

At the official reception ceremony in Kadriorg, where the Estonian Defence Forces' guard of honour stood in attendance and the Estonian and Afghan national anthems were played, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves greeted the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai who today arrived on a state visit to Estonia.

At the state dinner given in the honour of President Karzai in Kadriorg Art Museum, President Ilves recalled how he had recently seen a documentary of Kabul in the sixties – an enchanting, peaceful, modern, and flourishing city: "This was a proud Afghanistan with its ancient and high culture that remains hidden from view because of the wars of the past 35 years. I, however, have memories of my own from autumn 2010 when I visited Kabul, Lashkar Gah, and the Wahid patrol base where Estonian soldiers were stationed. The meetings that we had at that time confirmed Afghanistan's wish to become a stable state that is safe for its own citizens as well as its neighbours."

The Estonian head of state quoted a Pashtun proverb, according to which a single bloom does not mean spring has arrived, and continued: "When we talk about Afghanistan's future, we see many hopeful signs. The spread of education and medicine to regions in which both schools and hospitals were before in short supply. A growing economy. New infrastructure projects. Many of yesterday's enemies giving up armed resistance. The readiness and ability of the Afghan army and police to independently control an increasingly large amount of Afghan territory."

Taking over responsibility for security by the Afghan government forces and police is of key importance, President Ilves emphasised, as are of course, next year's free, fair, and transparent presidential elections.

"Estonia knows what it means to rebuild a country. Estonia knows what it's like when you appear to be back to square one and only difficult or very difficult choices lie ahead. We are prepared to share our experience with Afghanistan, if you reckon you could benefit from it," President Ilves confirmed, according to whose words Estonia and its allies feel the responsibility to help Afghanistan become successful and stable, as was agreed at the Chicago summit and the Tokyo conference.

"Afghanistan needs no longer fear that the international community will leave you to face the

difficulties and consequences of war alone after 2014," the Estonian head of state emphasised, also saying: "Responsibility for one's freedom makes each state stronger and more successful. Regardless of international aid and support, the ultimate responsibility for Afghan security and wellbeing lies with Afghanistan itself. Only you yourselves can forge your future, and only you can decide whose and what kind of help and advice you need."

President Ilves drew the outlines of how Estonia sees the future co-operation between our states after 2014. One possibility is to continue to invest in security, which, among other things, would mean training Afghan soldiers and police officers. And, of course, then there is also development co-operation, in which Afghanistan is one of Estonia's most important partners, and in which field Estonia is prepared to focus on education, healthcare, and the advancement of the rule of law. We can also share our know-how and experience when it comes to information technology and e-governance, and also help train diplomats and officials.

"Perhaps Estonia's experience with reform and our expertise in establishing a successful e-state is precisely what could help the central government of mountainous Afghanistan. We would like to be active in areas that Afghanistan feels it needs assistance in, and where Afghanistan would benefit the most in its day-to-day business," the Estonia head of state said.

He also thanked the members of the Estonian Defence Forces who had fought in Afghanistan, and their families: "We have contributed much. It has been everything that we could muster, and more. This has been Estonia's conscious choice. And it demonstrates our dedication to protecting our interests and values."

President Hamid Karzai's two-day state visit is the first visit of an Afghan head of state to Estonia. Tomorrow, Presidents Ilves and Karzai will have an official meeting. The Afghan leader will also have a meeting with the Speaker of the Riigikogu, Ene Ergma, and Prime Minister Andrus Ansip. The meetings will focus on relations between the two states as well as on Afghanistan after 2014, by when the Afghan army and police forces should bear the principal responsibility for security in their country.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department
Phone +372 631 6229