

## Opening remarks by President Ilves

Thank you very much. I'm always happy to come to NATO. This is one of my favourite places for many decades already, but especially since becoming a NATO member nine years ago.

Just a few points that we talked about. First, NATO is in good shape. The operations, especially ISAF, show that NATO is able to operate in multiple theatres in a sustainable and successful way. The crucial issue for us will be the orderly handover of ISAF's security responsibilities to the Afghans by the end of 2014. It's natural for every military operation to come to an end. So we look forward to that end. But we will be there until the end – until the elections to be precise.

Whereas there's no reason to believe that the world will become a more peaceful place when ISAF is over, it's also important to keep in mind that NATO has to be ready at all times to respond to future security challenges. We cannot allow NATO to run out of steam.

That is why I welcome discussions within the Alliance on how to maintain NATO's agility and interoperability after the ISAF mission has been successfully concluded. And I think it is crucial that in these discussions the voices of all NATO Allies are listened to and operated upon. We need to take advantage of the comparative strengths of each member within the Alliance. That is what makes the Smart Defence work.

Secondly, I'd like to say that the transatlantic link remains strong and steadfast. It is based on the solidarity, unity of purpose and collective decision-making that goes on day to day, and has done so decade to decade. That has created a genuine and unbreakable bond between the US, Canada and European Allies; and it has been this way for generations. NATO is a truly unique organisation in this regard – it is our common home.

Two things give me more confidence to say so. First of all is the idea of a TAFTA or the Transatlantic Free Trade Area. This will bind these two areas closer than they have been in areas other than military. We in Estonia very strongly support the idea of an EU – US free trade agreement.

The second thing is the slow but steady disappearance of the distinction between the "old" and "new" Europe when it comes to the Alliance. When we look at what used to be called the "new" Europe, we see that we do rather well and have turned out very good Allies. And I hope that as we come to the 10th anniversary of our becoming Allies next April, the distinction has completely disappeared.

Let me now touch upon something that is more bland or even sour. The question of burden-sharing in NATO is an eternal one. Yes, the share of military capabilities between the US and other Allies is disproportionate; this needs to change. The commitment of different Allies to spending on military defence must become more realistic. It is not realistic to think that the US will continue to pay 75% of the costs of NATO, with the number of countries going way below 2% - in what we have all fundamentally agreed to.

Of course we should do this in a smart way. The Secretary General has pushed forward Smart Defence. That is not about spending money, but spending it more wisely. Which we in Estonia believe is a really good idea.

But it is important for all of us in the Alliance to think deep and hard about fulfilling our commitments to the Alliance. We do not want free riders. We do spend 2% of GDP on defence in Estonia. Unfortunately, Estonia is rather the exception than the rule.

We have our work cut out for us in this regards. And I would hope that we see a positive movement in defence spending for those Allies who have fallen behind.

[President Ilves: The end of the mission in Afghanistan is not a sign of fatigue](#)