

**Dear Nordic colleagues, honoured speakers, ladies and gentlemen.**

When you mention climate change to an Estonian, there's a pretty good chance he will say something like: "That's perfect! This country is too cold as it is, some global warming would be great!"

I'm always in favour of a positive outlook on life, but I'm not sure if this optimistic attitude is based on enough analysis and scientific data to form a solid basis for our national climate policy.

Climate change can be many things – scary, controversial, difficult to understand or relate to, but it's certainly not a joke. And no nation that is serious about itself and its future, cannot treat it as such. It's a topic that moves billions of euros and can sink entire countries. It's a topic no-one can afford to ignore, no matter how differently we choose to approach it.

So it seems reasonable that if we need a policy for something that complex and important, we better base it on the best information we can get.

This is why Estonian Ministry of Environment together with the Nordic Council of Ministers, Stockholm Environment Institute and Tallinn University is hosting the first high level conference on climate change here in Tallinn. I am very much looking forward to hearing from Jens Hjesselberg Christensen, one of the most respected climate scientists in the world, about the latest status of climate science. IPCC is possibly the biggest science project in the history of the world, bringing together the smartest people we have, to understand what's happening to our planet. We really should pay attention when they agree on something.

I'm equally curious to hear Simon Upton's take on what all this science means for us policy makers. People often believe that economic and environmental goals form a zero sum game: if one wins, the other must by default lose. I personally don't agree with this view – I cannot see how pollution, depletion of resources or extreme weather events increase our prosperity. And I am convinced that future business stars are the ones who make the most out of the least resources. OECD is an organization known for their excellence of economic thinking and I believe Simon's views will be extremely valuable for all of us.

Changing climate and the policies we have designed to deal with it, affect more or less everything around us – how much we pay for electricity, how far from the sea it's safe to build or why the Latvian butterflies are moving north. Everything we do, in turn, influences the climate – the houses we build, the transport we use, the food we eat. This is why our speakers for the next two days are not only climate scientists, but economists, negotiators, civil servants, businessmen, architects, journalists. Looking at climate in isolation will not get us far. We need to be aware of what it means for all walks of life, how to minimize the negative consequences and maximise the positives.

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I would also like to say something you don't hear very often from an Estonian politician – we have been lucky with our neighbours. Well, maybe not with all of them, but most. First of all, this conference would not have been possible without our Nordic neighbours. Thank you for your help and support. Secondly, I believe it's always smart to compare yourself with and learn from the best. And if there's anyone who knows how to combine progressive climate policies with economic and social success, it's the Nordic countries. We have most of them represented here today to share their experience and we plan to listen very carefully. I am extremely happy to welcome my good colleagues from Finland and Sweden, who have taken time from their busy schedule to travel to Tallinn especially for this conference. I'm also glad to welcome our Baltic friends, who struggle with many of the same issues that we do, balancing energy security demands with environmental concerns while growing the economy and providing people and business with affordable energy.

It is no news that climate change doesn't recognize national borders, nor can it be solved by one country alone. What we want to examine during these two days is what climate change means specifically for the Nordic-Baltic region, what we can learn from each other and what can be our contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

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Today is October 23, there are 19 days until UN's global climate conference in Warsaw. Many people around the world have been hard at work for a long time to make this a success and I'm sure Artur Runge-Metzger will join them again as soon as he finishes his presentation here. If we want to reach a truly global climate deal in 2015, now is the crucial time to prepare. These are also the days of important discussions in the EU about what we want our future climate policy to look like beyond 2020.

Sometimes, discussions about the climate remind me of the four-stage crisis strategy from the British TV series "Yes, prime minister":

- In stage one we say nothing is going to happen.
- Stage two, we say something may be about to happen, but we should do nothing about it.
- In stage three, we say that maybe we should do something about it, but there's nothing we *can* do.
- Stage four, we say maybe there was something we could have done, but it's too late now.

I would, instead, propose a different four-stage strategy: stage one, let's find out what's going on; stage two - discuss our options; stage three, agree on our course of action and stage four – make it happen.

So let's get started. Thank you for coming.

