

At the Estonian World Council held in Tallinn today, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves acknowledged the central role of this organisation, which was founded more than 50 years ago, in organising cooperation between Estonians living outside their homeland.

"We cannot measure, and certainly not calculate in money, the support that the Estonians living in Sweden, Canada, the United States and elsewhere provided for almost 50 years to their relatives and friends in their captive homeland," said the Estonian Head of State.

"Today, our common mission and task are very different than they were 20 or 30 or 60 years ago," noted President Ilves. He affirmed that nevertheless the primary and cohesive purpose behind the Estonian organisations operating elsewhere in the world has not disappeared.

"We have gained our freedom, but the broader substantive issue for Estonians still troubles and haunts us - that Estonians, whether living at home or far from home, carry on our outlook and our language. That they keep alive the world, the culture that we call 'Estonia'," the Head of State said.

In his remarks, President Ilves proposed that we take the position that all Estonians in Canada, Germany, America or Sweden, but also in Finland and Belgium, Ireland and Great Britain remain patriots of the country of their forebears, ambassadors of their historical homeland.

"A large community of compatriots living abroad is the wealth of any country and people," stressed President Ilves. "They can help defend the interests of the Estonian state and people. And make us better known in the rest of the world."