

“Croatia’s success in building a democratic and flourishing country during the last 15 years has been impressive and sets an example for all the countries in the region,” said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who arrived in Croatia on an official visit at the invitation of Croatian Head of State Stjepan Mesić.

“In 1995, the Estonian Defence Forces started their first peacekeeping mission here in Croatia. Now Estonia together with its allies can welcome Croatia to a place at the NATO table,” President Ilves said, since all the alliance’s member states have ratified Croatia’s accession.

“This demonstrates that dedication to the achievement security and foreign policy goals can be fruitful, along with consistent and trustworthy explanations of these objectives at home, as well as to one’s partners,” the Estonian Head of State stressed. He also recalled the extensive informational campaign organised by the Croatian authorities that significantly increased support among the population for NATO accession.

At the meeting with President Mesić, President Ilves encouraged Croatia as a European Union candidate state to consistently and resolutely continue the reforms necessary for accession to the Community that could also inspire changes throughout the region.

“Croatia bears responsibility for the future of its neighbors in this,” he asserted.

“Estonia has experienced all of this. Thus, I can confirm that the decisions made in the name of accession to the European Union, which seemed difficult and unpopular at first, have paid off handsomely. They have given us self-confidence and helped to shape Estonia’s success story,” President Ilves said.

He commended Croatia’s agreement to seek a solution to the Croatia-Slovenia border problem through mediation by an international expert group provided by the European Commission. He urged that the group be used group effectively and the solution be based on Croatia’s long-term national interests.

At the same time, the Estonian Head of State confirmed that bilateral issues, which do not pertain to the talks being conducted with the European Union, should not be an obstacle to accession negotiations. He added that the chapters should be opened and closed based on the progress of the candidate state.

At the meeting between Presidents Ilves and Mesić, the general situation in the Western Balkans was also discussed. They stressed the importance of the stability of the region and providing continued motivation for all the countries to aspire to the European Union.

The Estonian Head of State called Croatia's contribution to the NATO-led ISAF operation noteworthy. The operation strives to achieve stability in Afghanistan, and in addition to 300 soldiers, Zagreb has sent a unit under the ISAF flag to train the Afghanistan Army and Police, as well as civil officials in Kabul.

"The situation in Afghanistan can only be resolved with a comprehensive approach, which along with military assistance, places equal emphasis on civil and developmental aid," President Ilves said. "We require flexibility that takes into Afghanistan's history, traditions, and neighbors into consideration, along with as many protagonists on the local political stage as possible."

Today in Zagreb, the Estonian Head of State is participated in the signing of two agreements regarding the mutual protection of the confidential information by the two countries. He also met with Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Luka Bebić and Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, who hosted a working lunch for the visitor. His agenda also included meetings with the parliamentary Croatian-Estonian Friendship Group and leaders of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as a visit to the Zagreb City Government. Tomorrow President Ilves will visit the City of Varaždin.

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