

In opening the Presidendi Kärjad (The President's Counsel) day of debate in Pärnu on 10 October, President Ilves remarked that if a working bee is a collective undertaking bringing people together in a very hands-on way, the day of debate was its intellectual counterpart.

“People have been meeting at gatherings like these to discuss important social issues and questions of court and matters of war and peace for hundreds, if not thousands of years here in Estonia,” he said. “They are a counsel in every sense of the word, involving everyone equally.”

The day of debate, which focussed on issues related to the future of Estonia and Europe more broadly, was organised by the President's Academic Advisory Board, the Open Estonia Foundation and Pärnu Conferences.

“The board is made up of representatives from different professional backgrounds and different walks of life, from fields as wide-ranging as science and culture,” the president explained. “The counsel they provide is not something we want to keep to ourselves: when it comes to important issues we want to extend it to the general public,” he added, urging those present to take the message of the day to those unable to attend.

The first half of the day represented the inaugural public event of the board, which was established in autumn 2006. Going under the title Presidendi Kärjad, it saw Professor Marju Lauristin, academic Peeter Tulviste, doctor of law Lauri Mälksoo and Theatre NO99 director Tiit Ojasoo discuss cohesion and tolerance within Estonian society.

The day then continued with the now traditional Open Society Forum – the 12th such event organised by the Open Estonia Foundation. Discussing the future of Europe before the audience were President Ilves, executive director of the European Council of Foreign Relations Mark Leonard and chairman of the board of the Sofia-based Centre for Liberal Strategies Ivan Krastev.

The day of debate came to a close with a public dialogue between President Ilves and Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Anne Applebaum about Europe, Russia and interpreting history. There followed a reception for guests attending the event and those participating in the Pärnu

Management Conference, which was being held simultaneously at the same venue.

The objective which the organisers of the event have set themselves is to unite, today and in future, leading figures from public authority, enterprise and civic society in one discussion space to debate Estonia's welfare and development – something which everyone in the country must strive to ensure.