

"It is our duty to protect freedom, human rights and human dignity, to protect the principles that were upheld by the people in Central and Eastern Europe who regained their countries 20 years ago and which we call today European values," President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, on a state visit to Romania, said yesterday at the formal dinner held at the Cotroceni Palace in Bucharest. The dinner was hosted by the President of Romania, Traian Băsescu, and his wife Maria Băsescu.

In his speech, the Estonian Head of State recalled the valour of thousands mixed with personal bravery and their opposition to dictatorship, which was the trigger for the Romanian Revolution of 1989, and also named two young people, Anamaria Hâncu and Liana Buzea, who in 2009 saw a video of the national clean-up day in Estonia on YouTube, were inspired by it and now, for the third year running, thousands of Romanians take part in the national campaign "Teeme ära!" or "Let's do it, Romania!".

"How are these two different stories from different eras – those from Timișoara to Bucharest who overthrew the hated regime, and young Anamaria and Liana picking up ideas from social media – connected to each other? They are connected by the power of a person to change the world and bring others along," President Ilves said. "In December 1989, the Romanians took back their country. Along with the liberation in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Romanian Revolution gave hope to Estonia that we, too, could become free. Twenty years later, the participants of "Teeme ära!" affirm that this is a country of our own, and we can make it better and cleaner."

"In those two stories, we also see how much we need the care of civic society, courage and gall to stand for one's country," the Estonian Head of State asserted and added: "Today we know: a strong civic sector is the sailor's knot of a democratic society and the guarantee for preserving people's freedom to get involved."

For Estonia and Romania, not unlike many other subjugated countries, the story of regaining freedom, preserving it and integrating with Europe is one of the greatest achievements in recent history, President Ilves noted. We can understand this particularly well right here, on the edge of the Balkans and on the shores of the Black Sea, where several countries that started off at the same time as us are in a worse shape.

"Estonia and Romania are now part of the unified and free Europe. Feeling responsible for

contemporary Europe, we have taken our experiences of restoring our independence and used them to help the Eastern Partners of Europe, such as Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. Actually, "help" is not the right word here. We are talking about co-operation with these states, bringing them even closer to Europe, making the lives of their people better, safer, freer according to rule of law, and ruling out external political or economic pressure in deciding their future," the Estonian Head of State emphasized.

He quoted the Romanian proverb that the cheapest thing in the world is advice and the most valuable is setting an example, and continued: "Estonia and Romania want and know how to set an example, how to build a state, how to broaden the scope of values of stability and democracy in Europe."

Speaking about the relations of Estonia and Romania, President Ilves called us allies: Romania has taken part in the Baltic Air-Policing Mission of NATO, our units have fought and suffered losses in the NATO Security Forces in Southern Afghanistan, the most dangerous area of the operation; Estonia initiated the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, the similar common initiative of Romania and Austria is called the EU Strategy for the Danube Region; Estonia supports Romania's aim to join the Schengen area, because Bucharest has met all the agreed technical conditions and imposing new rules is no longer justified; Estonian entrepreneurs have invested in the IT sector in Romania and information and communications technology could be one important area of co-operation for the two countries.

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