

The President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, today chaired the fourth meeting of the European e-health work group that convened in Barcelona; the meeting focused on the policy recommendations chapter of the drafted report.

"Innovation is not merely technology but rather a way of thinking and action," told President Ilves. "In the European Union, this stands for, above all, bringing down organisational and legal barriers."

President Ilves confirmed that the technology needed to develop e-health is available, but until today, we have lacked the skills needed for putting the technology in practice in the sphere of health care, where the focus should be on a citizen, his medical records, his opportunity to manage the use of these records for treatment, anticipation and research works and also, his responsibility.

"The final report of our work group must tell the European Union that there is no need to contribute only to technology, as it is already there; we need to invest into organisational changes, telemedicine, home monitoring – that have all become the bottlenecks for today's technology," told the Estonian Head of State. "Therefore, we have an opportunity to make e-health, figuratively speaking, into a technology that would bring down outdated, paralysed ways of thinking. We must not be bound by political correctness or the wish to make someone like us."

The work group admitted that in Europe in general, the organisation of health care is approximately ten years behind the development of information technology.

President Ilves considered the creation of common e-health services to be an important step, as it would ensure standardised handling of medical records in different countries, and the creation of a solution for anonymous use of data, facilitating a safe comparison of data collected from different e-medical records within the European Union. The next step allows us to predict links with the trans-European X-road and mutually acceptable ID cards.

According to the plans, the report will be presented at the meeting of the European Union health

care ministers in Copenhagen, in May of this year.

This spring, President Ilves accepted the proposal of the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso; Vice President, Neelie Kroes; and EU Commissioner, John Dalli, to chair a high-level advisory work group, which is tasked with shaping the future of e-health in the European Union.

By the end of its 15 months of work, the work group, consisting of health care experts, representatives of patients, medical, pharmaceutical and ICT industries, legal experts and politicians, is expected to send their proposals on using the e-health solutions to the European Commission to achieve a safer, patient-focused and more efficient organisation of health care, which also extends to the spheres of diagnostics, prevention and treatment. Family doctor Madis Tiik, who is a promoter of e-health, is representing Estonia in the work group as an expert.

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