

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Iceland's President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, who arrived in Tallinn in connection with the 20th anniversary of the restoration of the independence of Estonia.

"There are situations where the courage of small states knocks on the conscience of the large ones and opens doors whose opening has been yearned for a long time," said President Ilves, remembering that Iceland was the first western country to recognise the independence of the Republic of Estonia on 22 August 1991.

"Iceland helped Estonia and our people to take back our state, showing the big Western players the only morally and politically thinkable way, which is to recognise the states that were leaving the collapsing Soviet empire and our return to Europe," said the Estonian head of state.

Presidents Ilves and Grímsson also discussed Iceland's preparations for accession to the European Union and the financial situation in the European Union.

"An inseparable part of the solution to the European debt crisis is tight monetary policy as well as the unanimity and joint responsibility of the euro zone members in solving the problem," stressed President Ilves. "Estonia participates solidarily with the euro area in all the initiatives aimed at ensuring the stability of the euro zone."

Background

On 19 December 1990 and 11 February 1991 the Althing, the Icelandic Parliament, adopted resolutions expressing support to the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania through peaceful negotiations. After the coup d'état in August 1991 had failed, the Baltic prime ministers were invited to Reykjavik to meet the Icelandic political leaders. On 22 August 1991 Iceland was the first western country to recognise the independence of the

Republic of Estonia. On 26 August 1991 Estonian Foreign Minister Lennart Meri and Icelandic Foreign Minister Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson signed a joint declaration on the establishment of diplomatic relationships in Reykjavik. In gratitude, in 1998 the square in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia in Tallinn was renamed Islandi väljak (Icelandic square) and in 2006 a memorial plaque was installed there in honour of the Republic of Iceland.

On Sunday, August 21, Iceland Day, dedicated to the Icelandic state, will be celebrated throughout the City of Tallinn. There will be performances by Icelandic musicians and bands at various venues and on Islandi väljak, exhibitions relating to Iceland, a film will be shown and an Icelandic food market will be opened. With Iceland Day the Estonian state and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs thank Iceland for the courage to be the first to recognise Estonia's restored independence in 1991. For further information see <http://www.20.ee/islandipaev> .

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