

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves today at Paldiski met with the servicemen who in the next few weeks will start their service in Helmand province in Southern Afghanistan participating in the biggest foreign mission of the Estonian Defence Forces.

"We wanted to join NATO as we wanted to receive help in case of need, which means that if our allies need help we will go and help them," the Head of State explained why there will be as many as about a hundred Estonian soldiers participating in the NATO led Afghanistan mission by the end of the year.

"Afghanistan has been hijacked by a terrorist group, from there Taleban and Al-Qaida started their attacks against the United States of America and Europe, now you will help to build up that still weak state so that one more corner in the world would be safer, which means that also Europe and Estonia would be safer," President Ilves said.

"I thank you on behalf of the Estonian state for protecting democratic Estonia," the Head of State said to the servicemen.

In the words of President Ilves the presence of NATO in Afghanistan will probably last for a long time as at first it is necessary to suppress Taleban and then to ensure the security of those who will be engaged in building up the state.

"The mistakes made in Iraq have been avoided in Afghanistan and a lot of attention has been turned to civil projects," the Head of State said.

Chief of the Land Forces Staff Lieutenant Colonel Indrek Sirel and Commander of Battalion Major Aivar Kokka introduced the Scoutsbattalion, and Staff Officer of the Operations Department of the General Staff of the Defence Forces Major Sten Reimann spoke about the situation in Helmandi province. Chief of the Defence Forces Vice Admiral Tarmo Kõuts was also present.

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