

“Compliance with the agreed rules within the EU is extremely important for small European Union countries, as this is the principle that makes us strong as a community,” said the Estonian Head of State at today’s meeting with Mr. Heinz Fischer, the President of Austria. Mr Ilves arrived in Vienna for an official visit.

“Estonia and Austria are determined partners in the European Union, and we observe the same principles. Both of us follow the same directions when pursuing the matters related to the Eastern Partnership initiative, West Balkan integration with the European Union, and solving the energy security issues,” President Ilves told. “From 1st January, we can also extend our co-operation to the euro zone.”

The Estonian Head of State emphasised that the coherence of the European Union is important for smaller Member States like Estonia and Austria.

The Estonian and Austrian heads of state discussed European Union enlargement towards the West Balkans.

“Vague status outside the European Union will only contribute to instability not just in the south-eastern part of Europe but – as we’ve all seen – in Europe as a whole,” President Ilves said. “I’m worried that enlargement fatigue is descending on the European Union. This is wrong. The open door policies of the European Union will extend the belt of reform-orientated countries in Europe, while making us all stronger, more successful, and influential.”

According to the Estonian Head of State, the enlargement policy must be pursued further on the current grounds, as the European Commission recommended in its recently published enlargement strategy and progress reports, but an uncompromised principle should be applicable to both the candidate countries and the EU itself – rules must be observed.

Presidents Ilves and Fischer confirmed their support for the European Neighbourhood Policy and for strengthening of the Eastern Partnership Initiative.

“We must take the road of free trade, simplified visa procedure, and visa freedom to give substance to the Eastern Partnership. This does not only require steps to be taken by the European Union, but it also assumes a preparedness from the Eastern Partnership countries to take the negotiations more seriously. Free trade agreements are not just political declarations,” President Ilves confirmed, as he invited Austria to participate in the work of the EU Eastern Partnership Training Centre in Tallinn.

When discussing the Baltic Sea Strategy, which was initiated by Estonia, and the Danube Strategy, completed under the leadership of Austria, both President Ilves and Fischer confirmed that both contribute to promoting co-operation within the European Union and the competitiveness of the EU.

In discussing European energy security, the Estonian Head of State highlighted the diversification of suppliers and sources, the establishment of additional energy links between the European Union Member States, common energy policies towards third countries, and the creation of a working energy market within the European Union as the most important issues.

“But we also need to agree upon some common rules that are applicable to importing electricity from third countries, as this must contribute to enhancing competitiveness in the market while not putting investments, made between Member States to ensure energy security, at risk,” said President Ilves. According to the President, the success of the South Corridor projects – whether it be Nabucco, Turkey-Greece-Italy and Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania, or the White Stream gas pipe – is of key importance for the European Union energy security.

Economic relations between Estonia and Austria are making progress, despite these difficult times, admitted the Estonian Head of State: “We encourage Austrian businessmen to come to Estonia. The adoption of the euro serves as a sign of our stable economic environment.”

President Ilves invited Austria to participate in the NATO Centre of Excellence for Co-operative Cyber Defence in Tallinn.

“I’m sure that Austria could participate in projects of interest. Threats in cyber space, both those of a criminal and military nature, represent a common concern, problem, and challenge to all of us – both for NATO member states and any democratic countries that do not belong to

the alliance,” said the Estonian Head of State.

President Ilves also spoke about the close cultural ties between Estonia and Austria, reaching back centuries, down to Mr. August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue, who used to organise theatrical performances in both Vienna and Tallinn and even in Vardi Manor in Nissi Parish.

“A number of creative Estonian people are currently active in Austria, such as Mr. Arvo Pärt, a composer loved in both countries, Ms Annely Peebo, a soprano, and Mr. Ain Anger, a bass singer.”

President Ilves will meet with Mr. Michael Häupl, the Mayor of Vienna, and Ms Barbara Prammer, the President of the Austrian National Council or Parliament.

Mrs. Evelin Ilves will also pay a visit to Haus des Sports within the framework of the visit; a programme that is developed to combat obesity in children will be introduced to her in the establishment.

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