

This morning President of the Republic Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Brigadier General Vello Loemaa and in the afternoon with Major-General Ants Laaneots, tomorrow he will meet with Brigadier General Alar Laneman.

"These meetings represent a logical sequel both to the National Defence Council that agreed with my proposal that the Riigikogu would release from office Commander of the Defence Forces Tarmo Kõuts who had handed in his resignation, and also to the consultations with the Riigikogu factions where we discussed the overall situation in national defence and potential candidates for a new leader of the Defence Forces," President Ilves said. "We all intend to find quickly a Commander of the Defence Forces, who in his turn would in cooperation with executive power help to lead the national defence past the reefs, such as the recently apparent discord between the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff of the Defence Forces caused by different interpretations of civil control."

Pursuant to current legislation a regular member of the Defence Forces after reaching the age of 60 will be retired. Major-General Ants Laaneots is 58, Brigadier General Vello Loemaa is 55, and Brigadier General Alar Laneman is 44 years of age.

At today's meeting with the President of the Republic, Laaneots and Loemaa confirmed their readiness to become candidates for the Commander of the Defence Forces even if they have to resign before the term of office of the Commander of the Defence Forces as provided for in the amended Defence Forces Service Act will expire.

"This is a dignified attitude of an officer who is concerned about the present and the future of our national defence," said President Ilves, who hopes to make his decision on the candidate for the Commander of the Defence Forces in the next few weeks. Following that he will again summon the National Defence Council and will then present the candidate to the Riigikogu.