

“Helsinki and Tallinn support each other’s development,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves yesterday at a lunch hosted by the city fathers in honor of him and Mrs. Evelin Ilves during a visit to the Helsinki City Government within the framework of a state visit to Finland. “It is increasingly simple for people to cross the bay and the border, and the number of companies that transcend the bay and the border keeps increasing,” added President Ilves.

Helsinki is the closest large city to Tallinn—a hundred kilometers closer than Tartu, the Estonian Head of State recollected, adding that, during the past few years, Helsinki has become home to thousands of Estonians.

“I believe that as European citizens the local Estonians are fine members of Finnish society. Strong individuals with clearly developed identities are a valuable addition to any society and a wise society supports all aspects of its members’ development,” said President Ilves. “I would like to thank the members of the Helsinki City Council who have understood the importance of the initiative for a Helsinki Estonian School and wish to support and promote it. The city’s collaboration with the local Estonian community is of decisive importance for the success of the undertaking,” stressed the Estonian Head of State.

President Ilves noted that neighbors inevitably affect each other, and therefore, it is important that both countries be successful: “It is also important that, as neighbors, we be able to stand for common interests, be it in our immediate vicinity, within the borders of the European Union, or on the international arena as a whole. The precondition for close cooperation is positive familiarity and trust.”

In his remarks, President Ilves considered it important that Helsinki and Tallinn, which both belong to one of the fastest growing economic areas, the Baltic Sea Region, not be left behind in this development.

“Here the keywords are common interests, vision, a mutual ability to cooperate and frequent direct contacts,” said the Estonian Head of State. “Increasingly, the future of Helsinki and Tallinn is spoken about as twin cities. Actually, one should—to quote Professor Mart Saarma—think primarily about creating a research bridge and how, in practical collaboration, to most effectively divide functions so that Helsinki and Tallinn would warrant the self-chosen common name of “Knowledge Arena”. I am happy to acknowledge that cooperation and direct communications

between Estonian and Finnish authorities have already become routine.”

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