

On Tuesday in Riga, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves participated in a meeting with Latvian Head of State Valdis Zatlers and Lithuanian Head of State Valdas Adamkus.

The Baltic presidents discussed the period following accession to the Schengen visa zone, problems of energy security, transportation routes that pass through the three countries, and the European Neighborhood Policy.

“I am delighted that the long preparations for the enlargement of the Schengen visa zone have been successfully completed and the result provides our citizens with even freer movement,” said President Ilves. “Keeping the future in mind, we think it is necessary to continue close and professional cooperation between neighboring countries, for instance in the fields of information exchange and training.”

Speaking about the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, the Estonian Head of State said that he is concerned about Russia’s increasingly entrenched power-based behavior that is also reflected in the planned moratorium regarding its responsibilities pursuant to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.

“The NATO countries must not yield to Russia’s blackmail tactics, which try to make others responsible for its withdrawal from the treaty,” said President Ilves, saying the CFE Treaty continues to play an important role in guaranteeing the security and stability of Europe. “Estonia is ready to commence negotiations for acceding to the treaty when this becomes possible—that is when the altered CFE Treaty has been ratified by all the parties and has come into force.”

According to President Ilves, Estonia cannot accede to the CFE Treaty unconditionally because, “Our security solution is part of the collective NATO defense and the terms for our accession must first be discussed with our NATO allies. Therefore, we are first interested in intra-NATO consultations regarding issues related to our possible accession.”

In respect to the Ignalina nuclear power station, the Estonian Head of State said that clarity is necessary regarding the subsequent course of the process.

“Estonia feels it is essential that a shareholders’ agreement be signed between the energy companies of four countries—the Baltic countries and Poland—and a project company founded as soon as possible,” said President Ilves. “Three points are important—the significant decisions related to the project, for instance the choice of the reactor, must be based on consensus between the partners; the partners must have a complete overview of the developments related to the project; Poland’s participation in the nuclear power station must be accompanied by the construction of a Lithuanian-Polish electricity connection.”

Presidents Ilves, Zatlers and Adamkus also spoke about cooperation among the Baltic countries. “Baltic cooperation—this outwardly nice expression—requires explicit content,” said the Estonian Head of State. “We are sure that the key to the success of our cooperation is hidden in the word “coordination.”

According to President Ilves, coordinated activity means smooth, frank, and friendly cooperation in order to solve problems of common interest between the national governments, parliaments, and local governments in border areas.

The Estonian Head of State recalled how the joint letter of the Baltic Prime Ministers regarding the truck queues on the Russian border was not delivered at the European Union summit and mentioned the problems in respect to the signing of the joint letter from the three Ministers of Economy Affairs to the European Commission regarding the so-called Amber Gas Pipeline (i.e. a land-based gas pipeline proposed as an alternative for Nord Stream).

“Are we mutually good neighbors and allies? Of course. Are we also competitors? Of course,” said the Estonian Head of State. “This is natural and we need not fear the fact that we may have differing opinions regarding some issues. However, our opinions are similar regarding many issues and coincide totally in even more cases—let’s make the most of these opportunities.”

According to President Ilves, the great advantage in mutual relationships between the Baltic countries is that we know our partners very well. “For instance, we don’t put each others flags on the table upside down, because we know and understand each other too well to make such mistakes, and this mutual knowledge and understanding must be turned into mutual success through coordinated activity.”

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