

"I am delighted to be back in Lithuania – an ally, partner and friend of Estonia. I am sure that this state visit will reaffirm our close ties and shared views," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who arrived in Lithuania today for a three-day state visit.

"Estonia and Lithuania are both among the responsible and common rule-abiding European Union members. This has helped us to overcome the economic crisis. Estonia is certain that this very same sense of responsibility will also ensure Lithuania's accession to the euro area. On this issue, we are your staunch supporter as well as adviser, if you wish us to be," said the Estonian Head of State, who met the President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė, this afternoon.

He recalled the Lithuanian female climber Edita Uksaitė Nichols, who reached the summit of the world's highest mountain, Mount Everest, in the early hours of 22 May – after a month and a half of acclimatisation, training and waiting in the icy air of the base camp.

"Her success stemmed from good preparation, resilience, patience and perseverance. These are the same qualities that we need for promoting mutual cooperation in the Baltic/Nordic region and for the success of important projects," President Ilves stressed.

He added that it is not just about economic efficiency, but also about improving regional security and stability, when it comes to modern transport links to the rest of Europe: the high-speed railway Rail Baltica that starts from Finland and requires the establishment of a joint enterprise within this year, and of course the Via Baltica road, the repair of which should be our regular concern.

"It is the success of our joint projects that serves as a real test of Baltic cooperation in the 21st century," said President Ilves.

The Estonian Head of State also drew attention to the region's energy security and energy supply independent of non-EU providers.

"Estonia will be a valuable ally for Lithuania in the second half of this year, when Lithuania becomes the first Baltic state to hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union," said President Ilves. "All of Lithuania's priorities are also very important for Estonia – energy security, Eastern Partnership, securing the external EU borders, and macro-regional strategies, including the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region."

With regard to the Eastern Partnership, the Estonian Head of State noted that it is in the interests of the European Union to have democratic countries at its borders; democracy and economic success are also in the interests of these countries themselves.

President Ilves recalled visiting the biggest training exercise "Kevadtorm" (Spring Storm) of the Estonian Defence Forces about ten days ago and meeting the Lithuanian scout patrol unit there. "They are good soldiers," commended the Estonian Head of State.

"The fact that NATO allies Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the UK, USA and Belgium took part in the training exercise together with Estonian conscripts shows that our hard security is protected better than ever before," said President Ilves. "We must continue to contribute to it – both at home and on foreign missions, even after the conclusion of Estonia's and Lithuania's shared Afghan operation. This also requires an understanding of new threats, which certainly concern cyber defence and cyber security."

The President of Lithuania will host a state dinner in honour of her Estonian colleague this evening.

Tomorrow, President Ilves will deliver a speech at the plenary assembly of the Parliament of Lithuania, meet Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius, and open an Estonian-Lithuanian business seminar together with the Lithuanian Head of State Dalia Grybauskaitė; the two Presidents will also visit the Republic of Užupis, a distinctive neighbourhood in Vilnius that came into being at the initiative of the third sector. On Wednesday, the Estonian Head of State will travel to Klaipėda to make a tour around the shipbuilding and repair yard of BLRT Group.

Evelin Ilves will visit the Oncology and Haematology Department of Vilnius Children's Hospital, the manufacturer of eco-friendly products BLOK Laboratorija, and the Palanga Rehabilitation Centre.

The official delegation accompanying President Ilves on the state visit includes the President of the Bank of Estonia Ardo Hansson, Minister of Economic Affairs and Communication Juhan Parts, Minister of Defence Urmas Reinsalu, Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, Major General Riho Terras, Professors Birute Klaas-Lang and Rein Raud, and President of the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Tooman Luman.

President Ilves will also be accompanied by a solid business delegation consisting of 37 business people. Lithuania has already been at the forefront of the major target countries of Estonian direct investments for some time; Lithuanian direct investments have also increased substantially.

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