

"Through its military annexation of Ukraine, Russia has violated all the so-called international peace-time rules and agreements. As a consequence of the Ukrainian crisis, the European Union must reconsider its eastern partnership policy; this has now become a global security issue," told President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Rome, during a panel that focused on the challenges faced by Europe within the annual meeting of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"Russia's dominant anti-western ideology of dividing countries into "us" and "them", combined with attacks against democratic values like freedom of speech and the right to choose a partner, irrespective of gender, is highly distressing," stated President Ilves when commenting on the current relations between Europe and Russia. He viewed as important the support of the European Union, which apart from Ukraine has also extended to democratic reforms in Georgia and Moldova, countries that have chosen the European way.

President Ilves stated that one more aspect should receive our attention as we consider the crisis in Ukraine – a possible immigration crisis. "Ukraine borders four European Union member states. Crossing the border is only a bus ride away. If we fail to pay enough attention to Ukraine, we may have to deal with a refugee or immigration crisis in the future," added the Estonian Head of State.

Alongside the Estonian Head of State, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Carl Bildt; former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy, Emma Bonino; Head of the United Kingdom Number 10 Policy Unit, Jo Johnson; Chairman of the Bundestag's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Norbert Röttgen; and editorial director and journalist at Le Monde, Sylvie Kauffmann, took part in the debate.

During the discussion, it was stated that the European Union is facing three major challenges at present: geopolitical challenges in the east and south (conflict in the Middle East, changes in regional dynamics in Asia and the increasing influence of China, and the crisis in Ukraine); the economic recession in the euro area, and the increased influence of the euro sceptic parties following the elections to the European parliament. Against the background of these changes, the differences between the views voiced by the mainstream parties and so-called new political forces are becoming more and more apparent.

The goal of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), which was established by several former heads of state, is to pursue coherent and effective European values-based foreign policy to support common European interests and values. The 50 founding members of the Council include former presidents, prime ministers, European Union commissioners, members of parliament and ministers from the European Union Member States, including Martti Ahtisaari, Joschka Fischer, Bronisław Geremek, Mart Laar, Chris Patten and Dominique Strauss-Kahn. The list of founding members also includes intellectuals and cultural figures who include writer Timothy Garton Ash and investor and philanthropist, George Soros.

In Rome, President Ilves also met with the former Prime Minister of Italy, Giuliano Amato.

The Head of State will return to Estonia tonight.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229