

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said in his opening address at the Riigikogu conference "Values and Interests in International Relations" that "today European values have come under serious pressure inside the European Union and even more so in our immediate neighbourhood."

President Ilves spoke both of the ever more mounting criticism of the so-called 'old members' towards the countries that joined the EU in 2004 and of the undue unconcern of the so-called 'new members'.

"There is no reason for arrogance or complacency," President Ilves said and called on the European Union to defend and help those in the neighbourhood of the Community who are striving for democracy and freedom. "We have no right to look down on others if they don't express themselves as well and as diplomatically as we would wish. Just a short time ago also in Warsaw, Budapest, East Berlin, Prague, Bratislava, in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn, leaders were clumsy, sharp and too demanding," President Ilves said recalling the story of Eastern and Central European liberation.

The Head of State called on the European Union to understand that "nearby, in Europe's immediate neighbourhood today are people who risk their lives and their freedom in order to defend fundamental European values." "They are threatened by forces that are stronger than they, forces that are more stable, with whom it is always easier to strike a deal, invite to our country, and to whom we can sell our goods. The Walesas, Havels and Nagys are always more difficult and troublesome, because democracy is perforce more difficult and troublesome," President Ilves said.

"We, the politicians of Europe, must become less selfish. Both in the so-called 'new' as well as in the 'old' member states. It is true for all of us. For those who defend their country's internal market by torpedoing the Services Directive while enjoying the free movement of capital. And it is true also for those for whom the European Union simply means huge injections of money from the 'Brussels' budget," the Head of State said and added that the continued development of the European Union assumed from the countries that joined the EU in 2004 their "contribution, creativity and acting".

"But the so-called 'old members' also need to realize that the departure from their Eastern

borders of the tank divisions of the Warsaw Pact does not mean that what happens on the other side of the border of the European Union no longer concerns them," President Ilves said.

The international conference organised by the Riigikogu on October 29-30 "Values and Interests in International Politics" focuses on preserving national and regional interests and their linkage with global values. Among the participants are former and current heads of states, leaders and members of governments, politicians, diplomats, higher government officials, civil servants, representatives of NGOs, academic and press people - from the EU member states and neighbouring countries as well as from other countries.

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