

Respected ladies and gentlemen, good friends.

I am happy that gatherings and exchanges of ideas, like this one, contribute to Estonia's progress – helping us to highlight issues that concern us and allowing us to get to know each other. Let us recall that 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, if you permit – made Estonia even more visible on the world map.

Our so to say "cyber story" – something that is definitely worth, among other things, to be recorded as a real book – has undoubtedly made Estonia more visible and larger. We had to think boldly with our economy, which mainly started from scratch in the 1990s, offering no international competition. It was pure luck that we were free in our choices as the rapid spreading of the Internet started approximately 15 years ago.

And these choices were made with complete awareness. Indeed, neither the Tiger Leap programme nor the purposeful digitalisation of the public services is to be taken for granted. 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 that allows us to maintain our state and population while remaining visible in the world.

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.

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 chairman of the e-health work group of the European Commission.

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. We should not look to cut ourselves off from the social world or the world of human relations, but focus on rationality and efficiency.

However, efficiency cannot become our sole purpose. The development of our state and society also calls for democracy and a state based on the rule of law. We can boast about being a country more free from corruption and having a public administration more transparent than most of the countries who shared our fate in Europe – largely thanks to the extensive use of the Internet in Estonia. I am saying this figuratively to illustrate the fact that you cannot bribe a computer.

In cyber defence, as many of you know better than I do, the last five years have brought along a real paradigm shift in the international arena. Although the attack of 2007 was not the first alarm bell of its kind, it still sounded louder at an international level than others. Apart from the benefits that this primitive attack contributed to our image, I would like to stress the main lesson for ourselves: the importance of co-operation between the private and public sector.

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 the 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.

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

I would also like to emphasise the co-operation within the private sector. 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.

The subject of this conference – "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.

In the speech that I gave on the anniversary of the Estonian Republic on 24 February, I invited Estonia to speak up at international level in spheres where we can contribute added value. To be able to make the voices of our professionals heard everywhere else, we must first listen to them more carefully ourselves here, at home. Therefore, let us cherish our professionals and develop our knowledge.

Have a fruitful exchange of ideas!