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Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves participated in the Munich Security Conference in Germany, one of the most influential annual European security and foreign policy conferences. The 47th Munich Security Conference (MSC) took place from Feb. 4-6, bringing together senior figures from around the world to engage in European and transatlantic security.

The annual meeting, known as the "Davos of security policy," discussed new and traditional challenges facing world security, such as the financial crisis, cyber war, transatlantic security, NATO-Russia relations, non-proliferation of mass destruction arms, Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Big names opening up the conference, and starting off discussion on the impact of the financial crisis on world stability, included World Bank President Robert Zoellick, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble and U.S. investor George Soros.

At the start of the conference, German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and British Foreign Secretary William Hague spoke out, pointing to the need for security cooperation in times of shrinking defense budgets. The German defense minister detailed how the German army is becoming smaller, more professional and more capable.

President Ilves highlighted the new threats of the 21st century with senior officials, acknowledged experts, and analysts – from the United States to Kazakhstan – focusing largely on cyber defense issues and the imperative need for international cooperation in this sphere.

At a Feb. 5 meeting, President Ilves facilitated a discussion which focused on arms control. "This is an historical day, as today, here in Munich, the United States of America and Russia

exchanged the letters of ratification of the START memorandum, which restricts the use of strategic nuclear weapons," Ilves said. He stated that the START only marks the beginning in the sphere of arms control.

"Some progress is also required in the sphere of tactical nuclear weapons and conventional weapons," the Estonian head of state emphasized. "The current situation, in which there is no balance with regard to tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and the CFE conventional arms control memorandum, is not working and creates instability and will not contribute to real security," he noted.

Apart from issues concerning traditional arms control, the options for restricting the spread of nuclear weapons to Iran and measures to be taken with respect to North Korea, which already possesses such weapons, were also discussed.

President Ilves also emphasized the need for more efficient international cooperation in the sphere of controlling and anticipating cyber threats. He said, in describing Estonia's experiences in the sphere of cyber defense and cyber attacks, which were launched against the country in spring 2007, that the organizers of attacks often cannot be identified by, so to say, documentary means, as the computers used are often located outside the country that supported the attack.

"Indirectly, this can be described as a public private partnership," President Ilves stated, adding that "As we think about the future military and other conflicts, we must inevitably take cyber issues into consideration and prepare ourselves for situations where the regular means for communicating information – not just national defense systems, but also media and banking – are no longer working."

He suggested that Internet attacks may ultimately be dangerous for the attackers themselves, as one day, the respective technologies will become available to the countries attacked.

Conference Chairman Wolfgang Ischinger said he hoped this year's meeting would be a milestone on the way to a new and comprehensive Euro-Atlantic security community. "I have high hopes for us to be able to show that the course has been set towards cooperation and the use of new opportunities so that we may design a coherent and even more comprehensive security community based on the results of the Lisbon NATO summit," he said.

His comments echoed those of Russian ambassador to Germany Vladimir Grinin, who recently said there was now a unique opportunity to create a common Euro-Atlantic security community. "We owe this to the generations to come," he said, adding the recent progress was increasing the pressure of this debt.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov exchanged instruments of ratification for the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, bringing the new START treaty between the United States and Russia into force.

A high-level quartet of Middle East mediators meeting was also held on the sidelines of the MSC, attended by Ban Ki-moon, Clinton, Lavrov and EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy Catherine Ashton. The quartet discussed ways to break the current impasse between Israel and the Palestinians and revive bilateral talks. The current crises in Egypt and some other Arab countries were discussed as well.

British Prime Minister David Cameron at the conference stressed that Europe must "stamp out intolerance of Western values" within its own Muslim communities and far-right groups if it is to defeat the roots of terrorism, reports AP. He said that European governments have been too tolerant of some sectors of society that publicly oppose democracy or reject equal rights for all, and that Britain had found that many convicted terrorists had initially been influenced by so-called "nonviolent extremists" - people who aren't involved in encouraging plots, but denounce Western politics and culture - before going on to carry out violence.

"We won't defeat terrorism simply by the actions we take outside our borders. Europe needs to wake up to what is happening in our own countries," Cameron told the conference.

Both Britain and Germany have had noisy domestic debates about the impact of immigration, and the difficulties of integrating some religious communities, or those who struggle with the language of their new home.

In an attack on Britain's previous government, Cameron said authorities there had been too hesitant to intervene when some sectors of society espoused abhorrent views. "We have even

tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values," Cameron said. "We have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream."

Cameron said a culture of tolerance had allowed both Islamic extremists, and far-right extremists, to build support for their causes. "We've been too cautious, frankly even fearful, to stand up to them," he warned.

Some European allies have criticized Britain for harboring hardline Islamic clerics and failing to clamp down on mosques that promote a perverted view of Islam. Several terrorists involved in attacks or attempted plots in the U.S., Sweden, Denmark and Norway over the last two years have had links to Britain, or British-based clerics. "If we are to defeat this threat, I believe it's time to turn the page on the failed policies of the past," promoted Cameron. "Instead of ignoring this extremist ideology, we - as governments and societies - have got to confront it, in all its forms."

In his speech "Building security in an age of austerity," Rasmussen reiterated that: "What is less good news is that we continue to face the effects of the financial crisis. And this years' conference focuses on dealing with a major challenge – how to build security in an age of austerity." Responding to allegations that by holding a Strategic Defense and Security Review, Britain is somehow retreating from an activist role in the world, Cameron had to remind the audience that "Britain will continue to meet the NATO two percent target for defense spending. We still have the fourth largest military budget in the world. And at the same time, we are putting that money to better use, focusing on conflict prevention and building a much more flexible army."

Host of the conference, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, said the Middle East protests resemble the incidents that ended communism in Eastern Europe. Merkel said Egypt urgently needed a peaceful change.

Clinton said that reforms would empower Arab countries, improve prosperity, and curb the tendency for extremism. She cautioned that if the status quo in Arab countries is preserved, the gap between the people and governments could grow bigger.

The U.S. Secretary of State had a one-hour long meeting with Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish minister of Foreign Affairs. In the meeting the sides agreed upon following topics: Egyptian state organs should be protected, the military and people should not clash, if change is to take place, it should happen immediately. The recent situation in Iraq was also evaluated.

According to British Ambassador to Germany, Simon McDonald, the Munich Security Conference has established itself as the premier fixture on the security policy calendar. "This year's conference – the 47th – is my third, but my first as British Ambassador to Germany. I know from personal experience that the Conference regularly attracts world leaders. It is a tribute to the organizers that this year 16 heads of state or government and more than 40 Foreign and Defense Ministers will take part.

The MSC, formerly known as the Munich Conference on Security Policy, was founded in 1962 by German publisher Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin. The annual forum focuses on major thorny issues facing the world today.

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