have been dissipating those doubts. We have conquered our inner hesitation. This is a victory won by our joint will, our joint faith, our joint self-confidence. It is, using the words of the Estonian politician Juhan Luiga, a victory won by the

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strength of our souls. I thank the Russians who have overcome their hesitation and become loyal to the Estonian state. This is your victory day, it is our joint Victory Day. I shall not use the word your. I am saying our. Our joint Victory Day.

We all know the words: He who does not remember the past lives without a future. Let us make clear to ourselves the meaning of these words, today and for good: *human beings live in the name of the future, in the name of a better and happier future for their children and grandchildren. The future is the aim, the past only the means for attaining a better future.* I can only sympathize with those who mix up the end and the means. Today and here at Narva, I, too, could speak about the past. Exactly fifty-five years and a week ago, on as beautiful a summer day as this, I was behind the bars of a cattle wagon and watched through a narrowish window how our captive train was rolling across the Narva bridge towards Russia. I was twelve and my brother was seven. Mothers were crying, we did not know where our fathers were, nor did we know that most of us would never see our fathers again. Guarding soldiers were barking out orders in Russian, which we did not understand. We were 11,000 on a single day of deportation! And when the occupation regime, erected on Stalinist terror, collapsed and Estonians began to add up the victims, a terrible sight emerged: more than 260,000 of our small nation had lost their lives or homes in that communist genocide.

Dear people of Narva, this is the past from which we have learned together and in like manner. *I am proud of you that only a wretched handful of the citizens of the Russian Federation living in Estonia voted for communists in the recent Russian presidential election. I can assure them: they may wait for the return of communism till doomsday.* As for you, I can assure you that the Estonian Constitution and the Republic of Estonia trust their citizens alike, no matter whether they are Russians or Finns, Ukrainians or Germans, Jews or Tatars by birth. All enjoy human rights granted by law; all the citizens of the Republic of Estonia enjoy equal civil rights. —*Victory Day, June 23, 1996*

A very important problem is how to deal with minority issues. For many post-socialist countries, Estonia among them, this problem is even more complicated because of the recent past. During the

Soviet occupation, ethnic minority issues were kept out of the public agenda, and to an outside observer, the situation looked quite harmless with all major problems allegedly solved. However, as we well know, this was not the case. The real issues simply could not be addressed, the aspirations and concerns of minorities could not be openly discussed. This became possible only after the restoration of Estonia as a sovereign state, at which time minority issues came powerfully to the fore. Estonia faces a task of integrating the minorities, some of them quite numerous, into a society based on democratic values.

The Estonian Round Table on Minorities was established in 1993 as a meeting place for politicians and representatives of minorities to achieve consensus on such disputable matters as minority education, cultural activity, citizenship, and participation in political life. It can be said that our Round Table has made a certain progress in facilitating the interaction of different views that exist in our society. In particular, it helped to resolve the problem of political participation of minorities in the local elections of 1993. You should not overlook the simple fact that in contrast to Estonians, it was a totally new experience to all those who had emigrated from the totalitarian Soviet empire and had never seen democratic elections. However, there is still a long way to go.

I very much appreciate it that the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), His Excellency Max van der Stoep, has taken interest in the activities of the Estonian Round Table and supported the idea to organise this seminar in Tallinn. I also appreciate it that he has found the time to participate in this seminar in person. —*International Seminar, "Advisory Bodies in the Minorities Policy," December 1, 1995*

A bad politician is one who does not accept reality. But a bad politician is also one who, when seeing reality, does not try to make it better. I think that the creation of the Round Table gave one hope to many people, both Estonians and our ethnic minorities: that a certain tool had appeared. Maybe these hopes have not always been realized. And to be honest, I was somewhat disappointed myself when it came out that at the present time 46 percent of Estonians think that the Russian people should leave Estonia—as my

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assistants told me. No one conducted such research in 1992 when I took this office. And we can tell only on the basis of our inner feelings whether this percentage has increased or decreased. I am convinced that it has decreased considerably. And I am not even very sure whether this percentage reflects the reality. When I travel in Estonia, I am convinced that our mutual understanding has improved a great deal. And sometimes it really touches the heart. –*Session of the Round Table of Ethnic Minorities in the Hotel Viru Conference Hall, April 28, 2000*

Understanding Each Other

Civilizations do not clash. Clashes are created by the lack of civilization. –*Opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Estonia in Tokyo, March 24, 1997*

The border of culture can only be flexible, or else we lapse into self-admiration, the result of which is a mental degeneration. The division of the world into “us” and “not us” reveals the desire to give the neighbour a piece of one’s mind, in worse cases it entails a desire to decide for the neighbour. Culture is dynamic, it involves intrinsic development and dialogue. This dialogue is expressed in political decisions. Unfortunately it has not always been the constructive part of the dialogue. The borders of culture move for the very reason that culture in itself is never hostile. A cultural border becomes threatening, destabilising only when a POLITICAL DESIRE for crusades arises. Behind the crusades, the cultural phobia, you will usually find resource deficit, unemployment, shortage of markets. Sometimes the cultural phobia hides a drastically different rate of freedom, behind which is a drastically different standard of living. The Berlin Wall used to be one of such symbols which was climbed over at the expense of life. The movement of cultures can certainly not be an invasion. The political map of Europe has changed, as have changed entire civilisations and cultures in the course of history. Luckily history does not know rigid solutions. –*Meeting of European members of the Trilateral Commission, Helsinki, October 12, 1996*

Populations and languages can move in different directions. I have tried to compare this process with a broad cornfield caressed by the wind. If we watch it

long enough, we can see a golden wave sliding across the field. And yet every single stalk of corn will remain in its place. Language always carries along culture. Language is the guide to understanding another nation. –*Ceremony of Awarding the Prize of the European of the Year, Paris, March 23, 1999, and Conferment of the Decorations of the Republic of Estonia, March 10, 2000*

Every culture has the right for a marked border which must certainly be flexible to facilitate dialogue. Europe today has more or less steadily moved in this direction—maintaining the borders of states, yet struggling towards free movement and transparency. This is a real cultural triumph. Nor could a stiff Cold-War border on the Narva River, let alone the Oder, be in the interests of Europe as a whole or Estonia in particular. A European border between Estonia and Russia—a firm, yet peaceful border—could mean a membrane instead of a wall. It would facilitate the expansion of stability, the strengthening of democratic values in Russia, cultural vibrations out of which cultural masterpieces could be born. For freedom is the power that makes culture colourful or, I should say, productive. Independence unites the good colour with good health. Mental health cannot be found in a mentally equalised world. An equalised world rules out change. Change, however, is the success guarantee of every civilised society. European civilisation also means a constant wish to ask, “Quo Vadis, Europa?” –*Meeting of European members of the Trilateral Commission, Helsinki, October 12, 1996*

Understanding is a journey in the country of the other. –*Turkish poet Fazıl Hüsnü Daglarca, quoted by President Meri at the Festive Dinner, Ankara, October 15, 1998*

The Interconnectedness of the World

In the Internet you and the whole world are welcome to Kadriorg’s Home Page, complete with our Guest Book. There you will find my weekly schedules, my speeches, opinions, and addresses that have not made their way to the press, and I find your letters there. Fifteen thousand people from all the counties of Estonia, all countries, and all parts of the world have visited the Kadriorg Home Page. It is a fine example of how modern technology helps enhance democracy. I was

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particularly moved by a pre-Christmas letter from Peter Hargrove. I had met him by chance in 1967 when I was on my first visit to East Berlin. He and his pals were young volunteers of the Kennedy Peace Corps on their way back from India to the United States. We spent the day together, and in the evening they returned to West Berlin behind the Wall. Of course we talked about Estonia, only about Estonia. Now, thirty years on, a message came from him by email—a greeting to all of us. He repeated a sentence I had said to them on departure: “*I come to this Wall here to gasp for a breath of freedom.*” Peter wrote: “*I have thought about this sentence perhaps a thousand times.*” This example made me realize that *no seed sown in the world of people gets lost.* Just think: for thirty years this sentence had travelled with him all over the world and sown new seeds. —*New Year, December 31, 1996*

Estonians are a seafaring nation. The Baltic Sea has never been a dividing factor for us. The well-known writer and traveler Ernest Hemingway once wrote that in every port of the world one can always run across a sun-brown Estonian seaman. Today this rings more true than ever. —*Estonian-Indian Business Seminar, New Delhi, February 5, 1999*

The Baltic Sea—a sea that was, as far as we know, discovered by a Greek, Pytheas. Thus, the bridge of thought extends over twenty-four centuries. The spirit of ancient seafarers has helped us in our development and bolstered our spirit of enterprise. —*Dinner Hosted in Honour of the President of the Republic of Greece, October 11, 2000*

Open borders open up new academic horizons. Science cannot bear political borders. Science trapped in a narrow space, a limited circle of opponents, an atmosphere of stale arguments, will lose its competitive ability. Only science that is open to the world can synthesise regional into global, and thus preserve and strengthen also the national value of scientific achievements. —*Opening of Villa Tammekann, Tartu, April 4, 2000*

If we trace Life from its most primitive form to the most complex one, we may sum up the development of life in three surprisingly simple and pure words. The words have been and are: LEARN TO LEARN. The prospects for preserving Life depend on the

prospects for storing Memory effectively in order to learn effectively. So, let us learn to learn. Over the times, across the distances. Together, by nations and continents. —*Conference of EDEN at the National Library, June 6, 1994*

Building Estonia with Wisdom and Love

It may be wonderful to live here, or it may not be so—it is all for you to decide, for Estonia is, year after year, symbolically handed over to the coming generations in this very garden here. Estonia will never be complete, and the weather in Estonia is such as it is—today there is both sunshine and rain. Unlike the elements of nature, the Estonia that we have been shaping and that is now your task to shape, is in human hands. Mankind has got the world, but it also creates the world.

You were born in Estonia and new Estonia will be born of you. You are a generation. There have been a hundred, five hundred generations in Estonia; when we go to Tartumaa we will see a grove that still looks the same as it did in ancient times. It is rare for trees to be more than 200 years old, but there are trees in Läänemaa that are more than 500 years old—one of them stands on Kotkamäe, on Cape Puhtu—and right beside it, there is an oak that may have grown there for 800 years. Imagine that some forest or other biological association could be more than 5,000 years old. And the nation lives in the same way.

You have got a better education than anybody from my generation could ever hope for. For us, graduation from university was formal in many senses, because 20 percent of our lectures dealt with military training, 20 percent with the Russian language, and 15–20 percent with the so-called disciplines of Marxism-Leninism, and not much time was left to educate oneself. My real studies started after graduation from the university. This was not the necessity of the times: the same is going to happen to you. Not because your university bears any likeness to mine, but because this is the secret of human life. If you think that today you are finished with something, you are mistaken. This is the beginning, the beginning of the most serious studies. But now, you will no longer be shaping your own knowledge, you will be shaping our country, our future, our children.

The Estonia that you are going to build will have no boundaries, it will be likewise close to the sister

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universities of Tartu University in Heidelberg and Uppsala, or to Columbia University or the University of St. Petersburg or the University of Beijing. In your hands the world will become small, and together with Estonia we hand this small world over to you. Shape it to be happy, let this day be a summary that says: there may be rain or sunshine, but *it is possible for man to cup light and sunshine in the palm of his hand and shine in the darkest of nights, just like nature.* You are the Estonia of tomorrow—carry Estonia to the day after tomorrow, for Estonia deserves it. I have no better Estonia to offer you. I wish you a lot of luck and a lot of strength, above all a lot of strength. —*Best University Graduates, June 18, 1998*

After we had heard all the teachers' speeches [at our high school graduation ceremony], our much-respected teacher of astronomy and logic, Mr. Teaste, got to his feet. We had great respect for him, because he had been the headmaster of our school before the Second World War and during the German occupation. What he said was this: "I wish you, my dear young graduates, to have the blue sky of Estonia always above your heads, to have the strength to plough the black earth of Estonia, and to have the white colour of hope in your hearts." This is what Professor Teaste said in spring 1948. A few months later he was arrested and had to leave Estonia for many years. Those were times when mentioning blue, black, and white meant long years in prison. And yet, it meant something else too. I wish I could describe the deep silence that fell over us all sitting at our tables, for these words went right into our hearts. As you see, they are still in my heart now, fifty years later. And now that I speak to you, I am certain that fifty years later, looking into your hearts and your memories, you will see there some of your teachers whose words have remained with you for fifty years to come. They will remain just as guiding, just as fatal, just as pure. —*Best College Graduates, June 18, 1998*

The most efficient way to reduce social inequality is to invest in education. We will only see the results in many years' time. Estonia cannot do better than her citizens. Once more: we belong together! —*December 31, 2000 and January 1, 2001*

Sometimes, in my mind's eye I compare graduation to a race. You are at the starting point, and some of you

think that this is a 100-metre sprint, while others think that it will be 200, 400, or 800 metres. But in fact it is a marathon, my dear young people. This marathon shall never end as long as you live. One way to keep moving is, of course, education. Education is the most powerful spring that gives you force.

May you always have the feeling that embraces you now—that all paths and all doors are open to you. They are not, but you have also been educated to open doors when they are closed. The austere and trying world you will enter today is also a beautiful world full of hope.

Welcome to the Estonia of tomorrow, my dear boys and girls. Remain true to Estonia. Estonia needs you. If I look at all of you now, I can see that you are the future of Estonia. Estonia will realise herself through you. —*Best University and College Graduates, June 19, 2000, and Best High School Graduates, June 19, 2000*

Take with you the wild hope that reminds me a little of the year 1988, when I suddenly discovered myself on the Town Hall Square, hand in hand with someone I did not know, there was also someone behind me, and we all repeated one simple sentence, I do not know how it had been born: "Estonia is in our hands." Now, Estonia is in your hands, and in twenty, thirty, forty years' time some of you may be speaking these words to other people as young as you are now—then you should repeat this, because Estonia will always be in our hands, but it must also be a little more of Estonia every year, which also means that it must be a little more of Europe. —*Best University and College Graduates, June 21, 2000*

Today is the first schoolday for the children born in the independent Estonia. This is important for us all, for our hearts as well as our minds. For Estonia, the first of September is more important than the first of January. Today, dear students and teachers, you start to add another layer of bricks to the building of the state of Estonia. This task—the building and fortifying of our own state—is never going to be completed. The happy new working-year beginning today is going to form the Estonia of tomorrow. Let the bricks be without cracks and the walls upright, so that Estonia, our common home, can stand firmly. A nation eager to learn is a strong nation. An educated nation is strong even if it is

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small. I wish you the courage to ask and the will to discover. The most beautiful present you can give your teacher is to raise your hand and come up with questions, questions, and more questions. Learning Estonia is strong Estonia. An old Estonian proverb states: “*Kes tark, see võtab õpetust,*” which means, “The wisest man is the one who is willing to learn.” – *First Day of School, September 1, 1998, and Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Osaka, Japan, March 21, 1997*

This year is the book year in Estonia; it is the 475th anniversary of the first book in Estonia. Dear mothers, dear parents, it is up to you to keep the book year going in your homes. Find fifteen minutes every day to tell a story to your children before they go to bed. They will be grateful for the answers to the hundreds of questions they have. Do not lose this time, this valuable time, when you have to plant faith, hope, and love. Childhood is the field of a child—plant books, do not replace mother’s voice with electronics and television. Every evening, read one page in your own voice. This is how you teach your children to picture landscapes they have never seen with the help of words, also to listen to the voices of animals and birds they have never heard, and understand and draw the line between good and evil—for life. My dear mothers. I wish you all faith, hope, and love. You do the most important job in the state. Thank you, Estonian mothers! –*Mothers’ Day, May 14, 2000*

Why are books so powerful and so dear to us? I suppose it is so as books always have two authors: the writer of whom the book is born, and the reader, who is, via the book, giving birth to his own world, his own landscapes, his own characters, to whom he extends his love or whom he rejects. Thus, a book will only be complete within the reader, as it is also the fruit of his imagination. This mysterious ability to imagine, to be curious, to pose questions to the book and hear the answers, or to put it briefly—to have a dialogue with the book—is not born out of nothing. It must be taught and learned. I will use the opening of the year of the book to ask the parents of our children: find ten minutes every night to read to your child from the favourite book of your childhood, read in your own voice something you used to like in the

past. Do not listen to the false prophets who think that the fairy tales of your childhood are no longer in fashion. The distinction between good and evil is not a matter of fashion. I would certainly be happy and grateful to you all, if the year of the book could [stimulate] the need for books and reading above all in our children, who will celebrate the 500 years of the Estonian book in the future. –*Opening the Year of the Estonian Book on Estonian Television, April 22, 2000*

The miracle is that with the appearance of books, people started carrying their memories outside their heads. Rudolf Kenkmaa published a document about school visits, where school inspectors admitted that children have left the farms in order to go to school—in the middle of the 17th century! This unbelievable movement towards idealism, towards light in spite of all financial interests—this has always been characteristic of Estonia. Words put on paper are a power that has to be recognised. As soon as the word has been written down, culture is one step closer to immortality. –*Opening Ceremony of the Estonian Book Year in Vanemuine Concert Hall, April 23, 2000, and School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, March 8, 2000*

There was an era when all the experience needed for life could be carried along in our brains. And then the era came when a constantly increasing proportion of our memory was placed on bookshelves. The milestone on that boundary is Gutenberg [and] today we are amidst the Gutenberg galaxy. –*Opening of the Estonian National Library, September 11, 1993*

Home decorating is not a task for the state, it is not a campaign, it is something to make our own lives, our own families more beautiful. It is something that creates a basis for a strengthening family. A strong family cares for its home not because it has cost them so and so much, but because they know how much work is contained in each wall, how much trouble it has taken to plant a bush or a tree. How much watering the lawn needs before it gets rooted. How much weeding is necessary so that a flower would have space to blossom and breathe. And this goes for all the country. The state is nothing else but a big

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cluster of Estonian homes. If we keep Estonian homes tidy, we will also keep our state tidy. And I mean this in the broadest possible sense. We must keep our state clean of corruption, and laziness, and the habit to put everything off till tomorrow. We have all these proverbs don't we?

On this beautiful Midsummer Eve we have a thousand pennants going to a thousand families to recognise their tidying care for their homes. There is a difference between a pennant and a flag. A pennant is a symbol belonging to the family, and you yourselves will decide how to use it. –*Handing over the Home Decoration Awards in Haapsalu, June 23, 2000*

The history of our homes is part of the country's history. *A beautiful tool, polished by the work of our parents and grandparents, is alive with the warmth of their hands.* Everybody in Estonia is a master, everybody can be a creator and cover Estonia with love step by step. –*Winners of Home Decoration Year, June 23, 1998*

From generation to generation, Estonians have been industrious despite circumstances and powers. Good work has been a matter of honour for Estonians. “*Jõudu tööle!*” (good luck in your work) is the way we say hello and we can be proud of it. –*Mothers' Day, May 14, 2000*

In every child that is born to this world, there are seeds of love, seeds of curiosity, seeds of the knowledge of good and evil—but these seeds must be brought to sprout within a very short time, and protected from the frost, and the indifference, cruelty, and selfishness creeping in its shadows. Dear mothers, love is the most powerful motive force of life. Home begins from the mother, and it always has. *The care and love of mothers is always with us, they send us through the whole life as a memory. Mother's love is the mother of love.* –*Mothers' Day, May 13, 2001, and Mothers' Day, May 14, 2000*

Estonia is far in the north, under the 58th latitude. What does this mean in art and what does this mean in politics? My friend Jean Cathala called it the pearly light. Our sun does not rise high, but at midsummer, it disappears behind the horizon for a mere hour. In Estonian mythical legends, we speak

about Dusk extending her hand to Dawn. One expects darkness, but instead of darkness, he can see the sun rising from almost the same spot where it has just set. Forests and islands, fields and buildings have no time to cool down, they emanate pearly white light also on our white nights. Light is the mother of colours. –*Presentation of the Exhibition of Estonian Paintings in Paris, August 30, 2001*

Our hills, larger trees, and the boulders left on our fields from the last Ice Age all have their own names, like living people. An Estonian is in continuous dialogue with Estonia. It is a quiet murmur. –*European Music Festival, Munich, October 31, 1993*

We should understand what an extraordinary bliss it is to see the Estonian flag again, to walk the paths of this small and beautiful country. For the first time in their truly long history, the Estonians step into a new century and a new millennium as a nation making its own choices. I wish all of us to have a beautiful and happy New Year on the new century! –*Estonia Remembers: Jõhvi Park, June 5, 2001, and December 31, 2000 and January 1, 2001*

If I ask myself, if I ask you, if I ask my countrymen: where are we going, what kind of Estonia do we want?—then the answers fan apart, yet converge on one point on the axle of this fan: *we are heading towards a state where the individual is in the centre, which is open to innovation, self-fulfillment, and the retention of Estonian culture as an everlasting part of European culture. We are heading towards our secure home.* –*Upon Accession, October 7, 1996*

A smile has the glow of freedom. This, after all, is the measure of things. –*Ceremony of Accession, October 7, 1996*



Biography of Lennart Meri*

Lennart Meri was born on March 29, 1929, in Tallinn in the family of the Estonian diplomat and later Shakespeare translator Georg Meri. With his family, Lennart Meri left Estonia at an early age and had to study abroad, in nine different schools and in four different languages. His warmest memories are from his school years in Lycée Janson de Sailly in Paris.

The family was in Tallinn at the time when Estonia was occupied by the Soviet armed forces. In 1941, the Meri family was deported to Siberia along with thousands of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians sharing the same fate. Heads of the family were separated from their families and shut into concentration camps where few survived. At the age of twelve, Lennart Meri started his career as a lumberman. He has also worked as a professional potato peeler and a rafter.

The Meri family survived and found their way back to Estonia, where Lennart Meri graduated *cum laude* from the Faculty of History and Languages of Tartu University in 1953. The Soviet administration did not allow him to work as a historian. Lennart Meri found work as a dramatist in the Vanemuine, the oldest theatre of Estonia, and later on as a producer of radio plays in the Estonian broadcasting.

After the trip to the Tian-Shan Mountains in Central Asia and the old Islamic centres in the Kara-Kum Desert in 1958, Lennart Meri wrote his first book, which met the warm reception of the readers. Already as a student, Lennart Meri had had to earn his living with writing, after his father had been arrested by the Soviet powers for the third time. With the help of his younger brother who had to quit his studies and take a job as a taxi-driver, he managed to support their mother and to complete his studies. And yet it was only through his first book that Lennart Meri discovered his true calling. For a quarter of the century he wandered alone or arranged expeditions to the regions of the Soviet Union that were the hardest to reach, and where he was fascinated by the cultures of small ethnic groups, the history of the discovery and colonisation of Siberia, and the constantly aggravating economic and ecological conflict between local needs and the planned economy of Soviet Moscow. The books and films born of these travels managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain and were translated into many languages. The film, *The Winds of the Milky Way*, shot in cooperation with Finland and Hungary, was banned in the Soviet Union but won a silver medal at the New York Film Festival. In Finnish schools, his films and texts were used as study materials. In 1986 Lennart Meri was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Helsinki University. He had become a member of the Estonian Writers' Union earlier, in 1963. In the 1970s he was elected an Honorary Member of the Finnish Literary Society.

Between his travels, Lennart Meri translated the works of Remarque, Graham Greene, Vercors, Boule, and Solzhenitsyn. At the time of the totalitarian Russification campaigns, Meri's literary works, films, and translations significantly contributed to the preservation of the Estonian national identity. His *Silverwhite*, which became the most popular of his works, an extensive reconstruction of the history of Estonia and the Baltic Sea region, depicted Estonians as free people in Northern Europe, as active agents in an open world.



* From President Lennart Meri's Website, 1999, with minor changes.

After more than twenty years of waiting, the Soviet administration finally gave permission for Lennart Meri to travel outside of the Iron Curtain, and Meri persistently used the opportunities open to him in Finland to remind the Free World of the existence of Estonia. He established trustful relationships with politicians, journalists, and Estonians who had fled from the occupation. He was the first Estonian to take abroad the protest against the Soviet plan of mining phosphate in Estonia, which would have rendered a third of the country uninhabitable.

In Estonia, environment protection soon grew into the “Singing Revolution,” which was led by the Estonian intellectuals. Lennart Meri’s speech, “Have Estonians Got Hope,” focused on the existential problems of the nation and also had strong repercussions abroad. Lennart Meri’s shift of focus from literary to political activities was smooth and yet antedated the political events. In 1988, he founded the nongovernmental Estonian Institute to promote cultural contacts with the West and to send Estonian students to study abroad. Estonia’s cultural missions, opened under the umbrella of the Estonian Institute in Copenhagen, Stockholm, London, Bonn, Paris, and Helsinki, functioned as embassies and became officially so in August 1991, when the democratic West restored diplomatic relations with the Republic of Estonia.

Neither for Estonia herself nor for the West had the Soviet occupation disrupted the continuity of the Republic of Estonia or eliminated her international obligations and rights. Lennart Meri signed the instruments for the restoration of diplomatic relations already as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. To this post he had been appointed on April 12, 1990, by Edgar Savisaar, leader of the Popular Front, after the first non-communist elections. Prior to this, Lennart Meri and other authors had already published the collection of documents titled “1940 in Estonia” (1989), which unsuccessfully attempted to convince the Soviet members of the Parliament that the occupation and Sovietisation of Estonia were based on the criminal Hitler-Stalin pact dividing Europe between the two totalitarian regimes.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lennart Meri’s first task was to create the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to employ studious young people, and to establish a steady communication channel to the West, and at the same time, to represent Estonia in the more important international conferences. He participated in the CSCE Conferences in Copenhagen, New York, Paris, Berlin, and Moscow; in the foundation conference of the Council of the Baltic Sea Countries; had several meetings with American and European Heads of State and Ministers of Foreign Affairs; and was the first East European guest to give a presentation at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

After a brief period as an Ambassador of Estonia to Finland in 1992, Lennart Meri was elected as the 28th President of the Republic of Estonia. Lennart Meri was sworn to the office of the President on October 6, 1992. On September 20, 1996, Lennart Meri was elected the President of the Republic of Estonia for a second term of office.

During his work as a writer and a politician, Lennart Meri was elected a Foreign Member of the Kalevala Society, a Corresponding Member of the Finnish Literary Society; he was also a Member of the Board of the European Academy of Arts, Sciences and Humanities and Co-President of its Committee of Honour, and a Member of the Board of the International Council of the Memorial Foundation for the Victims of Communism and Member of the Inter-Parliamentary Council against Anti-Semitism. As earlier, he was a member of the Estonian Writers Union, the Estonian Cinematographer’s Union and the Estonian PEN, patron of the Home Decoration Year, the Language Purification Year, and the Tartu University Foundation. Lennart Meri has been awarded the Coudenhove-Kalergi European Award and the Prize of Freedom of the Liberal International and decorations of several countries; he was also elected the European of the Year in 1998.

Lennart Meri’s second wife, Helle Meri (1949), worked as an actress in the Estonian Drama Theatre until 1992. Lennart Meri’s first wife, Regina Meri, emigrated to Canada in 1987. In 1999 Lennart Meri had three children: sons Mart (1959) and Kristjan (1966) and daughter Tuule (1985), and four grandchildren.
