

“Estonia, like the rest of the European Union, sees Azerbaijan as a partner with great potential, with whom we wish to develop and increase both economic and political ties,” President Toomas Hendrik Ilves confirmed at today’s meeting with Azerbaijani Head of State Ilham Aliyev.

At the meeting, President Ilves, who is the first Estonian Head of State to visit Azerbaijan in the history of the two countries, focused on the future of relations between the European Union and Azerbaijan.

“The Caspian Sea Region, and Azerbaijan as one of the leading countries in the area, has an important role to play in increasing the energy security of the European Union. During the recent gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine, it again became clear how important the diversity of energy channels is for the European Union,” said President Ilves.

“This is why we greatly appreciate Azerbaijan’s readiness to participate in the implementation of the South Energy Corridor projects—the Nabucco gas pipeline and the Odessa-Brodō-Plock oil pipeline,” he said.

President Aliyev stressed that, in the case of the Nabucco gas pipeline, the activities and responsibilities of each of the parties must be clarified.

President Ilves encouraged Azerbaijan to make extensive use of the opportunities provided by the Eastern Partnership initiative prepared in the European Commission.

“The European Union is convinced that the success of our eastern partners depends on the readiness of each country and their will to truly converge with the Community and its values,” President Ilves emphasized. “This means democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, as well as increasing the pace of justice reforms and administrative capabilities.”

According to President Ilves, Estonia does not presume to be a teacher for any country or to teach it how to shape its future.

“However, if a country declares its wish to intensify relations with the European Union, it is natural that Estonia, as a member of the Union, can provide recommendations on how to successfully achieve eurointegration,” he said.

The Estonian Head of State also spoke about the freedom of the press and the freedom for journalists and the media to operate, which are inherent to and important for Europe.

Speaking of the European Union’s visa simplification policy, President Ilves said that the Community should not show preference for some close neighbours over others when providing visa simplification.

President Ilves also stressed the importance of closer economic ties between Azerbaijan and Estonia, and mentioned information technology as an example of a field where close and businesslike ties could be developed between the entrepreneurs of the two countries.

“Estonia and Estonian entrepreneurs are interested in Azerbaijan and its developing economy as an investment environment as well as a market,” President Ilves said. “We want our investors to have a secure entrepreneurial environment, characterized by a functioning justice system, transparency, and the lack of excessive bureaucratic obstacles.”

Speaking about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Estonian Head of State confirmed the necessity of respecting the principle of territorial integrity and said that the conflict poses a risk for the security and stability of the entire region, and inhibits the economic, political and social development of the involved parties.

“Estonia is thoroughly convinced that permanent solutions for such conflicts can only be achieved at the negotiating table by diplomats and politicians,” President Ilves said. “I am glad that the Azerbaijani leadership is of the same opinion.”

The discussions at the meeting between Presidents Ilves and Aliyev included the intensification

and expansion of cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO. The Estonian Head of State acknowledged Azerbaijan's participation in the missions led by the alliance in Kosovo and Afghanistan, as well as in the international coalition in Iraq.

"Estonia feels that respect for common values, flexible cooperation and dialogue based on the needs of security policy are important to the development of NATO partnership relations," President Ilves said.

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