

## Estonian Leader Voices Worry Over Russia

TALLINN, Estonia, Nov. 27 -- On the eve of the first visit to this tiny Baltic country by a sitting U.S. president, Estonia's new president voiced concern Monday over the poisoning death of a prominent Kremlin critic in London, portraying it as another worrisome signal about the political situation in Russia.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves, 52, grew up in New Jersey and spent 23 years in the United States before renouncing his U.S. citizenship. He said he would not speculate about who was behind the death of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko. But he said in an interview, "If you see a critic of the Kremlin die with a radioactive chemical polonium that is not one of your regularly available commercial chemicals but rather is one that falls under the purview of state regulation, then it's cause for concern."

He also pointed to the case of another Kremlin critic, journalist Anna Politkovskaya, whose recent killing Litvinenko was investigating. "Coming on the heels of the murder of Politkovskaya -- these are all things that should make all people in the democratic world feel a little edgy," he said.

His comments suggested that Bush will also be discussing growing concern in Europe and the United States over rising authoritarianism in Russia under President Vladimir Putin and his hostile relations with some of the new democracies on Russia's borders. Bush will participate in a round of meetings Tuesday morning with Ilves and other Estonian leaders before flying to Riga, Latvia, for the NATO summit.

Ilves said he would be discussing Russia's difficult relations with some of its neighbors, especially Georgia, which he visited last week for consultations.

The Estonian leader said Russia "seems to treat democracy on its borders, be it Estonian, Ukrainian, Georgian, as a security threat and sees despotism on its borders -- Turkmenistan, Belarus -- as being a good thing as it represents stability. . . . That kind of view is not one which is very conducive and helpful to the security situation on our continent."

Ilves is one of several Baltic leaders who spent large chunks of their lives in North America; Bush will also meet with Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, who was a professor of psychology at the University of Montreal. Ilves was born in Sweden to Estonian exiles and moved to the town of Leonia, in northern New Jersey, at age 3.

Ilves said he does not make much of his past connection to the United States. "The parties against me made it a big issue, but obviously it wasn't important enough to be a defining issue," he said. "I have been serving the Estonian state almost from the time independence was reestablished. I renounced my U.S. citizenship. What else can you do?"

By **Michael Abramowitz**