

"I feel proud of our defence force members," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves on his visit to units of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Brigade in Tapa, Jõhvi and Võru on the eve of his leaving office.

"I have seen how the Estonian Defence Forces have grown steadily stronger in my ten years as President of the Republic," he said in his address to the Defence Force members.

"Estonian officers and non-commissioned officers – true professionals – are among the best in the world, and many have experienced difficult field operations. Estonian conscripts are young people who make the most of their compulsory services and have the desire to learn," acknowledged the Head of State.

He confirmed that Estonia is protected and our national defence well-secured and developed, through what has been and will continue to be the ongoing commitment of thousands of people. We have seen and will continue to see the statesmanship of Estonian politicians through the military strengthening of Estonia; reaching the NATO-agreed level of 2 per cent of GDP in our defence expenditure is an inseparable part of this process.

President Ilves recalled his visits to many trainings that have helped to mould the Estonian Defence Forces into becoming more and more professional.

"Field operations like Iraq and Afghanistan have brought us severe losses and shown that we will not forget our fallen comrades and offer as much support as possible to the injured. And these operations have given real battle experience to many of our soldiers. I saw it with my own eyes when I visited Wahid Patrol Base and Camp Bastion in South Afghanistan, which are manned with Estonian defence force members," said President Ilves, who has seen off all the units deployed in field operations and said the last goodbye to fallen defence force members.

"However, our Defence Forces have been most strongly shaped by everyday service here in Estonia, whether it be refining military service or preparing to host the allied units," said the Head of State. "Our NATO allies are present in Estonia, standing side by side with our defence force members."

He asked the officers and non-commissioned officers to pass on his thanks for understanding and caring to their families and loved ones, and to thank them for being there to support those who have chosen the profession of a soldier.

President Ilves will also visit the units of Defence Forces in Tallinn, Ämari and Paldiski before completing his term in office.

Office of the President  
Public Relations Department