

“The Estonian language has been the skill, substantial part of our being, which has helped us survive. Despite all the difficulties and setbacks,” President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said at the language forum organized yesterday by the Estonian Language Council and the University of Tartu in Tallinn. “For some people it is their religion, for others their territory, and yet others their values and ideals,” the President said. “The cement of Estonians’ coexistence and of being Estonian is the Estonian language.”

The Head of State expressed hope that the current Year of Innovation will also be expanded to include our language. “If we examine our last 17 years of freedom, I would like to ask—where are our language innovations?” President Ilves asked.

“The principle that naturalist Charles Darwin formulated already 150 years ago is also valid for language—longevity is only guaranteed by adaptability. The Estonian language is long-lived, therefore it has been able to adapt,” the Head of State noted. “Johannes Voldemar Veski and Johannes Aavik made a significant and positive contribution to the adaptability of the Estonian language.”

“During the new period of independence, new words have not been brought into our vocabulary in a volume or with a success comparable to Aavik. Only the word “lõim” immediately comes to mind and even this was a derivative of an older word,” President Ilves said.

“If the Estonian language does not include the precise and necessary concepts we will inevitably be left out of many important discussions. And this means that we will be poorer,” the Head of State said, adding, “I believe that the protection of the language, its preservation and development can only be successful if we purposefully and continually deal with the updating of the language.”

“Naturally, our conservative attitude is based on reasons from our language’s history. Yes, we must protect our language. But at the same time, we must also develop it if we want Estonian to survive as a language of culture and science,” President Ilves declared.

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