

"The crisis in Ukraine is not about a single country; it is about the security of all of Europe. Therefore, Europe must adopt a clear position and demonstrate its decisiveness, determination and strength. Under the current conditions, military support for Ukraine or imposing more severe sanctions on Russia should be discussed. If we decide against this, does Europe have a plan B?" asked President Toomas Hendrik Ilves who is taking part in the high-level Brussels Forum.

When speaking about the Baltic Sea security, President Ilves emphasised that the Baltic states must contribute to defence and offered Estonia, which contributes two per cent of its GDP to defence expenditure, as an example.

"As a consequence of the changed security situation, NATO quickly adopted a decision to increase its presence in the Baltic states; however, the Baltic states must also make a significant contribution to defending their territory," Ilves said.

On Thursday, the European Union Member States decided to continue with sanctions against Russia until the Minsk armistice agreement has fully entered into force.

"Sanctions are the consequence of Russia's aggressive behaviour and these are aimed at changing the behaviour of the Kremlin," commented the Head of State in Brussels. "Under the given conditions, to simply say that we need to maintain dialogue with Russia is definitely not an adequate intellectual response. We must keep our eyes on the goal that we hope to achieve through dialogue. As long as we are unable to see any long-term changes in Russia's behaviour, long-term sanctions that influence the Russian economy must remain in force."

The main issues addressed at this year's Brussels Forum included the economic competitiveness of Europe, entrepreneurship and innovation, trans-Atlantic relations, the changed security situation in Ukraine, relations between Russia and Ukraine, terrorism and energy independence.

Brussels Forum is an annual, high-level meeting that concentrates on foreign and security policies. This year, it is taking place for the tenth time and brings together the most influential political, corporate and intellectual leaders from Europe and North America to address the

pressing challenges currently facing both sides of the Atlantic. Participants include heads of state, senior officials from European Union institutions and member states, U.S. Cabinet officials, Congressional representatives, parliamentarians, academics and the media. Brussels Forum provides a forum for maintaining and strengthening trans-Atlantic relations and the discussion of global issues.

President Ilves will return to Estonia late this evening.

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