

Veterans' Day is a reminder and recognition of the bravery of the men and women who have served on foreign missions, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said at the charity dinner for the Carolin Illenzeer Fund, stressing that he is proud of the Estonian Defence Forces and the professionalism and dedication of Estonian soldiers.

The President said that the Carolin Illenzeer Fund, which was founded to support the education and hobbies of children whose parents have been killed or injured in the line of duty as members of the Estonian Defence Forces, is an NGO initiative started by volunteers and it indicates the growth of Estonian society as a whole.

President Ilves recognised that the coalition and opposition have been united in their support for bolstering national military defence, and no one has attempted to collect political points for themselves or their parties over the issue.

Support from NATO and the determination of Estonia have accomplished an important aim of our defence policy over the past few years: units of our allies are here in Estonia. Italy, Germany, Belgium, Spain and other European allies – they feel solidarity with our security concerns, which, in turn, makes our solidarity with them self-evident, the Head of State stressed.

He said that in the future the focus should continue to be on the development of Estonian military capabilities and not letting our defence spending fall below current levels. At the same time, President Ilves considered it inevitable to contribute to security elsewhere in the world, and focus on our own internal security, which is part of Estonia's wide-ranging national defence. He reiterated the idea expressed at the National Defence Council, saying that Estonia's outer shell, i.e. military defence, is strong, but the interior, i.e. internal security, is currently more vulnerable, and future budgets call for decisions that would support the bolstering of internal security.

The Head of State reminded that the upcoming autumn will bring a new president and according to the constitution, the President of Estonia has two important and inevitable duties – he or she is the supreme commander of national defence and represents Estonia in international relations.

Considering the events that have taken place around us in recent years, especially since 27 February 2014, when the current security architecture collapsed with the annexation of Crimea, and since we are not an isolated island in a sea of safety, the new head of state must have a clear idea on how to hold his or her ground in these areas, President Ilves said.

"Yes, the head of state must realise what is going on in the state and step in when he or she sees a violation of the constitution or injustice; he or she must have a vision in many domestic areas. I agree with that. However, I do not understand the advice that the president must be a cross-section of society or that he or she must only be strong on domestic politics," he said.

"I am certain that foreign and domestic politics, as well as national defence must – and I stress – must be the most important parts of the president's duties. It is in the job description of the president, as set out in the constitution. Estonia needs a president who thinks in terms of foreign policy, who will not merely read out the points of the agenda at meetings, but will make Estonia greater internationally," he said.

He called on the candidates – once they are established – to explain to the members of the Riigikogu and, if necessary, to the members of electoral colleges, how they see Estonian national defence, Estonian domestic and foreign policy: "The next president must have answers to these questions before 10 October, when he or she will be sworn in at Riigikogu. We all have a right to hear these answers."

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