

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren, liebe Freundinnen und Freunde  
Finnlands,

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentleman, Dear Friends,

Herzlich willkommen in unserer Feier des finnischen  
Unabhängigkeitstages,

Warm welcome to celebrate with us today,

Finland celebrates this year 105 years of independence. It has been a long way to become a country as Finland is today. At the path of Finland, there have been many sacrifices. We faced a civil war already during the first months of our independence. The scars from this conflict healed very slowly and divided us for two decades.

However, the winter war, which broke 30.11.1939, 83 years ago, proved that Finns had united. Brutal, unprovoked attack by the Soviet Union meant for us a fight for our existence. We fought alone but we received volunteers from neighboring countries and elsewhere. The memory of the Winter War and the Continuation War 1941–1944 will never be forgotten in Finland.

When this February Ukrainians were attacked by Russia we could associate ourselves with Ukrainians. We felt that they should not be left alone and we feel today strongly for the Ukrainians. We stand with Ukraine. Slava Ukraini!

As you know after Russia's attack against Ukraine Finland decided to reconsider its security and defense policy. That led to the decision of applying for membership in NATO. Unpredictable neighbor, Russia and the deteriorating security environment in the neighborhood encouraged the people and the decision makers in Finland to take that step. We are thankful for ratifications of the NATO member countries and we are looking forward to the cooperation in the future.

Even in the middle of this devastating war in Europe, I want to bring also a positive message to you. Finland has been chosen once again, fifth time in a row as a happiest country in the world. You probably wonder that result, as we Finns do too. Having this outcome already so many times triggered some soul-searching among us about the basis of this result. If you look at

the history of Finland and our path as an independent state, it might offer some explanations.

What we have learned throughout the history is, that no one should be left behind in the society. Our society is built based on this principle. Equality and same opportunities for all has been the basis in order to be able to build success and a striving society. Already before the independence, in 1906 women in Finland obtained all the political rights. One of the cornerstones of the society is that both men and women have contributed to the improvement and development of Finland.

Here in Austria already Emperor Maria Theresia made the decision that all the children should have access to education. In Finland, education today has been seen as a fundamental right and basis in building a well-functioning and capable society. Equality in this respect has meant free of charge education from the grammar school to the university level. One of the small but important aspect is free of charge school meals for children and youngsters.

Our society is based on the rule of law, human rights and functional public institutions. We gather to the same table all the stakeholders in the society when we prepare fundamental decisions by the government and the parliament in order to take into account views of different parties or groups.

My conclusion is that the happiness consists of different smaller and bigger parts or aspects, which are in place or taken care of in our society. We appreciate it and we trust in our institutions and politicians. That makes us happy in our own peculiar Finnish way.

On the other hand, we should not forget the importance of the environment and traditions in Finland. As you know there would not be happy Finns without sauna and the nature with 200 000 lakes around or four seasons from almost total darkness in the winter to the mid-summer sun all night long.

But I would not be a Finn if I was not concerned about the future risks and obstacles ahead. Climate change is one of the biggest. We have to work together in order to combat that and tackle the consequences which we already can see. We don't know the future but we can always do our best to leave best possible heritage to our children and their children.

It is a privilege to me to serve my country here in Vienna. Austria and Finland have so many things in common. We can learn from each other and we share common concerns.

The work in the UN organizations is utmost important. I don't go through that agenda with you but I want to emphasize that foreign and security policy of Finland is consistent with the principles I described earlier in our society. That means that also in the international cooperation we should not leave anybody behind.

With these words, I wish you a joyful celebration today, thank you!