

*Questions by Arne Bengtsson*

**Arne Bengtsson: Does the President still stand by the statement: "There is no reason for anyone to speak Russian here more than speaking English, Urdu or Japanese because that (Estonian) is the (state)language"?**

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves: According to the Estonian Constitution, Estonian is the official language of the Republic of Estonia. Naturally, the Estonian President must stand up for the Constitution and defend the Estonian language, and it is therefore inevitable and quite normal that the Estonian President speaks Estonian to his citizens. Just as other heads of state speak the official language of their countries to their citizens.

I respect the mother tongue of every Estonian citizen and have a high esteem for Estonian laws which by no means restrict anyone from communicating in the language they feel most comfortable in. In this respect, private individuals are perfectly free to make their choices, as they are anywhere in the democratic world.

The official language and official communication necessarily belong to a different category, which the President has to stand up for. And this is what I said in the interview to the BBC: "...there are one million Estonians and there's only place in the world where you can speak Estonian.

**I have been in contact with people in Ida-Virumaa and there is much anger among Russian speakers who demand an apology from the President. Is there any reason for an apology?**

I am deeply sorry if my words have been interpreted as an offence to anyone's national feelings or mother tongue.

The Republic of Estonia is a safe home for those who do not have Estonian as home language and whose roots are in other countries, however far. But in order to be truly successful in this country, they also ought to learn the official language. I am pleased to see this happening more and more often.

**Can there be a risk that the Presidents statements in the BBC-interview alienate a group of Russian speakers who kept their belief in the Estonian state even after the bronze soldier conflict?**

I seriously hope that this is not the case, even if some comments on my statement, which was torn out of context, have raised questions.

I hope also that with the present explanations I have succeeded in clarifying my position; and I thank you for the opportunity to do so.