

At the opening session of the 11th Riigikogu on Monday, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said that the parliament answers only to the people and not to anything or anyone else. This distinguishes European national representation from pseudo-parliaments," said the Head of State, recalling that the members of parliament are the employers not servants of the government.

According to President Ilves, for a long time, the productivity of Riigikogu work has not been measured by the quantity of laws and resolutions that have been passed, because the work of building a legal framework for the country has been completed to a great extent, and now the time has arrived to start discussions on a possible new emphasis for parliamentary work.

"I feel that the Riigikogu could become an effective intermediary that monitors and controls the conformity of the government's policies to the needs of real life. However, this presupposes that every Member of Parliament, along with having extensive insight, is constantly informed about the background of the draft legislation that is sent to the parliament for decision," said President Ilves.

The Head of State emphasized that the voters cannot and should not forgive the Riigikogu abandoning the obligations placed on it by the constitution of a parliamentary republic, and reducing itself to the role of an obedient and impassive executor of the will of the coalition parties. "Your voters expect independent thinking and conscientious voting from you. Actually, this means no less than the Riigikogu seizing the power assigned to it by the law," President Ilves addressing the new members of parliament.

The Head of State recalled that the oath of office of the Members of the Riigikogu to remain true to the constitutional order of the Republic of Estonia is an oath to the Estonian State and not to their political parties. "Do not give in to the temptation to make this honorable institution into an election campaign tool. This is not easy, but it is not impossible. If in no other way than by completing your work a month or two, not a week, before the next elections," said President Ilves. "The representative body of the Estonian people does not have the right to make a fool of itself. Therefore, resolutions that are consciously unconstitutional, similar to the one we saw in the final weeks of the last Riigikogu, must be precluded."

The Head of State also condemned the possibility of the parliament being transformed into a

marketplace, where interest groups can buy laws for campaign contributions or tilt them in their favor as well as ignore the proposals of the Chancellor of Justice or Auditor General. “Let’s be honest—accusing them of partisan leanings generally indicates that their criticism has hit the mark,” said President Ilves. “In the time that has been spent trying to ascertain the non-existent political preferences of the Chancellor of Justice, both party financing and the management of state-owned businesses could have been made more transparent. During the three months of this year, over forty of our fellow citizens have died in fires. Already last year, the Chancellor of Justice made a proposal to immediately enact a mandatory requirement for smoke detectors. Unfortunately, the decision makers are still discussing whether smoke detectors should be installed next year or the year after.”

The Head of State acknowledged the role of the opposition in parliament. “This is laudable work, on which ultimately the level of political discussion and transparency of governance depends. I expect the ruling coalition to respect its opponents, because only in this way does everyone respect themselves and the choices of the Estonian people.”

President Ilves also paused on questions, the solution of which requires foresight, consensus, and wisdom on the part of the Riigikogu, by calling upon them not to be lulled by our economic success and seemingly ever-increasing state budget. The Head of State named the main economic problems as being the large current account deficit, the gap between productivity indicators and salary increases, the general lag in innovativeness in respect to the rest of Europe, and the shortage of skilled labor. “The simultaneous interaction of these influences may be accompanied by tough times for companies and families that have overextended their borrowing, as well as for fellow citizens that have trouble coping financially,” warned President Ilves. “Please make decisions that would prevent, or at least moderate, possible setbacks. Always place the interests of the people above the egotism of party politics and optimistic self-confidence.”

According to the Head of State, one should not be lulled by the supposed impasse in the European Union, in which the question for Estonia is whether we are prepared for possible developments. “All the ministries must conduct one and the same European policy, not operate as competitive principalities,” said President Ilves, who thought it important that Estonia join the Eurozone, which is not just a question of financial or economic policies, but a question of Estonia’s security.

Speaking of Estonia’s survival as a country and people, he highlighted family policies, education policies, and healthcare policies. “This means numerous children in families that feel secure and happy; the opportunity to receive a good education everywhere in Estonia; and a people

concerned about their health along with the availability of quality healthcare,” the Head of State enumerated, saying that this can all be summarized by one well-known concept – quality of life. “It is within your power to make Estonia into a country that will have positive natural population growth after four years, and where an increase in well-being will reach all the people,” said President Ilves at the opening session of the 11th Riigikogu.

The full text of the speech by President Ilves is available at [www.president.ee](http://www.president.ee) .

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