

“The nature of our small cultures must reach much further; then the world will understand us and will stand up for us, if necessary. This is not for simply maintaining the old traditions, but also their discreet and forward-looking modernisation to avoid being stuck in a frozen culture that is only of interest to ethnographers. It would also echo back, stronger and more powerfully, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world,” said the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at the meeting with participants of Pan-Finno-Ugrian days, which take place in Estonia.

The Head of State recalled the cultural development and growth of self-awareness of the Sami people in the last decades in the Nordic countries as a positive example; they are proud of their Sami origins and language and this process is also supported by societies and the state.

The cultural situation of the Finno-Ugrian people was discussed at the meeting – literature and education in their native languages, maintaining and promoting their own culture, as well as environmental issues, such as the experiences of the Votic people due to the construction of the Ust-Luga harbour.

“In this, we need a responsible approach from each country to their small nations, their culture and uniqueness, which is highly important in today’s technological world where small cultures often go unnoticed,” President Ilves told. “This is a mistake, as cultural diversity makes each country stronger and greater, and it is in direct opposition to a society that is spiritually broken and acting arrogantly both internally and externally.”

The organisers of the Pan-Finno-Ugrian Days include Viia-Kadi Raudalainen and Jaak Prozes from Fenno-Ugria Non-Profit Organisation, Sami musician Pjera Jovanna Somby from Norway, young Votics Ekaterina Kuznetsova, Ekaterina Nikolayeva and Aleksandra Sokolov from the Maaväči group from St. Petersburg (the Power of Earth in the Estonian language) and Komi preserves of folk culture, Mihhail Burdin and Tatiana Kostareva, leader of young Komis, Olga Averina and a Komi writer Anželika Elfimova were present at the meeting.

The Pan-Finno-Ugrian Days, which have been held since 1928, have become one of the most important series of events for introducing the Finno-Ugric people and strengthening their mutual relations. According to the decision of the Finno-Ugric Cultural Congress, adopted in 1931 in Helsinki, the Pan-Finno-Ugrian Days are held every year in October in Estonia, Finland or Hungary. Over the last couple of years, various Finno-Ugric events have also been organised in

Russia. Last year, the *Riigikogu* adopted a resolution to declare the Pan-Finno-Ugrian Day a public holiday and flags will be hoisted in Estonia.

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