

“75% of the countries to which Radio Free Europe broadcasted its programmes in 1991 are not living today in a free society,” stated the President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, last night at a panel discussion at a conference in Munich dedicated to the 60th anniversary of Radio Free Europe.

In his presentation, President Ilves referred to a survey published this year by Freedom House, which measured the political rights and freedoms of civil populations in a total of 194 countries. The countries involved were divided into three groups, according to the results: free, partially free and not free.

According to this survey, a free country is characterised by political competition, a respectful attitude towards civil rights and free journalism. In a country that is partially free, some restrictions are imposed upon political rights and civil freedoms, and often there are some corruption issues. A country that is not free is characterised by lack of political rights and a wide and systematic restriction of civil rights.

“If we look at the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which were the former parts of the Soviet Union and were situated in the broadcasting range of Radio Free Europe back in 1991, Radio Free Europe reached, in total, approximately 40 million people. Today, only 25% of the population of these countries is living in a free society, according to the definition, while 15% and 60%, respectively, are living in countries that are either partially free or not free. There is no doubt we once did a good job, but in reality, there is still a lot to be done,” added the Estonian Head of State, who was the head of the Estonian editorial board of Radio Free Europe in Germany from 1988–1993 and an analyst and investigator at the Research Institute of Radio Free Europe from 1984–1988.

The Estonian Head of State, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves; the US Consul in Munich, Mr. Conrad Tribble; a Professor of Hamburg University, Mr. Hans J. Kleinsteuber; a representative of Radio Free Europe, Mr. Abbas Djavadi and Mr. Ingo Mannteufel, a journalist from Deutsche Welle, took part in the panel discussion.

On 1 May, President Ilves and Mrs. Evelin Ilves will participate at the beatification ceremony of Pope John Paul II in the Vatican at the invitation of the Holy See.

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves will return to Estonia on 2 May.

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