

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who spoke at the official reception to celebrate the anniversary of the Defence Forces, reminded those present that even when a crisis of communication is apparent and palpable in society, 79 per cent of the Estonian population trusts the Defence Forces and 92 per cent still consider mandatory military service useful.

"This serves to prove that people have not lost their defence will and shows that compulsory military service is a badge of honour that young men – and why not also young women – see as an inseparable part of their lives and careers," told the Head of State. "The more and better employers understand this, both in the private and public sector, the less we will hear cowards bragging about saving their skins." A person standing close to me became a decisive individual from a deliberative student. He went there as a child and emerged a man.

President Ilves thanked the officers and non-commissioned officers for their choice in becoming a defence force member and also their next of kin – for their understanding and patience.

"By this, I am speaking of all the defence force members, including those – or actually, mostly about those – who serve in Estonia, in training centres, staffs, units," told the Head of State. "You are the people who ensure the visibility and credibility of Estonian defence abilities. The staff and wage policies of the Defence Forces must be aimed at encouraging and supporting you so that you will not have any hesitations about whether to continue your service or not."

When speaking about the Defence Force members who have fought and who fight for Estonia's interest as a part of international operations, President Ilves emphasised: the state must do everything possible to give battle units the best training available and the best possible equipment, according to the specifics of each and every military operation; the state will also take responsibility for soldiers returning from battlefield and here we must have loads of attention, patience and understanding as the defence force members may suffer from the consequences of battles or incidents that have taken place far away for a long time after returning home.

Integrated veteran policy that offers support to both current and former defence force members and their next of kin is the state's immediate responsibility," confirmed the head of State, adding: "This is the very veteran policy that is about to be completed at the initiation of the Ministry of Defence; and I am very proud of this as the President, high commander of national

defence and as a basic citizen."

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