

At his meeting with the Georgian Head of State, Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili, the President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who arrived in Batumi last night, encouraged Georgia to continue with the political and economic reforms that they began in 2003 during the "Revolution of Roses".

According to the Estonian Head of State, Georgia could set an example of consistency and commitment by cutting down corruption in law enforcement organisations, contributing to NATO's operations in Afghanistan, various economic restructuring and transforming Batumi into a modern coastal city.

"All of this is a part of Georgia's future and now is the time to begin building this," said President Ilves, while confirming Estonia's continued support to Georgia's territorial integrity.

"A successful, future-orientated country must contribute equally towards both democracy and the economic welfare of its own country and people, as these two spheres are closely intertwined for European interpretation," said the Estonian Head of State. He described linking Georgia's economy with the European Union and western economic space in general, and he highlighted dialogue between the ruling and opposition parties, their mutually respectful attitude and strong citizens society as important.

"All of this is an issue that focuses on Georgia's political future," President Ilves told.

"Estonia set its foreign and security political goals twenty years ago and has been committed and successful in reaching these goals – in becoming a part of the European and trans-Atlantic community. This is the experience that we are still willing to share with Georgia, our friend," President Ilves assured. "But Georgia and the Georgians will choose their path and goals themselves; this is a task that only they can fulfil."

"Georgia's way" is not an issue that solely focuses on the democratic choices of a country, but it will also demonstrate their cognisance of Europe.

European integration will mean common values and has nothing to do with geography, emphasised the Estonian Head of State.

“Europe does not start or end with the border of one or other country. Europe and European nature shall mean certain principles – democracy, freedom of speech, a state based on the rule of law, separation of powers, human rights, equality of people, social justice and an open economy,” told President Ilves. “Europe means protection of freedom of speech, a state based on the rule of law and democracy, even when it may seem a bit uncomfortable for the authorities.”

Countries that share these principles can rely upon the support and trust of other democratic countries, told the Estonian Head of State.

Today, President Ilves will meet the Georgian Prime Minister, Mr. Nika Gilauri, leaders of opposition parties and representatives of the third sector in Tbilisi.

The Head of State will return to Estonia tomorrow.

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