

All of the member states of the European Union, regardless of their size or the year in which they joined, are answerable to both the union and their neighbours, agreed Estonian and Polish Presidents Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Lech Kaczynski during their meeting last night in Warsaw.

“This means that no member state can take the easy way out as a bystander in decision-making processes,” President Ilves explained. “We all have to be equally avid in the defence of our interests. And at the end of the day this means standing for a stronger and more united European Union.”

A united European Union also means equality within the union, precluding the division of member states into ‘old’ and ‘new’ or ‘big’ and ‘small’, the presidents concurred. They stated that it was unreasonable that just one of the 158 foreign representations of the union is led by an ‘Eastern European’ and that not one of the directors of the 41 General Directorates of the European Commission is from a country which joined the European Union six years ago.

President Ilves had spoken on the same issue at the Natolin campus of the College of Europe in Warsaw immediately prior to meeting with the Polish Head of State.

“There are no new members [of the European Union],” the Estonian president said in his address to the students and teaching staff at the college and the foreign diplomats in attendance. “There is no ‘old’ and ‘new’. It is time for us to make it clear that we do not accept a difference in the amount that member states do: we must all be treated as equals. There is only one European Union, and its member states, and most importantly its citizens. Equals. None of them are ‘old’ or ‘new’.”

Presidents Ilves and Kaczynski named stability and success in neighbouring countries of the union as being in the common interest of the EU, as well as strong trans-Atlantic ties and the success of NATO in Afghanistan.

We must encourage democratic reform in the union’s neighbouring countries, since the success of such reforms will bolster the union’s own security, the Estonian Head of State stressed, adding: “But this also means responsibility on our part – promoting change in other countries,

we must have the courage to continue offering them the opportunities they are striving for.”

President Ilves referred to the Western Balkans as an example, where a number of countries have been successful in the course of reforms on their way to joining the union, but opposition to which from certain member states has hindered their progress somewhat.

“I am very pleased that the foreign ministers of the European Union have finally decided to validate the stabilisation and association agreement entered into with Serbia which the Netherlands called a halt to last year,” Ilves said.

The Estonian and Polish heads of state said that part of the neighbourhood policy of the European Union must continue to support reforms in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, but that it is also important to encourage the governments of Belarus and the Central Asian states to choose in favour of democratic changes.

“The European Union will neither intervene in the internal affairs of these countries nor teach them how to lead their lives, but we are prepared to provide them with any assistance they need should they decide to move towards democracy and the rule of law,” President Ilves stated.

Discussing the development of their own region – the Baltic States and Poland – the presidents underscored that the success of one country in coping with the financial crisis boosts the success of the region as a whole, just as failure on one count affects the reputation of the remaining three.

“That is why we have a responsibility not merely before ourselves in terms of how we are faring, but before the entire region,” President Ilves said, praising Poland for maintaining economic growth despite the pressure of the global crisis.

Fulltext of the speech is available [here](#) .

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