

Editing deadline is 15.12.2025

DECLARATION 2025

"The impact and effectiveness of development cooperation on European & Global security in time of turbulence"

The Security & Civil Society Conference 2025 was a three-day event (5th, 6th and 7th December 2025) in Toila, Estonia with an intensive programme of high-level discussions, working groups, and development of the civil society and international stakeholders appeal to the international community.

The event gathered experts, development cooperation actors, policymakers, civil society organizations, youth, researchers, governmental institutions and community leaders from Europe, Middle East, North Africa, Central and West Africa and beyond to discuss critical issues surrounding development cooperation, humanitarian aid, existing crises and community resilience.

The conference was an opportunity to reaffirm the significance of the importance of the work of the European Union and other international and national organizations achieving a safer, greener, socially sustainable and digitally integrated community. The conference connected development aid organisations, regional networks of practitioners, policymakers, civil society organisations, analysts, politicians, representatives, academics, media and donors from Europe and actors of the African, Euro-Mediterranean regions and beyond.

The key themes of the conference were:

- Global challenges and their implications for Estonia and Europe.
- Development policy and humanitarian aid in 2025: Needs, challenges and expectations.
- The future of development cooperation in turbulent times and possible scenarios.
- The role of local governments and civil society organisations in building resilient societies.

The discussions of global challenges and their implications for Estonia and Europe showed a situation of more crises and less funding for international cooperation from the EU and OECD and also less funding for bilateral cooperation. This new geopolitical situation has led to a decrease in foreign development aid to respond to domestic needs.

- **EU Global Gateway** is EU's instrument for international cooperation. It reflects the new way EU approaches external action by focusing on the needs of partner countries while ensuring of the EU strategic interests.
- The discussions showed the need for a broader focus of development aid than just money. It is important to pay attention to the needs of the local population and focus on developing sustainable solutions.
- Furthermore, there is a need for coordination between the different development cooperation programs and actors so they complement each other's efforts
- Presentations of experiences from local programs show that local people can develop their own solutions that are multifaceted and thereby more robust because the solutions pay more attention to the local conditions.
- The need for media and digital literacy was stressed. Well educated citizens are more resilient, more aware, more confident and less likely to allow fear and insecurity to drive their actions and decisions.
- Civil society organizations are an essential component in development aid strategies as they act as first responders, radar and alarm system. However, their work is challenged by small and fragmented funding, which limits their outreach.
- The need for youth and gender inclusion and empowerment was stressed.
- The UN Agenda 2030 must be kept alive but its relevance needs to be increased by mainstreaming sustainability into everyday work. Progress assessment should move beyond measuring economic growth to include development criteria. Agenda 2030 activities must also be carried out in a cooperative approach engaging citizens and the private sector.
- In order to increase the strategic autonomy of regions, the dependency of import of critical raw materials should be decreased through more sustainable mining ensuring local development and by prolonging the lifetime of products through better design and cheaper repair.

Done in Toila, Estonia, on December 7th, 2025