

"I hope that the Macedonian flag will soon be raised among the flags of the current member states of the European Union, and thereby, the Community will become richer by one successful country," President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said at his meeting today with Gjorge Ivanov, President of the Republic of Macedonia\*.

President Ilves, who is the first Estonian Head of State to make an official visit to the Republic of Macedonia\*, acknowledged Macedonia's\* progress in updating its political system, economy and public services.

"In the four years that Macedonia\* has been a European Union candidate state, you have carried out extensive reforms in your country, as well as strengthened democracy and moved irreversibly closer to the European Union and NATO," the Estonian Head of State affirmed.

At the meeting between Presidents Ilves and Ivanov, the issue of Macedonia's name was discussed, whereby the lack of a compromise between Greece and Macedonia is hindering Macedonia's\* accession to NATO.

"Estonia encourages Skopje and Athens to find a compromise as soon as possible, which is necessary for normalising the relations between the two countries and for completing Macedonia's\* integration into the European Union and NATO," President Ilves stressed. "This assumes frequent and purposeful negotiations between Macedonia\* and Greece - both directly and brokered by the UN."

The Estonian Head of State expressed his hope that the European Commission's progress report that will be made public tomorrow will propose that accession negotiations be started with Macedonia\*.

"The name issue must not prevent the initiation of accession negotiations," President Ilves said. "The parties in bilateral problems must not overlook the general interests of the European Union."

During the last five years, Estonia has actively shared its own reform experiences and those related to its accession to the European Union and NATO with Macedonia\*, turning special attention to information technology.

"Hopefully, our excellent political ties will be expanded into close economic cooperation, which assumes that Estonian and Macedonian\* companies will take notice of mutually beneficial opportunities," the Estonian Head of State said. "Of course, this also assumes that conducting business is equally simple, transparent and clear on both sides."

President Ilves will also be meeting with Macedonian\* Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in Skopje, as well as opening a photo exhibition by Kihnu women.

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