

At the Round Table on Local Governments, which convened at the invitation of President Ilves, the main issue discussed was co-operation with Enterprise Estonia (EE). At today's Round Table on Local Governments, which convened at the invitation of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the main issue discussed was co-operation with Enterprise Estonia (EE).

Mr. Tarmo Leppoja, Member of the Board of EE gave an overview of the current status of programmes available for local governments, the processing of applications and reports, and the time required for that purpose.

According to the local government leaders who were present at the Roundtable, the decision-making and processing procedure should be faster and the opportunity for transferring European Union funds directly to contractors should be provided. It was admitted that more attention should be given to the development of an e-environment for the more efficient use of the funds, but also ex ante consulting and a simplification of reporting; the implementation of an advanced payment system would also be of great assistance for the success of projects.

Mr. Siim-Valmar Kiisler, Minister of Regional Affairs, presented an overview of the collection of revenue base of local governments and the use of EU Structural Funds within his area of administration. He stated that regardless of the bleak economic situation there are no signs of crisis with regard to projects not being implemented; however, the fact that local governments are asking for an extended term for the submission of projects, having already been granted the support, is something to be concerned over.

"It is extremely important to use EU Structural Funds efficiently. A creative, human approach should be taken to solving the problems encountered, in a spirit of benevolent co-operation between local government, the state and EE," President Ilves said. "Now is not the time for rigid bureaucracy. Local governments today require flexibility, consulting and compliance."

The local government leaders who were present at the Roundtable admitted that the mutual efforts of both the applicant and the entity processing the applications are required for the speedy and efficient utilisation of structural aid.

The Minister of Regional Affairs provided an overview of administrative reforms at the Head of State's request, explaining the responses to radical administrative-territorial reforms suggested by him and how much progress had been made with the discussions that have begun.

According to Minister Kiisler, a governmental committee should be established to solve the problem. The Minister also believed that the local governments should be given some time for a voluntary merger and only then should the Government adopt a decision regarding the non-merging governments.

The President's Roundtable on Local Governments and Regional Development brings together the representatives of local county governmental associations and their umbrella organisations. The function of the Roundtable is to devise recommendations to the Head of State on matters related to regional development.

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