

In his remarks, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who hosted a dinner last night in honour of Slovakian President Andrej Kiska, recalled that one of the visitor's favourite subjects in school was mathematics, and he has also consistently emphasized the importance of teaching and learning real subjects.

"Why am I talking about mathematics at this formal dinner? The reason is actually obvious, because one of the recurring themes of your state visit is the development of information technology and startups. As small but energetic countries, we both know how important it is to develop forward-looking societies and contemporary economies, and how all this is related to technology and innovation," President Ilves said to the Slovakian head of state.

If we limit ourselves to the promotion of the economy, we are unjustly narrowing our horizons. We must also speak about updating society and the state. Various IT solutions can help the citizenry to communicate with the state better and faster; they can bring the people closer to the state and help rid the state of burdensome bureaucracy. Estonia and Slovakia are experienced and we are taking actions to make sure that the state's relationship with its people is more human; and we both understand the opportunities offered by information technology for achieving this.

The trait that has linked the histories of our two countries since the eras of national awakening is the defense of our languages. Our languages were the bearers of our nations' essence when we did not have our own states, the Estonian head of state said.

According to him, this helps us understand the past in two ways: "In the 21st century, we are also defending our national interests with all the power and fortitude of our people. But we are no longer societies that are introverted and apprehensive about the future, but rather, we are characterized by openness to the world, by having a say and participating in the world."

Our membership in the European Union and NATO as influential and successful organizations based on solidarity and common values increases our weight and size, President Ilves said.

"From here on, it is our choice how we make use of this so as not to diminish ourselves. For

instance, by abandoning solidarity as a value, something that is especially necessary when trying to cope with the refugee crisis. This is a test of the European Union's strength," the Estonian head of state said. And confirmed that "We will not abandon solidarity because we feel a sense of responsibility toward Europe and understand that today's solidarity with the so-called "southern" states will also provide solidarity should it be needed by the Central and European countries."

Estonia and Slovakia have already experienced this solidarity – when NATO accepted us as allies. When the European Union accepted us as Member States, President Ilves said.

Speaking about bilateral relations between Estonia and Slovakia, he emphasized the importance of human communications along with political ties. The former includes the long-term and top-level cooperation between our scientists in the real sciences, as well as, for instance, the annual trip of students from Tartu, the spiritual capital of Estonia, to the ex-libris competition in Slovakia.

"This human level is the foundation on which the common interests of our countries – as European Union Member States and NATO allies – is based," President Ilves emphasized.

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