

"The co-operation between the public and private sector, watching each other's back and personal contacts and communication allowed us to spring to the defence of the Republic of Estonia, fast, five years ago. The alliances that were born in this war – the cyber war – made Estonia even more visible on the world map," told the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves today, opening the "E-governance or e-dependence?" conference, organised by the Estonian Information System's Authority.

He recalled that Estonia, luckily, was free to make its own choices as the rapid spreading of Internet started approximately 15 years ago and our choices were supported by the understanding that the lagging behind caused by occupation can only be overcome with an innovative course of action and the understanding that information technology is not just an opportunity for Estonia, but a necessity.

"Of course, today there are some cynics among us, who see our cyber story as a skilfully yarned myth or national propaganda; those cynics stress only weaknesses instead of our strengths and want to see ourselves as inferior in relation to everybody else – characteristically, as it seems to me, the slave mentality still persists," stated President Ilves. "I can only recommend that these people look around the world – and they could start with Europe – with their eyes wide open and then evaluate Estonia's e-lifestyle from a distance. Evaluate and try to understand why digital prescriptions are public services that are seen as some sort of sci-fi gadget by most Europeans. This is a simple and practical example that I have experienced in my very own work as the chairman of the e-health work group of the European Commission."

"In Estonia, we are all dependent on public and private sector e-services today, whether we speak about the e-Tax Board, e-school or Internet banking. I am quite convinced that we must make the most of this dependence and even enhance it whenever possible – and reasonable," President Ilves emphasized. He confirmed that Estonia can boast about a country that is more free from corruption and has a public administration more transparent than most of the countries who shared our fate in Europe – largely thanks to extensive use of the Internet in Estonia, as, figuratively speaking, one cannot bribe a computer.

"Like any modern large company needs a well operating IT component, a modern state needs the same. The reliability of the critical information infrastructure of the state is largely dependent on private sector's ability to defend itself. And if a company offers some vital services to society, it will be required to ensure its consistency even when it is under attack," President Ilves told.

"Figuratively speaking – "firewalls" between the public and private sector in Estonia are not as impossible to overcome as in larger countries, but the habit of stressing autonomy instead of co-operation is no stranger for us, too. An excellent example of public and private interests entwined is the Estonian Cyber Defence League, which promotes, apart from national defence functions, communication among people, special education and increased awareness," acknowledged the Estonian Head of State.

He also described the co-operation within private sector as positive. Banks began exchanging information on cyber incidents ten years ago, perceiving that the vulnerability of one bank does not represent an advantage for other banks.

"No Estonian company can enjoy a considerable competitive advantage for just being from a different Estonian company. But all Estonian companies can enjoy a competitive edge by being more secure than other companies in the world. And a state that can ensure the maintenance of a successful cyber defence and information society image can also contribute to the export of our IT services," continued the Estonian Head of State.

In his words, the subject of the conference organised by the Estonian Information Systems' Authority – "E-governance or e-dependence?" – contains a paradox, as an e-lifestyle includes certain – and acceptable – dependence.

"As long as we remain aware of the level of our independence and possible threats, maintain cyber hygiene and vaccinate ourselves against viruses, e-dependence will not become a problem in itself. Mankind has sensed new and unknown threats with every technological innovation. This is quite natural – as knowledge of innovations will allow us to control and anticipate risk," told the Estonian Head of State.

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