

The working visit of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Evelin Ilves to East-Viru County continued today in Narva. Together with the East-Viru County Governor Riho Breivel, Narva Mayor Tarmo Tammiste, and the Army's Chief of Staff, Colonel Urmas Roosimägi, the Head of State discussed plans for organising the Defence Forces parade next February 24th.

"I am sure that the General Staff of the Defence Forces along with the Narva City Government will organise an inspiring celebration for us all, but especially for the citizens of Narva," President Ilves said. "Narva, a venerable and honorable Estonian city, is the right place for the Defense Forces parade. This parade and the Independence Day reception in Jõhvi are recognition of the capability of the people of East-Viru County."

The Head of State recalled that the 1996 Victory Day parade also took place in Peter's Square in Narva and this was totally successful, adding, "I am glad that the people of Narva will now have a chance to see how much the Estonian Defence Forces have developed in 12 years."

At this morning's meeting with Andres Toode, Director of the Narva Museum and the representatives of nongovernmental organizations, President Ilves said that in Narva, as elsewhere in Estonia, people must actively participate in shaping the life of their home region. "You have targeted the areas of activity that are important for the development of Narva—culture, sport, enterprise, and tourism. However, you have also noticed the troubles and problems in your native city, by dealing with AIDS and narcotics prevention. Your concern and the involvement of the citizenry deserve recognition."

In Narva today, President Ilves also met with the members of the leadership of the local Defence League Brigade and placed flowers at the Independence War memorial in Siiverts Cemetery.

Thereafter, the Head of State and Evelin Ilves travelled to the Kuremäe Convent, where the current abbess, Varvara, introduced them to life in the 117-year-old convent.

"I am proud that being part of the Republic of Estonia saved both the Kuremäe Convent and Petseri Monastery at a time when thousands of Russian Orthodox churches and cloisters were

being destroyed in Russia,” President Ilves said. “Moreover, Kuremäe and Petseri continue to be important symbols of Russian cultural and spiritual life.”

According to the Head of State, the Kuremäe Convent, under the leadership of Abbess Varvara plays an important role as a spiritual centre in Estonia and beyond.

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