

"Only 15 years ago, NATO was something abstract for Estonia. Now we can all see and recognise that NATO is visible and real – a part of Estonia," told the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, today in Paldiski, where a part of the largest international exercise over the last couple of years, BALTOPS, took place and where the landing of allied forces in Estonia was practiced.

"We cherish the freedom to choose our own allies," emphasised the head of State.

According to the President, it is symbolic that BALTOPS, which trains expedition units of the Marines of the United States of America and the navy to respond in crisis situations all over the world, is taking place in Estonia on 14 June – 71 years to the day that thousands of Estonians were deported from here by occupation powers; these were people who had no other choice but to surrender.

"But now we do have a choice and we have made our choice – this is democracy and defending democracy; this is membership in NATO, and putting our trust in the Alliance as the Alliance has put in us," assured President Ilves.

The former 'closed' town – a training centre for nuclear submarines and a naval base of the Soviet Union – has become an open town, where Estonia is happy to receive its allies, to confirm our alliance and belief in common values, democracy and freedom," told the Head of State.

"Paldiski is free, Estonia is free, we are free and we sense the commitment to defend this freedom together," stated President Ilves.

He considers looking into the future important: "We must look to the future – keep the Alliance relevant, sustain the commitment and focus on not just being "smart" but also having "defence"."

President Ilves: Estonia cherishes the freedom to choose its own allies

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