

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves is currently on a two-day visit to Setomaa and will take part in the opening of the Seto Kingdom Day in Mikitamäe today.

President Ilves says that the strength and future of Estonia as a nation depends on its people's ability to preserve what is so unique and valuable about it, while at the same time weaving new ideas into established traditions. "The unique Seto culture and customs, such as their chanting ladies, deserve full protection, and we have to pay heed to the national development plan in this area," said the Estonian head of state.

President Ilves took part in Väiko Kingdom events in Laossina on Friday, meeting the leaders of Mikitamäe and Värskä and village elders from Setomaa. The round table of elders held in the village of Lobotka focussed on encouraging young people to live and work in the countryside.

"Young people go out to discover the world, and we can't stop them doing so, but it's up to us, at some point, to bring them back," said President Ilves. "We have to instil a sense of connectedness between young people and the places they live in, so that if they ever do come back to the countryside, it will be their home, not some place long abandoned. A huge number of Estonians have no idea what a luxury it is to live in the countryside. And that's what we have to promote, using our own lives as examples."

The Estonian head of state added that people who come to live in the countryside tend to be enterprising, innovative and open to new challenges. "And that, in fact, is a matter of Estonia's survival as a nation. The state has to take an interest in ensuring that there is life even in its backwaters."

During his visit, the president visited the local companies Värskä Vesi, Värskä Sanatorium, Saatse Pansionaat and the Seto museum.

A selection of photographs from the president's visit are available on the president's website www.president.ee and on Toomas Hendrik Ilves' Facebook page.

President Ilves visits Setomaa

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