

A summit of the presidents of the Baltic States was held yesterday on the invitation of President of the Republic of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves.

The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Heads of State met as part of the Baltic Presidents Council at the Sausti Manor in the vicinity of Tallinn. The meeting participants primarily discussed economic problems and foreign policy issues.

The global financial crisis, coupled with the overall crisis of trust, affects all countries in Europe, including the Baltic States that, just like other countries, are now facing budgetary tensions and poor economic perspectives, as concluded by the Baltic presidents – Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Valdis Zatlers and Valdas Adamkus.

“Let us view this as our great challenge as we are preparing to adopt the euro because this common European Union currency will allow us to strengthen our economic security and get an additional boost to restore trust,” said President Ilves. According to the Estonian Head of State, the budget deficit topic is becoming a vital issue for us all and as we plan budgets for the next few years we should by all means avoid exceeding the GDP 3% deficit limit.

The Baltic presidents have stressed at the meeting that in the current complicated economic situation the Baltic States are viewed as a single entity and the failures of one are extended to all three.

“Because of this it is imperative that our governments and agencies be engaged in reliable information exchange, ensuring that Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius are equally and promptly informed about serious economic problems and possibilities for solving them,” said President Ilves.

“In the widest sense the cooperation between the Baltic States must be characterised by trust, pragmatism, practicality, orientation towards the future, perception of common problems and challenges and search for their solutions,” stressed the Estonian Head of State.

When discussing the energy issues, Presidents Ilves, Zatlers and Adamkus agreed that it is important to create a common energy market in Scandinavia and the Baltic States. Market access and operations must be simplified and made more transparent.

“One common interest of the Baltic States is to complete the Baltic-Swedish electricity cable as soon as possible as it will considerably reinforce our electricity supply outlook and facilitate electricity deficit prevention,” said President Ilves. “I hope that Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden will very soon reach an agreement as to the cable route on the Baltic side.”

President Ilves has also spoken about the new nuclear power plant project in Lithuania, reiterating that Estonia still wishes to participate in the project.

“Nevertheless, as the process is slow, we are simultaneously looking into all other options for supplying Estonia with electricity, including building our own nuclear power plant,” added President Ilves.

Moving on to foreign policy questions, the three presidents have discussed at length several issues related to the neighbouring European Union countries.

“The EU’s neighbourhood policy should be efficient and carefully considered to motivate our neighbours towards choosing democracy and the rule of law,” said President Ilves, pointing out that it is imperative to support the development of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. “The European Union, interested in the expansion of the common European values and security zone, cannot act like a haughty headmaster – it must instead be a friend and an ally, encouraging the desired development.”

Touching upon the subject of the relations between the European Union/NATO and Russia, Presidents Ilves, Zatlers and Adamkus have asserted that pragmatism must prevail in the spheres where such cooperation is of practical use.

“We believe it is important for the European Union and NATO to continue the dialogue with Russia but, at the same time, it is obvious that we cannot now speak of many common values,”

said President Ilves.

Presidents Ilves, Zatlers and Adamkus have also discussed NATO operations, primarily those conducted in Afghanistan. The presidents have stressed that military operations alone are insufficient for establishing peace and stability as civilian projects and development aid aimed at improving the well-being of the population of Afghanistan are essential.

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