

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is on a working visit to the United States, gave a lecture yesterday about Estonia's success story at the University of South Florida in Tampa. President Ilves gave the audience a short overview of the country's history, the consequences of the Soviet occupation, and the rapid developments during the last 17 years.

"In 1991, when we had lived exactly one year as a re-independent country, Estonia's GDP per capita was 702 dollars. Based on this indicator, Estonia was among the poorest developing countries," President Ilves said. "In 2007, our GDP per capita already reached 20,300 dollars carrying us past Portugal, which was already a EEC and NATO member when Estonia was still occupied."

According to President Ilves, in 1991, when Estonia's independence was re-established, there was nothing to be done with the structures left behind by the occupation regime. "However, it is said that it is easier to create something new than to reorganize something old. The same principle also applies to Estonia. Starting from zero allowed us to skip some of the stages that were conditions of natural development elsewhere in the world."

"Today, Estonia is one of the most innovative countries in Europe," President Ilves noted. "Ninety-eight percent of banking transactions are made electronically; this year 90% of taxpayers filed their tax returns through the e-tax office; we have e-elections; and all school children have access to computers and the Internet at school."

However, according to President Ilves, a well-Internetized country must also take new risks into account. "In May of last year, Estonia was the victim of a massive cyberattack," the Head of State said. "Luckily we were well-prepared—e-elections had recently taken place, for which the government had already considered the possibility of certain problems and attacks."

"Actually, the cyberattacks backfired on the attackers—today a NATO Cyber Defence Center operates in Tallinn, which deals with these types of crimes," President Ilves said.

After the lecture, the Estonian Head of State answered the audience's questions on cybersecurity, the uses of ID-cards, Estonian participation in NATO military operations, the

Estonian election system, and Estonia's role in the European Union.

President Ilves will complete his visit to the United States today with a visit to United States Central Command. The Estonian Head of State will arrive back in Estonia on Wednesday, April 23rd.

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