

"Just like Afghanistan requires commitment in building up a safe and secure country, so do we all who are ready to assist, advise and support Afghanistan with this," told the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who held a discussion today in Kadriorg with the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, who arrived in Estonia for a state visit.

"We do not have to feel hopelessness here but rather the opposite; we must feel hope. Afghanistan anno 2001, when ISAF began its security operation, and Afghanistan 2013, as ISAF is preparing to remove its units from the country, are depictions of two very different countries," emphasised the Estonian Head of State. "This serves to confirm that the presence of Estonia and our allies in Afghanistan has not been futile. Our sacrifices in Afghanistan have also served to defend Estonia's security."

President Ilves characterised the fact that ISAF is now about to transfer responsibility for security in Afghanistan to its own army and police forces as positive. Further military co-operation should now be regulated by agreements between Afghanistan and NATO.

"We trust in the will of Afghanistan and we believe in your ability to ensure the security and development of civil society in your country. Transparent and honest elections, which we expect to take place next year, are important. Internal reconciliation in Afghanistan is inevitable in order for the former and current enemies of the central government to give up fighting. The continued development of education, health, economy – everything that can be described as the construction of a state and normal civil society – is inevitable. And, of course, we must not forget about regional co-operation to enhance stability and security," told the Estonian Head of State.

"The international community, the European Union and NATO among others, will not abandon Afghanistan if it wants our assistance and support," confirmed President Ilves. According to him, the co-operation between Estonia and Afghanistan will become more and more focused on civil projects.

"The use of information technology and e-governance – these represent some of the strengths and experiences of Estonia, which we can share. We are willing, together with your experts, to create suitable e-solutions, including in the sphere of e-health, for Afghanistan. Co-operation between Tallinn University and the University of Kabul for the development of master degree

programmes in the sphere of IT. A study programme for your diplomats in the Estonian School of Diplomacy. The training and advising of the police officers and rescue workers of Afghanistan. This is what we already do, also via EUPOL. We are definitely ready to participate in a further training mission of NATO, if this is considered important by Kabul. Sounding out possible economic relationships and then, perhaps, also their development in reality," said President Ilves, in listing some of the current or future spheres for co-operation between Estonia and Afghanistan.

When speaking of NATO's role in Afghanistan, the Estonian Head of State assured that the alliance has proven itself to be a strong military organisation that can operate far away from home.

"The experience with Afghanistan has also shown a need for a new NATO that would be a match for the challenges and threats of the 21st century. This is something that we need to think about and deal with today," stated President Ilves.

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