

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, today in Kadriorg presented Class I Order of the Cross of Eagle to Admiral James Stavridis, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, who was in charge of the development of NATO's defence plans for the Baltic States and Poland and who commands the flights made by NATO fighters in the Baltic airspace.

"Class I Order of the Cross of Eagle is our biggest acknowledgement for the work you have done in support of our country and to ensure the powerful protection of our democratic alliance," told the Estonian Head of State when presenting the decoration, as he described the efforts of Admiral Stavridis in developing NATO's defence plans for the Baltic states and Poland as "of determining importance". "The Cross of Eagle is a sign of our gratitude for your support to Estonia and the principles that Estonia holds dear."

According to President Ilves, NATO's current operation in Afghanistan shows that allied forces can operate in a number of places, sustainably and with success.

"However, we also admit that after the ISAF mission is wound up, the world will probably not become a more peaceful place. This is why NATO must always be ready to respond to security problems," emphasised the Estonian Head of State, who expressed his pleasure with the fact that the allied forces are discussing how to maintain NATO's speed and co-operation capabilities even after the completion of the ISAF mission.

All the allies must take cyber security very seriously, President Ilves confirmed, as "The changes that take place in today's cyber world represent a sort of a rapidly wound forward version of the changes that the world had to go through in the century of the industrial revolution. We must understand that cyber security will mean the integrated protection of our society. In other words, cyber security is not just military protection. No country can be a lonely island in cyber space."

Strong and consistent trans-Atlantic connections remain the prerequisite for the successful protection of NATO's borders and these can only be based on solidarity, common goals and the adopting of joint decisions on a regular basis, which have established the strong, uninterrupted connections between the United States, Canada and European allies, President Ilves told.

He expressed his full support for the establishment of a free trade zone between the USA and the European Union, which would bring these two areas that share common democratic values closer to each other than ever before, even closer than military co-operation solely could ever achieve.

According to the Estonian Head of State, the slow yet steady abolishment of distinction between "old" and "new" Europe is notable in NATO.

"As we observe what is described as "New" Europe, we can see that we are doing pretty well and we have turned out to be very good allies. I do hope that when we celebrate our tenth anniversary of joining NATO in April of next year the former distinction lines will have vanished completely," said President Ilves.

Admiral Stavridis emphasised, in his response address, that Estonia is a model ally that lives up to its promises and has increased its defence expenses to two per cent of GDP.

"NATO's Co-operative Centre of Excellence for Cyber Defence is an excellent example of Estonia's contribution to the alliance," he stressed.

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