

"Estonia and Azerbaijan are linked by common interests; we want stability and peace to rule in the Southern Caucasus and the region in general, to ensure both the energy security of the European Union with as versatile means as possible," President Ilves "Estonia and Azerbaijan are linked by common interests; we want stability and peace to rule in the Southern Caucasus and the region in general, to ensure both the energy security of the European Union with as versatile a means as possible and the development of political, economic, and cultural co-operation between our countries," said the President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, as he welcomed the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev and Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, who arrived in Estonia for a state visit.

"Azerbaijan as a leading country in the Caspian Sea region is an important partner for the European Union both economically and politically; the member states of the European Union, in turn, can share with you their experiences to ensure that the reforms introduced in Azerbaijan will be successful," said the Estonian Head of State.

According to President Ilves, as a European Union Member State, Estonia supports and encourages Azerbaijan to join the World Trade Organisation as the achievement of such an objective will show Azerbaijan as a country that adheres to international norms and standards: "This, in turn, would be beneficial for the stability and progress of the country's economic and business environment and would contribute to closer economic integration with the European Union."

When discussing Estonian Azerbaijan relations, President Ilves reminded that tomorrow, 8th April, will be the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Estonian Society in Baku, which demonstrates the substantial history of our relations.

The Estonian Head of State emphasised the brevity of today's political dialogue between the two countries, but also added that co-operation could even be closer between the heads of government and also the ministries of economic affairs, defence and agriculture.

"We also need to focus on much closer economic co-operation; Estonia is very interested in pursuing this matter," said President Ilves. "We want Estonian investors to have a secure business environment in Azerbaijan and the co-operation to be smooth, without excessive bureaucratic restrictions, characterised by rules understandable for everyone, and transparency."

President Ilves acknowledged Azerbaijan's wish to modernise its public sector, using co-operation with Estonia to meet that purpose. For example, Estonian information technology companies are participating in partnerships with their Azerbaijani colleagues to develop e-governance in Azerbaijan and create a safe data exchange layer, which is known in Estonia as X-tee.

"Following this, it will be easy for Azerbaijan to adopt other solutions that are successfully operating in Estonia, such as e-Health, e-Police, e-School and eventually the ID card," said President Ilves.

Presidents Ilves and Aliyev also discussed the Mountain-Karabakh conflict.

“Estonia supports the resolution of the issues related to Mountain-Karabakh and the adjacent areas through negotiations, and I know that this is also your opinion in this matter,” said President Ilves to the Azerbaijani Head of State. “You need to prepare for peace, not war, which means patience during the negotiations in order to arrive at an agreement for a peaceful solution of the Mountain-Karabakh issues, which would pave the way for an extensive peace treaty.”

The Estonian Head of State emphasised the important role played by Azerbaijan in increasing the energy security of the European Union as whole.

“This is why we highly appreciate Azerbaijan’s participation in the Southern Corridor initiative and in projects such as the Nabucco gas stream,” said President Ilves.

The Estonian and Azerbaijani heads of state also discussed the situation in Afghanistan, where both countries contribute to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

“Azerbaijan, as one of the key countries of this region, understands quite clearly the importance of a stable Afghanistan for both itself and its neighbours, as this would stop the spread of extremism,” said President Ilves. “This is the reason why the international community has accepted its responsibility and many countries – not just NATO – have sent their defence force members and civilian experts to Afghanistan.”

Presidents Ilves and Aliyev today signed the common declaration on relations between Estonia and Azerbaijan.

Mr. Ilham Aliyev, who arrived in Estonia for the first state visit in history, will also meet with the Prime Minister, Mr. Andrus Ansip, give a lecture at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visit the information technology demonstration centre in Ülemiste as well as the Town Hall of Tallinn, where he will meet with the Mayor of Tallinn, Mr. Edgar Savisaar, and place a wreath at the Monument of Liberty of the War of Independence. This evening, President Ilves and Mrs. Evelin Ilves will give a state dinner in the honour of the Azerbaijani Head of State and Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva.

Tomorrow morning, President Aliyev will depart Estonia.

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