

The President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is currently on a state visit to Sweden, Prince Carl Philip, and the Swedish Minister of Defence, Mr. Sten Tolgfors, paid a visit to the European Union Nordic Battle Group today. Estonia, Finland, Norway, and Ireland are participating in this formation, which is under the command of Sweden.

According to the battle group concept of the European Union, the battle groups – which are tactical rapid response units, consisting of an average of 1,500 men – must be ready to respond within 15 days, five days spent to adopt a political decision and ten days to dispatch the units to the area of operation. The conflict area may be located 6,000 kilometres from Brussels and the battle group must be capable of remaining operable there for up to four months. The battle groups are primarily intended to carry out various humanitarian, rescue and peace securing tasks, at the UN's request, and participate in the anticipation and prevention of crisis.

Estonia's contribution to the Nordic Battle Group is a staff defence unit, reconnaissance team, staff officers, and a military police investigator – in total, up to 55 defence force members.

President Ilves said that although the European Union battle groups have not been engaged in action to date, they have made a considerable contribution to defence-related co-operation, interoperability, and the rapid response capabilities of the Member States of the EU.

“All of this serves to improve the general rapid response capabilities of the European Union as a community,” the Estonian Head of State explained.

He also acknowledged the good co-operation between Estonia and Sweden in the sphere of defence: “For us, the Nordic Battle Group stands to serve as an importance experience, not just for the purpose of the European Union's common security and defence policies but also for Nordic co-operation.”

This morning, President Ilves and Mrs. Evelin Ilves, accompanied by His Majesty, King Carl XVI Gustaf, and Her Majesty, Queen Silvia, visited the Estonian School in Stockholm. Last night, the Estonian Head of State with his wife and the royal couple participated at a reception of the Estonian Ambassador, Mr. Alar Streimann, where Ms Igna Paenurm, the Chef of the Office of

the President of the Republic of Estonia, presented meals that were made using produce of Estonian origin and UMA provided musical entertainment.

President Ilves, who arrived in Sweden last Tuesday on board the Victoria cruise liner, also met with the Swedish Prime Minister, Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt, and the Speaker of the Parliament, Mr. Per Westerberg; gave a presentation at a cyber defence seminar, initiated by Mr. Carl Bildt, the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs; visited the Estonian House in Stockholm and the Town Hall; and opened the Estonian-Swedish business seminar. During the state visit, the Estonian Head of State is accompanied by a 37 member delegation from the Chamber of Trade and Industry.

This afternoon, President Ilves will visit the laboratories of Uppsala University and give a lecture at the university.

Mrs. Evelin Ilves paid a visit to a project initiated by Her Majesty, Queen Silvia, during the visit. The project focuses on children with parents who have drug addictions or mental disabilities. The First Lady also visited the Swedish company Rönisch, which manufactures sports apparel; met with Ms Linda Nurk, a designer of Estonian origin; paid a visit to the Salta Kvarn ecological farm; met with Dr. Claude Marcus who deals with the problem of overweight children; and visited the Swedish University of Life Sciences, where she was introduced to the sphere of healthy food and eating. This afternoon, Mrs. Evelin Ilves will visit the hospital of Uppsala University, which includes a therapy department for children and young people with behavioural disturbances.

President Ilves and Mrs. Evelin Ilves will return to Tallinn late this evening.

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