

“We are proud that we have a country that is worth defending. One of the foundations of our statehood is our defence capability,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves today when speaking to the higher national defence courses in Roosta.

He named the lack of a reserve army as one of the most distressing problems in Estonia's national defence.

“We have to understand that when the boys complete compulsory military service, but thereafter are forgotten by the state, we do not actually have a functioning reserve army,” said the Head of State. “Yes, Estonia's defence is based on collective defence and the guarantees given by NATO, but at the same time, it would be totally irresponsible to abandon our initial self-defence capability.”

For us to have an effective reserve army in a crisis situation, we must noticeably increase the number of courses intended for reservists, recommended President Ilves, because, “Only then can we hope that the men who have completed their compulsory service will be able to efficiently cope with their assignments during a state of war. Let's be direct. The current situation, where the majority of the men who have completed their compulsory service during the last fifteen years have not received additional military training places the necessity of compulsory military service in doubt.”

The President of the Republic also spoke about the clarity and unambiguity of the chain of command, emphasizing that competition between the civil and military leaderships of the defence forces is alien to a democratic country. He recalled that the Peacetime National Defence Act passed in 2002 defines the Defence Forces unequivocally and clearly as part of the executive branch of government, and called the amendment to the Constitution initiated this spring, which transfers the management of the Defence Forces to the jurisdiction of the Government, as indispensable.

“The Defence Forces do not stand outside civil society. The Defence Forces are one of many authorities that are created for the defence of our society and its chain of command must be crystal clear and understandable,” said the Head of State. “This is not a step toward politicizing the Defence Forces, as some opponents—hopefully due to superficiality—have asserted. This is a step in the direction of clarity and a more efficient chain of command.”

As top priorities in the development of the national defence system, President Ilves mentioned good relations with our allies or more active involvement in the activities of the European Union and NATO and in foreign missions, as well as the need to act morally and jointly or to share our experiences, for instance, with Georgia and Ukraine.

Moreover, he recalled the words of Finnish Minister of Defence, Jyri Häkämiehe, in a speech he gave recently in Washington, that from a defence point of view, Finland has three great challenges—Russia, Russia, and Russia.

“The same applies to Estonia,” said President Ilves. “Unfortunately, we must admit that recent developments in Russia’s foreign and domestic policies have moved our neighbor away from democracy.”

At the same time, the Estonian Head of State called for a difference always to be made between Kremlin’s current policies and the Russian people, who have suffered no less than many other peoples under undemocratic regimes, “We must not descend into Russophobia that asserts that Russians are not even capable of democracy. Based on our geographical location, it is probably difficult to find another country alongside Estonia where the development of Russia into a democratic, prosperous, and successful country is so desired.”

The Estonian Head of State recalled the cyberattacks that befell Estonia in April and May, and said that we should share what we have learned and personally experienced with others.

“After the cyberattack against Estonia, NATO, as well as the US and Denmark at the government level, have demonstrated an interest in this unpleasant and arrogant, and also unique incident,” said President Ilves. “This attack has provided Estonia with an unparalleled opportunity to become one of the leading countries in the world in the field of cybersecurity. Hopefully, the NATO Center of Excellence for Cybersecurity will be established in Estonia, which would grant great recognition to our knowledge and executed work.”

The Head of State stressed the increasing role of the Defence League. The role of the Defence League as auxiliary police in April-May is difficult to overrate, he said, adding, “The Defence

League has a special place in the entire Estonian national defence system, as a way to involve civil society in the organization of the national defence, as well as a part of an effective reserve army.”

Office of the President  
Public Relations Department  
Phone +372 631 6229