

"We see many issues from the same perspective, from the financial crisis in Greece to the enlargement of the European Union," said President Ilves. "Estonia and Finland are tribal brothers and good neighbours, who see many issues from the same perspective, from the financial crisis in Greece to the enlargement of the European Union. Therefore, we can compare President Halonen's state visit to Estonia today as a red-letter day of our close relations, which seem to be taken for granted; a day that is above the usual and which will be given special value," said President Ilves, who with Mrs. Evelin Ilves is hosting the Finnish Head of State, Mrs. Tarja Halonen, and her husband, Mr. Pentti Arajärvi, who arrived in Estonia for a two-day state visit.

Finland has become Estonia's most important economic and trading partner and is the second biggest foreign investor in Estonia after Sweden, recalled President Ilves, adding: "As we have close economic ties, we sense the impacts of the current recession in quite the same way, and both countries have been forced to adopt desperately needed measures regarding their budgets."

The Finnish Head of State expressed her hope that Estonia will meet all the criteria established for joining the European Union common currency zone and that it will join the eurozone on 1st January of next year.

President Ilves was interested in the views of Finland, as a financially sound country, regarding the recent developments in the eurozone and the events in Greece. The heads of state admitted that while helping Greece will be complicated and difficult for many countries, it is vital in avoiding the spread of problems in the eurozone in general.

"The financial crisis in Greece shows that a strong eurozone and stable euro ask for sound financial policies by the Member States as well as transparency and efficient control over corruption," said the Estonian Head of State.

Finland represents Estonia in issuing Schengen visas in 11 countries; the exchange programme for diplomats has been running between the two countries for the past four years; humanitarian and development co-operation between Estonia and Finland, which relies upon the exchange of experience and joint projects, involves several eastern neighbours of the European Union. We also enjoy a close and diversified partnership in the sphere of defence – from the studies of Estonians in Finnish military schools to a joint procurement of the two countries for the purchase of medium range 3D air surveillance radars. The two countries also co-operate in the sphere of internal and judicial affairs, the avoidance of risks related to increasing marine traffic on the Gulf of Finland, and close relations in the spheres of education, research, innovation, information technology, and culture.

The Estonian and Finnish heads of state also discussed the Baltic Sea Strategy as the official macro-regional strategy of the European Union.

President Ilves emphasised that during the current implementation stage of the Baltic Sea Strategy the role of the European Union countries located around the Baltic Sea in leading the different sections of the strategy is highly important; however, the governing role of the

European Commission must be maintained.

“The future of the internal market, including the digital internal market, is important for Estonia,” said President Ilves. “For us, it is important to enjoy e-freedom apart from the four basic freedoms – and by e-freedom I mean the freedom of e-services, which would give us, as an end result, an opportunity for the e-authentication of digital signatures throughout the European Union.”

The Finnish Head of State repeated the support of her country for establishing the European Union IT agency in Estonia.

Presidents Ilves and Halonen expressed their hope that the foreign service of the European Union will be established as soon as possible. “Delaying with the decision will harm all who hope for stronger common foreign and security policies,” said President Ilves.

When speaking about the enlargement of the European Union, presidents Ilves and Halonen stressed the importance of reversing enlargement fatigue, notably experienced by many countries of the community, into faith in enlargement once again.

“The current neighbours of the European Union are doing serious homework before joining the union and they are building up democracy, economic reforms, transparency, and citizens’ communities in their countries; they must be sure that we see and appreciate the efforts they make,” told President Ilves. “This is the European Union’s responsibility to itself, its neighbours, and Europe. We must rise above past conflicts and attach more importance to looking forward and embracing the future.”

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