

The states and people of Estonia and Hungary have had good, close relations throughout history said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves today in Budapest, as he began his state visit to Hungary.

At the meeting with the President of Hungary, László Sólyom, the heads of states recognised that Estonia and Hungary share similar foreign policy priorities, which have contributed to good co-operation both in the European Union and NATO.

The heads of state expressed delight at the positive outcome of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon treaty and emphasised that Estonia and Hungary strongly support further enlargement of the European Union, including the Balkan states. Next week, President Ilves will visit Serbia and Macedonia with the aim of assisting in the negotiations on the enlargement of the European Union towards the Balkan states.

The subject of the IT-Systems Agency of the European Union was one of the important issues raised by President Ilves at the meeting, and according to Mr. Ilves, Estonia is interested in putting itself forward as the agency's country of residence. According to President Ilves, both he and the President of Hungary agreed that there is a need for such an agency.

When speaking about NATO, it was mentioned that the alliance needs a new strategic concept. This means that new and old threats should be dealt with in a balanced way said President Ilves. Defining new threats does not mean that old threats have disappeared.

Today, President Ilves met also with the Prime Minister, György Gordon Bajnai, Speaker of the Parliament, Béla Katona, and leader of the FIDESZ opposition party, Viktor Orban.

At these meetings, Estonia's and Hungary's economic issues were discussed at length. It was mentioned that both countries have been severely hit by the global economic crisis. The countries were affected particularly because of the loss of export markets, as Estonian and Hungarian economies are strongly export-orientated. In overcoming the economic crisis, Estonia has made joining the euro zone its primary objective, stressed President Ilves.

The issue of energy safety was also discussed. It is obvious that the European Union requires a common energy policy. The prerequisite for implementing such policy is the diversification of energy sources, the range of countries where energy comes from and consumers as well as the liberalisation of energy markets, stressed President Ilves. The Head of State added that Estonia was expecting significant steps in shaping EU's common energy policy from Hungary's EU presidency in 2011.

Estonia and Hungary have both decided to participate actively in Afghanistan, where, according to President Ilves, in addition to ensuring safety more attention should be given to civil missions.

Estonia and Hungary closely co-operate in preserving the culture and identity of Finno-Ugric people. A significant step in this would be a co-operation programme for 2010–2012 to be signed today by the ministries of education of Estonia and Hungary, stipulating the active exchange of students and teachers between Estonian and Hungarian universities.

The state visit of President Ilves continued today with a visit to Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) University in Budapest. The Head of State laid wreaths at the Memorial of the Heroes of the Nation and the memorial to the victims of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

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