

“The actual strength of Estonian society will now be put to the test,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the presentation of the Estonian Human Development Report 2008. “In the near future, essentially already today, we must find an answer to the most burning question – how do we introduce a sense of security in those who have been left without jobs and a stable income by the current economic crisis?”

The Head of State recalled that the darkest scenarios predict that the unemployment rate could double, that is, unemployment in Estonia could increase to between 15 and 20 percent.

According to President Ilves, we must learn from the severe setbacks suffered by Finland and Sweden during the 1990s, since “they emerged from the crisis stronger and more educated.” He also added, “They did not abandon their unemployed and leave them to search for solutions on their own. Their societies’ social networks were sufficiently strong to endure hard times.”

The Head of State said that Estonia did not enter this period of global crisis as a weak and poor country, but one with quite a large reserve of strength. Thus, the pillars of our future progress should be improved wellbeing, increased self-confidence, and most importantly, the feeling that we are making our own decisions.

“In addition, the weaknesses and gaps in the social network of Estonian society will now become apparent. The common efforts of our public authorities, entrepreneurs and civil society must be directed at overcoming these shortcomings and creating a new and stronger network,” said President Ilves.

“Actually, Estonia now requires a social contract. But not some formal document that is signed with golden pens by dozens of organizations, the government, trade unions and entrepreneurs in a formal atmosphere,” said the Head of State. “Instead we need a common understanding of the fundamental values of community. Awhile ago, the Supervisory Board of the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, the compiler of the Human Development Report, proposed its ideas and called upon society to discuss them. We expect the same kind of initiative from the parliamentary coalition and opposition, entrepreneurs and trade unions.”

Background

The Estonian Human Development Report 2008 (HDR), for which Marju Lauristin served as editor-in-chief, focuses primarily on the quality of life of the Estonian people and society. One of the principal goals of the HDR is to provide comprehensive and comparative information about Estonia's development. The Estonian Human Development Report includes the results of analyses conducted by leading scientists that reflect the important topics of our society, such as education, public health, the formation of civil society, Estonia's economic development, the level of the people's wellbeing and life satisfaction. Since this is an international publication, the goal of the HDR is also to provide an overview of the situation in Estonia in comparison with other European countries.

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