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EANC Greeting on the 107th Anniversary of the Republic of Estonia

Fellow Estonians and friends,

This 107th anniversary of Estonian Independence comes at a moment that feels particularly precarious. In recent times we have seen a normalization of what previously seemed unthinkable, exemplified by Russia's vicious attack on the sovereignty of its neighbor Ukraine. It is all too stark a reminder that freedom is never free and history is not over.

At the same time, it is important to celebrate Estonia, its accomplishments, including the steps it has taken during these turbulent times. It has worked to maintain social cohesion while facing the financial challenges of increased defense spending (now 3.4% of its GDP, second only to Poland within NATO, and ahead of the U.S.). Estonia has embarked on a serious program of civic preparedness, and together with its Baltic neighbors, cut ties with the Russian electric grid. Estonia has invested in and is home to the NATO Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Estonia's forward leaning tech sector continues to innovate and compete globally.

In this moment, what can we as Estonian Americans do? Foremost, we can help educate the new Administration and new and continuing Congress, as well as our fellow regular Americans, on what we believe is true – that a free and secure Europe is just as important to the US as it is for the Baltics, and that for lasting peace in Europe, we will need a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Required is a peace that does not reward Russia's aggression through ceding territory nor by cutting off Ukraine's future options to join the EU and NATO – required is a peace that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and self-determination, including the nation's right to defend itself against aggressors. Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine. We must make the case that Baltic/Transatlantic security is also US security. We must make the case for continued support of a strong NATO alliance, within which the US is a reliable partner.

It is so important that in these times we do not allow ourselves to get divided on matters pertaining to Estonia's security but rather speak with a strong and united message, staying focused. Just being well-informed will not be enough. We will need to be watchful, engaged, and ready to use our combined voices and our influence. This is an important moment for all of us to speak out for core civic values, a rules-based world -- and within that -- for a free, strong and independent Europe.

This summer we can also take enormous pride, and perhaps ourselves get to experience the joy of being alongside 100,000 other Estonians who will once again gather for the globally recognized Laulu- and Tantsupidu in Tallinn in an amazing demonstration of the vitality of Estonian culture.

On this 107th anniversary of Estonian independence, Estonian Americans wish Estonia continued prosperity and security, and an environment where Estonia and its people, language, and culture can flourish.

ELAGU EESTI!

Mai-Liis Bartling
president

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