

During the second day of his tour in Pärnumaa today, the President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, met with the promoters of local life in Seljametsa community house, Paikuse rural municipality, and at Kergu village centre in the north of the county.

“We often engage in diffident thinking, such as “Me? Well, I don’t know”, while we should be thinking “It’s me who can do it” and this is exactly what you’ve done,” said the Head of State in Seljametsa Community House, which is promoted by “Martad”, a local women’s society.

The society, which has been active for six years, organised the building of a gym in the old barn of Pustuski cattle farm; until the support amount from ARIB (Agricultural Register and Information Board) arrived, the women guaranteed the loan with their personal property. The “Martad” society organises fairs in front of the Seljametsa community house and future plans include establishing a market place, paved with cobblestone, at the site.

The Head of State met with the representatives of Rohelise Jõemaa Koostöökogu (Green Riverland Partnership), the Pärnu Lahe (Pärnu Bay) Partnership, NGO Liivi Lahe Kalanduskogu (the Gulf of Riga Fishing Association) and Pärnumaa Kodukant association.

Ms Mercedes Merimaa from the Pärnu Lahe (Pärnu Bay) Partnership, one of the initiators of the “Romantic Road Along the Coast” or the old Pärnu-Riga road, which joins local entrepreneurs, farmers and village communities, said “we can be big by working together”.

Ms Merle Adams from Rohelise Jõemaa Koostöökogu (Green Riverland Partnership) encouraged the promoters of the region and village movements not to be afraid of someone doing something and the consequences that may arise, if they don’t succeed.

Ms Krista Habakukk from Pärnumaa village movement Kodukant described the importance of village centres becoming the heart of word – apart from social interaction.

President Ilves acknowledged the drive and open mindedness of the promoters of local life in

striving to develop well-being in the region, and he also mentioned the importance of the diversification of rural life, particularly in sparsely populated areas, which could provide the platform for young people to return to their home region. Village communities, committed people and their initiative help to maintain life in the countryside, assured the Head of State.

“Civil society is the only tool that helps to get rid of the collective farms that we harbour inside ourselves,” emphasised President Ilves. “The more the state can rely upon civil society, the more the state can focus on the main functions of a state and the more local life will look like the people living within the region instead of appearing like a standard project.”

During his tour of Pärnumaa, President Ilves also visited Tammiste Kindergarten, which was shortlisted last year as one of the best wooden buildings of the year, and Vändra Health Care Centre, where a nursing home, medical centre, pharmacy, hospice and canteen share a common building.

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