

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Evelin Ilves welcomed today in Kadriorg the President of Austria, Heinz Fischer, and Margit Fischer, who arrived in Estonia on an official visit.

At the meeting that followed the welcoming ceremony, the heads of state focused on the security situation in Europe and the relations between Estonia and Austria.

"Regrettably, we no longer live in the peaceful Europe that I experienced in the autumn of 2010, during my visit to Austria," stated President Ilves. "The Russian annexation of Crimea and support for armed separatists in eastern Ukraine has changed the security situation in Europe and this concerns all democratic countries."

According to the Estonian Head of State, the different approaches adopted in partner countries point to the need to speak to each other more often, as: "A uniform and common position for the European Union has now acquired special importance. Economic interests should not win out over our common values, which form the foundation of the European Union."

According to President Ilves, the recent political developments in and around Ukraine do not mean that the Ukrainian-Russian crisis is about to be solved.

"We support the peace plans of President Poroshenko and expect real and visible activities in supporting him in solving the crisis to also come from Russia," he said.

The Estonian Head of State continues to support the openness of the European Union towards its neighbouring countries that make European integration a success – in deepening democracy, the market economy and a state based on rule of law.

"This concerns the Western Balkans, and our eastern partners (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), which the European Union recently entered into association and free trade agreements with. Political, economic or military pressure here from any third countries is absolutely unacceptable and we rule out their right to veto any decisions that may shape the future of our neighbours,"

emphasised President Ilves, inviting Austria to co-operate with the Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership.

The heads of state welcomed the presentation of the candidacy of Jean-Claude Juncker for the position of the President of the European Commission at the recent European Council. President Ilves stated that considering the changed security situation, the election of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has acquired a special importance as this will largely shape the common foreign policies of the union.

The Estonian Head of State expressed pleasure at Austria's recent joining of the NATO Co-operative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn.

"We attach much importance to NATO's enhanced co-operation with its closest partners, which share common values and understanding and also have the ability and willingness to contribute to security," President Ilves said, recalling that Estonia and Austria are brothers in arms in NATO's missions, Afghanistan included.

The heads of state spoke about the need to promote economic and trade relationships between Estonia and Austria; this will be also discussed at today's economic forum of the two countries in Tallinn.

"Our very close and everyday cultural relations could set an example here," the Estonian Head of State said.

President Fischer will today also meet with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia, Taavi Rõivas, and take part in the Austrian-Estonian economic forum.

Margit Fischer and Evelin Ilves will pay a visit to the Seaplane Harbour in Tallinn and take a walk in Kalamaja and along the Culture Kilometre.

The Estonian Presidential couple will host an official dinner to honour the Austrian Head of State and his spouse at Kõltsu Manor.

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