

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves opened the international symposium of Estonia's Friends Meeting titled Quo vadis, Estonia? today at the Estonian Academy of Sciences, focusing on the economic decisions of Estonia in recent years, the euro crisis and Estonia's progress in the field of technology.

"For Estonia, austerity was not a matter of choice, it was inevitable, because borrowing or devaluation was not possible in our situation," the Head of State said. "Despite the eurozone crisis, joining the euro was the right decision for Estonia. On the other hand, while the majority of the parliament supported joining the EFSF, polls indicated that the overwhelming majority of the people were against it. And a democratically elected government cannot go on ignoring the wishes of its voters neither in Estonia nor in Germany."

As a positive example, President Ilves highlighted Estonia's great standing in the European Competitiveness Index and emphasized that in addition to financial stability, it is necessary also to look at the openness of the economy, flexibility and the spread of information technology.

Speaking about information technology, the Head of State praised Estonia's achievements in this field and suggested that Estonia's next task should be working out an Internet platform for e-democracy, connecting people who are passionate about liberal democracy, from the public and private sector as well as civil society.

This year, the keynote speaker of the symposium was the Professor of European Studies at Oxford University, Timothy Garton Ash, who, in his presentation, outlined the roots of the euro crisis and the reasons behind forming the European Union. According to Garton Ash, the only thing keeping Europe together at the moment is the fear of what will happen if the fiscal union collapses. Therefore, it is necessary to find new, better reasons for keeping the European Union and the monetary union together.

According to Maria Alajõe, the member of the board of Enterprise Estonia (EAS), it is good that Estonia has, with the help of its friends, reached a position where it has become a place for coming together and discussing the future of Europe.

The traditional Estonia's Friends International Meeting was formally opened yesterday with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra concert "A Great Summer Meeting: FRIENDS", conducted by Neeme Järvi. After the symposium, there was a meeting with Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and a concert at the Oandu water mill. This year, the international friends of Estonia include entrepreneurs, scientists and politicians from many countries.

The idea for the Estonia's Friends International Meeting came about in 2010, as a consequence of an exchange between President Ilves, prominent entrepreneur Margus Reinsalu, and the leaders of Enterprise Estonia. The gathering is intended to show gratitude towards entrepreneurs, politicians and cultural figures, whose efforts have helped Estonia to develop into a European country with a dynamic economy and lively cultural environment. The first gathering celebrated the 19th anniversary of Estonia restoring its independence and last year's event was linked to the Song and Dance Festival.

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