

At President Toomas Hendrik Ilves's meeting with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen today, the discussions focused on the alliance's operation in Afghanistan and the topic of collective defence.

"In the course of the Afghanistan operation and directing it onto a path of success, all of us, i.e. NATO and the alliance's partners, must demonstrate patience, resolve, a belief in victory and ever better plan of action," the Estonian Head of State said. He considered it important to improve the effectiveness of the cooperation between NATO, the UN, European Union and other international organizations in resolving Afghanistan's problems.

The NATO Secretary General acknowledged the service of the members of the Estonian Defence Forces in increasing stability in the most complicated and dangerous places in south Afghanistan.

According to President Ilves, along with military steps, it is important to pay increasing attention to civilian projects in Afghanistan, with the objective of strengthening the state and improving the daily lives of as many people as possible.

"However, it is also important that the projects are sustainable even after they are handed over to the Afghans, and that Afghanistan's dependence on external aid is not increased, which we are already noticing," President Ilves said.

At the meeting between the Estonian Head of State and the NATO Secretary General, the framing of the alliance's new strategic concept was also discussed, whereas President Ilves and General Secretary Rasmussen considered it important that emphasis be placed on the principle of collective defence as the foundation of NATO.

"NATO must be a visible and credible presence in all its member states, as we in the Baltic countries are aware of NATO through the Air Policing mission," the Estonian Head of State said.

President Ilves also emphasized the importance of continuing NATO's open door policy, adding that every country that aspires to membership should be examined individually, based on its progress.

President Ilves and General Secretary Rasmussen also spoke about NATO-Russian relations, hoping for an improvement therein, which would however necessitate increased trust. The Estonian Head of State expressed concern about the recent exercises by Russian military forces in the immediate vicinity of NATO's eastern border, to which observers from the alliance's member states were not invited.

[Video of the press conference](#) , *Estonian Public Broadcasting*

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229