

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met in Kadriorg today with Alexander Stubb, the newly elected Prime Minister of Finland, who chose Estonia as the destination of his first foreign visit.

While serving their countries as members of the European Parliament, both President Ilves and Prime Minister Stubb were closely involved in the development of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which has fostered both the competitiveness and success of all of the countries in the region.

President Ilves remarked that the cooperation between Estonia and Finland in a number of spheres should set an example to other countries, giving the implementation in Finland of the X-Road – a secure data exchange layer solution created in Estonia – as an example.

Discussing the Ukrainian crisis, the Estonian head of state and Finnish prime minister agreed that Russia's actions had substantially altered the security situation in Europe, affecting both Estonia and Finland.

"Right now Russia isn't a strategic partner to the European Union, but a strategic challenge," President Ilves remarked.

According to the Estonian head of state, a democratic Europe must be guided by common values that exclude altering borders and territorial mergers through the application of military force, as recently occurred in Crimea, as well as support for armed separatist activities in neighbouring countries, as the world is currently witnessing in Eastern Ukraine.

Estonia and Finland hope that Moscow will find a way of resolving the ongoing conflict that means supporting Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko's peace plan, denouncing the separatists in Eastern Ukraine and respecting the territorial unity of the country.

President Ilves confirmed that Estonia has been paying more attention to its national defence in recent months, with Finland doing the same, as it and Sweden play an important part in

ensuring security in the region.

"Finland is also a valued partner to NATO, and that partnership is growing stronger," he said.

Acknowledging the extensive and very close economic and trade relations between the neighbouring countries, President Ilves expressed his hope that Estonia and Finland would soon reach consensus on the unresolved issues relating to the gas pipeline connection between them.

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