

“Although Estonia and Portugal are located at opposite ends of the European Union, the bilateral relations between the two countries have always been good,” noted President Ilves. As part of an official visit to Portugal, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Mrs. Evelin Ilves met yesterday with President Aníbal Cavaco Silva of Portugal and Mrs. Maria Cavaco Silva.

At their meeting, the two Presidents discussed at length the European Union and the co-operation of the two states within the framework of the EU; Mrs. Maria Teresa Gonçalves Ribeiro, the Portuguese Secretary of State for European Affairs, also took part in the meeting.

“Although Estonia and Portugal are located at opposite ends of the European Union, the bilateral relations between the two countries have always been good,” noted President Ilves, adding that opportunities for developing the mutually-beneficial relations could be sought and improved upon at all levels.

When discussing the European Union, both Heads of State emphasised that smaller countries like Estonia and Portugal have benefited considerably from being a part of the Union and European integration in general.

“The joint European projects are of great importance for small countries; therefore, countries like us need a strong European Union, while, in turn, the European Union needs a strong Commission,” said President Ilves.

The Presidents of Estonia and Portugal also expressed their support for the prompt implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. According to President Ilves, the European Union should also proceed with the liberalisation of the energy and service markets.

The current economic recession was also discussed at the meeting, including the opportunities for more active co-operation in the sphere of information technology. According to President Ilves, the restoration of economic growth is largely dependent upon the implementation of innovative solutions, and Estonia and Portugal have good potential for co-operation in this sphere.

Trans-Atlantic relations were also an important issue discussed by President Ilves and President Silva. “Estonia considers the close partnership of the European Union and the United States of America, based on shared values, to be the cornerstone of both European and global security and stability,” President Ilves stressed.

Yesterday evening, President Ilves also participated in a discussion at the Catholic University of Portugal (Universidade Católica Portuguesa), where the challenges faced by Europe were discussed.

On Wednesday, President Ilves and Mrs. Evelin Ilves will participate as guests of honour in the official opening ceremony of the cascades of Belém Palace, the residence of the Portuguese President.

President Ilves will return to Estonia on Thursday, 23rd July.

Background information:

In 2008, President Ilves bestowed a Collar of the Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana upon President Silva of Portugal for his support of the non-recognition policy regarding the occupation of Estonia. Photos of the ceremony are available at: www.president.ee .

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