

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, today opened the symposium of the Estonia's Friends International Meeting, "Quo vadis, Estonia?", in the White Hall of the Riigikogu; this year, the event focuses on digital identity. In his opening address, the Head of State focused on the deficiencies of the common European digital market and identity issues on the Internet.

"The problem with the European Union is that it involves 28 digital markets with different taxation systems. The member states must realise that Europe will lose its competitive edge unless we put some effort into creating a common digital market," emphasised the Head of State, stating that otherwise the gap between Europe and the United States of America and Asia will start to broaden. The Head of State stressed that although it is always more convenient to stick to the old system, all the European Union member states would benefit from the common digital market. "However, political commitment will be required to solve the problems," he added.

In his address, President Ilves also introduced the principles behind Estonia's e-services and e-governance. The Head of State introduced the solutions that Estonia uses to identify its citizens on the Internet and the main digital services, such as digital signature, digital prescriptions and tax returns. According to the President, the state would be unable to offer its citizens such services unless the citizens have trust in the state.

The second presenter of the symposium was Balaji S. Srinivasan, the partner of Andreessen Horowitz, CEO of bitcoin startup 21 Inc. According to Srinivasan, the Internet is increasingly taking over the services earlier offered by governments, and the importance of states is in decline. Srinivasan added that people communicate on the Internet without borders and spend more and more time in a virtual world; in the future, they may choose the country in which they would like to live and that will match their values. According to Srinivasan, the e-residency programme of Estonia is highly smart and up-to-date within this context.

The traditional meeting of Estonia's friends was opened yesterday by the seminar "Estonia – the country where stuff happens first", hosted by Entepriise Estonia, and was continued in the evening by a traditional concert by the Estonian Symphonic Orchestra, "Big Summer Meeting. Friends", with conductor Neeme Järvi. Tonight, friends of Estonia will meet with the Prime Minister, Taavi Rõivas, and take part in a concert-reception at Oandu watermill, Lahemaa, where singer Tõnis Mägi will perform.

This year, more than 150 entrepreneurs, politicians and opinion leaders from more than 24 countries attend the meeting, including the US Department of State Coordinator for Cyber Issues, Christopher M. Painter; MP Gordon Marsden from the United Kingdom; Mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti, and the board of the Mitsubishi corporation.

The idea to have an international meeting of friends of Estonia was conceived in 2010. The event is organised to thank and recognize business, political and cultural figures whose actions and advice have helped Estonia to become a truly European country with a dynamic economy and thriving culture. The event may have a key role in bringing foreign investments to Estonia.

Office of the President
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