

“Estonia welcomes the European Commission's recommendation to the Council of the European Union to start accession negotiations with Macedonia\*,” said the President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at today's meeting with the Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. “This confirms that you've chosen the right path.”

President Ilves expressed his pleasure with the fact that Macedonia's\* name issue with Greece did not affect the opinion of the European Commission.

“However, it is quite obvious that this issue must be settled as soon as possible to achieve the political consensus required by the Council of the European Union to adopt the accession decision,” said the Estonian Head of State. “The UN international mediators may be of assistance to this end but, above all, Macedonia\* and Greece must come to an understanding through pragmatic and constructive negotiations.”

According to President Ilves, the road to accession with the European Union is complicated and full of obstacles, as demonstrated by the recent history of Estonia.

“Macedonia\* has covered part of this way successfully but the other part – and not an easier one – is still ahead. It has bends as well as ups and downs, but I'm sure that you can do it,” said the Estonian Head of State. “Should you find Estonia's experiences regarding the accession with the European Union to be of any value, we are willing to share these.”

President Ilves also mentioned visa-free travel in the European Union, which will soon become available to Macedonian\* citizens, as a positive aspect.

“Macedonia\* has proven its responsible attitude to international issues, the participation of your defence force members in NATO's operation in Afghanistan serving as evidence of this,” said the Estonian Head of State.

President Ilves considered it important for the Macedonian\* Government and the Parliament to

contribute to maintaining exceptionally wide-based support for the European Union and NATO in its society. Close co-operation between the coalition and the opposition as well as mutual agreements, which would help to complete the NATO and Euro-efforts successfully, are also valuable.

President Ilves also emphasised the importance of a professional and apolitical public service.

“This makes a state stronger, both on the inside and out,” said the Estonian Head of State.

President Ilves also met today in Skopje with the Speaker of the Macedonian\* Parliament, Mr. Trajko Vekjanovski, and opened a photo exhibition of Kihnu women.

The Estonian Head of State will fly to Belgrade in the evening to begin a two-day visit to Serbia.

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\* the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia

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