

"The European Union must put some serious effort into creating a more favourable economic environment for technology-intensive companies. We are currently witnessing a brain drain to the US, which has a single digital market across all states; in effect, the US is offering a business sector with a bigger reach and better opportunities. According to European Commission estimates, Europe will lose approximately 340 billion euros per year as a consequence of its fragmented digital market," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Brussels at a digital society panel of a high-level seminar, which was organised by the Friends of Europe think-tank.

According to President Ilves, promising European start-up companies that succeed in getting the required venture capital avail of the first opportunity to take their business to the USA market. "The reason is simple – the European Union has never been able to ensure the cross-border movement of e-services, and IT-based service companies must adopt and adapt to 28 different taxation, consumer protection and copyright regimes," stated the Head of State. "For them, it is far more beneficial to move to the United States where business enjoys much better conditions and a single market," he added.

According to a member of the European Parliament, Marietje Schaake, who gave a presentation at the very same panel as President Ilves, it is very complicated to suggest a solution for the traditional democratic decision-making process to catch up with rapid technological development and the resultant changes within society. "One of the options would be to pay more attention to education and research activities in order to use the available tools for the purpose of enhancing Europe's readiness to move in tandem with digital development," commented Schaake.

The Estonian Head of State expressed his hope that the European Commission would make fast progress towards the conclusion of the EU-US trade agreement to abolish customs duties and move towards either mutual recognition of product standards or development of Trans-Atlantic standards.

Former NASA scientist, France Cordova, member of the European Parliament, Marietje Schaake, Head of Google's Cultural Institute, Amit Sood, and the CEO of NewsMonkey, Wouter Verschelden, debated the digital society issues along with President Ilves.

The first President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, the first Vice President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, former Prime Minister of Italy, Mario Monti, and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carl Bildt, along with many business leaders, journalists and cultural figures took part in the seminar organised by Friends of Europe to analyse the problems currently faced by Europe. More additional information at: <http://www.friendsofeurope.org>

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