

In Kadriorg this evening, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves gave a formal dinner for U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, who arrived in Tallinn in connection with Estonia joining the United States visa waiver program as of November 17th.

"Estonia joining the visa waiver program confirms Estonia's ability to act, along with the United States and all our partners, on behalf of increasing the security of international travel and, of course, this demonstrates our mutual trust," President Ilves said.

The Estonian Head of State recalled the so-called Tallinn declaration by U.S. President George W. Bush in November 2006 as strong support for Estonia joining the visa waiver program. Last year in Washington President Ilves met with President Bush and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, with whom discussions were also held on the opportunity for Estonian citizens to travel to the United States without visas.

"At that time, we spoke about the visa waiver program as something in the future, but as something that was self-evidently necessary situation between two strong allies," President Ilves said. "I am glad that now—after mutual thorough consultations and the resolution of technical issues—we have arrived this far."

President Ilves acknowledged the effective cooperation in the fields of the interior and justice of the two countries as well as between diplomats that preceded Estonia joining the United States visa waiver program.

"The negotiations and the concluded agreements, for instance, regarding the exchange of information necessary for the prevention of serious crime, only serve one objective, which is a safer and more secure world for our people," the Estonian Head of State said.

President Ilves invoked a broader view of safety and security than usual and focused on the topic of cyber security.

"The abuse of cyberspace is a serious security risk as we have seen with various countries and very close international cooperation and information exchange is the key to the containment of this cross-border threat," the Estonian Head of State stressed. "A good example of this is the NATO Cyber Defense Center operating in Tallinn, where eight countries are currently already participating."

According to President Ilves, the amendment of international law and domestic legislation is important for guaranteeing cyber security, in order to make it possible to pursue cyber criminals and hold them accountable. In addition, the owners of information systems must understand their responsibility for the rational utilization of these systems, the Estonian Head of State said. One must also not forget that international steps to guarantee cyber security must not hinder the opportunity for the unrestricted use of information technology.

Estonian Minister of the Interior Jüri Pihl and Justice Minister Rein Lang also attended the dinner in Kadriorg.

On November 17th Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and South Korea will join the U.S. visa waiver program that is intended for tourists and short-term business trips.

In Estonia, the visa waiver program will apply to Estonian citizens who must have a biometric passport for travel to the United States; an electronic application must also be filled out at least 48 hours before the trip, which will ascertain within a few minutes whether the person is welcome in the U.S. or not.

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