

Speaking today at the Senior Courses in National Defence the President of the Republic Toomas Hendrik Ilves called collective defence a cornerstone of Estonia's national defence system.

"But it does not mean that we can be unconcerned or passive and hope that our allies would surely save us from the worst in case of danger," the Head of State said. "The principle that those are helped who are ready to help themselves will always be true. Or in another way - if the Estonian state is not ready to defend itself, at least to a limited extent, nobody wishes to seriously help us."

In the words of President Ilves it has often been asked why Estonian boys have to fight somewhere in Iraq or Afghanistan. "But it is exactly what a farmer in Oklahoma might ask, why his son has to fight somewhere in Estonia or Latvia when needed. Hence, if we want that the others help us in case of need, we have to be ready to help also our allies. This forms the foundation for mutual trust," the Head of State said.

Talking about civil control President Ilves said that he would not like to dramatize the discord that has recently become apparent between the General Staff of the Defence Forces and the Ministry of Defence.

"There is a certain tension in the relations between politicians and civil servants from one side and the military from the other side not only in Estonia but in all democratic states," the President said. "This is rather natural as, for example, a general who has been in service for 30 years certainly knows about warfare much more than inevitably more frequently changing civilian defence ministers."

In the words of President Ilves in a democratic society military people simply have to understand that representatives of elected legislative power and appointed executive power decide on the use of defence forces, arrange their financing and control their activities.

"According to that the defence forces fulfil security and defence policy guidelines provided by representatives elected by people and while designing the guidelines those representatives will

take into account competent advice of the defence forces,” the Head of State said. “Civil control is a system that requires the existence of mutual respect and introduces clearly defined control mechanism.”

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