

“Serbia has clearly proven to everyone that its path is the path of accession to the European Union and Serbia’s persistence and dedication towards achieving this goal deserve respect and recognition,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is on an official visit to Belgrade, at a meeting with Serbian Head of State Boris Tadić.

Serbia’s remarkable progress is also confirmed by yesterday’s European Commission progress report. President Tadić named membership in the European Union a strategic goal of his country.

“Now the European Union needs to take the next steps in its convergence with Serbia – it is time to start fulfilling the Stabilization and Association Agreement signed with Serbia last spring. Serbia is already doing so unilaterally, and now, it is the turn of the parliaments and governments of the European Union member states,” the Estonian Head of State said. “Serbia’s cooperation with the international tribunal for capturing the war criminals has constantly improved. Estonia finds that Serbia could rapidly move forward with its accession process towards the European Union.”

A large number of the Community’s member states agree that after Radovan Karadžić’s capture last summer, implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement concluded with Serbia could be started.

“I am glad for the European Commission’s decision to propose to the Council and the Parliament the granting of visa-free travel to the EU for Serbia, as well as to Macedonia and Montenegro. Estonia has always strongly supported this,” President Ilves said. “On the one hand, the Commission’s decision demonstrates your success story. On the other hand, it confirms that Serbia has many friends in the European Union and your rational and pragmatic actions will bring even more support - it demonstrates our mutual respect and trust.”

At the meeting between Presidents Ilves and Tadić, the situation in the Western Balkans was also discussed.

“The stability of this region is part of the stability of Europe, and as we know, a part of much

broader stability," the Estonian Head of State said while expressing concerns about developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the inability of the various communities to agree on the country's political future and subsequent reforms undoubtedly deserves increased attention from the international community.

The Estonian and Serbian Heads of State called the relations between their countries reliable, while emphasizing the great potential in developing economic and trade ties.

"Serbia is already Estonia's largest trading partner in the Western Balkans," President Ilves said. The treaty to avoid double taxation, which was signed recently between Estonia and Serbia, should be an added benefit, he added.

"Many successful Estonian companies are weighing the possibility of entering the Serbian market," President Ilves added. "Thus, the Viru Keemia Grupp is seriously interested in Serbia's oil shale and is already cooperating with the University of Belgrade."

President Tadić called this an important and promising partnership that is closely related to energy security.

Many Estonian information technology companies are also looking for opportunities to start operations in Serbia. For instance, Webmedia has already opened a representative office in Belgrade.

At the meeting, President Ilves also spoke about Estonia's experiences with e-governance and e-elections. He introduced to the Serbian Head of State the unique X-Road software solution that was developed in Estonia. This solution brings the citizens closer to the government, makes the functioning of the state more efficient, and facilitates the citizens' communications with the state. Estonia is ready to donate the basic X-Road technology to Serbia.

"Estonian specialists are ready to cooperate with Serbian partners in order to implement the system and adapt X-Road to Serbia's needs. This would also entail the training of local experts," the Estonian Head of State said.

President Ilves, who is the first Estonian Head of State to visit Serbia, will also meet with the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament Slavica Đukić Dejanović and the Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković. He will also give a lecture on “The Future Enlargement of the European – Estonia’s Lesson” at the Belgrade City Hall.

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