

In his message sent on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the Estonian Defence Forces, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves made an appeal to think about what the defence forces and national defence should look like in the next decades.

"What kind of structure, capabilities and emphases are needed in our national defence in 10, 15, 20 years? Which threats will we be facing and with which allies should we work more closely? What kind of leaders do we need and how should we train them already today? In what way do we ensure continuity essential to maturity, while avoiding conformity and lack of ambition?" President Ilves said, outlining the most important questions. "Let us think about this because the choices of today make up much of the reality of tomorrow."

He recalled the end of our ten-year mission in Afghanistan in the summer of 2014: "Estonia has already achieved a great deal over there; however, even more has been out of our control. Already in a few months, when Camp Bastion will have closed its doors, we must pay more attention to domestic affairs - bolster what is good and change what is not good yet. We do have both."

As the supreme leader of national defence, President Ilves wishes that the attitude in the vein of "Let's do it!" was more prevalent among the defence forces.

"True, compared to several other areas, this has been a relative strength of the field of national defence; however, there should be even more initiative, thinking outside the box and action and daring in the positive sense of the word. Just as a free country is never finished, so the defence forces can never be finished. I want to see more zeal and energy, but also critical thinking and a broader view," the Head of State told the defence forces.

"In addition, there is something on my mind, which can seem trivial but is not. Namely, that the defence forces would place a higher value on the physical fitness of all soldiers. I am regularly told by conscripts, as well as professionals in active service, that daily physical activity is undervalued. I am not talking about the tests of general physical abilities taken once or twice a year, but a general athletic attitude. In a society where the health characteristics of men are worrying, the officers should set an example and lead the way," President Ilves noted.

He again thanked the soldiers who had taken part in dangerous foreign missions, recognising their bravery, professionalism and patriotism, and he congratulated the entire defence forces and wished them confidence and resilience.

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