

The President, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who has arrived in Washington for a working visit that will focus on cyber security issues, visited the Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) of the United States of America yesterday afternoon and later in the evening met with its commander, General Keith B. Alexander, who is also the Director of the US National Security Agency (NSA).

International co-operation in the sphere of cyber defence was the main subject discussed at the meeting between President Ilves and General Alexander.

“NATO, as with the European Union Member States, are still operating at a national level when it comes to cyber defence,” admitted the Estonian Head of State.

“Our goal has to be to cope with cyber threats in a collective, reasonable manner as successfully as NATO protects its territory against so-called conventional threats,” President Ilves said. “The NATO Centre of Excellence for Co-operative Cyber Defence in Tallinn and the cyber defence policy that is being currently drafted by the alliance together with the related action plan represent important steps to challenge the sceptics who are afraid to contribute to cyber defence or think that only NATO’s own networks should be protected.”

However, this is a cross-border problem, in which not only military infrastructure but operating the country as a whole stands to be threatened – if we are to consider banking, the availability of media or, for example, the control systems of energy networks – assured the Estonian Head of State.

He gave “a small example, which could inspire the large”, when speaking about cyber defence: close, regular and successful co-operation between the Estonian Criminal Police and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation in fighting cyber crime, involving the FBI sending a representative to take office in Tallinn, in the headquarters of our criminal police.

“This example proves how co-operation can increase mutual success. We need co-operation and success to ensure cyber security both in NATO and the European Union, the Member States of which have already faced politically-motivated cyber attacks,” said the Estonian Head of State.

He recalled that in certain situations we experience a unique public private partnership, where the interests of some governments and the activities of hackers from the same country work together towards weakening other countries.

“We can oppose this through a strong public private partnership of our own, which means co-operation between the state, IT sector undertakings and good citizens,” President Ilves emphasised. “The cyber defence alliance, which was recently established in Estonia, represents one opportunity for directing co-operation between the state and volunteers – pre-emptively – at enhancing our own cyber security.”

Yesterday afternoon in the Estonian Embassy in Washington, President Ilves handed a Class III Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana to Mr. Michael Turner Evanoff. Mr. Evanoff is a former security leader of NATO’s Head Office and a current high-ranking official in the Foreign Affairs Department of the United States of America. On the eve of this year’s Independence Day, he was awarded a decoration of the Republic of Estonia for his considerable contribution to safeguarding Estonia’s security as a NATO member state and for the successful co-ordination of the efforts of the alliance in the sphere of counter-intelligence and fighting terrorism.

“When we speak about NATO’s internal security and of protecting the secrets of the alliance, we have 28 doors, one for every member state, all of which have to be kept closed; otherwise, this would mean a hole in the security of the whole alliance,” President Ilves stated. “During his time in NATO headquarters, Mr. Michael Evanoff has taught many of us how we can strengthen firewalls within the alliance that are invisible to outsiders.”

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