

*Aivar Viidik, Sulev Oll*

Politicians must not be allowed to fool the people; however, neither must they be automatically treated as lowlife and scum. Otherwise, we are giving away the Republic of Estonia all by ourselves, emphasises the President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in his pre-election interview.

**You said, when opening the President's "Chautauqua" on 9th October, that the political parties have learnt nothing nor grown any wiser, and they are still trying to fool their electorate with cheap promises. Did the politicians get the message themselves?**

I don't think so; they were not even there. The journalists, however, selected certain phrases from the speech, which annoyed several politicians.

**What should change in order for politicians to avoid using cheap tricks with their electorate and for voters to have the wisdom to avoid being fooled?**

Everything will change once we become more demanding. As long as we are succumbed by single deals, we facilitate such behaviour.

The situation will improve once people will begin to demand explicit ideas, strategies, policies,

and start to ask how one or another issue should be settled. The Chautauqua also proved that people want to think and go beyond mere slogans.

Once people start asking for more, politicians are forced to start giving more. A political market economy will then be created – supply will meet demand half way.

**So, your message to the electorate is to demand more?**

Yes.

**However, we don't have the right to claim that the people have been stupid until now.**

This is neither an issue of stupidity nor wisdom but rather serving future interests and therefore looking further than just as far as the nearest elections. We should think in which direction local development could move, what kind of future we want to see in one or another place in Estonia, and where and how we want to proceed with kindergartens and schools.

All this is not related to the amounts offered by one or another political party before elections. Although, for many of us, even a small sum of money would be more than welcome.

**Recently, Professor Rein Taagepera stated that fooling people with political promises during an election campaign is something that is being introduced, step by step, into our everyday life: "he pretends to be a candidate and you will pretend to be foolish enough to believe him." In summary, Mr. Taagepera admits that this will end up in a situation where we do not have any statesmen as politics is considered to be a game. What should be done to change this situation?**

In some sense, Mr. Taagepera's course of thinking can be seen as rationalisation. We cannot argue that there are no statesmen. They are characterised by their ability to adopt difficult decisions and to see further than the next elections.

On the other hand: if people are running for the European Parliament or local government without having the intention to actually work in the chosen position, when elected, we can hardly be surprised by the fact that trust in politicians is so low.

**Maybe politicians use words such as "trust", "honesty" and "justice" before every election for the very reason you have mentioned – a low trust in politicians and their modest desire to take responsibility for their actions?**

Politicians have probably realised that these issues are important for the electorate. Indeed, honesty and trustworthiness are abstract definitions, but it is very good that decisions are also adopted on the bases of general principles, not solely specific promises.

**You said at the opening session of the Riigikogu that Estonia could be a state in which institutions pursue their objectives – making life in Estonia better for the people of Estonia as well as shaping a more reliable and fairer business environment – instead of stupid bureaucracy.**

**How do you feel? Do our authorities have the internal desire to follow this objective? People expect that.**

I do believe that the wish is there. Because if not, why participate in politics in the first place? Of course, various attitudes can be encountered in this sphere, too. There are committed politicians who do their job and have a deep faith for a better future. And there are those who say one thing and do the opposite.

**In the previous issue of Maaleht, Mikk Sarv, a fisherman, who lives in Vilusi village at Lake Peipus, remarked that the state has never expressed any interest in helping them – there are no roads, even fire engines get stuck in the sand and houses burn to ashes. Elion refuses to fit a communication cable, one kilometre in length, which would allow twenty families to enjoy the connection. “If the state would act in accordance with its words in the sphere of regional politics, businessmen would not leave the village and our area would be among the wealthiest in Estonia,” says Mr. Sarv.**

**It is good to see that people have maintained optimism and will continue to do so, but still they will get no support from the state. What should one do in a situation like that?**

Living in a place that matches the definition of periphery myself, I can relate to the despair of Mr. Mikk Sarv. If we want to avoid a situation where Estonia will only consist of one metropolis and a national park called the Republic of Estonia, we must not ignore the problems of people like this. Giving up on them means that a state is giving up the very region, the very people.

If the situation with roads and telephones is really as Mr. Mikk Sarv relates, this means that one Estonia exists for vulnerable people, who have less rights. But this breaches the rules of democracy.

How can it happen that houses are burning, yet there is no road? The state of Estonia is not just a market economy experiment, or is it? If everything were to be weighed according to a "worth it – not worth it" scales, then we could ask why we need this Republic of Estonia at all.

But we still think that the people of Estonia have a home to call their own and this home is the Republic of Estonia. If we say that we work hard and have a nice-looking front door and a good kitchen but there is a neglected corner in the house that no one takes care of and is left to deteriorate, the whole house will finally come crumbling down.

**Last week, we asked the Prime Minister whether he is ready to seriously address the issue of administrative reform once the elections are over, instead of brushing off the Minister of Regional Affairs and his proposals again. Prime Minister Ansip said, loud and clear, that he is not ready.**

**The representative of the other coalition partner, the IRL (Pro Patria and Res Publica Union), Mr. Mart Laar, admitted at the President's Discussion Forum on Friday that delayed administrative reform is one of the biggest mistakes made both by himself and the Government. How do you feel about it?**

Estonia needs administrative reform. Whether people are ready for the reform or not is a completely different issue. We have numerous examples of local governments that are unable to manage themselves, but yet are unwilling to do anything serious about the situation.

The local governments are not coping; however, the majority of the support they get is not spent to serve the people, but rather to maintain their own existence. Now I ask – why should the state support such a local government? A rural municipality or a city is meant for the citizens, not only for itself.

The state has delegated a number of functions to local authorities, including, among other matters, the issue of building permits. If a rural municipality is unable to fulfil this task, what

would justify the existence of such a rural municipality?

However, the objective is not to increase or decrease the number of local governments or the intent to make something more efficient. The objective is to achieve a situation where any citizen of the Republic of Estonia who lives, for example, 200 km from the capital city can deal with everyday matters as effectively as anyone living in Kadriorg.

All citizens are equal in the eyes of the state and must have the opportunities to communicate with the state in the same way, using the same methods. It has been established without constitution that all people must be treated equally by the state.

**For several reasons, there have been problems in Ida-Virumaa. Now, prior to the elections, the population increased by a third in Alajõe rural municipality – on account of the so-called ‘dead souls’. Does the Republic of Estonia have a firm foothold there?**

The Republic of Estonia is there where Estonian legislation is applicable and functions. The truth is that all kinds of things can be done even within the legal framework. But it is also true that the people of Estonia, and therefore also the state of Estonia, is cheated when events like this take place.

We should believe in the goodness of people as long as they have not deceived us. Should we adopt different legislation that eliminates any possible deviations, we would face the danger of being guilty of breaking the law at any time.

When speaking of Alajõe, Paldiski and similar events, we could ask people whether they are happy with those who depict their rural municipality or town in this light.

Maybe we should recall an old proverb, as Mr. Rein Taagepera did: cheat me once, shame on

you; cheat me twice, shame on me.

**A teacher of Põltsamaa Public Gymnasium told a Maaleht journalist that for some children who attend school, the school lunch is the only meal they get in a day. In the morning, they ask the lunch ladies whether they could have some leftovers from yesterday's lunch. At the same time, the budget cuts also apply to school meals.**

**What should we tell an unemployed mother and children who expect to be fed? Move to town? Or that they are not sustainable?**

In making cuts and more cuts, we must ensure that things are in proportion. We cannot just say that this or that money should remain as is. By adopting such an approach, we would move in a direction, which would give results like we have seen, fortunately for us, in countries other than Estonia.

We can only spend what we have. Bankruptcy is not just a word or an artistic concept, but it is the actual situation in which we suddenly do not have any money. Luckily, the Estonian economy is still sustainable – no matter how difficult the situation is.

**Recently, the Estonian Institute of Economic Research published its rather optimistic forecast. The Minister of Economic Affairs, Mr. Juhan Parts, then invited people to consume more, as the deposits of individuals – in banks – are bigger than ever. Isn't it rather irresponsible to invite people to consume more at the moment?**

You can indulge yourself if you believe that you can really afford it. Should you feel insecure, don't buy yet.

The truth is that diminished consumption is one of the many reasons behind the economic recession and also that our emotions and reality can be described as imbalanced. While six months ago, the real situation was rather gloomy, people had not yet realised this. Now we can observe the very first positive symptoms, such as business related to export experiencing a slight increase, but our fear is bigger than ever.

**You are the initiator of the Baltic Sea Strategy and one of its chief promoters. However, quite probably most of the candidates running for local government seats have no idea of the nature of the strategy. Could you please outline the Baltic Sea Strategy in a couple of sentences?**

In brief, the European Union has launched a number of regional programmes. The Baltic Sea Strategy is a macro-regional programme, which promotes the fact that as of 1st May 2004, the Baltic Sea is basically a European Union lake, which does not separate nations but rather joins them together instead. And, as we have the opportunity, let us do something together! On top of everything else, we do have several common, shared understandings.

The European Union has established a minimum programme – what needs to be done. But we could always do more! Making lives easier – that's the minimum we could do. It is easy to cross any border, but try, for example, to marry anyone, who comes from a neighbouring country. Try to establish a company in any of these countries! Yes, in principle, it can be done, but have you any idea how much effort is required?

The Baltic Sea Strategy will offer us opportunities not to think – what the hell, I come from Hiiumaa Island; I'm living so far from Tallinn – but to say, instead, that I live really close to Stockholm and maybe we can do something together.

**The programme does have not funding at the moment.**

Right now it is time for action, to lay the foundation for co-operation, and adopt law amendments that will get the funding for 2013-2020.

**Is the fear of people – that more extensive co-operation, supported by external funding, will diminish specific regional developments – somehow justified?**

Where do ideas like this one come from? And who are these people? Anyway, this is not valid for people who see the importance of smaller cultures participating in comparable projects on a daily basis.

The Seto people, Võru and Viljandi county people (võroke and mulk), and the island populations receive European Union funding for their culture and for specific development projects. How could more money take their specific developments away?

See how local diversities are promoted in Finland and Ireland.

**On Vikerraadio's Kihnu language news programme, the reporter, Mere Marju, asked one Kihnu man whether it is possible to survive in politics while remaining honest. The man answered that there are some honest politicians but that you cannot survive solely by being honest in politics. Why is that?**

I find such an attitude – that politicians are scum and lowlife – really troubling. If we continued

with this thread of thinking to its logical outcome, we would conclude that democracy is bad and something more 'tight-fisted' should be introduced instead.

**So you do believe, that ...**

... that the majority of our politicians are not dishonest. We cannot define all politicians as being lowlife. What does it say about ourselves in the end, if we go on talking like that? That someone else should come and rule us?

Our politics is exactly as good as we are ourselves! If one specific person is not acting as you expect him/her to, do not elect him/her. But do not give up your faith in the Republic of Estonia.