

Yesterday, 23 September, the President of the Republic of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, gave the opening address at the high-level discussion entitled "Safe and Free Internet", which was organised by Estonia to coincide with the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in New York.

President Ilves emphasised in his opening address that improving the safety of the Internet is important, but cannot become a reason or excuse for restricting the freedom of the Internet – unfortunately, this is a pretence used by countries that are not into respecting any freedoms.

"The same freedom of speech and the same personal liberties that are protected by law in the real world must be applicable on the Internet," confirmed the Head of State. The same position is also reflected in the report issued by the UN government experts in August of this year, which the President acknowledged.

President Ilves also defended the maintenance of the Internet without boundaries, which is, regrettably, no longer elementary in the world – there are countries that restrict the Internet access of their citizens. "We should not introduce the Westphalian system, whereby rulers can do whatever they want in the name of sovereignty within their countries, to the Internet. The cyber world does not know borders and this is why authoritarian countries are afraid of notions of freedom that find their way in through the Internet."

"Technology itself is not just a tool – it is also liberating, but only when used properly. We must stand for technology as a means for promoting our values – freedom, rule of law, human rights and personal liberties," the Head of State added.

The opening address by the President was followed by a panel discussion at which high-level Internet and cyber security experts discussed the safety and freedom of the Internet: Sanja Kelly from the think tank Freedom House; CEO of Guardtime, Mike Gault; editor of Ars Technica business newspaper, Cyrus Faviar; and Frank Cilluffo from George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute. The moderator was Chris Perry from the International Institute of Peace. President Ilves also responded to questions from the audience with other panellists.

The discussion focused on the challenge of ensuring the compatibility of Internet security and freedom in the modern world of the Internet. One of the questions discussed was what should the role of governments and co-operation between governments be in enhancing the security of the Internet while not making compromises on fundamental freedoms and human rights. The panellists agreed that the freedom and safety of the Internet should be concepts that support each other instead of being in conflict. Estonia was praised heavily by the panellists for being a most successful country in ensuring the compatibility of Internet freedom and security.

After the discussion on the freedom of the Internet, President Ilves visited another side event, which discussed the issues of civil society and was organised by the USA, as a guest of President Barack Obama.

Office of the President
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