

"Russia's interference in the civil war in Syria has forced European countries to face complicated foreign policy choices, particularly seeing as the current actions are against the backdrop of Russian aggression in East Ukraine and Crimea," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves yesterday in Washington at the opening panel of the Center for European Political Analysis (CEPA), in which the President of the Republic of Latvia, Raimonds Vejonis, also participated and which was moderated by the Editor of Economist magazine, Edward Lucas.

President Ilves also discussed the current foreign and security policy situation at the Foreign Policy Initiative conference in Washington. According to President Ilves, one of today's most serious international crises is the current situation in the Middle East and the resulting mass wave of refugees that has hit Europe.

"Europe now has to make some concrete decisions regarding the crisis in Syria and Russia's activities in this region. On the one hand, the European Union must remain true to its principles, by acting as one and not acknowledging the annexation of Crimea and responding to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine; on the other hand, only some days ago we heard the address by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, at the UN; now that we have read the news about the activities of Russia in Syria, we need to ask whether we all fight for common values in the coalition against ISIS. For a Europe relying on the fundamental values of liberal democracy, these developments clearly involve a challenge," the Estonian Head of State mused.

President Ilves added that Europe must show solidarity in receiving and assisting the war refugees moving in mass from the Middle East. Given the situation, the emergence of extreme right and left wing political forces in Europe, who are fanning intolerance in society, is a worrying development.

A video of the opening panel is available here: <http://cepaforum.org/video/hard-and-soft-security-rethinking-defense-in-an-era-of-hybrid-war>

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