

The global spread of populism is a threat for societies that used to rely on facts when making decisions, emphasised President Toomas Hendrik at today's XXI Open Society Forum, "Russia in Europe: What Does the Future Hold?".

Propaganda, the distribution of falsified information and political culture were the issues discussed by President Ilves and Lilia Shevtsova, an expert from the Chatham House international affairs think tank. The Estonian Head of State admitted that Russian propaganda was not the only problem for us today. "We are witnessing the emergence of extreme political forces, populism and a media based on the fast dissemination of information, which regrettably results in limited control of the facts," said President Ilves.

"We live in an era characterised by frequent failure to listen to scientists and believe in facts. Liberal democratic countries offer an abundance of examples, such as Brexit or the US presidential elections. In both cases, the development of technology, social media and other virtual media channels have combined to disseminate misinformation that in turn influences people," President Ilves added.

In his address, President Ilves expressed his concern with non-transparent funding schemes that involve various sectors of the society, suggesting the bribing and funding of political parties as an example. According to the President, transparency can be ensured by digital society.

"Weak democracy and corrupt society walk hand in hand and anonymous cash definitely serves its purpose as an amplifier of corruption. Transparent monetary transactions are the only tools available to fight corruption. This idea is highly radical, indeed, but could be ensured by the abolition of cash and traceable money transfers," added the President.

The second part of the forum focused on this year's elections to the Russian Duma. Lilia Shevtsova, Lyubov Sobol, a lawyer from the Anti-corruption Foundation, journalist Jevgeni Kissel'ov and journalist and writer Arkadi Babchenko took part in the discussion. The moderator was freelance journalist, Artemi Troitsky.

Office of the President
Public Relations Department