

"Estonia and Bulgaria, two border states of the European Union, are allies that think and act similarly in issues important to Europe – and during the financial crisis we both demonstrated a sense of responsibility which could serve as a model for many," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who today hosted Rosen Plevneliev, the President of Bulgaria, on his official visit to Estonia.

At the meeting, President Ilves stressed the importance of e solutions, e government and cyber security, assuring his counterpart of Estonia's readiness to comprehensively participate in the efforts of Bulgaria in the field of information communication technology.

"We are talking about cooperation rather than assistance," the Estonian Head of State said, urging Bulgaria to join the NATO cyber defence centre in Tallinn.

Cooperation and mutual consultation will also characterise the activities of Estonia and Bulgaria in the European Union, where the two countries will hold the presidency in 2018.

President Ilves assured continued support for Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen area and for its desire to join the OECD, saying: "Your homework has been exemplary."

Presidents Ilves and Plevneliev stressed the importance of further and deeper integration of the Western Balkans with the European Union, specifically recognising Serbia's current European policy.

"Keeping in mind peace and security in the Balkans as a region with a complex history, it is essential that the European Union candidate state knows that that the door to the European Union is open to it, provided it continues to implement political and economic reforms," President Ilves said.

The Heads of State also emphasised that threatening the European Union's Eastern Partnership countries with economic or commercial measures to force a future outside of

Europe on them was unacceptable.

"This is extortion – something we, like the European Union as a whole, will not accept," President Ilves said. "I believe that the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius will reaffirm the desire and willingness of the European Union to pursue even closer cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia by signing or initialling respective agreements with them. We will not leave these countries on their own."

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