



**Speech
by President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at a Dinner
in Honour of
Egils Levits, President of Latvia,
Gitanas Nausėda, President of Lithuania,
and Alar Karis, President of Estonia**

**Bessastaðir
25 August 2022**

Honoured presidents of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia,
presidential spouses and foreign ministers of the Baltic nations,
speaker of Alþingi, prime minister,
other ministers, honoured guests

On behalf of my wife, Eliza, and myself, and all the people of Iceland, I welcome you all to our country, esteemed presidents with your spouses and entourage. I can safely say that our bond is exceptionally strong and close. We are small nations on the international scene, and we all share one major historical landmark: we became sovereign nations in 1918.

Afterwards, the twentieth century proved largely favourable to us Icelanders. It was another story for your nations, dear guests, but then the sun rose again. A year ago, we had hoped to mark the 30th anniversary of your nations' reclamation of full independence. That plan was derailed by the pandemic. Now, however, we are gathered here at Bessastaðir. We Icelanders are happy that we were able to offer our support in your struggle for independence. We appreciate your gratitude. Still, the greatest honour belongs to you. The greatest honour is due to those who stood up against violence and oppression.

Today, a little more than thirty years have passed; over thirty years of independence, over thirty years of freedom and progress. The people of your countries can travel at will, even settle elsewhere, temporarily or permanently – as we know so well and like here in Iceland. Under their own national flags Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians have made their mark in the fields of culture and knowledge, sports and the arts. Estonian and Latvian singers have, for instance, been victorious in the Eurovision Song Contest, while we, Lithuanians and Icelanders, must wait and hope.

It must be acknowledged that since your nations regained their sovereignty, the people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have faced numerous challenges. The Russian invasion of Ukraine serves to remind us that we must always be on the alert, and that democratic states must stand together. As we recall that, let us celebrate our friendship over the years and confirm our desire for further collaboration in the future.

Dear friends: I ask you to raise your glasses in honour of the presidents of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and to celebrate the friendship between our nations.