

"Estonia and Georgia are in the same European boat," assured the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, today at an official dinner given by the Georgian Head of State, Giorgi Margvelashvili, at the Presidential Palace of Georgia.

He spoke about Europe that relies upon a state based on the rule of law, democracy, transparency in both politics and the adoption of economic decisions and mutual trust in the fact that everyone will abide by the agree rules.

"This is the very reason why Estonia sees the Eastern Partnership policy of the European Union as important. We support the expansion of space where common values apply," emphasised the Estonian Head of State, who is currently in Georgia for a two-day official visit. He described the association agreement as a strong tool to accompany the Eastern Partnership policy, as one of the parts of the agreement is a free trade area intended to bring Georgia – and also Moldova and Ukraine – closer to the European Union.

"The Eastern Partnership is not a one-way ticket to the European Union, but we will not rule it out as a final destination," assured President Ilves.

The initial entry into force of the Agreement of Association and free trade agreement between Georgia and the EU, which took place in September of last year, means that the financial support of the European Union to Georgia in 2014-2017 will be twice as big as during the three previous years, and trade between the European Union and Georgia increased by 12% during the first six months following the implementation of the free trade agreement.

The Estonian Head of State reiterated that the initial opinion of the European Commission regarding the simplified visa procedure applicable to Georgia is encouraging, as the efforts and development of Tbilisi are visible and the fulfilment of all the recommendations should allow the adoption of the decision that will grant visa-free travel by the end of the current year.

"The success of Georgia that took the road of innovations after the Revolution of Roses will depend solely on Georgia – the people who live here. This will also depend on the statesmanship of the leaders, freely elected by people, and the scope of your view into the

future," remarked President Ilves.

The European Union and NATO, two of the pillars of success and security of the democratic world, have imposed strict accession requirements; however, compliance with these requirements is not impossible and the successful state that will emerge as a consequence will be a long-term investment into your own security, he said.

As we look back on the euro-integration years of Estonia, we can see that only in 1997 were there opponents who were against the accession of the Baltic states, seven years before Estonia became a member of the European Union, and as for NATO, there were hesitant allies even back in 2002, two years before we became a member of the alliance, said President Ilves.

"However, we did overcome our own stubbornness and convinced the hesitant. Because we were sure that if we did everything possible to become as similar to the European Union and NATO member states as possible, the arguments against us would finally lose their strength. This is why I encourage you to follow the path of changes," remarked the Estonian Head of State.

"We knew that we had to do well enough so that the European Union could not say "no" to Estonia's accession wish. This was our strategy. This was supported by domestic unity – the parliamentary parties, which were usually split into coalition and opposition, came together with accession to the European Union as a common goal and the President of Estonia, Speaker of the Parliament and the Prime Minister all worked with the government as a crew of the same boat," he said, in emphasising the experience that brought success to Estonia.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department