

The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian presidents, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Andris Bērziņš and Dalia Grybauskaitė, met today at Bīriņi Castle near Riga. One of the main issues on the agenda was the Eastern Partnership summit of the European Union, which takes place in Vilnius in late November.

"Estonia still feels that the association and free trade agreement with Ukraine should be signed there as well as similar agreements initialled with Moldova and Georgia," President Ilves asserted.

"However, most of all, we wait for Ukraine to fulfil the promises given to the European Union and take care of their homework before the summit," the Estonian Head of State added. "All parties must make an effort prior to the Eastern Partnership summit, including the European Union that has encouraged the Eastern Partners to take more steps towards Europe. Now it is also our responsibility."

The European Union is not forcing any choices concerning how and with whom to organise a state's future on anyone, President Ilves stressed.

"However, if our neighbours choose democracy, rule of law, market economy and Europe, then the European Union is a strong partner, and a good ally for them," he said. "The same applies to our relations with each other and, this way, we stand unequivocally with Lithuania, as the current president of the European Union and the organiser of the Eastern Partnership summit, which has been faced with pressure similar to economic sanctions. This kind of pressure is not acceptable."

According to the Estonian Head of State, Latvia joining the euro area at the beginning of next year is also important: "It is a stamp of quality on the state's finance, its adaptability and competitiveness. It is a recognition for Latvia - not just to the Latvian government or parliament but to all Latvian people who have contributed to the state's success."

For this reason, the meeting at Bīriņi Castle was also attended by the President of the Eurogroup, the Dutch Minister of Finance Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who gave an overview of the

situation in the euro area and developments linked to the banking union.

President Ilves noted that the euro area, which Latvia is about to join, is better equipped to deal with crises than a few years ago; there is more responsibility, meeting joint responsibilities and honouring agreements in general.

He expressed hope that we can soon welcome Lithuania to the euro area, too, because: "It makes all the Baltic states and this entire region of the European Union stronger."

According to the Estonian Head of State, the Baltic states must pick up the pace and increase their efforts to complete the modern high-speed railway Rail Baltica, which is currently the most visible and tangible opportunity for our co-operation. However, the discussions on founding the joint company required for Rail Baltica are progressing too slowly, even though it has been agreed to establish it by early 2014.

"On the one hand, Rail Baltica is the connection with Europe for the Baltic states, which is also linked to Finland in the north and Poland in the south," President Ilves said. "All this together is like a bloodstream, essential not to us alone but also to larger states, encouraging new investments, industrial development, job creation, social welfare and economic growth."

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