



**A Speech  
by  
the President of Iceland  
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson  
at the Opening of the Iceland Day  
in the  
Estonia Song Festival  
20 August 2011**

*Austatud president Toomas Hendrik Ilves. Armsad sóbrad.*

*Kallis Eesti rahvas, annan teile edasi sóbralikud tervitused ja head soovid Islandilt.*

*(Translation: Your Excellency, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, dear friends.*

*I bring you, the Estonian people, a friendly greeting and sincere congratulations from the people of Iceland.)*

In August 1991, the Republic of Iceland proudly became the first country formally to recognize the independence and freedom of Estonia.

Now, twenty years later, we celebrate our friendship and rejoice with you in how much has been achieved.

The people of Iceland are deeply honoured that Estonia has decided to mark this occasion by a special Iceland Day. Now, at midnight, I bring you all, citizens of Estonia, profound thanks.

With deep emotion we come to pay homage to Estonia, our heads bowed in respect for a struggle paved with sacrifices which ultimately brought you freedom and democracy.

The course we ourselves had travelled and our good fortune in gaining full independence around the middle of the last century, encouraged Iceland to support, at a moment of destiny, the Baltic nations' demands for freedom.

The recognition of independence which Iceland's Parliament had approved, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries on August 26<sup>th</sup> in Reykjavík, were a triumphal confirmation of how small nations can achieve democratic victories.

Those of us who were present at that historic event in Höfði House, the small building where presidents Reagan and Gorbachev had met a few years before, when the Cold War still imprisoned half of Europe, will never forget the high emotion expressed by Lennart Meri.

Tonight I pay homage to the memory of that great Estonian statesman, whom you later elected president. With him on that day was the Icelandic Foreign Minister who signed on our behalf. It is therefore, both for us Icelanders and the people of Estonia, a great pleasure to have Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson here with us at midnight as we welcome a day dedicated to Iceland.

Tomorrow, Icelandic artists, singers, musicians, choirs will celebrate our friendship with concerts and performances all over Tallinn, saluting freedom in the true Estonian tradition with melodies and songs. Exhibitions of photographs and design will also mark the day.

The bonds of our friendship, formed decades ago, will inspire the entire programme and confirm that our cooperation has continued to flourish and grow.

The independence of both our countries proves how the will of the people can be triumphant, that small nations can indeed be victorious even against formidable tyranny, occupation, and colonial powers.

History shows that small states can be creative forums for democracy, law and legal order, models for civilized society and an arena for creative thought and original ideas; Estonia as a pathbreaker, helping to bring transformation to all of Europe.

Recent years have in many ways been a difficult time for our two nations, testing our fortitude, yet at the same time offering us the opportunity to strengthen the foundations of a successful future.

Our friendship is based on the solidarity expressed so powerfully twenty years ago when Estonia broke free from the terror. We have journeyed from Iceland to honour your triumph.

Now, at midnight, we celebrate your extraordinary achievement.

People of Estonia! Our commitment is clear: *Elagu vabadus ja demokraatia!* (Translation: *Long live freedom and democracy!*)