

TOOMAS HENDRIK ILVES  
President of the Republic of Estonia  
(Estonia)  
[@IlvesToomas](#)

## Expanding and Defending Civic Life On-Line

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves is a global thought leader on democracy in the digital age. Under his leadership, Estonia, also known as "E-stonia", has continued to be a pioneer in using technology to make government service delivery more effective and citizen-friendly. In 2007, Estonia became the first country to allow online voting in a general election; a quarter of the electorate now votes online. A full 95% of Estonians file tax returns online, and citizens also have easy Internet access to their medical and dental records. Its [e-Governance Academy](#) shares expertise and knowledge on e-governance throughout the world. Having led his country through a period of concerted cyber attacks, President Ilves is also recognized as a leader on cyber security and on defense against those who are seeking to use technology to restrict freedom. As he has noted, "George Orwell could have never imagined all the possible methods of repression offered by modern technology. Therefore, it is even more important for democratic countries to defend freedom, openness and transparency both on the internet and in our 'offline' lives."

## Biography

Toomas Hendrik Ilves was born on December 26, 1953, in Stockholm. He graduated from Columbia University in New York City in 1976 and received his Master's degree in Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1978.

Upon graduation, Mr. Ilves worked as a teacher and researcher at Columbia University and at the Open Education Center in Englewood, New Jersey. Since 1984 he worked at the office of Radio Free Europe in Munich, Germany.

From 1993 to 1996 Toomas Hendrik Ilves served in Washington as the Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia to the United States of America, Canada and Mexico. From 1996 to 1998 and 1998-2002, he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia.

From 2002 to 2004, Mr. Ilves was a Member of the Estonian Parliament; in 2004 he was elected a Member of the European Parliament. He was elected President of the Republic of Estonia in 2006 and re-elected for a second term in 2011.

During his presidency Toomas Hendrik Ilves has been appointed to serve in several high positions in the field of ICT. He served as Chairman of the EU Task Force on eHealth from May 2011 to May 2012, and since November 2012 he is Chairman of the European Cloud Computing Steering Board at the invitation of the European Commission. He has spoken and written extensively at international forums on e-government and cyber security.

President Ilves has published many essays and articles in Estonian and English. His books include essay collections in Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Hungarian and Russian.

Original article on the NDI [webpage](#) .

NDI's W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award honors individuals and organizations that have exhibited a sustained commitment to democracy and human rights, and have demonstrated leadership, integrity and courage in their dedication to democratic values and practices. This year, the award is going to the Civic Innovator, in recognition of an emerging class of creative and entrepreneurial individuals who are using technology to help advance and improve democracy in the digital age. The award will be given to 21 leading civic innovators, whose work exemplifies the range and diversity of this movement. These civic activists, entrepreneurs, and government and elected officials are at work all over the world, innovating to improve the responsiveness and transparency of government institutions and to expand opportunities for democratic participation.