

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, hosting the Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian ambassadors to Estonia at Ärna, congratulated the diplomats of the three countries as they today concluded association and free trade agreements with the European Union.

"This is an important step on the long road that these countries have to take to deepen democracy, transparency and a state based on the rule of law. A long section of this road to Europe still needs to be travelled," the Estonian Head of State told those in attendance.

"Having joined the European Union ten years ago, Estonia knows from first-hand experience that the commitment of parliaments and governments to European integration can only really be successful when their people understand and support this choice," President Ilves stated.

Estonia entered into an association agreement with the European Union in 1995 and became a full member of the union nine years later.

"Indeed, these nine years were tense and we had to start doing many things differently, but we have no reason to regret it," emphasised the Estonian Head of State. "The competitiveness of our economy, agriculture included, is better than ever before and the strong education that our youth has acquired will give them an opportunity to think big and expand their horizons; our transparency and almost non-existent corruption will offer all the confidence that our potential foreign investors need."

Therefore, ambitious agreements with the European Union will be beneficial for the people of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as these will contribute to the development of both democracy and a modern economy; on the one hand, these countries will have easier access to the European Union market, and on the other, the entrepreneurs of the European Union will have the confidence required to invest in these countries, President Ilves said.

"Association and free trade agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Georgia will serve to shape the successful future of these countries. We do know that in policy – just like in economic and trade relations – sticking to the present will mean being left behind in the future" he said.

"Estonia is a convinced supporter of the principle that each and every country should have the right to adopt decisions regarding its future, with no economic or political pressure. Abolishment of barriers to trade and enlargement of the free trade area, supported by the deepening of democracy and a state based on the rule of law, will be beneficial for everybody. Association and free trade agreements concluded with the European Union pose no economic or security threat to any country," emphasised the Estonian Head of State.

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