

“Latvia is Estonia’s good neighbor and Estonia wants to be just as good a partner for Latvia,” affirmed President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at yesterday’s meeting with Latvian Head of State Valdis Zatlers in Riga.

President Ilves recalled that Latvia continues among Estonia’s five most important trading partners, and is an important export market for our products and services. Since the summer of 2006, Estonia has been investor no. 1 in Latvia in respect to foreign investments—there are 1,375 companies with Estonian capital registered in Latvia.

“And just as important are our common goal of building a dynamic, democratic and caring society and our similar understanding of foreign policy questions, including the need to strengthen the two organizations that are extremely important to us—the European Union and NATO,” said the Estonian Head of State.

Presidents Ilves and Zatlers spoke at length about the expansion of the Schengen visa and legal space on December 21st, whereby Estonia and Latvia will be united.

“This is an opportunity and a challenge, which—if we know how to use it—will help border-area residents, as well as invigorate tourism and enterprise,” said President Ilves.

The Heads of State supported the proposal of the leaders of the local governments in the border area to initiate activities by a cooperative Estonian-Latvian cross-border commission, under the direction of the regional ministers of the two countries, which would help to compile the various problems and ascertain the needs. For instance, the Estonian and Latvian highway authorities should agree on which border roads are most important for local residents or for tourists and businesspeople, and thereafter put both in order. Problems related to police cooperation and the movement of ambulances across the border, also need to be solved.

The Estonian and Latvian Presidents also spoke about the need for modern train service.

In addition, the Heads of State Ilves and Zatlers discussed the topic of energy, focusing on the security of supply and finding alternatives to current energy carriers, and spoke about the importance of the Ignalina nuclear power station for the Baltic countries and Poland. However, the Heads of State emphasized that one must not ignore alternative methods of electricity generation.

Speaking of Russia, as the large neighbor of both countries, President Ilves stated that the European Union must be more decisive and forceful in its relations with Russia and maintain a direct and frank dialogue with Moscow on all topics.

“Estonia hopes that the problem of the queues at the European Union-Russia border will also be raised at the European Union-Russia summit in Mafra on October 26th, because this is a serious problem not only for Estonia, where a few days ago, there was a 70-hour queue of trucks in Narva due to the slow activity of Russian customs, but also for Finland and Latvia,” said President Ilves.

Speaking of Europe’s neighborhood policy, the Estonian Head of State said that Estonia wishes to see an approach to the various countries that is as flexible and individual as possible.

“We feel that closer economic and trade cooperation, visa simplification, dealing with frozen conflicts, and closer energy-related cooperation is very important,” President Ilves said.

The Estonian Head of State will be in Riga on October 14 and 15 to participate in a distinguished international conference on security issues entitled “Europe at a Crossroads: From Riga to Bucharest”. Today, President Ilves will participate in a discussion on the neighborhood policies of the European Union and NATO.