

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is on a state visit to Georgia, was awarded an honorary doctorate today by Tbilisi University.

In a lecture following the ceremonial conferment of the degree, President Ilves said that Estonia is carefully following the developments in Georgia, since the two countries are united by a complicated past and similar expectations for the future.

“We are formerly subjugated peoples,” noted the Estonian Head of State. “We share in the nineteenth century an almost simultaneous national renaissance, led by the leading poets and writers of our respective peoples which paved the way for each our rebirth as independent countries in 1918.” Subsequently both countries were wiped off the map when a military occupation ended our statehood.

According to President Ilves, Estonia and Georgia also share something far more important than occupations and repressions—we are democracies.

In his address, the Estonian Head of State emphasized that the entrance requirements for two of the pillars of the Western democratic world—the European Union and NATO—are stringent but not impossible. “There were member states opposed to Estonia's membership. But we overcame those doubts,” said President Ilves. The Estonian Head of State is convinced Georgia will succeed. For he feels everywhere in this country that same spirit, that same will to make it happen, to show that democracy, prosperity, and security are possible here in this far corner of Europe.

The full text of the speech by President Ilves is available at www.president.ee .

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