

The heads of state of Estonia and Macedonia*, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Mr. Gjorge Ivanov, met today in Tallinn and described relations between their two countries as warm, work-related, future orientated, and based on sharing common values.

“Macedonia stands on the brink of accession negotiations with the European Union and NATO and is an important Balkan partner for Estonia. We remain willing to share the experiences of our own accession to these organisations with Macedonia,” told President Ilves.

“I have no doubt that our co-operation in the sphere of information and communication technology will develop further, and, hopefully, more direct contacts between the businesspeople of our two countries will be established. Estonia has provided all the pre-requisites for that, which include a transparent business environment, a secure legal system, government administrative capacity, and a favourable economic climate for investments.”

President Ilves expressed his pleasure with the fact that Macedonia plans to organise a number of cultural events in Estonia next year, when Tallinn will become the Cultural Capital of Europe.

The Estonia Head of State described the progress achieved by Macedonia in approaching the European Union and NATO and in organising internal national reforms as “impressive”.

“Macedonia meets all the requirements established for gaining NATO membership,” President Ilves told, as he acknowledged Macedonia for its remarkable contribution to the Alliance’s operation in Afghanistan: “The 300 defence force members and medics you have supplied to participate in this operation serve as confirmation of Macedonia’s responsible policies and wish to participate in making the world a more peaceful place.”

Presidents Ilves and Ivanov also discussed the biggest obstacle to Macedonia’s movement towards the European Union and NATO, that is the name dispute with Greece, which has not allowed Macedonia to launch into accession negotiations with the two countries.

“Estonia is of the opinion that bilateral issues shouldn’t serve as an obstacle to accession negotiations, but the enlargement of both the European Union and NATO is a matter of consensus policy of these organisations,” President Ilves stated, also saying that pragmatic and constructive negotiations between Skopje and Athens are required to reach a compromise in the name issue; this is also the position of the UN, which is mediating the negotiations.

“This is necessary to stabilise the relations between two countries and to complete Macedonia’s integration with the European Union and NATO,” emphasised the Estonian Head of State to President Ivanov. “I assure you that both a stable Balkan and an open door policies for countries that have successfully launched the reforms required for starting accession negotiations serve the interest of both the European Union and NATO, as influential international organisations.”

The President of Macedonia, Mr. Gjorge Ivanov, who arrived in Estonia for an official visit last night, will also meet with the Speaker of the Riigikogu, Ms Ene Ergma, the Prime Minister, Mr. Andrus Ansip, and the Minister of Justice, Mr. Rein Lang, and will visit Lahemaa National Park. The Estonian Head of State will give a dinner tonight to honour his guest.

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