

"I will never support the idea of Estonia having just four or even two centres, concentrating everything, surrounded by emptiness where lone enthusiasts live," assured the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who today met with city leaders, businessmen and third party representatives of Paide, and visited various local offices of state agencies.

"Estonia needs strong and developing county centres that help the county to cope and keep busy" the Head of State said. "This assumes, however, that county centres have the support of the state – meaning that the state will not optimise or consolidate government institutions into only four or two larger centres. Our state and government must be seen and felt all across Estonia."

President Ilves acknowledged the Tax and Customs Board who decided to maintain their specialists working in the county centre, ensuring continued availability of professional services at county level. "If state agencies decided to allow centres disappear and the variety of services available in county centres diminish, this would inevitably result, over time, in a brain-drain from the area concerned," President Ilves added.

President Ilves emphasised that the state can offer the alternative of long-distance employment – our E-governance will give us the opportunity to offer services at national level from different county centres.

The Head of State also emphasised the importance of state-owned companies of strategic importance – for example, Eesti Energia and Elering – being understanding and supportive of local entrepreneurs.

"Business creates jobs and the creation of jobs is in the interest of the central government, local authorities and state-owned companies alike," President Ilves emphasised. The President acknowledged the positive co-operation between the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and local authorities – their flexibility in reintroducing the unemployed to the labour market sets a good example of positive and efficient co-operation.

Meeting with President Ilves, Järvamaa entrepreneurs highlighted the lack of qualified labour as

one major problem. "Co-operation between the private and public sector is required in order to bring qualified workers to Järvamaa and have them stay," admitted President Ilves after the meeting.

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