

At a formal ceremony today, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves handed the Defence Forces flag over to Major General Ants Laaneots, the new Commander of the Defence Forces, saying that Estonia must continue doing serious homework in the field of national defence.

“I am delighted and confident to greet Major General Ants Laaneots as the new Commander of the Defence Forces in front of this military formation,” said the Head of State. “I am delighted that the Riigikogu and Government acted quickly and unanimously to appoint the new Commander of the Defence Forces. I am confident because Major General Laaneots merited the trust and support of the National Defence Council, the parliament, as well as the executive power. Apparently, he is the right choice.”

President Ilves quoted the words of Head of State Jaan Tõnisson in February 1928, “The people cannot be permanently deprived of their freedom as long as they do not give it away themselves.”

“During the 20th century, Estonia has proven that it will not give away its freedom. Even when this freedom was taken from us,” said the Head of State.

Maintaining our freedom no longer means trenches and antitank defences somewhere here on our border, said President Ilves, because as a NATO country, we must support missions further away—in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Iraq. “This is the front line of Estonia’s defence, if we are searching for a figurative comparison,” added the Head of State.

“Does this mean that Estonia itself is now a deep and peaceful rear?” asked President Ilves. “Look at a world map and you see the answer. Estonia is one of the border countries of the European Union and NATO. This obligates us to do serious homework in the field of national and border defence.”

The Head of State affirmed that our nation is proud of its soldiers and officers, because they are brave, resourceful, and ready to cooperate with our allies.

“I hope that our new Commander of the Defence Forces will be able to dispel the thoughts of resignation harboured by many good members of the Defence Forces. Believe me—we need

you. We need your skills. We need your dedication,” said President Ilves. “I also hope that the new Commander of the Defence Forces will bring domestic tranquillity to the relations between members of the Defence Forces and politicians. On the one hand, this means that the officers will understand the nature of civilian control, more exactly its primacy. On the other hand, this means the accountability of civilian control, including politicians not yielding to the temptation to drag national defence problems into everyday politics.”

In conclusion, the Head of State wished a firm attitude to all the members of the Defence Forces and only the right decisions to Major General Laaneots.

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