

“I promise to stand for a state based on rule of justice, Estonia’s security and our long-term interests, and I promise to resist populism, which promises easy and rapid solutions. I promise to stand for the third sector and oppose any attempts to restrict the freedom of citizens. I promise to stand for the dignity of people and resist attempts to diminish people, threaten or humiliate them, regardless of whether these attempts come from the level of national or local law, media or business,” addressed the Head of State, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, to the *Riigikogu* today, after being sworn into office as the President of the Republic.

“How is Estonia coping as a state? Are we smart, innovative and clear-sighted enough?” said the Head of State, in defining our questions.

“A clear perception of our opportunities is one of the pre-requisites for making Estonia bigger. By doing everything like others, those who are bigger and richer, we will inevitably proclaim ourselves to be smaller and cheaper than they are. Therefore, we need to ask how we can find this greatness in Estonia, which would allow us to continue developing and growing in an equal vein to everyone else, while being better than many others, just like we dream,” President Ilves said. “This means that we need to understand the inevitable restrictions of our smallness and make wise choices within the given limits, starting from relations between people and ending with our attitude towards the debt crisis in Europe.”

The Estonian Head of State admitted that helping Greece may seem unfair, as Estonia has made a unified effort and assessed our abilities realistically instead of attempting to amplify today’s wellbeing to the detriment of tomorrow’s opportunities, but it is still reasonable and responsible to help others to help ourselves.

“Let us not forget that the activities of European countries today, which may seem far too lenient for some and too slow and closefisted for others, are actually attempts to convince – and also force – these countries to adopt decisions that are necessary for tomorrow,” President Ilves told.

He said, when speaking about the European Union, that although in 2012 every sixth euro in the budget of Estonia comes from the European Union, Estonia still has to appraise the future budget perspectives of the European Union as a whole and demand our share, based on our rights and justified expectations within the framework of the single European project.

“At the moment, it is not important whether this is expressed by an increase in direct aid paid to farmers, allocations from the Cohesion Fund increasing or something else. However, Estonia must apply for fair treatment, together with its allies. As we have reached out a helping hand, as a poor country, to those who are better off, we also have the moral right to demand larger – but actually fairer – support allocations from the common budget. We need a social discussion, which could be shaped into a budget negotiation mandate for the government, to explain our wishes,” told President Ilves to the *Riigikogu*.

According to the President, there are some spheres where Estonia could be more balanced and prudent, but there are also areas where we need to spend some more. For example: “While in a large country, some failed rescue helicopters would not be something to worry about, these few helicopters mean full rescue capabilities for a small country like Estonia. Here, absurd frugality may result in a loss of human life. We are small, and we cannot afford stupid human losses.”

The Head of State described the organisation of school network, which would ensure high-quality education to children living anywhere in Estonia as well as investments into infrastructure as important.

“We should not go for simplified polar opposites of whether we need brains or concrete. We need both. But we certainly do not need a situation of brains cast into concrete, life freezing, with every bold initiative colliding against a concrete wall of bureaucracy,” President Ilves said.

“We need a country to protect us, to build roads, to educate both the small and the big and to ensure an opportunity for dignified aging for the elderly and available treatment to the sick. This is why we pay taxes. We can find the colours of life, the feeling of a supporting shoulder, the joy of being together ourselves. This is where we do not need the guiding hand of the state. We can get something done; we can take the welfare of a street or town district into our own hands. The more there are colours in some sphere of life, the better society works,” said President Ilves, in describing civil society as the backbone of our country and the connective tissue that will protect us from the truculence of national or local power.

“A small power that is evil and mistrusts people has the tendency to become arrogant and sneak into people’s everyday life. A bold and large country will be satisfied through the active approach of people and will not try to look bigger. Society is an order that emerged quite

spontaneously from voluntary co-operation between individuals. The state supports it, but it will not interfere where it has no business: private life, our choices of free communities. This is a framework contract of any successful, democratic state that is based on rule of law," the Head of State told.

Our size is mainly linked to the size of our soul, said President Ilves, who also said that tolerance, politeness and friendliness do not depend on population sizes. "We have all got these precious assets, for free. And do believe me when I say that our success or failure depend on these very assets, more than on anything else."

He reminded those present that in Estonia where slightly more than one million people live everyone knows each other; we live at approximately two "hellos" from each other and this smallness and closeness also means that we are all linked to each other.

"But this coin also has another side: Vulnerability," told President Ilves. "Sometimes, we act as if we are living in a large, anonymous country, where we can hardly meet anyone more frequently than once in a lifetime, where we can offend some random people, as they are merely random people. In Estonia, there are no random people. We are all somehow connected."

Full text of President Ilves's speech is available [here](#).

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