

Today, within the framework of his working visit to Ida-Viru County, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves delivered a lecture during a civic education lesson at the Narva Humanitarian Gymnasium.

The Head of State considered it unfair that many people think that Ida-Viru County has a kind of non-Estonian aroma. "You should not be ashamed about living here as Ida-Viru county is actually one of the most educated and certainly the most rapidly developing counties in Estonia," President Ilves said. "You should also not be ashamed that your home language is not the Estonian language, just as I was not ashamed in front of my friends that my home tongue was Estonian when I was living in Sweden, USA or Germany."

President Ilves, whose grandmother Aleksandra had come to Estonia after the Bolshevik coup d'état, said, "her family and she personally knew very well what it means to live as a representative of another nationality among the indigenous population." "In the same way I also understand those people and their descendents who in the second half of the 20th century came from different parts of the Soviet Union and settled in Estonia," the Head of State said.

"I do not want you and your parents to feel as strangers in Estonia," President Ilves said while speaking at the Narva Humanitarian Gymnasium. "Living in Estonia you are our fellow countrymen. Namely our countrymen, not countrymen of the Russian government. That means that your problems are not the problems of the Russian government or the President of Russia, your problems are our problems. We cannot do without you. Estonia is too small a country to allow itself to be indifferent towards its fellow countrymen."

President Ilves pointed out that Estonians make up 14 percent of Ida-Viru county's population, but 73 percent of young people in the age group up to 15 years have Estonian citizenship and Estonian passport. "From this I understand that you are not indifferent to Estonia, that you consider this country as your own," the Head of State said and wished the students of the Narva Humanitarian Gymnasium to believe more in themselves, in Estonia and in the possibility to make one's way in life and succeed here.

"If you want to make your way in life in Estonia you have to know the Estonian language," President Ilves said speaking in Estonian in front of the students and answering their questions that were also asked in Estonian. "Learn, and you'll have a possibility to get a good education,

find a good job, also here in Ida-Viru county or elsewhere where education and intelligence have always been highly appreciated.”

The Head of State spoke also about Narva Bridge, which is more than half a century old, has only two lanes and is obsolete. “It is clear that we need a new bridge in Narva. But Estonia needs also a mental four-lane highway leading from Narva to Tallinn and Tartu that will connect our fellow countrymen from Ida-Viru county with rest of Estonia,” President Ilves said.

He called on the students to be politically active, to join interest groups and political parties, to run as candidates in the elections and to vote.

“Thereat it is worth to remember that no political party can represent the interests of all Estonians as people are different, neither can any political party take the role of a spokesman of all non-Estonians,” President Ilves said.

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