

Speech by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Ceremony marking the beginning of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU

Madam President,

Dear Prime Minister,

Dear President Tusk,

Dear Estonian Vice-President of the European Commission, well-known in this country, dear Andrus,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tere õhtust! For those who are less fluent in Estonian than me that means “good evening”.

It is indeed a great pleasure to be with you here in Tallinn for the launch of the first ever Estonian Presidency. It has been a long time in the making but I already know that it will be worth the wait.

Estonia’s European love story started long before you enriched our Union on May Day 2004. The architects of Estonian independence had witnessed the atrocities of war and had a vision of a peaceful Europe built on both economic and political integration.

And even before that, the Young Estonia movement called on their compatriots with their now famous slogan: “Let’s be Estonians, but become Europeans”.

Today, that European spirit is alive. Estonians are consistently amongst the most positive about the European Union.

I am convinced that this Estonian Presidency will build on this positive momentum and contribute to a more prosperous and more secure future for all Europeans. The programme, the priorities you have set out clearly shows that.

From security to sustainability, from protection to prosperity, the work you will do over the next six months will help us build a Europe that delivers.

In many ways, this wonderful, historic city is a symbol of where Europe needs to go. Tallinn is one of the great hanseatic cities. It has been built on trade with the rest of the world since the 13th century. Today, it is one of the most forward looking cities in Europe. Its cutting edge technology and digital infrastructure are admired all over Europe.

That mix of history and future is inspiring us as Europe looks forward. We have much to learn and much to benefit from Estonia, notably in becoming as digital as you already are. But also when it comes to embracing new challenges whether they be on defence, migration or technological development.

This is the forward-looking vision that the European Union, that Europe needs. And I am absolutely certain that Estonia can provide it.

Elagu Eesti! Elagu Euroopa! Aitäh!

For the non-Estonians I was just saying: Long live Estonia! Long live Europe! Thank you.