

“Estonia and Switzerland have taken different paths in history. You have chosen a policy of neutrality, while we have joined the European Union and NATO. Despite these differences, Estonia and Switzerland are close allies who attach high importance to extending the belt of democracy and states based on rule of law throughout Europe and within our region,” told the Estonian Head of State, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at a meeting with the President of the Swiss Confederation, Micheline Calmy-Rey.

“The fact that Switzerland does not belong to the same international organisations as Estonia does not demonstrate your indifference. On the contrary, Switzerland is often a global messenger, a world diplomat and mediator,” President Ilves emphasised.

However, at the same time, no one is excluded in Europe as we are hit by the debt of and financial crisis in some countries as well as the Arab Spring, cyber threats or military conflict in regions such as Transcaucasia.

“Today, amidst the threats and risks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, neutrality will ultimately mean involvement and this is what Switzerland has efficiently proved,” stated the Estonian Head of State.

In the recent past, Switzerland has successfully played an intermediary role in the negotiations between Georgia and Russia, preceding Russia joining the WTO, which showed that agreements on such complicated matters can be reached between two countries.

“The international responsibility of Switzerland and wish to participate is confirmed by your plan to join the European-Asian dialogue and co-operation forum, ASEM,” told President Ilves. “Estonia, as a European Union Member State, will be supporting Switzerland strongly in this.”

*The European Union is the most important political and economic partner for Switzerland and a firm ally in shaping, for example, the future of the Balkans. “Hopefully, this will result in the joint presidency of Switzerland and Serbia of the OSCE in 2014-2015. Estonia is a firm supporter of such a solution,” President Ilves told.*

According to the President, over the past two decades relations between Estonia and Switzerland have been characterised by flexible and smooth co-operation across many different spheres.

“We are good partners in the UN. The Estonian Defence Forces have been advised by Switzerland on mobilisation issues and we have been happy to offer Switzerland the opportunity to participate in the NATO Centre of Excellence for Co-operative Cyber Defence. Most people in Estonia have an ID-card and many have a driver’s licence, which are both made by Trüb, a Swiss company. From next year, electrical and diesel trains, manufactured by the Swiss company Stadler Bussnag AG, will operate on our railroads – these are just some examples of our businesslike relations,” President Ilves stated.

*The Swiss Head of State, Micheline Calmy-Rey, in expressing special interest in Estonia’s e-governance and e-election systems said, “We – Switzerland and Estonia – do not have problems; we only have opportunities.”*

The Estonian Head of State, who arrived in Switzerland last night for a working visit, will continue from Bern to Vienna today to meet with the President of Austria, Heinz Fischer, and to take part in an influential global policy conference.

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