

"We both know what it means to return to Europe. We both know what it means to establish the rule of law, democracy and a market economy after a period of repressive and totalitarian rule. We have both succeeded in doing so," told the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, yesterday at the official dinner that was held in honour of the Bulgarian Head of State, Rosen Plevneliev, who arrived in Estonia for an official visit.

"Now Estonia and Bulgaria are front line states in the European Union – one in the east and the other in the south. And, as allies in the European Union and NATO, we have similar understandings about the world around us, and of the obstacles that we must surmount," President Ilves told.

"Here, I see ever greater possibilities for cooperation between our two countries. Both Estonia and Bulgaria have acted responsibly throughout the global financial crisis, and we both agree that the recipe for European recovery, albeit a slow one, is to stand by our agreements, and to implement sensible financial and economic policies," said the Estonian Head of State.

He reminded that in only five years – in 2018 – Estonia and Bulgaria will be assuming the European Union Presidency for the first time. The preparations for this will definitely increase our mutual contacts and discussions, and thereby bring our countries closer together.

Krum Garkov, the head of the European Union's IT Agency that was recently established in Estonia, is from Bulgaria. According to President Ilves, this indicates that Estonians and Bulgarians have a serious interest and deep understanding of the field of information and communications technology.

"This brings us to the future of broad-based ICT-related cooperation between our countries. You, Mr. President, undoubtedly understand this very well, thanks to your educational background and technological knowledge. Being aware of Bulgaria's active involvement in solving problems related to cybercrime offers me a wonderful opportunity to invite Bulgaria to join the NATO Cyber Defence Centre located here in Tallinn," the Estonian Head of State told.

In general, he sees e-topics as playing an important role in future relations between Estonia and

Bulgaria – in other words, how to use information technology solutions in the organisation of our everyday life for the benefit of our countries and our citizens: "Estonia is ready to share its e-governance experience and solutions with Bulgaria, be they related to e-police or e-healthcare services. Naturally, these topics are not limited to our two countries. They are issues that affect all of Europe, but are something that Estonia and Bulgaria can promote together by supporting each other."

The implementation of e-solutions and promoting cyber security cannot be postponed, President Ilves emphasised and continued: "We have no time to waste, unlike the two drivers from Gabrovo who met on a narrow bridge – neither of them wanted to waste fuel by backing, then one of them started reading a newspaper, hoping that the other would leave. But instead of giving up, the other driver told him that he also wanted to read the paper once the other guy had finished reading it. We do not have this kind of time to waste."

The Estonian Head of State also expressed his hope that more Bulgarians will find their way to Estonia, and more Estonians to Bulgaria, be they tourists, business people, e-governance experts or basketball teams, as: "Estonia and Bulgaria are connected by the future."

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