

The National Defence Council, which was convened today in Kadriorg at the invitation of the President of the Republic, discussed the draft Veteran Policy developed by the Ministry of Defence to support the defence force members who fought abroad and their next of kin, as well as the 10 year National Defence Plan.

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, emphasised that Estonia owes consistent consideration, professional support and the recognition of society to the Defence Force members who have fought on the battlefield for the security interests of our country, as well as the men and women who have been injured during domestic military service.

Today, the Veterans' Policy that was introduced at the National Defence Policy by the Minister of Defence, Urmas Reinsalu, involves several thousand people, as approximately 2,300 Estonian Defence Force members have taken part in international military operations from 1995-2012. 11 soldiers have been killed in action and 130 people have been injured, 34 of them seriously. The Defence Force and active Defence League members who have been injured in service in Estonia must be added to these figures.

"A well-structured Veterans' Policy that offers support to the current and former Defence Force members and their next of kin represents the state's immediate duty to those who have stood for Estonia and Estonia's interests, often on the battlefield," President Ilves assured. "I am pleased that, apart from the health needs of the wounded, the Veterans' Policy is catering for the re-training of veterans and helping them to continue their education – towards their ability to cope in a successful and sustainable manner."

Before Urmas Reinsalu, the Minister of Defence, and the Commander of the Defence Forces, Brigadier General Riho Terras gave an overview of the 10 year National Defence Policy, President Ilves said that the Plan concerned established realistic and achievable objectives for national defence in Estonia.

"We have grown smarter and have improved our ability to estimate the real expenses involved in creating the required military capabilities and for financing their maintenance for Estonia," told the Head of State, in acknowledging our parliamentary parties who have helped national defence costs rise to two per cent of GDP. "The decisions adopted by politicians, officials and officers in charge of national defence in allocating this money must be accurate and

substantiated, and the plans must be ambitious, yet realistic."

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