

Dear members of the Defence Forces,
Family members,
Major Kruusmann and captain Loik,

As the President of Estonia, and the Supreme Commander of the National Defence Forces, but also simply as an Estonian citizen, it is important to me to meet the members of our Defence Forces before they leave for their mission in Afghanistan.

My thanks and respect belong to you and your loved ones. I value and appreciate your decision – to participate as professional soldiers in a NATO-led operation in Afghanistan. To be brave, resolute, daring, loyal, and caring. There isn't the least reason to doubt that your pre-mission training has been intensive, professional, and successful. That your gear and weaponry are the best our Defence Forces can provide specifically for the Afghan mission. For two-thirds of you this is your first ever mission abroad. For this reason, I hope that in the past couple of months you have understood how important it is to trust your more seasoned brothers-in-arms, and to learn from their experience.

Compared to previous Estonian infantry companies, your task in Afghanistan is different. You will not be permanently stationed in patrol bases and check-points, but instead you will probably spend most of your time in Camp Bastion as a rapid response unit on constant alert.

But maybe not, because we do not know exactly what the situation will be like in Afghanistan during the next six months.

We, however, do know that your mission will not be easy. No such mission is.

In accordance with international agreements with the Afghan government, from autumn, the local police and national army will take over responsibility for all security operations across the whole country.

Which means that in its current form the war that began in 2001 is nearing its end.

But a soldier must be prepared to wait as well as to go into battle unexpectedly after a long wait. You must be ready for everything: getting used to the routine, at the same time preserving your combat-readiness in order to successfully and securely repulse rebel attacks.

You are the next to last infantry company to leave for the ISAF mission. In around a year's time, in spring 2014, Estonia will bring back its company from Afghanistan because NATO's ISAF operation will come to an end by the close of 2014. Unfortunately, this does not mean that there will no longer be any wars. And for this reason, the foreign operations of the Estonian Defence Forces will also not end.

Dear friends,

Estonian soldiers in Afghanistan are praised both in Helmand province and at NATO's headquarters in Brussels. I have heard acclaim from NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen and from admiral Stavridis, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. You have also been praised by the chief of Task Force Helmand who underlined ESTCOY's professionalism and excellent mobility.

The experience of co-operation and of battle alongside other allied forces that you will gain from Afghanistan is essential for Estonia's security more generally.

Dear members of the Defence Forces,

Estonia leaves no-one behind on the battle field. Not when under fire in Afghanistan, nor later at home. It is the common concern of the Ministry of Defence, of the Defence Forces, and more broadly of society as a whole to support a veteran and his family before going to war, during the war and after the war. So that you may all be guaranteed modern and professional support that takes into account the individual needs of each soldier. That no-one who has fought for Estonia's interests may feel abandoned by Estonia.

My message will be the same tonight at the Carolin Illenzeer Fond's fund-raising dinner in support of those who have fallen or have been injured in battle, and in support of their children.

The same message will underline tomorrow's veterans day, which Estonia is celebrating for the first time.

Dear friends,

I am delighted that so many of your loved ones have come here. This shows that they support you and that you have a strong, personal home front. Each soldier knows how important the support of one's family and loved ones is when you're on the battlefield.

I wish your loved ones patience and understanding in order to support you! To you, brave members of the Defence Forces, I wish strength, wisdom, tenacity, and good luck!

Until we meet again. Thank you.