

The Estonian state supports the will of every non-citizen living here to acquire Estonian citizenship and to completely join Estonian society, which is the sole privilege of the citizens of the Republic of Estonia, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said at the formal presentation of citizenship certificates at the Kadriorg Art Museum.

“Every country must stand up for its citizens. It is in the interests of every country to increase its citizenry. No country that truly respects its citizens grants citizenship arbitrarily, and that has not been done to date and will not be done in the future,” the Head of State said, adding that every person must manifest the will to acquire citizenship.

“Your will demonstrates that you trust and need Estonia. I affirm to you that Estonia trusts and needs you. The Estonian state acknowledges your will,” the President said in his remarks to the new citizens.

President Ilves called upon natural-born Estonian citizens to help and encourage those who do not dare, do not want to or are not able to complete the process of applying for Estonian citizenship, “If every Estonian citizen would take the matter to heart and help even one compatriot with a “gray passport” to acquire citizenship, each person without citizenship would have a dozen helpers.”

If we would start to look around more openly and helpfully, if we would start to communicate more and to break down barriers between various nationalities, we could significantly reduce the number of people without citizenship in the next few years, the Head of State stressed.

“The Estonian state must ask itself— without changing the foundations of the citizenship policy, have we done everything to enable those who have not yet made the choice to acquire citizenship?”, President Ilves said. He added that bureaucratic obstacles, as well as those resulting from a lack of information, must be removed from the path to making a decision in favor of Estonian citizenship.

“It is in the interests of our common Estonia that these choices be made in favor of Estonia. Therefore, it is perhaps not uncalled-for to ask parents without citizenship to apply for Estonian

citizenship for their children,” the Head of State said.

He was gratified that the Estonian state does not view the process of acquiring citizenship as something rigid and changeless, and recalled that last week the government approved a new procedure for conducting citizenship examinations, which hopefully will eliminate the complicated wording of questions that are actually quite simple.

“Estonia is a free democratic country and we honor people’s free choice. Therefore, we also honor the choice of people who live here to acquire the citizenship of some other country,” President Ilves said. “We honor that choice, but we don’t understand it. We cannot understand it, because Estonia treats its citizens well and equally.”

According to the Head of State, it is difficult to understand the motives that force one to reject all the benefits that a democratic and free country offers to every citizen of Estonia for their self-realization and sense of security.

“However, it is the laws, traditions and customs of Estonia, and only Estonia, that are and will continue to be valid here,” President Ilves affirmed.

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