

“Administrative reform cannot lapse into mathematical summations or cost-saving campaigns. The idea behind administrative reform must be the equal provision of high-quality services to everyone, regardless of whether they live in the village of Kadjaste in the Vändra Rural Municipality or in the District of Pirita in Tallinn,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at today’s meeting with the local government leaders of the Kaisma, Vändra and Tootsi Rural Municipalities and the Town of Vändra in northern Pärnu County and the Järvakandi Rural Municipality in Rapla County.

“We know that many local governments cannot fulfill the functions assigned to them by law. Yet, Estonia’s population bases its attitude toward its state and its government based on local authorities,” President Ilves said.

“If all of us, regardless of the location and size of our local governments, pay an equal part of our income to the state in taxes, we must all receive services of equal quality in return,” the Head of State stressed. “Let’s be honest, this is not true at the moment and great differences in the capabilities of local governments may occur. We all want what is self-evident – that it would be convenient for people everywhere to conduct their affairs with city and rural municipality governments; that the Tiger’s Leap should reach everyone; that social benefits should be the same size regardless of the size of the local government; and education should be equally excellent everywhere.”

President Ilves affirmed his strong support for the merger of local governments, if this produces stronger united rural municipalities and more professional management of local governments.

“Smart governance is just as necessary in the national government as it is at the city and rural municipality level,” President Ilves stressed. “We do not need the reform of territorial administration just to save money. We need it to provide high-quality public services to our entire population.”

The Head of State said it was regrettable that only a few local governments have merged to date.

“There are various reasons for this – insufficient clarifications given to the people, as well as scant attention paid by the central authorities to administrative reform,” President Ilves said. “I am gratified that Vändra and Kaisma Rural Municipalities have overcome all these obstacles and decided to merge. At the same time, it is a pity that Tootsi and Järvakandi Rural Municipalities and the Town of Vändra will not be part of the merger.”

The Head of State expressed hope that cooperation between these local governments will eventually lead to the creation of a large rural municipality.

“I will try to immediately quash any talk of possible marginalization. Instead, I call upon you to see local government mergers as opportunities for everyone to defend the wellbeing of their villages, because strong villages are necessary for strong local governments,” said President Ilves. “On the other hand, when mergers do take place, the current rural municipality centers must be maintained as points of contact with the local government.”

The Head of State considered it important that the wishes and volition of the local residents reach the councils of the new united local governments.

“This will help to prevent marginalization as defined by democracy and civil society,” said President Ilves. “During administrative reform, it is important that along with politicians’ voices, the opinions of local people and nongovernmental organizations also receive a better hearing.”

The Head of State visited AS Tootsi Turvas, a peat production company, and the Carl Robert Jakobson Farm Museum in Kurgja. He also met with the promoters of local life in Kaisma and Vändra Rural Municipality.

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