

"Terrorism, the growth of populism and the increasing influence of radical political parties in Europe and throughout the world impact on all of us," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves today in his opening address at Tallinn Music Week's Creativity for Change Forum, which he delivered at Theatre NO99.

"Only a few noticed against whom the terror attack that took place last November in Paris was aimed. Perhaps we remember the name of the Bataclan theatre and even recognise that this was a rock concert, without realising that this was not just any American band. The band that played that day was one of today's alternative artists – Eagles of Death Metal. Even the name of the band is ironic, in a most-modernist way," said President Ilves.

"Ultimately, 89 people who listened to that esoteric band were slaughtered by terrorists. These were people like you and me, who listen to music that is different to what is broadcast on regular radio stations. I would have gone to the concert had I been in Paris at the time. I am sure that many of those attending Tallinn Music Week would have been there too," added the Head of State.

President Ilves emphasised that no standard symbols were targeted that day – such as government officials or military facilities; instead, liberal democracy, via a music audience, came under attack.

According to the Head of State, populist and demagogic responses that echo all across Europe become louder and stronger in the wake of terrorist attacks, such as the recent attack in Brussels. These responses are not unlike the black and white thinking of the terrorists themselves. "Such responses are carried by prejudice and even racism, and they are aimed at the very same tolerant and liberal society that allows us to play the music we like to listen to and want," remarked President Ilves, in inviting us not to forget the foundation values of Europe – openness, freedom of speech and a state based on the rule of law.

"The ability to become adjusted to new situations is the difference between a liberal democracy and authoritarian regime," he added.

President Ilves spoke at the forum's opening panel – "The Big Picture and Future Vision" – with Hamdi Ulukaya, a Turkish entrepreneur of Kurdish origin, and founder of Chobani. The forum mostly focused on the migration crisis and the role of refugees in economy and business.

"Why is it that the European countries that gained their freedom 25 years ago are suddenly so vicious towards refugees," was the question raised by the Head of State. The President used the United States of America as an example, as it has received many refugees over the years who have become committed workers and helped to accelerate economic growth.

"We live in the same world. Either we will make it better, together and for everyone, or no one will be safe. We must give new meaning to the word "refugee" and make a distinction between terrorists and those who have been terrorised in their own country. In the past, refugees meant people who contributed to research and the innovation of countries. Today, they mean a problem," said Hamdi Ulukaya.

Office of the President  
Public Relations Department