

Rīgas Laiks: Mr. President, even though you have repeatedly stated that you don't particularly care to discuss Russia, some questions may be Russian- , if not necessarily Russia-related.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves: But I can always be quiet, right?

RL: Yes, you definitely have that privilege.

Ilves: The last line of Tractatus Logico Philosophicus by Ludwig Wittgenstein states: "Of which we cannot speak we must pass over in silence".

RL: I was considerably advised to not ask you whether Estonia is or is not a Baltic State...

Adviser: Not true. My recommendation was not to ask this as the first question.

RL: I actually never intended to ask anything like that!

Ilves: One misinterpreted essay I wrote about culture, about Estonian cultural roots, made me the bête noire of Latvian journalists for the following fifteen years. A couple of years ago, Latvian television came here and I said: ask anything but if you ask me if Estonia is a Nordic or a Baltic country I am going to get up and leave. So they did the whole interview and then they say: one last question...

RL: But my first question will be a bit different. At the end of our interview about ten years ago you said that you would like Estonia to become a "boring Nordic country"...

Ilves: Yes, yes, and that line has also been picked up by Valdis Birkavs and all these other people. That line – I said it in front of a group of Swedes in 1993, and you know what it was like on the news then: cars being blown up, mafia shootouts – that was the context of becoming a boring Nordic country. Sweden and Finland did not have cars blowing up, they did not have machine gun attacks, they did not have mafia gangs, they did not have stores that did not pay protection money burned down – here we had it then and it was just too interesting.

RL: So would you say that now Estonia has achieved that goal of becoming a "boring Nordic country"?

Ilves: No, I think it is more interesting than it was even a couple of years ago, less boring in certain ways, but not as a destination for extreme tourism. This is also what I more or less said opening an alternative music festival here in Tallinn, featuring bands from all over Northern Europe, including Latvia.

RL: In 2001, you said that one of the things you missed in Estonia was alternative rock stations and that's why you can't follow the music scene the way you did in the United States. So that must have changed too?

Ilves: We still don't have an alternative rock station, but there are enough alternative music people around that it's okay. So I manage to follow these things in other ways.

RL: What music do you listen to now?

Ilves: I listen to everything – this (throughout the interview, music plays in the background) is an old P.J. Harvey thing – ten years old. But I also listen to Bach. And I listen to weird things. I always have music playing because that helps me stay sane.

RL: How about cooking? In the past you said that that's another thing that keeps you sane.

Ilves: On weekends. My week, thanks to all my advisers, is always full. This one is probably the worst I've ever had. It runs from early in the morning to late at night. So I am not cooking anything right now. Today, for instance, I don't have a break at all. One thing ends, the next thing starts.

RL: At the time of our last meeting, you said that you have no intention of becoming president and that you are tired of people asking you about it. Now you are probably tired of the question why you changed your mind.

Ilves: There were so many people who asked me to run and I had such a broad range of support, that finally I said okay. But I didn't in fact expect to win.

RL: You have said that being president is an intellectual responsibility. Would you elaborate on that?

Ilves: To quote Vladimir Nabokov, I only have words to play with. We have a very very parliamentary system: the president has no executive authority, so if you want to do more than cut ribbons, you really have to think hard of what you say to people. You know two magazines – two! – in Latvia republished my speech on our Independence Day (<http://www.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/7132-toomas-hendrik-ilves-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-94th-anniversary-of-the-republic-of-estonia-in-the-vanemuine-tartu-24-february-2012-/index.html>). So I guess they found something worthy there. I do work long and hard on my speeches and I spend a lot of time writing and a lot of time writing outside because I want Estonia to be on the map. So, for instance, I recently published this essay in Policy Review. To get it published is already a big thing and then the reader of this fairly influential journal says – oh, it's from Estonia, that must be an intellectually serious place. For a year, I headed the European Task Force on e-health, and that essay was published only yesterday – I presented or Task Force's report on how to use IT in healthcare, which is going to be a must in Europe given our demographics.

RL: I think many of my countrymen have probably never heard of e-health. So if you would care to just say a few words about that?

Ilves: Well, the Task Force just promotes a bunch of ideas, but I will outline the problem. We have fewer and fewer people and we are living longer and longer, so we have this upside down pyramid of a demographic pattern. In 20-30 years we will have many, many more people who are retired and fewer and fewer people who are paying for it. So in Europe we spend 7-8-9% of GDP on healthcare, but soon we will be spending 20% or more and that's not sustainable. The working population gets smaller and the retired and chronically ill population is increasing, so there are many things to do but one of them is to make healthcare more rational. One example, which already works in Estonia, is the digital prescription. This means that you go to see a doctor, he says you need this, this, and this and then you take your ID card and you go to the pharmacy and stick it in there and then they know what you need. First of all, you already decrease by a factor of three the number of mistakes. Also, if you have a permanent prescription, instead of having to go to the doctor each time, you just go to your pharmacy and get it.

RL: And so ultimately, if I am in Tallinn and I need a prescription, I just call my doctor in Riga and I can get my medicine here?

Ilves: Right. So then all the countries that have this – right now it's also Sweden, Denmark, Finland – start signing agreements and then you get to the point where you call your doctor in Riga and it goes into the system. To take it further, we have a low level system that's adopted only by five countries so far – epSOS – the doctors feed all the data on the patient into the system to which the patient has access – also dental stuff, X-rays, MRIs. Let's say the doctor says okay, you need this operation. In the past, you'd take your papers and maybe go to another doctor, whereas now you own these data and you send them to another doctor and then another and so on, so you can get twenty opinions if you want. It's all based on the premise of what theoretically exists in Europe but which actually legally is something that is hard to enforce: you own your data, anything about you is yours – not the property of hospitals or doctors. Another thing we recommend is the standardized European health form – say Box 37B has your allergies – and what we already have with Google Translate – say, you get sick in Greece and the Greek doctor can look at what you have and it's already translated into Greek and he says, well, I can't give you this because you are allergic to that.

RL: God forbid that he should use Google Translate!

Ilves: No, no, no – the idea is that all the standard medical terminology is already there. Then you can take it one step further and Slot 22B says your triglycerides are 5.6-7.1, what does it mean to you? Unless you are a doctor, it means nothing. But you click on triglycerides and it tells you either it's good or bad. It's all doable today, it all can make life easier, and people will live longer and die healthy.

RL: Given Estonia's sophistication in the field of IT, is there not a disparity between generations? Does the older generation have the same computer savvy? Are they happy to be part of the computerization of Estonia?

Ilves: Sometimes it is a problem. But we went through this big computer education program in the early 2000ths, and it was a private undertaking done by the banks. The banks had branches in every little village but they wanted to close them down and have people do more and more electronic banking. So they had a program where they taught older people how to use computers. The other side is that it has to be user friendly, it can't be something overly complicated. An important part of IT is to simplify things, not simply taking old forms that you filled out by hand and putting them online. We learned this with our tax return – at first it was the paper world transported into the computer but then it was realized that it's not all important. Now it's – if there is some income that's not already reported, you put it in but if there is not, then you just press the button that says 'done' and that's it.

RL: Speaking of demographics – it seems that perhaps to a lesser degree but Estonia too is losing its population. In addition to the negative birth rates, people are emigrating – right?

Ilves: To a much lesser degree than Latvia.

RL: So it's not a factor?

Ilves: Well, it is a factor psychologically and emotionally but we have actually lost about 75 thousand maximum in the past twenty years.

RL: So no real need for measures to lure people back?

Ilves: Sure. I undertook one, but... Well, there is this general idea that we have in all three Baltic countries that nothing good can be done by our country – everything is a priori bad. So you have a little initiative, you try to do something good, but (imitates disparaging sounds).

RL: But what was your initiative?

Ilves: It can be roughly translated as "Talents, Come Home!" The idea was to hook up people with employers in Estonia who need people. For example, your company is exporting to the Netherlands and we need a Dutch speaker -- so before you go and try to find a Dutch speaker who is Dutch, maybe we can find a student in The Hague who wants a job. But of course everyone was annoyed that I put "talents" in – you know, "I don't have a talent, so you don't want me". It's that typical East European thing that it's not possible to do anything nice or positive, it immediately has to be trashed. It's no different than Latvia. We have a relatively high level of unemployment, slightly under ten percent, but the real problem is that as a result of a huge restructuring of our economies, beginning in 1991 but even more so as of 2007, we are faced with a lack of qualified labor. So, on the one hand, we have a problem of relatively high unemployment among people with few skills while our employers are complaining about a lack of skilled labor – people who would be able to program computers. At the worst of unemployment, when it was 17-18%, the IT people told me they still needed about 500 people a year – there was no unemployment in the IT sector, none. That's going to be a problem we all face. If people keep going to school to learn public administration, business administration – I won't even mention public relations or journalism – basically, if people avoid science and math, the problem will not go away. If there is anything I can say to people in Estonia or anywhere: You want a job when you are old? Learn math! You need skills in various quantitative fields. Look at the experience of Estonians and Latvians after World War II when they went to the West – who had jobs? The engineers! In fact, I didn't know any Estonians who weren't engineers, practically. I knew a guy, my father's friend, who had gotten a law degree from Tartu, and he ended up in Sweden and then came to the United States. But what are you going to do with an Estonian law degree? So he went back to college and became an engineer. And then he had a great job, a beautiful summer house – you know, that's what all the exile Balts wanted, right? First you buy a car and then you buy a plot of land so you can fry up a herring on Līgo

undisturbed.

RL: While we are on the topic of quantification, I would like to ask you what have been Estonia's gains in introducing the euro and have there been any losses? Do people perceive anything as a loss?

Ilves: I just had a long meeting with two of our best financial analysts and I asked the same question you just did. And basically the answer is what it was a year ago: increased investments. Most importantly, however, it took off the devaluation pressure that we faced. The investments came back – not because the euro is so wonderful but because the investors' big fear was the devaluation of the kroona and so they had pulled out, they were afraid to lose their money. When there is the euro, there is no devaluation. So that was all positive. The inflation that we had over the past year, which is admittedly high, it's not due to being in the euro zone, it's due to energy costs and energy costs particularly in the Baltic region because the cost of gas has actually gone down in Central Europe but in our region gas problems raise prices. There is really no problem with the euro, there is a problem in the euro zone. But what is important is that you are not going to be less affected by the crisis in the euro zone if you are out of it, in fact, you are probably going to be affected more. That's what Christine Lagarde said already a year ago: the first victims of the Greek crisis are going to be the countries of Eastern Europe not in the euro zone. Because most of these EU countries in the East European area and even further – Ukraine, for instance – their banks are euro zone banks – Austrian banks, Finnish banks – even if they are Swedish banks, they still trust the euro zone, they don't trust the other areas, so that means that loans are going to dry up faster in the countries outside the euro zone. This is of course euro propaganda, you understand! But I believe it. I think it's absolutely vital that Latvia get into the euro zone, I mean it is the one thing you need to be fully integrated with Europe.

RL: In light of the election results in Greece and France, however, how do you assess the future of the euro area?

Ilves: It's too early to tell. Clearly, if the Greeks do not meet the commitments they have made, the IMF is not going to give the next tranche of money and that could lead to a catastrophe. My whole article in Policy Review was about this issue: do you meet your agreements or not? We, peasant North Europeans, have this belief that if you agree to something, you have to fulfill your obligations. In our culture, not living up to an agreement, is a really bad thing. In other cultures it's not. For us, we have to do it, so we grit our teeth and meet our commitments. If they don't

then they will default because they won't be able to pay their bills. We assume they understand this, so we believe they will live up to the commitments they've made and cut back on expenditures, but if they say, no, to hell with them, we don't want to do this, the consequence will be that they won't get the money. If they don't have the money to pay their bills, then they will be in default and will have to leave the euro zone.

RL: Yeah, but that's not the end of the story.

Ilves: Right, then we will all suffer. But that's all I can say, I have no additional intelligence on this. All I can do is read the Financial Times at half past midnight to see what's happening.

RL: In that Policy Review article you seem to warn that the voters in the well-behaved "peasant North" are not going to stand for this very much longer.

Ilves: Exactly. It's a serious problem. 75% of the parliament, the government parties and one of the opposition parties, voted in favor of bailing out Greece. The next day there was an opinion poll and 75% of Estonians were against the bailout. The government, the parliament and the opposition took a morally very good position: we have solidarity with Europe, but of course no parliamentarian is going to vote against the wishes of the public for very long. After all, we are not a totalitarian country, we are not an authoritarian country, some of which lie very close to us, where public opinion does not matter and people vote the way they are told to vote. Since you have a democracy, you have to do what the electorate wants and if the electorate is not willing to go along with this it is going to be very difficult for responsible countries that have been playing by the rules to put up with bailouts. You can understand why the Finns are annoyed, why the Germans are annoyed but they are richer than Greece. You can imagine what we feel here when we are bailing out the Greeks being poorer than them! We don't have 13th and 14th month's salaries. We have only twelve monthly salaries and the average salary in Estonia is 10% lower than the minimum salary in Greece. And our retirement age is ten years higher or more. So obviously people are annoyed. And I don't know where it's going to go. I don't think anyone does. On the other hand, whatever happens, it's important to be in the euro zone because there at least you are not afloat. Our allies in this area are Germany, Finland, the Netherlands... I'd rather be in the same boat as them than be floating alone.

RL: Estonia's defense budget, as you have proudly stated on many occasions, is 2% of GDP...

Ilves: Why proudly? It's the NATO requirement!

RL: Yes, well, Latvia's is only half that and it hopes to achieve 2% only by 2020...

Ilves: That's eight years away! That's a longer time than we've been in NATO! I'll be honest with you: when I hear Latvian politicians say: "We're the fastest growing economy in Europe!" Yeah --? Who cares? The point is that it's not just your economic growth, it's your economic growth and meeting your obligations. And it costs money. It costs money to be in NATO.

RL: In your estimation, what are the main threats to Estonian security?

Ilves: If you look at our investments, we invest heavily in cyber security...

RL: What part of the defense budget is that?

Ilves: That's a secret. But we clearly see cyber attacks as a threat, besides the prevention of those is something we do well. Defense spending is not simply a response to threat. We are investing heavily in the air base here – it's a good thing to have genuine NATO infrastructure in your country, not just using old Soviet bases but having a real state-of-the-art modern air base. Other threats – well, you look at what's going on around you, where money is being spent and then you draw your own conclusions. Who's putting in missiles, where they are putting them...

RL: There are all these reports of Russia amassing troops around the Baltic borders but I

also read that Estonia is holding major maneuvers on the 8th and the 9th of May, is that right?

Ilves: No, these are our annual three-week long graduation exercises. As you may know, we still have a conscript army. We like the idea, by the way. I will tell you why in a minute. But do you want to see a conscript? There is a picture of the best conscript in his base – his unit was the best and he was the head of the unit – and the prize they got for being the best unit in anti-aircraft missile firing was they got to go to Latvia where you have a testing ground where you get to shoot real missiles and he went there. I'll show you (goes to the wall behind his desk). That's a graduate of Stanford University 2009, he came back to Estonia and went directly into the army – seven days after graduating college. It's my son, Luukas Ilves. Actually, you can look on YouTube and see a lecture he gave in Latvia on cyber defense. Anyway, we love our conscript army, we think it's a great idea. 94% of people believe we should have a conscript army.

RL: Really?

Ilves: Yes. Our idea of defense is based on reserves. One thing you don't have when you have a volunteer army, you don't have reserves. You go, you work there for two years or three years or whatever but it means that your standing army is all you have. Our army is reserve based, so we can have thirty thousand troops that can be mobilized in three days. If you have a volunteer army, you don't have that resource. If you are a small country, it's a problem. If you are the United States, the world's richest country, you have 300 million people, and then you can have a volunteer army. Of course, 800 thousand men is a small army compared to the size of the country, but they are well paid and in absolute numbers it's not so small. But in a small country, if you have a volunteer army, you can only have as many as you can afford to pay for.

RL: So young men are not trying to shirk this duty?

Ilves: Every year we have more and more positive responses. I mean, some will always try to get out of it. But in addition, we also have volunteers. They are not going there for the money, they are simply volunteering. I would say, in the last ten years, since the improvement in the quality of life in the army, many of the old objections have gone out. There is a real sense that the army is something you have to do. So, anyway, to get back to your original question – every

year we have this thing called "Spring Storm" – three-week long exercises where they have a kind of graduation exam. We always have Latvians there – they always come to play the attacker, the enemy troops.

RL: Today in downtown Tallinn, there were quite a few people in old Soviet uniforms and sporting Soviet military insignia and medals – not only old but actually mostly young people. In Riga, there is a kind nervousness in the air about this date. How is it in Tallinn? Is there a special place where those celebrating the Soviet Victory Day gather?

Ilves: They gather where the statue of the bronze soldier was moved. And if people want to wear something – why not.

RL: However, this brings us to that dreaded set of questions...

Ilves: No question is dreaded.

RL: It is no secret that the integration policies of both Latvia and Estonia have been criticized by the outside world.

Ilves: Only by the East. No one else is criticizing us.

RL: I don't think it's quite accurate but okay. Both Estonian and the Latvian officials have always dismissed this criticism as ungrounded. However, at least in Latvia, the issue has been forced to the foreground...

Ilves: I would say that Latvia simply has a very unfortunate referendum law. If you only need

ten thousand signatures, you can basically wear out the entire Latvian population by having a referendum every ten days. So basically I would amend your Constitution. Not that I want to interfere in the internal affairs of Latvia by any means! But basically that's what I think.

RL: Leaving the referendum issue aside, I think quite a few in Latvia see the integration problem as a genuine one. So, at least in Latvia, you can't dismiss it simply as political maneuvering. How about here, in Estonia?

Ilves: How about here... Well, first off – when you look at that criticism, you have to realize who is criticizing whom and then you draw your conclusions. I am pretty proud of the fact that Estonia has a high rating in the Freedom House rating of individual freedoms. As a liberal democracy, we are doing rather well. Clearly, integration has to be an issue that has to be dealt with, on the other hand, Estonia as a previously occupied country is not going to give automatic citizenship. It was an occupied country and everything else follows from that. Now there is this talk in some quarters: well, you have this category of non-citizens. In fact, this category was suggested to us by the OSCE and Max Van der Stoep in 1992: "You need a category where you have more rights than citizens of foreign countries." It was accepted that we have requirements to become citizens. Now we are being blamed for what the OSCE recommended! That's simply not serious. And the OSCE is not saying anything about it. So do we have to take seriously what people supported by the Foreign Ministry of a certain foreign country are saying? Clearly not. And the rate of integration is actually fairly good. Sure, we'd love it to be faster, but it's not and we are not going to go around forcing people to learn Estonian. If you don't want to learn Estonian – don't. There is the requirement now that starting in Grade 10 part of your education is in the Estonian language. What I am amazed at is that there are people who are against it. I mean, what? You want your kids to be with fewer opportunities?

RL: But you still have Russian schools, right?

Ilves: Sure. I mean, I really see this as a forced issue. Just think this through: Do you want your child to grow up monolingual in a country where everyone speaks a different language? Do you want your child not to learn an official language of the European Union? It's kind of strange.

RL: Yet, in Latvia, after the last election the divide between the two communities seems

to have become wider, it is much more obvious than ever before.

Ilves: Let's not fall into the terminology that is forced upon us! Estonians are not a community, Estonia is a nation state and so is Latvia. I would never call Latvians a community!

RL: Okay, let's avoid that terminology. There are Latvians and Russians and the twine don't meet.

Ilves: Well, I don't know. I guess it's a matter of self-definition. There are many people who are considered ethnically Russian but speak Estonian, I mean they simply have Russian names, but they are a part of the Estonian scene... I mean, I talk to someone and then I find out later on that they are Russian. I don't think in these categories, what one's ethnicity is. That is not an issue. There are those people who like living in a European country that is a liberal democracy and then I guess there are those who don't like to live in a liberal democracy and have a deržava mentality. For them, a small, puny, insignificant little country is insulting, its very existence is insulting. Well, what can I do about that mentality? I am certainly not going to accommodate that. I mean, I am a democratically elected president of a democratic country and if someone thinks they'd rather live in an authoritarian regime, then that's too bad but I am not going to go along and accommodate them by saying, yes, you are right, we really should live in an authoritarian regime!

RL: Speaking of outside opinions, I recently read this book by Alexander Theroux called "Estonia"...

Ilves: Yes, I read it too, but then I am probably the only person in Estonia who also read his "Darconville's Cat", in 1981, and "Three Wogs" as well.

RL: So in the context of his novels, what can you say about "Estonia"?

Ilves: Well, I'd say it is typical Alexander Theroux, clearly one of the most misanthropic writers there are. I mean, if you remember, in "Darconville's Cat" he has a 30 page chapter called "Maleficarum", which is just a collection of one curse after another in Latin, most of them obscene, and then the English translation. So this guy comes to Estonia, he is here for the dreariest months, he hates everything he sees – but okay, it's just one view and it's fine. You know, there used to be this joke about the Finns – and now it applies to Estonians, with our obsession with all kinds of tables and rankings. It goes like this: A German, a Frenchman and a Finn discover an elephant. The German writes a three volume "Prolegomena to the Elephant". The Frenchman writes: "L'Eléphant: Fifteen Ways to Cook It". And the Finn writes a book: "The Elephant: What It Thinks about Us". That was a joke from about 20 years ago, now it's not so much the case in Finland whereas in Estonia every opinion counts. At least opinions from the West count. I claim I am the only person who actually knew of Alexander Theroux before he wrote this book and had read his novels – they appeared at a time when I did nothing but read novels...

RL: Not for the plot but for the language as you've said?

Ilves: In my opinion, that's the only way to read. I mean, read Nabokov or Pynchon and you will never think of language the same way. So most people can't even plough through Theroux's language, which is kind of fun to read actually – great sentences, wouldn't you agree?

RL: Yes, the language was fun even in parts of the Estonia book. But contrary to what you are saying, how every opinion seems to count in Estonia, I was trying to get some reactions to the book and found out it really did not make much of a splash here, whereas if something remotely like that were written about Latvia...

Ilves: And even more so, if someone has written something bad about Estonia, then all the Latvians have read it!

RL: Not this book, I assure you.

Ilves: Yeah. Well, what can you say. All you can do is just shrug your shoulders. Basically the book struck me as the kind of book someone would write if he's only been in one other country his entire life. Having been born in Sweden, brought up in the United States, lived for four years in Canada, nine years in Germany, then back in the United States, then in Estonia, I have found that when people move out of their native country for the first time, all they do is look at the differences and they complain. When you go to your second foreign country, then things are looking different, and it becomes easier with each next one to develop a perspective on things. It's a classic thing I have seen with diplomats. Diplomats go abroad and in their first country they only notice the differences, but then they come back, then they go to their second country and after a while they actually develop a perspective. You have to go and live different places to effectively start having a serious opinion. Before that you are just looking at what's different – either good or bad. Have you seen this cartoon video, making fun of Estonians, the Estonian's world view [Europe According to Estonians http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUggXGu_gTQ], you know – Ireland is where my sister plucks turkeys, Finland is where the moose are, and Latvia is inhabited by six-toed people.

RL: I think so. And one does wonder about the six toes for Latvians.

Ilves: It has nothing to do with six toes – these kids just made this up. But the amount of violent reaction to this – not realizing that yes, it makes fun of everybody but most of all it makes fun of Estonians (goes to the computer, searches for the video, turns it on).

RL: But still – six toes? Just like it's puzzling to a Latvian what's so special about the word "saldējums".

Ilves: Because it sounds funny, that's what! And may I ask you what's so special about Situ ruttu karu tuleb?! that all Latvians seem to know about?

RL: When we spoke last, you said that there is only one problem between Estonia and Latvia and that's that street in Valka, Vienības gatve, I think it was. Since that problem has been removed with the dismantling of the border, have there appeared any new ones?

Ilves: I see no problem with Latvia whatsoever. Aside from -- we'd like you to have higher defense spending – but that's not a problem, that's just a fraternal republic's request.

RL: I heard that you are coming on the state visit by train. Is there any special reason for that?

Ilves: There are several. One is that when I make state visits to our neighbors I try to go the traditional way. So, for instance, traditionally Estonians went to Finland by boat. So I took our largest military ship to Finland and entered the bay with a 21 cannon salute. When I went to Sweden, it was too cold to take the military ship, they said you'll never survive, so I took the ferry. But to Latvia Estonians have traditionally gone by train, especially in 1919 when we had our armored trains going there. So this is part of *družba narodov*! Also, we here in Estonia and Lithuania and Poland and Finland and the European Commission think that Rail Baltica is a good idea. Because that is the traditional way of going between ourselves and, in fact, if there is anything that gives real physical, infrastructural meaning to the term Baltic unity, Baltic cooperation, it is the rail link. It would be the one thing that would tie us to Europe physically, otherwise we are much more of an island. It's a big project, it will mean a complete change of things the way they are here, in this part of the world, and it will make moving between here or Latvia and Lithuania to continental Europe much faster, much easier and therefore more European. The Finns are hugely interested in this in terms of Finnish trade, it would cut down the time it takes Finnish goods to Central Europe by 24 hours. But the main thing for me is really the tradition. In fact, in my preparations for the state visit – and it's very important to me and I am preparing harder than ever... (Gets up, goes to his desk, starts a computer search) I even found a Latvian newspaper from October 10, 1919, "*Brīvā Zeme*". And there is an editorial, in the form of a greeting, on the occasion of the arrival of the Estonian armored train to Riga on 10th of October, 1919. Half of it is printed in Estonian and the other half in Latvian. The train arrives, the Latvians are on the platform -- "Greetings to our Estonian comrades!"

RL: And further down it reads: "We called you and you came!"

Ilves: And we came by train!

Original article on the Rīgas Laiks [webpage](#) .