

By now, almost everyone has heard of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves's tweets about Paul Krugman. But what does the head of state post on the rest of the time? And what does he use different kinds of social media for? We took a look for those who aren't into lurking or following, or whose translation software can't yet handle some of the Estonian posts.

First, a look at the numbers - he passed 10,000 followers around New Year's and has over 12,000 on Twitter. That's less than Barack Obama or the late Hugo Chavez, of course, who are in the millions.

A majority of world leaders now tweet, but Ilves is among the few who pen all of their posts themselves. That's what appealed to journalist Eric Garland, who this month wrote in *Transitionistas* about Ilves and another head of state, Laurent Lamothe: "I constantly know what both of these men are doing for their countries because they are actual, sincere users of social media. They do not employ 'Twitter monkeys,' as the term in Washington now goes – they are interacting with the world directly via the Internet. As a result, I know more about the strategic direction of Haiti and Estonia than I do in Missouri, where I currently reside."

It struck Garland as novel that Ilves responded to him personally on the tweets, and for a second, Garland came perilously close to cyber-bromance territory. "These are some awesome heads of state, my friends," Garland wrote. In fact, Ilves often makes second or third appearances in a thread to press a point or just banter with fellow tweeters. He's pretty generous in granting requests from followers to plug Estonia-related developments. He'll retweet a shout out to two Estonians running a London cafe, for example, or laud a good site on Estonia, Stuart Garlick's visually impressive Charm Offensive being his latest favorite.

In general, Ilves comes across as a man with well-rounded interests who often beats other media monitors to the scoop whenever Estonia is mentioned. On non-Estonian topics, postmodern and pop culture - Bowie singles, Pynchon book rumors - appear alongside the classics. His sense of humor is quite verbal and wordplay-oriented. In general, while Ilves can occasionally come across as haughty - he doesn't suffer fools gladly, at least - it's backed up by erudition. Rather than a schoolteacher, the aura he leaves is perhaps more that of a friend's cool dad.

He seems to take special offense at the idea that a head of state should be

technology-challenged. On May 30, a fortnight after setting up his Twitter account, someone asked if a staffer had helped him: "No one made my twitter account for me, sorry. I learned to program in 1968. What's so challenging about twitter?" (Incidentally, his first tweet ever: "Help! I'm being followed;")

Ilves's tweets are an eclectic lot. But like the Krugman tweets that first skyrocketed Ilves to twitterati fame, setting the record straight continues to be a recurring theme. And the targets aren't just foreign economists trained at rival universities. Just last weekend saw a classic Ilves tweet, in Estonian: "It seems to me that the ones who say Estonia's tiger is stalled or that our IT success is a myth would probably take JavaScript to be the alphabet they use in Indonesia." Ilves clarified in a later tweet: "I wasn't referring to foreigners. The latter have an extraordinarily adequate picture."

'What's on your mind, Toomas?'

Ilves's official website is visually appealing, but appears to be lower priority, updated far from daily with much of the content seemingly translated. But his page on Facebook is lively and current, with a balance of photos, pronouncements on domestic politics and reports on activities in the form of status updates. With 34,500 likes of his page, Ilves uses Facebook as most people do, to mention what he did or is doing, and to post pictures of the proceedings. A majority of the posts are in Estonian, though some are bilingual, and a few, depending on the subject, are in English or Finnish.

The question in his Facebook status box might say "What's on your mind, Toomas?" But Twitter is where the president posts more of his ideas - his own and links to other people's.

In contrast to Twitter, Ilves rarely if ever appears in the comment section on Facebook to discuss. One time he did was in the comments section of a post on meeting the parents of martyred gay American student Matthew Shepard, when he reiterated a humanist position. The status drew 392 likes and 95 people liked the reply (rough translation into English by ERR):

"If even a small part of our people are condemned a priori, that is a hatred that will be fatal to

us. Every person is extremely important to us. Otherwise there is no hope for Estonia. Without the love of fellow man, Estonia will not survive. If someone thinks a child's murder is justified, then it's time to close up shop. That sort of country is not sustainable. Seriously."

The biggest trenders are otherwise Independence Day greetings and Olympic medals, which have have drawn likes in the 5,000 range.

Ill wishers

Facebook comments appear to be largely unmoderated, but the trolls are strictly not fed. On Twitter, though, the president has a "three strikes you're out" rule regarding followers who are insulting. He discussed his rules for blocking followers here and put it to a vote.

Ives recently retweeted a comment by PR firm executive Andreas Kaju that argued that, given the president's limited powers under the Constitution, he could be judged as having acquitted himself well if news about him only showed up at the stage of writing his memoirs. Although Ives keeps above the fray of daily politics, perhaps no one can avoid media exposure in the viral, meta universe of social media.

As for his own meta-tweet on the Krugman spat that made him a star of the social media? "Nessun Dormo," he wrote, retweeting the Wall Street Journal piece on an arioso composed by two local expats. Was it a subtle bit of insomniac wordplay for those who know something about Italian conjugations, or a misspelling of the famous Puccini aria's title? What's certain is that someone will probably be discussing it in a subthread.

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