

Considering the organisation of today's world and the structure of today's international relations, we have no reason whatsoever to doubt the effectiveness of NATO and Article 5, President Ilves said. "Quite probably, we are currently living through the safest stage of our history, security-wise, and do not have to worry too much or fret all the time," said the President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in his lecture today at the Estonian National Defence College.

The Head of State described the debate on the subject, now and then launched by the media, of whether Estonia will receive assistance when facing a great danger as odd and even disturbing.

"Considering the organisation of today's world and the structure of today's international relations, we have no reason whatsoever to doubt the effectiveness of NATO and Article 5. This did work during the Cold War, in a situation, which was characterised by even greater international tensions. Therefore, we have no reason whatsoever to be fretting about it today," told President Ilves.

According to the president, it is even worse – not to say mean – to occasionally suspect our allies of shady deals and of selling us.

"Today, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is history," emphasised President Ilves. "We need to be aware of history, but that's as far as it goes. We cannot live history. Today's world cannot be compared to the world of the 1930s. We must live in the present and think of tomorrow. Non-democratic countries – yes, they may enter into deals with hidden agendas, but there are no non-democratic countries in NATO. This is why there is no reason to be afraid of shady deals."

When speaking about the preparation of the new strategic NATO concept, President Ilves asked: what is Estonia's interest here? "The new concept must find a balance between NATO's main function historically of protecting its territory and of the missions that take place outside the NATO countries," he responded.

"By nature, these two objectives – defending NATO's own territory and operations outside this territory – are not in conflict. Mobile units are required both to defend the territories of NATO countries and take part in other missions," said the Head of State, emphasising the importance of continued specification of the Baltic states defence plans apart from the strategic concept and increasing NATO's visibility in our region.

When speaking about the most important foreign military operation of both NATO and Estonia, President Ilves said: "It was extremely naïve to hope that the allies will achieve a quick success in Afghanistan. But those who predicted this war lost before it even began – they were also wrong."

Three or four years ago, many people also considered the war in Iraq a defeat, said President Ilves, adding that as of today, Iraq is nurturing a realistic hope of creating a stable country, which could also be described as relatively democratic, considering its cultural space.

“I am not trying to argue that success in Afghanistan is only dependent on the military and their numbers. Definitely not. However, a country cannot be built there during a war,” President Ilves told.

He repeated that in today’s world, the security of any country cannot be expected to start from its doorstep. “Should the terrorist get hold of weapons of mass destruction – let us recall that Pakistan, Afghanistan’s neighbour, is a nuclear country – and these are used against a NATO member state, this would result in a crisis of NATO’s current operating mechanism.”

President Ilves contested the simplified opinion of Estonians being in Afghanistan solely to convey the deal: ‘we are helping you today and should we run into trouble, you owe us.’

“Estonia is a member of NATO. Our discussion does not include the definition “we” and “you”, or even “us” and “them”. We are NATO. As long as the threat that spreads from Afghanistan and the area will endanger our security space, our Europe, and our NATO, this will also threaten Estonia, at least indirectly,” said President Ilves.

When speaking of Russia, the Estonian Head of State admitted that today’s Russia is not a threat for the existence of Estonia as a NATO and European Union Member State.

“This is why it is more important, by far, to fret about the success and progress of NATO and the European Union instead of being upset due to some slightly provocative news from Russia,” stressed President Ilves.

“The plan of Mr. Barack Obama, President of the USA – in improving the relations with Russia – matches well with Estonia’s interests. The friendly and mutually beneficial nature of such relations serves, above all, the interests of Russia’s neighbours,” said President Ilves. “Only time will show whether the plan is successful. Rhetoric, a bit more subdued than before, is definitely a good sign. The West, Estonia included, must be more open and ready for co-operation when communicating with Russia. At the same time, our actions need to be uniform, consistent and honest.”

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