

"Economic interests should not be allowed to win over the principles of liberal democracy. The European Union must not be afraid to take more forceful steps, considering the events that are taking place in Ukraine, and impose sanctions on Russia. Economic wellbeing should not be our only concern," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, one of the keynote speakers at the high-level Wrocław Global Forum, which brings together top-level politicians from Europe and will focus on Trans-Atlantic relationships.

At the Wrocław Global Forum in Poland, the focus this year is on defending democracy and security in Central Europe; special emphasis will be given to the future of Ukraine and economic relations as well as security co-operation between Europe and the USA.

Just as at the annual memorial lecture for philosopher Isaiah Berlin in Riga, the Head of State today in Wrocław emphasised that "the crisis in Ukraine, initiated and encouraged by Russia, is not solely the problem of Eastern Europe. The Western World in general is facing a new situation, created by an authoritarian regime in the East. I'm speaking about serious external challenges, which the liberal world has been forced to face in the last six months."

The Wrocław Global Forum commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe 25 years ago, NATO's enlargement eastwards 15 years ago and the European Union enlargement 10 years ago.

Within the framework of the Wrocław Global Forum, President Ilves will be awarded the Atlantic Council's Freedom Award in recognition of his role in standing up for democratic values in Europe, protecting personal liberties and promoting Europe-US relations. The Freedom Award will also be given to the European Union's Foreign Policy leader, Catherine Ashton (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), former prime minister of Hungary Miklós Németh and Polish diplomat Jerzy Koźmiński; the award will be accepted on behalf of the Maidan freedom fighters by the Mayor of Kiev, Vitali Klitschko, and Ukrainians Ruslana and Igor Lutsenko.

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