

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves thanked this year's participants in the students' historical research papers and announced a new competition, Estonia's Road to Democracy, for the next academic year.

The official closing of the XIII competition of historical research papers of students, organised by the Estonian History Teachers Association with President Toomas Hendrik Ilves as its patron, took place at the Ministry of Education and Research in Tartu today, from where President Ilves sent his greetings.

In commenting on the theme of the competition for the next academic year, President Ilves said that some of the things we take for granted today – like freedom of speech or human rights – have not always been so commonplace in Estonia. "We can find a number of different examples from history, from the populism which offers simple solutions and crude human rights violations that took place during the years of the occupation to extensive democracy and a functioning civil society. Analysing all of these issues and thinking about them is critical for our survival, and what time could be more suitable for this than the eve of the 95th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia," stated the Estonian Head of State.

Awards from the President of the Republic were handed over today in Tartu to the best of this year's competition. When doing so, President Ilves emphasised that good written expression skills form a part of a good education and schools should pay more attention to these. "Writing research papers definitely represents a good opportunity here and this is an important aspect of the competition for us, apart from merely studying history. The skills required to write down your knowledge and ideas are useful to you as both future historians and are as important in all the other spheres of life," stated President Ilves.

"Just like a knowledge of history is required in every profession and for every educated person, as they provide a clearer understanding of the story of the world," added the Estonian Head of State.

For basic schools, this year's research topic was "My Family", the purpose being to investigate family history, and the authors of the best historical research papers were Siret Müller from 9th grade of Nõu Basic School ("The Growing-up Environment of Estonian Children and their Duties from 1941-2012, Based on the example of Müller Family", mentor Reet-Ingrid Haamer), Karmen

Vesso from 8th grade of Kuuste Basic School ("Bullying in Schools and Discipline Problems in Estonian Homes from the 1st Part of the 20th Century to the Beginning of the 21st Century", mentor Kersti Kivirüüt) and Markus Vares from 8th grade of Pärnu Kuninga Street Basic School ("The 8th Grade Experiences of Two Generations", mentor Elve Tamvere).

For gymnasiums, the topic was "My Home and People" and the best were Triinu Avans from 11th grade of Võru Kreutzwald Gymnasium ("Sweet Võrumaa", mentor Helle Ruusmaa), Rauno Jallai from 11th grade of Vastseliina Gymnasium ("Association of Vastseliina Villages", mentor Külli Lendsaar) and Tuuli Talah from 11th grade of Tamsalu Gymnasium ("About Red Pioneers and their Activities from 1945-1990, Based on the Example of Tamsalu School", mentor Maie Nõmmik).

Special awards were given to Merilin Šaitor and Marilin Ait from 12th grade of Rakvere Gymnasium ("Andres Sõber and BC Rakvere Tarvas") for attaching value to sports; Riin Olvet from 12th grade of Kadrina High School ("From Labour Corps to a Public Limited Company") for recording the industrial history of a locality; Ingrid Kaasik from 11th grade of Võru Kreutzwald Gymnasium ("Childhood Games, Based on the Example of Memories of Three Generations of Women") for discussing issues of social cohesion; Laura Kivilo from 11th grade of Vastseliina Gymnasium ("Changes in Vastseliina Township From its Establishment to the Present") for discussing the domestic living environment; Karoliine Kruus from 8th grade of Võru Kreutzwald Gymnasium ("Sports in My Family") for promoting a healthy lifestyle; Merlin Sepp from 6th grade of Kuressaare Gymnasium ("Metsa Johan's Farm – Its Story, Work and Everyday Life") for a good narrative on a life story; and to Ksenija Borovichuk from 9th grade of Võru Downtown Gymnasium ("The Stories of My Ancestors") for an interesting family story.

This year, 75 basic schools and 75 gymnasium level studies took part in the competition. The first historical research papers competition of students with awards from the President of the Republic of Estonia, organised by Estonian History Teachers Association, was announced by the Head of State, Lennart Meri, back in 1999. Altogether, 1,641 students have taken part in the competition, writing a total of 1,312 research papers. The research papers of the students are kept at the Estonian Literary Museum where the materials are available for everyone for inspection.

The purpose of the competition is to contribute meaning to national values, maintain links and consistency between generations; enhance interest in history in students and widen their horizons; and develop independent research skills in students. The competition is organised for two age groups: basic school and gymnasiums, and vocational schools. The panel of judges, consisting of acknowledged historians, gives out three awards for each age category: 1st prize

President Ilves invites young people to write about Estonia's road to democracy

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200 euros, 2nd prize 175 euros, 3rd prize 150 euros, mentors of the best research papers get a 100 euro award. Prizes were also awarded by the 20th August Club, Integration and Migration Foundation Our People, Estonian Literary Museum, and historians.

The competition is financially supported by the Cultural Foundation of the President of the Republic and the Ministry of Education and Research.

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