

The current refugee crisis that is testing the unity and resolve of Europe, along with combatting international terrorism and security – these were the key words at the meeting of the presidents of the Baltic states in Palanga.

The Estonian Head of State, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, emphasised at the meeting with his Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts, Raimonds Vējonis and Dalia Grybauskaitė, that the refugee crisis is not the immediate reason for the terrorist attacks in Paris, as the brutal violence and mass murders that we witnessed on 13 November in the capital of France are the very reasons why war refugees are fleeing to Europe.

"The European Union, with its own population of over 500 million people, is capable of receiving war refugees whose lives are in dire and immediate danger. The Member States must show solidarity, unity and compassion to those who really need our help," said President Ilves. "This is something the Baltic states should know all too well, not only in recalling the major flight of 1944, but also when thinking back to the support we have received in recent decades from the European Union and fellow Member States. However, we need to achieve more efficient control over our external borders, which should be more emphasised along the EU's southern wing. It is also important to check the background of individuals to identify those who are linked to terrorist organisations and who are innocent war refugees."

The European Union has reached a crossroads; if we choose to move in one direction, we will opt for lost opportunities, whereas a step in the other direction will mean an internally strong and externally influential union, recalled the Estonian Head of State, stating: "I am opting for the second opportunity and encourage all of you to do the same."

The leaders of the Baltic states discussed the security situation in Europe in detail, which is influenced by attacks perpetrated by the Daesh terrorist organisation in Ankara and Paris, a bomb explosion on board a Russian passenger plane and the activities of Russia-supported separatists in Ukraine. "Ukraine still needs attention and support from democratic countries," added the Estonian Head of State.

When speaking about the upcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016, President Ilves emphasised that "deterrence is our credible policy", and he detailed the importance of joint NATO exercises, the rotating units of the allies and pre-deployed weapons and equipment

along NATO's west wing.

"This is how NATO can stand, equally, for all the allies," said the Estonian Head of State; according to the President, the unity of NATO is a pre-requisite for all that. "This means that NATO will look for actual solutions for the security threats that concern all the allies and will also contribute to handling those threats, just like we will all focus on the refugee crisis along the Trans-Atlantic axes, warding off the threats of terrorism and restraining extremist."

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