

Speaking at the educational forum at the Haapsalu Vocation Education Center today, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said that teachers require a sense of security that the reorganizations that have been discussed and deliberated within a circle of experts will reach their logical conclusion. “This is a belief that, after long years of searching and reform, Estonia’s educational system is finding the road that can lead any country or people to its most important objective—a wise nation in the 21st century,” said President Ilves.

“I do not think that a new era requires new people or that, in the age of Internet and mobile phones, the work of teachers needs to be done totally differently. Whether in ancient Greece or today’s Estonia, the main role of a teacher is still to arouse interest and provide guidance. The greatest challenge of this occupation is to make unavoidable necessities interesting. However, this requires that the teacher is fanatical, in the good sense, about his or her subject, and is a creative person, not just an insensitive worker,” said the Head of State.

“I myself have gone to school in the U.S. and my son has studied in German, Estonian, and American schools. Estonians schools are not inferior to others, but unfortunately, they are also not significantly better. Differences do exist at the university level and primarily in the humanitarian fields,” said the President of the Republic.

He recalled the positions voiced recently at the General Assembly of the Academy of Sciences and the newly created President’s Academic Advisory Board: that the development and success of countries and economies that are knowledge-based is connected one-to-one to the percentage of students that are studying sciences and natural sciences and to the number of educated engineers. “Those preparing and approving curricula for general education schools also cannot ignore this fact. If we reduce the number of subject hours in mathematics, physics, or biology today, then in 20-30 years at the latest, our children will have a reason to be dissatisfied with us,” said President Ilves.

The Head of State also quoted “Estonian Educational Strategies 2015”, a document that will soon be ten years old and that proclaims education as the national religion of Estonians. “It is the belief in the power of knowledge, that education opens doors, and helps in every sense to achieve a richer and better-quality life. The Estonian people arrived at this understanding already in the 19th century, when farm families sent their middle and younger sons to school in town,” said President Ilves. “We should maintain this belief. This means we must continue to learn. We must all learn—the President, Minister of Education, school director, teacher as well as students.”

The objective of the Educational Forum 2006: Teachers in a Learning School and Society is to start a public discussion about the future development of teacher professionalism, to support learning becoming cognitively more interesting, and to provide the public with an opportunity to participate in the discussion on the formation of the state's policies regarding teachers.

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