



## Estonian president: Scandal in Reform Party beyond tolerable



PHOTO: MIHKEL MARIPUU

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who summoned the leaders of Estonia's parliamentary parties to his Kadriorg office Friday in the wake of the scandal related to e-vote rigging in Reform Party's internal elections, said that the latest scandal went beyond the limits of tolerable.

### ostu- ja müügissoovid täituvad

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Describing the scandal as yet another fraud scandal in the Reform Party, Ilves said that "it clearly surpassed all limits of what's tolerable," at the same time adding that what happened in the Reform Party should not be mixed up with e-elections on the level of the state.

"Let me emphasize, internal elections in one political party and Estonian e-elections are two totally different things both substantively and technically. That difference has to be made," Ilves said.

The president said that "victory at any price" mentality in political parties was giving rise to a generation of young people ready to cheat to show themselves as good development managers. Because a good developer probably will emerge as a political adviser in a ministry after the next elections and will be raised in the following stage to a good place in the electoral ticket. "And then it will be already the next generation that plays foul," said Ilves, adding that this holds true not for the Reform Party alone.

"Many wish that I would restrict myself to condemning the Reform Party now. That however would mean choosing the easier path. Saying that this is one internal problem of one political party which one can look at as a bystander with pleasure: perhaps it will draw attention away from us and hopefully it will all be over soon," Ilves said.

### ostu- ja müügissoovid täituvad

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The president warned, however, that it won't be over and one needs to learn from the events of the past year to come out from the problems cleaner than one was before.

He said that internal democracy of political parties needs a fundamental change toward openness and honesty, as now all front-end politicians, all parliamentary parties and together with them the system of representative democracy have come under fire.

"I believe that we all know Estonian history well enough to know what happened the last time when ridiculing of political parties led to their discreditation and subsequent disappearance of democracy. If we do not know our own history well enough, those who observe processes in Europe ought to recognize into what stalemate discreditation of political parties has led entire countries," Ilves said.

He said the low reputation of politicians and parties that politicians and parties are often themselves to blame for is scaring responsible people with ideals away from politics.

This, he said, is not permissible in parliamentary democracy. It leads to degradation, disappearance of democratic values, to a Leninist "who whom" struggle, and eventually to a Leninist state. For this to be avoided, attitudes need to change. "A political party as a world view organization is the mainstay of the functioning of a democratic system. An integral part of that system, aside from competition, is businesslike discussion between different world views and respect for opponents. Where the arguments of others are taken into account and one's own arguments corrected when necessary," the president said.

In Estonia meanwhile political parties have become sect-like entities that preach the infallibility of their own positions and rule out alternatives.

Ilves urged the leaders of parliamentary parties to take things seriously. "I beg you to make necessary changes to come out of this crisis with a living democracy," Ilves said.

The president summoned chairs of parliamentary parties to his Kadriorg office to discuss the domestic political situation in Estonia.

"The situation is extremely worrying and this is a question of the credibility of Estonia's party democracy," the president said on Facebook issuing the call on Tuesday amid a scandal of voting fraud in internal leadership elections of the Reform Party in the course of which the leader of the party, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, and MEP Kristiina Ojuland, member of the governing board, accused one another of lying. On Wednesday the board of the senior ruling coalition member expelled Ojuland from the party's ranks.