

The economic situation in the region was the main focus of the work meeting of the presidents of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which took place in Riga. The heads of state also discussed the future of the European Union, the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, the development of NATO's new strategic concept and trans-Atlantic relations.

The presidents, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Mr. Valdis Zatlers, and Ms Dalia Grybauskaitė admitted that regardless of the possible easing of the financial and economic crisis, all the states must continue to adopt a highly conservative approach to the development of their budget policies and cut their expenses.

“None of us – neither Estonia, Latvia nor Lithuania – has any other opportunity than to remain highly responsible and just cope with the situation,” said President Ilves. “We must cope. And this is the best possible way to help each other.”

When discussing the future of the European Union, the presidents of the Baltic states considered it important to determine, as soon as possible, when the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty will be completed, as the time schedule for all the institutional changes is dependent on this benchmark.

President Ilves also mentioned the establishment of the European Union foreign services as an issue of high priority, which is to be accomplished by focusing on two main tasks: increasing the uniformity of the foreign policy of the European Union and improving the co-ordination of its foreign efforts.

The Estonian Head of State expressed his pleasure with the fact that the Baltic Sea Strategy will be adopted in the European Union next week as the very first macro-regional programme.

“Estonia has strived for years to accomplish this task; however, adoption of the strategy is not the end, but just one of the many steps, as now all the countries within the region are responsible for shaping the nature of the Baltic Sea Strategy,” said President Ilves. “The states must be active and understand that the Baltic Sea Strategy is meant for all of us.”

When speaking about NATO's new strategic concept, the Estonian Head of State mentioned visibility, credibility and clearly expressed capabilities as the backbone of NATO's collective defence.

"Cyber security, combined with energy security and terrorism, are the subjects which will definitely be mentioned in the new strategic concept," said President Ilves. "These are the spheres to consider for the purposes of devising NATO collective defence."

The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian heads of state emphasised the importance of relations between Europe and the United States of America.

"The close and diversified partnership between the European Union and the United States of America, based on shared values, must be strengthened, as this is one of the cornerstones of both European and global security and stability," President Ilves said.

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