

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves started a two-day trip to East-Viru County yesterday.

He said that despite the economic recession East-Viru County has not forfeited its opportunities, but awaits forward-looking entrepreneurs with daring ideas, who can avail themselves of a qualified labour force, available production space, electricity, heating and water.

“I am concerned about the people who have lost their jobs and are facing difficult situations. The task of us all—family members, friends, and compatriots—is to care about them, to provide support, make sure they do not lapse into negligence and hopelessness,” President Ilves said. “The government cannot remain a self-satisfied bystander. As in the rest of Estonia, the state must help to improve the entrepreneurial environment in East-Viru County in order to attract new investments, which also means new jobs.”

The government must assist with well-conceived retraining, which is based on the actual needs of companies, the Head of State stressed.

“Also important is entrepreneurial training that encourages and teaches those who have been salaried employees to start their own sustainable businesses, which would provide work for both the entrepreneurs as well as other people in the region. Entrepreneurial success depends on the enterprise of all of us,” the Head of State said.

This morning, President Ilves visited Kohtla-Järve Upper Secondary School in the Ahtme district attended by 578 students, where 141 children study in Estonian and 272 in Russian, while 165 attend language immersion classes.

Accompanied by the school’s director, Ülle Kumpin, the Head of State met with the language immersion classes and students in the upper secondary classes. Early total language immersion was introduced at this school in 1995, and five years later, it was included in the Canadian-Finnish-Estonian project entitled “Language Immersion as the Key to Integration”, in which Narva and Tallinn schools are cooperation partners.

“The more knowledge you have, the more languages you know, the better you will be able to cope in society, and the broader your opportunities will be on the job market. The mission and objective of language immersion is to help you manage and cope better in life,” the Head of State said.

If the first-grade pupils asked President Ilves whether he likes the winter and whether the first elves have already visited his home, then democracy and dictatorship was discussed in the ninth-grade history class. “Dictatorship is based on people’s fear of expressing their opinions, while democracy is strong when people can freely and fearlessly express their opinions,” the Head of State said.

President Ilves also watched a short performance by the seniors at Kohtla-Järve Upper Secondary School, which comprised student essays, in which the young people expressed their concern that, due to their large study load, they are not able to deal with everything they would wish, that there is a shortage of bilingual teachers, that tuition-based learning at institutions of higher education is expensive, and that there are other cities in Estonia besides Tallinn, but they also said, for instance, that tolerance and a multicultural society is born gradually.

“It is always satisfying to meet smart young people who know how to think,” President Ilves said.

Thereafter, the Head of State visited the Järve Upper Secondary School in Kohtla-Järve attended by 470 students, where he met with the senior class.

This is an excellent school with emphasis on the sciences, where, at the upper secondary level, in-depth studies in physics, mathematics, informatics, fundamentals of ecology, as well as national defence are offered.

“The successful studies of your graduates at Estonia’s institutions of higher learning demonstrate that emphasis on real and natural sciences at the upper secondary school level provides a strong basis for coping with very different specialties,” the Head of State said. “A good education in the sciences provides a basis for the development of a knowledge-based economy and innovation, which are keys for Estonia’s success.”

President Ilves expressed hope that the graduates of East-Viru County schools will return to their neighbourhoods after acquiring their professions and make a contribution to the county's development as educated scientists, engineers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and doctors.

“The development of East-Viru County depends, to a great extent, on you,” the Head of State stressed. This is your home region, you can improve it. I believe that during the next 15 years East-Viru County will become a place where people will want to come to live. This may seem like a great challenge, because it is undoubtedly easier to cope elsewhere, but here you will be able to gain the greatest experience and also see your work produce the greatest benefits.”

Office of the President  
Public Relations Department  
Phone +372 631 6229