

It would be difficult to find relations in Europe as close and friendly as those between Estonia and Finland, stated President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who met today with the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, who arrived on a two-day state visit.

The Estonian Head of State described the relations between our two countries as unique in many spheres and Finland as a close friend and ally, both regionally and in the European Union.

Finland is also the primary economic partner for Estonia and the economies of the two countries are becoming increasingly intertwined, admitted President Ilves, who expressed his hope that this partnership could also form part of the future economic growth of both countries. He mentioned IT co-operation as an example of an area in which strong progress can be achieved to boost the economy in general.

The Estonian Head of State also noted that Finland has joined the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence and Estonian Defence Force members are serving as a part of a Finnish unit in the UN's peace ensuring mission in Lebanon.

The meeting of presidents Ilves and Niinistö largely focused on the current in the European Union – the migration crisis, economic depression still prevailing in a number of countries, increasing populism and extremism, and the complicated and occasionally aggressive security situation in the vicinity of the European Union. The heads of state shared their common concern about the future of Europe and admitted that it is becoming more and more important to pay attention to alleviating the doubts, suspicions and fears that citizens may have.

In discussing the importance of the European Union, President Ilves stated that, "we must remember where we would be without the European Union and what the alternative would be, considering our geographical location".

The presidents of Estonia and Finland reiterated the fact that we must all make efforts to maintain the common Schengen visa system and that travelling without border control is important for both business people and others.

"Unity, mutual solidarity and leaders who have the courage to make decisions have been the strengths of the European Union – this is what we need the most today," said President Ilves.

President Niinistö will also meet with the Chairman of the Riigikogu, Eiki Nestor, and the Prime Minister, Taavi Rõivas. The Estonian and Finnish heads of state will take part in the FinEst Future Forum to discuss the future of the economy. The event is being organised by the Mektory innovation and business centre of Tallinn University of Technology. President Ilves and Ieva Ilves will give a state dinner in honour of the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, and his spouse, Jenni Haukio.

Tomorrow, the presidents will meet with the students of Viljandi Gymnasium to give them a lesson in the form of questions and answers. President Niinistö will also visit the home farm of his Estonian colleague at Ärna, Viljandi county.

The spouse of the Finnish Head of State, Jenni Haukio, and Ieva Ilves will visit KUMU Art Museum, Finnish school in Kadriorg, and the Museum of Coastal Folk and Open Air Museum in Viimsi. They also plan to visit the Institute of the Estonian Language and the Estonian Design Centre in Culture Kettle. They will also visit the Estonian Traditional Music Centre in Viljandi where they will be given an overview of the cultural academy and approaches taken to support and promote traditional culture.

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