

Not only is Tartu the driving force behind development in Southern Estonia, but it is also an intellectual and educational focal point for the country as a whole. “Not only is Tartu the driving force behind development in Southern Estonia, but it is also an intellectual and educational focal point for the country as a whole – one where freedom of thought is central,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at his meeting today with city government in Tartu Town Hall.

The Head of State praised the civic authorities for their efforts to improve the quality of life of Tartu's residents despite the financially challenging times, saying it set an example for the rest of the country.

President Ilves said that it was very important to open up Tartu to the world in every way, which would require not only a good network of roads and a variety of transport connections, but also, for example, an upper secondary school offering studies in English, which is of great importance to foreign specialists. The City of Tartu is currently establishing such a school.

“If you want to be an international city, you must have an international school,” advised the Head of State.

President Ilves encouraged Tartu to make greater use of the opportunities of the European Union's structural funds for the city's development: “We have to act wisely, and we have to act quickly, because if the local government is not forceful in applying, someone else will get this EU money – and yet the structural funds are the perfect regional policy lever to prevent everything from focusing on Tallinn.”

While in Tartu the Head of State visited the biggest shirt manufacturer in the Baltic States and Scandinavia, Sangar, which has stood out the recession and retained the majority of its domestic and foreign markets, exporting most of their goods to Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Latvia and Lithuania.

“Sangar's flexibility and quality are the two most important reasons why the company has been able to cope as well as it has and come out on top in areas where there is fierce competition for cheap labour,” the President said.

The Head of State also visited Southern Estonia's leading metal industry company, Metec, which manufactures car parts and agricultural, forestry and roadwork machinery, as well as subcontracting for the medical and foodstuff industries. Almost 90% of the company's output is exported.

“Your company is an excellent example of how a company which initially establishes itself on its home market can break through to and make a name for itself in foreign markets with its products,” said President Ilves, also praising Metec's management for their smart use of the export support provided by Enterprise Estonia. “Companies which invest in the development of new products instead of merely relying on existing ones will emerge from the recession sooner, and that is one of the keys to your company's success.”

President Iives meets with the leaders of Tartu and visits Sangar and Metec

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