Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

Diplomatic assignments eventually come to an end. After 4 years and 4 month of service in Latvia, that end has caught me. Friendships, partnerships, trust and memories created during this time, remain. Tonight is therefore a good opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and to reflect on what we have achieved together. So, after all this time, bare with me for the next few hours!

First and foremost, I would like to speak about the special relationship between Estonia and Latvia.

Our countries share much more than a geographical border. We share a common history. We have similar nature, landscapes, climate, values and attitudes. Except that we are slower, as you all know. And of course, Latvia does not have any islands, and yes, Christmas tree was first put up in Tallinn. It might have been decorated first in Riga, but let's leave that for historians to figure out.

Our diplomatic relations, established in the early years of our independence, reflect a longstanding friendship built on mutual respect and solidarity. Important milestone in our more than century long diplomatic relations was the opening of our new Embassy in Riga last year.

My tenure in Latvia has encompassed cooperation with five different Latvian governments and two presidents. Throughout this period, relations between our two countries have remained close and constructive, demonstrating the continuity of the strategic partnership and mutual trust between Estonia and Latvia.

Of course, the cooperation between Estonia and Latvia is not merely a matter of diplomatic interactions, statements and declarations. It is visible in the daily connections of our ministries, municipalities, universities, businesses, cultural institutions and ordinary peoples.

I firmly believe that Estonia and Latvia are stronger when we act together. Our partnership is not only important for our two nations but also contributes to the stability and influence of the entire Baltic Sea region thru deepened cooperation between the Baltic states, the Nordic-Baltic, within the European Union, NATO, and other international frameworks.

An equally important dimension of our relationship has been economic cooperation.

Latvia is one of Estonia's most important economic partners. Total bilateral trade exceedes 6 Billion EUR this year. At the end of 2025, the combined bilateral investment

rose to €6 billion. About 22.2% of all Estonian outward investment is located in Latvia, making Latvia Estonia's most important investment destinations on per capita bases.

Behind these figures are thousands of businesses, entrepreneurs, employees and consumers whose daily activities connect our two countries. I have been pleased to witness the dynamism of Estonian and Latvian businesses and the growing opportunities for cooperation in digital technologies, innovation, energy, logistics, transport, in recent years more and more defence industries.

In this context, the opening of the Estonian Business Hub at the Embassy in May last year, plays an important role. Since then, the Hub has engaged more than 740 companies, supported 260 Estonian businesses, hosted 57 events and meetings, and attracted close to 1400 participants in different events.

We want to encourage more cross-border investment, create better conditions for businesses and ensure that our economic partnership continues to deliver tangible benefits for our people.

Projects such as Rail Baltica are particularly important in this regard. It is more than a pan-European transport connection: it is an investment in the future competitiveness, civilian and military mobility and better integration of our entire region.

I want to express my gratitude to the business communities, trade and investment agencies and all those who have worked tirelessly to bring Estonian and Latvian companies closer together.

It would be impossible to reflect on our cooperation without addressing the security environment in which we live.

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the European security landscape. It has reminded us that peace, freedom and democracy cannot be taken for granted. Ukraine is defending not only its own independence and territorial integrity but also the principles upon which European security and the international order are founded. We must continue our unwavering support for Ukraine.

For Estonia and Latvia, security is not an abstract concept. It is a daily responsibility and a strategic priority. The Baltic countries have a particular responsibility to ensure that the voice of our region remains strong and consistent in NATO, the European Union and the wider international community.

As NATO Allies and European Union partners, we have a shared responsibility to strengthen our defence capabilities, protect our borders, enhance resilience and ensure the security of our societies.

European security is indivisible, and our cooperation must remain equally strong in the years ahead. Every moment NATO Allies are defending the sovereignity of the Eastern Flank of the Alliance. In the past 4 years I have had the privilege to see how Canada with many other Allied nations have helped to built up a military muscle in Latvia. The task is to show to the enemy that the security of the Alliance is indivisible anywhere and anytime. This is also evident in major NATO Naval operations at the Baltic Sea, Air defence operations in the Baltic skies, or thousands of coalition troops practicing in together. Our cooperation in defence, cybersecurity, protection of critical infrastructure, energy security and crisis preparedness has become increasingly important.

I am proud that Estonia and Latvia have consistently demonstrated solidarity and strategic clarity on these issues.

I would also like to say a few words to the diplomatic community in Latvia.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being an Ambassador is the opportunity to work not only with the host country's authorities but also with colleagues representing countries from different corners of the world.

The diplomatic corps in Riga has been an important professional and personal community during my assignment. I have greatly appreciated the openness, collegiality and constructive spirit that characterise our exchanges. Whether discussing international developments, economic cooperation, cultural relations or the challenges facing our societies, these conversations have broadened perspectives and strengthened mutual understanding.

Diplomacy is ultimately about building bridges. It is about finding common ground even when our national perspectives differ, maintaining dialogue when international circumstances become difficult, and creating opportunities for cooperation where they may not initially seem obvious. The relationships established here have reminded me that diplomacy is not conducted only in closed rooms or through official statements. It is also built through personal encounters, mutual trust, shared experiences and the willingness to listen.

I would like to thank my fellow ambassadors, and all members of the diplomatic community for their congeniality. I leave Riga with many valuable friendships and with deep respect for the work of the diplomatic community represented here. As of the end of November, I will pass the torch of the dean of the diplomatic community to our fellow Slovakian Ambassador Branislav Pavlovic.

Beyond politics, security and economics, the true foundation of relations between countries are people.

Cultural exchanges, educational cooperation, tourism, personal contacts and regional partnerships have brought Estonians and Latvians closer together.

I have been fortunate to experience Latvia not only through official meetings but also through its culture, history, traditions, places and, above all, its people.

I have come to appreciate the warmth of Latvian hospitality, from Liepaja to Ludza, from Mazirbe to Daugavpils, from Valka to Jekabpils, the richness of your cultural life and the determination of your people to preserve national identity, traditions and values.

These experiences have made my posting in Latvia particularly meaningful and fullfilling.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to strengthening the human dimension of our bilateral relationship: cultural institutions, artists, educators, students, local authorities, journalists and civil society organisations.

They are often the quiet ambassadors of the society, and their contribution and commitment should never be underestimated.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Estonian community in Latvia, and in particular to the Estonian School in Riga and the Estonian Society in Latvia.

Both institutions play an invaluable role in maintaining the connection between Estonia and the Estonian community living here. Their work goes far beyond education and cultural activities. They are important guardians of our language, national identity and sense of belonging.

The Estonian School in Riga, which was founded in 1908, deserves a special recognition for its dedication to providing young people with an opportunity to learn and grow in the Estonian language and cultural environment. The school ensures that Estonian identity remains alive and meaningful in Latvia. Its teachers, management, parents and supporters deserve our deepest respect and gratitude for their commitment and daily efforts.

I deeply appreciate the dedication of all those who volunteer their time, energy and knowledge to keep these institutions active and vibrant. Their contribution may not always be visible in official diplomatic statistics, but its importance for the long-term friendship between Estonia and Latvia is immeasurable.

As Ambassador, I have been particularly pleased to see the commitment and enthusiasm with which the Estonian community preserves its heritage while actively contributing to Latvian society.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the President, the Government, and all Latvian state institutions for their cooperation and support throughout my assignment in Riga. Together, in the past 4 years we have made 10 times Estonian presidents, 11 times Foreign ministers, 8 times Prime ministers and 3 times Speakers visits to Latvia successful, meaningful, and memorable.

My special thanks go to the colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, with whom I have enjoyed close, professional and constructive cooperation.

I am equally grateful to my entire team of the Embassy of Estonia in Riga. Your professionalism, commitment and dedication have been essential to everything we have accomplished professionally, but also in personal relationships. Diplomacy is always a team effort, and I am proud of the work and achievements we have done together. Kristine, Kristiana, Kadri-Mai, Marika, Raja, Jaanus, Eva, Arno – you have done really well.

And to all our Latvian friends, partners and supporters: thank you for making us feel special. I hope that the contacts and friendships established during my time here will continue to flourish. And I sincerely hope that the cooperation we have developed will be carried forward with even more energy, openness and determination.

We have a saying in Estonia: *Sõprus ei tunne piire* — friendship knows no borders. I believe this expresses perfectly what I have experienced in Latvia. I may be leaving Riga, but I will I will carry Latvia with me, together with the many people who have made this chapter of my professional and personal life so special. Thank you for your trust, your friendship and your support. Elagu Eesti! Lai dzīvo Latvija! Paldies! Tänan!