

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who along with Evelin Ilves visited Vilsandi and Abruca Islands, encouraged the promoters of local life and the local government leaders. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who along with Evelin Ilves visited Vilsandi and Abruca Islands, encouraged the promoters of local life and the local government leaders to use the opportunities provided by the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

“The present is an extremely good time to do so since one of the priorities of Sweden, which has taken over the EU Presidency, is to jumpstart the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,” the Head of State said.

The Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which was initiated by Toomas Hendrik Ilves and current Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb when they were members of the European Parliament, should become a separate item in the European Union’s budgetary strategy.

“Find new opportunities in this strategy,” President Ilves stressed at his meeting in Saare County, recalling the success of Saare residents to date in applying for and using euro funds. “In the European Union, the ones who succeed are those who submit sensible projects for solving their problems and deal with problematic issues related to the future.”

At the same time, the Head of State stressed that local government leaders should look as far into the future as possible, regardless of whether the topic is the merger of local governments or the construction of local cultural and sports buildings, not to mention finding solutions for educational and employment problems. “I encourage you to look further than just four years minus one day.”

On Vilsandi Island, naturalist Arvo Kullapere introduced the unique local bird sanctuary, which was established almost 100 years ago, to President and Evelin Ilves. The visitors met with volunteers from the Estonian Fund for Nature and made a tour of the island, where about a thousand sheep have been brought to prevent the spread of undergrowth. They also visited the home of island ranger Jaan Tätte and the fish-smoking plant located in Papissaare Harbour.

On Abruca Island, the Head of State became acquainted with the reconstruction work in the harbour and presented a gift of books to the island’s library. Thereafter, island ranger Rein Lember led President and Evelin Ilves on a nature hike. On his visit to Abruca, the Head of State was accompanied by writer Ülo Tuulik, who initiated a cultural village tour, and with his characteristically incisive humour, told stories about the 20th century, which was not very good to the island. President Ilves met with the island’s residents in the Abruca Community Centre; he answered their numerous questions ranging from issues related to local life to the trustworthiness of politicians. He also planted a linden tree in the yard of Maria Priske’s former home.

Both islands, which were quite populous in the first half of the last century, have few permanent residents today, although there are numerous summer homes.

“I met people who deserve respect, who know how to love and care for their home, its unique nature and cultural heritage,” President Ilves said. “The state in turn has the responsibility to

care for and help its citizens even if they live in places like this located beyond the seas.”

According to the Head of State, fixing up small harbours and resolving transport and communications problems would help to guarantee the preservation of life on these islands and would also make Estonia a stronger maritime nation.

“For instance, I hope that the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication will finally support the request of the Kaarma Rural Municipality Government to acquire a barge for Abruca, which would cost almost a million EEK, but is needed for transporting vehicles, waste and domestic animals,” President Ilves said.

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