

At his meeting with the Slovenian Head of State, Borut Pahor, President of the Public Assembly of Slovenia, Janko Veber, and the Prime Minister, Alenka Bratušek, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves introduced Estonia's political choices for emerging from the economic crisis. According to the rating published in May this year, the European Commission is forecasting a 2% economic decline for Slovenia\*.

The complicated economic situation has caused tensions in Slovenia, in society in general and between the political parties that are forced to adopt difficult decisions. Presidents Ilves and Pahor together confirmed that the role of a head of state involves the reconciliation of political forces in difficult times and finding common elements of ideologies and decisions to be adopted.

"Estonia and Slovenia are similar small countries – both historically and today, as we are both members of the European Union and NATO and we use the euro. We understand each other," told the Estonian Head of State at the meeting with President Pahor.

"In Estonia, the income that people earned decreased during the economic crisis and many people lost their jobs. The government cut expenses drastically, we had to adopt difficult decisions and implement them fast. At the same time, it was important to explain the difficult budgetary decisions to our people. The determination of the population to emerge from the economic crisis was the foundation for our decisions. Today, we are proud of the decisions that we once adopted," President Ilves told.

It is as important to take care – later, once matters improve – that we do not find ourselves in a situation where the country has made it as a state while many people still find it extremely complicated to make ends meet, added President Ilves.

The participation of the state in the strategic sectors of the Slovenian economy – energy sector, banking, telecommunicate, infrastructure – is very big. The privatisation process was started recently, and the government decided to sell Slovenia's second-largest bank and 15 enterprises.

According to President Ilves, privatisation is a sensitive issue at national level, accompanied by

fears of the population and the opposing positions of political parties. "Back then, we realised that there was no need to fear privatisation and the coming of foreign investors. However, transparent transactions are the pre-requisite for a successful privatisation process," he added.

After the bilateral meeting, Presidents Ilves and Pahor gave a joint lecture at Bežigrad Gymnasium; the heads of state discussed, supported by the active questioning of the students, the relations of the European Union, Estonia and Slovenia as well as economic issues. More than two hundred students had arrived to listen to the debate between the two presidents. The major share of the questions, asked of President Ilves, concerned Estonia's e-success story.

The Estonian Head of State introduced our e-election and e-services system to the students, provided an overview of the IT sector and start-up company culture. "Successful information technology and e-governance solutions represent Estonia's largest foreign aid article. Estonia and Slovenia are only one telephone call or e-mail away from each other. We are willing to share both our experiences in overcoming the economic crisis and implementation of e-solutions with you," President Ilves told.

President Ilves will also meet with Ernest Petrič, President of the Constitutional Court, during the visit.

Evelin Ilves today visited the Regional Hospital of Ljubljana University, which is a leading medical institution in Slovenia and also one of the largest hospitals in Central Europe.

The presidential couple will return to Estonia on Sunday, 16 June

\* The European Commission is predicting that Slovenia will experience a 2% economic decline and its budget deficit will be around 5.3% this year. Slovenia's economy is still suffering from the post-boom problems – public debt has doubled by today, the banking sector has generated a loss for the last three years, reaching a loss of 77 million Euros last year; the number of the unemployed is 111,000 – which is the largest number since 1993; and domestic consumption has decreased by 7.7%, compared to the last year.

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