

By Antti Vilpponen

On Wednesday, some 100+ people met in Estonia to help startups develop their businesses further in a Seedcamp Tallinn event. Seedcamp's Carlos Eduardo Espinal said that it is about time the organisation came to Estonia as 6 of their investments are from just Estonia and even more from Eastern Europe. I joined the event as an observer, but also as a mentor to give my feedback to the companies.

I find myself at the venue, Tallinn's IT College, around 10 and immediately begin to wonder what makes this place so special that they have two secret service type guys directing traffic in the parking lot.

As I walk into the auditorium, I find it packed with only a few vacant seats here and there. A really good crowd, not only in numbers, but also in terms of their background and experience.

Just as I open my laptop, Espinal welcomes everyone to the event and goes through interesting figures of Seedcamp as a program and what they have achieved. 63 investments in more than 20 countries and six of those investments are to Estonian companies.

As we are expecting to move forward with the program Espinal asks everyone to stand up and join him in welcoming Estonia's President Toomas Hendrik Ilves. Wow. This is quite a contrast to what I've been used to from politicians.

President Ilves started his quick talk by mentioning Estonia is #1 in internet freedom and welcomes USA to join the race, clearly playing around with the US protectionist plans to control internet more closely.

Jokes aside, President Ilves clearly seemed to understand where a small country, like Estonia, is able to build its growth from - companies working with innovative products and services. A

recent reminder of this is naturally Skype. People must be allowed to tinker here and there with lots of unattractive results, something that others might label as failure, to really find the right combination of problem-solution and market need.

GrabCAD has certainly made their pitch to President Ilves in an inspiring way as he began on stage to pitch the company and how well they are doing in US - having already signed up 10% of the world's mechanical engineers to their service.

When was the last time you heard a president pitch a small, quite an insignificant company even on an Estonian scale, in the hopes that it will one day make it big and bring more growth home?

The clear message President Ilves was trying to put forward on stage was that we need this spirit of doing things and pushing forward and not getting comfortable with status quo. President Ilves made a clear statement also on Europe, where he sees too much backward politics that don't embrace the new opportunities out there.

He finished off, by telling entrepreneurs to keep pushing forward even in the face of nay-sayers - otherwise we will fall into stagnation as a country.

This is exactly the reason I have tremendous appreciation and respect towards Estonia and how they steer their ship in the global economy.

Back to the startups though.

There were 20 companies (see here for the complete list) who were selected to pitch on stage on their products and solutions. Some were clearly quite clueless on where they should go where as others asked for pretty direct advice on go-to-market approaches and pricing models, for example. After the pitches, a quick coffee break enabled more networking before a panel discussion moderated by Transferwise's Taavet Hinrikus.

The afternoon was reserved for direct mentors-to-startup sessions where mentors were able to give advice to startups on specific issues that they wanted help with. Each set of mentors saw at least six companies during the afternoon.

As the day turned towards evening, a bus was outside waiting to take the crowd to F-Hoone, a stylish local bar/restaurant in the middle of an old warehouse district. I had to leave the place with Hammerkit's Mark Sorsa-Leslie around 8 to catch our boat back to Helsinki. I got home around 23.30 exhausted, but excited to realise that the Nordics and Baltics are really moving forward by leaps and bounds.

What a day it was, thanks to Seedcamp for letting me be part of it!

Original article on the Arctic Startup [webpage](#) .