

"The departure of NATO troops from Afghanistan is no excuse for the Alliance to feel tired or to take a break. The changing security environment of the Transatlantic space, and further afield, continues to require NATO's constant attention, NATO's unity and success," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves who today had a meeting with NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Brussels.

"A visible, credible and deterrent NATO continues to be necessary for the Alliance's members and partners," the Estonian head of state said. "In order to achieve this, NATO allies must agree among themselves on common goals and threat assessments in a complicated world where instability persists, in a world that is not divided along as clear lines as it was 30 years ago."

According to President Ilves, it is especially important that the voice of all allies be not only audible in NATO's internal debates, but we must also be smart and skilful enough to listen to everyone and to take different opinions into account because: "Only then can we use the strengths of all the allies for the benefit of the Alliance."

The Estonian head of state claimed that the diminishing defence budgets of the allies was one of NATO's serious problems, as is the growing divide between the USA's and European countries' contributions to defence expenditure.

"With the continuation of such a development, it will become increasingly difficult to convince the Americans why they should participate in guaranteeing European security," President Ilves claimed. "Yet I believe that the Transatlantic relationship – which rests on a decades-long experience of solidarity, togetherness and common decisions – is unbreakable."

Europe's economic woes do not indicate that the defence budgets of Europe's democratic states will increase markedly in the near future, the Estonian head of state admitted, adding: "Of course, Europe should increase its defence expenditure, but right now it is just as important to consider how and on what to spend resources so that every euro spent will have been spent on what is most important for the Alliance. This is similar to compiling a country's budget – the allocation of money depends on priorities."

"NATO continues to be militarily stronger than all its closest competitors put together, and this will remain so in the foreseeable future," President Ilves emphasised.

The Estonian head of state recognised the importance of the activity of NATO's command staff also after the Afghan mission and emphasised the need to conduct joint exercises. A good example is Steadfast Jazz, the most extensive exercises in the Baltic Sea region, which is to take place this November.

Speaking about so-called new challenges, President Ilves recalled: "There are no cyber attacks that are not within range; they can originate from anywhere and can hit anywhere."

In this field, NATO allies must co-operate more, the Estonian head of state said.

Estonia is prepared to actively participate in all of NATO's new developments, to be at the forefront of influencing change, and this especially due to or, in fact, despite our size. We must be smarter and more flexible than others, the Estonian head of state said.

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