

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves was the keynote speaker at the Baltic studies conference at the University of Pennsylvania at the invitation of the organisers, who asked him to speak about the impact of international developments on the Baltic Sea region.

In his speech, the Estonian head of state recalled that, thanks to prompt and correct choices, as well as bold decision makers in the 1990s, we are one of the most secure, innovative and increasingly successful countries in Europe. We live under the security and solidarity umbrella of NATO and the European Union, and we are more successful than many in the West once believed possible – after all, based on many indicators, we now outpace many of our friends in "old" Europe, President Ilves stated.

He quoted the words of a high European official - of a current member state - who said in 1941: "I do not feel that the independence of the Baltic states is necessary for Europe." The opposite is now true. "Today, we see that our friends are paying increased attention to the Baltic Sea region, and we also share the opinion that the region's security needs to be strengthened," the Estonian Head of State said, adding that the U.S. has taken a giant step in its thinking on security policy, by considerably increasing its contribution to the strengthening of security in the Baltic Sea region.

In speaking about the situation in the European Union, he acknowledged that he is concerned about the future of the post-war institutions. At a time when many crises are occurring simultaneously in the EU and worldwide, it is our obligation to make an even greater effort, President Ilves said. According to the President, we need government and opposition leaders who can lead and have the courage to make decisions. However, the voters also have a responsibility. When they go to the ballot box they too must understand the weight of their votes and the consequences of their decisions, he added.

The Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) conference organised at the University of Pennsylvania is an interdisciplinary scientific conference focused on research on the history, economy, culture, language and international relations of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. AABS was founded in 1968 and its global membership includes scientists from Japan, North America, Australia, Russia and Germany.

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