

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at his opening address at the Days of Towns and Rural Municipalities spoke about the obligations and opportunities of the state to influence local life in such a way as to ensure its sustainability and ensure the equal availability of required services in both large towns and small rural municipalities.

The Head of State used the state-owned Eesti Energia as an example, saying that, "The owner – in legal terms, the Supervisory Board – has authorised investments made by Eesti Energia that are located thousands of kilometres from Estonia. However, thousands of clients of the national energy company here, at home, are simply interested in the principles used to calculate their energy bills and the justification behind profit margins. We are happy that Eesti Energia earns a profit. However, we should ask what is the price of the profit for power consumers in the domestic market and to which extent is the profit used to ensure the security of supply in Estonia, to build underground cable lines and simplify connections to the grid for rural companies. However, I have not seen any strong moves here on behalf of the owner of Eesti Energia. Regrettably."

As a second example, President Ilves spoke about the decision of the profit-earning Swedbank Estonia to close its offices in Elva and Märjamaa.

"People are dissatisfied and the heads of local governments are disappointed, but it seems there's nothing we can do. The bank can decide for itself where offices will be opened and closed," told the Head of State. "On the one hand, this is true. On the other hand, however, the Republic of Estonia has trusted this very Swedbank and allocated our public sector monies into this bank. This means that Swedbank has made a part of its profit on account of the Republic of Estonia. This would call for an approach that diplomats describe as 'mutual understanding'. In the business world, the definition "socially responsible company" is used. Has any of the competent committees of the Riigikogu or the Minister of Regional Affairs met with the CEOs of Swedbank to discuss whether the decision to close the bank offices in Elva and Märjamaa is final. I have not read anything about this in the newspapers."

According to the Head of State, these two examples show that the state fails to make the most of its opportunities or meet its obligations to avoid situations where people living away from bigger towns feel like inhabitants of less-favoured areas.

"Local governments can become the driving forces here and this is what I am encouraging you to do, both through local government associations and parliamentary parties," told President Ilves.

He also spoke of the towns and rural municipalities that we can maintain in order for the standard of living to be good for everybody in Estonia. Merging and co-operation with other local governments is an opportunity that is being considered more and more, admitted the Head of State, and he wished strength to all the local governments that are merging or considering merging, as they are doing the right thing.

President Ilves recalled that this is the year of elections, which often translates into contributions to cosmetic aspects in Estonia – roads, streets, kindergartens and community cultural centres, sports centres and fountains, parks and benches.

"Let us all remember that what is being built today will need maintenance and administration in the years to come," told the Head of States. "This is why I invite you all to review your investment plans and programmes with a long term perspective in mind, not just one rural municipality and one election cycle."

President Ilves also gave some recommendations to the electorate: "Be careful when you are told that something will be free. In reality, nothing is free as everything will only be available on the account of something or somebody; therefore, do not hesitate to ask on what or whose account this 'free' offer will be."

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