

“Firstly, I would like to say that I am proud of you. I am proud of your courage and valor,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at today’s meeting with the Defence Forces flying to Afghanistan and to their family members.

The Head of State called service in the NATO operation in Helmand Province the front line of Estonia’s Defence Forces, which is also the front line of the interests of Estonia’s security policies.

“For those who are not interested in world issues, it may seem unbelievable that Estonian soldiers serving in the Helmand Province of southern Afghanistan are defending Estonia. But today, when Estonia, which is concerned about world security, is a member of NATO and the European Union, a peaceful Afghanistan is in Estonia’s interests,” said President Ilves.

“I assure you that your service is proper and fitting and you are supported by me personally and by the Estonian people,” said the Head of State.

Currently, 226 members of the Estonian defence forces are serving on foreign missions: 120 in Afganistan, 39 in Iraq, 31 in Kosovo, 31 in the NATO Rapid Deployment Forces in the NRF; additionally there are Estonian defence forces at NATO Headquarters, and as UN military observers in Syria and Israel.

“For Estonia, 226 members of the Defence Forces is a major contribution,” asserted President Ilves.

“What makes a soldier a good and brave soldier? Above all a sense of duty!” he said. “This means the ability to use what is learned in training, discipline, the ability to cope with fear, which is natural, the ability to always support one another, and the knowledge that your companions will support you.”

According to the Head of State, the people who think that the basic assignment of the members

of the Defence Forces is to observe established rules and fulfill the orders issued by officers, and that there is no room for creativity in their service are mistaken. "In battle situations, members of the Defence Forces who think and act creatively are those who are successful. So-called "robot soldiers" who mechanically fulfill orders fail themselves and also subvert their companions," said President Ilves.

The Head of State wished soldiers' luck to the members of the Defence Forces leaving on the mission to Afghanistan, as well as expressed the hope that their intimates would be patient and understanding. "Don't be annoyed if you feel that during the next six months—when the men are in Afghanistan—they have no time for you. They truly will not have the time. My dear women, wait for your men and while waiting, do not become estranged from them."

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