

“The both of us – Israel and Estonia – know what it means to stand up and fight for your existence,” said Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at a meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres, the first on his state visit to Israel.

“Estonia appreciates Israel’s security concerns,” President Ilves continued. “But at the same time, there is a clear need to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. That peace won’t be won in war: it will be reached through diplomacy and negotiation based on the two-state solution of Israel and the new Palestine.”

President Ilves described relations between Estonia and Israel as warm, cordial, sympathetic, professional and ever-growing.

Today’s meeting between the Estonian head of state and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu focussed on the economic and trade relations between the two countries.

“Since Estonia joined the European Union, trade between Estonia and Israel has doubled, but in fewer branches compared to our other trading partners,” President Ilves explained. “We are both interested in testing and implementing new technology, so we could work together in future in such fields as information technology, energy-efficient construction, renewable energy and energy technology.”

President Ilves and Prime Minister Netanyahu discussed potential Estonian-Israeli cooperation in the fields of cyber-security, e-government and oil shale.

The Estonian head of state also met with Tzipi Livni, the leader of the opposition in the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) and Bank of Israel president Stanley Fischer.

After arriving in Israel yesterday, President Ilves visited ‘Better Place’, a demonstration centre for energy-efficient solutions at which he saw the preparations being made for the creation of a service network of electric cars.

The Estonian head of state was then taken on a tour of old Jerusalem, visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, erected on what is believed to be the site of Jesus' tomb at Calvary.

Last night President Ilves attended a reception organised by the Estonian embassy in Jerusalem, to which Jews with Estonian roots and Estonians living in Israel were also invited. The guests included Mark Rybak, the founder of Estonia's Jewish Museum; Ilja Sundelevitš, the organiser of the Jewish cultural festival held in Tallinn; and musician Avi Benjamin.

Today President Ilves visited Yad Vashem – the memorial to the martyrs and heroes of the Holocaust – at which he wrote in the guest book: “I bow my head in memory of the millions of victims of the Holocaust. We must never forget the horror of it. This abhorrent crime against humans and humanity reminds us again and again how important it is to do everything you can to stop totalitarian and hateful regimes from ever coming to power.”

While at Yad Vashem, President Ilves also visited the Avenue of the Righteous among the Nations, where a tree has been planted in honour of Estonian thinker, theologian and translator Uku Masing. The avenue is full of trees planted in memory of non-Jews who risked their lives to help Jews during the Holocaust.

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