

Estonian Review

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FOREIGN NEWS



Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Estonian Permanent Representative to the European Union Raul Mälik in Brussels, 29 January.

Photo: Council of the European Union

Paet: Serbia's Course to the European Union is the Key to Stable Development in the Region

Jan 28 - **Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet participated in a session of the European Union General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) in Brussels, during which the situation in the Western Balkans was discussed. The foreign ministers also discussed the situations in Africa and Pakistan, as well as matters related to the Middle East peace process.**

While analysing developments in the Western Balkans, the foreign ministers primarily focused on Serbia. In its conclusions, the council emphasised that the European Union would like to develop more intensive ties with a stable and democratic Serbia. For this, the European Union will invite Serbia to sign a Political Agreement on Co-operation on 7 February. "We hope that Serbia will continue to integrate into the European Union," said Foreign Minister Paet. "This is the key to stable development for Serbia and the entire region," he added. According to Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, the outcome of the second round of presidential elections occurring on 3 February is very important. "The Serbians can choose between two paths—the path to integration and the EU, or the path that continues in relative isolation," Paet noted.

The foreign ministers were pleased over the visa facilitation and readmission agreement that has gone into effect with the Western Balkans, and they welcome the European Commission's launch of a visa dialogue with Serbia, which will begin soon. The Council of Foreign Ministers expressed their readiness to define detailed road maps and a schedule for the countries in the region, so that they may advance towards visa liberalisation. According to Urmas Paet, Estonia supports the initiation of a visa dialogue with the Western Balkan nations.

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FOREIGN NEWS

Estonia Helps Ukraine Combat Bird Flu

Jan 26 - **The Estonian Foreign Ministry is supporting Ukraine's bird flu research by donating 334,000 kroons to the Veterinary and Food Laboratory for the lab to acquire equipment necessary for research.**

According to Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, Ukraine needs Estonia's help to combat the bird flu. "A pandemic can only be avoided if there is co-operation between nations and integration of resources," said Paet. "Therefore it is crucial that nations untouched by the bird flu should provide multifaceted aid to those countries where outbreaks have been found, but that may lack the resources, technology or skills to prevent the spread of the disease," he added.

Estonia is helping the Ukrainian Veterinary and Food Laboratory purchase equipment that will allow them to study and identify different strains of bird flu. This will help Ukraine to combat cases of the bird flu more effectively.

Ukraine was the first nation in the vicinity of Estonia in which bird flu was discovered. After the outbreak was found on the Crimean peninsula in August of 2005, Ukraine sent out an international appeal for aid, in order to get the resources and knowledge needed to prevent the spread of the disease. As of right now, the last registered case of the bird flu in Ukraine was in June 2006.

In 2006, Estonia trained Ukrainian laboratory workers in fighting the bird flu. Estonia also became a donor of the World Bank Bird Flu Grant in 2006.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) data, the risk of a bird flu pandemic outbreak is high. An outbreak could occasion both loss of human life and long-term economic consequences.

FOREIGN NEWS

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The European Union foreign policy leaders also discussed the situation in Sudan and Darfur. An overview of the activity in the area was given by UN Special Envoy to Sudan Jan Eliasson, who said that the presence of both the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and the United Nations/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), which began in January of this year, is crucial to the region.

According to the Estonian foreign minister, Sudan has an urgent need for the employment of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. "The government of Sudan must co-operate as promised, both in guaranteeing that humanitarian aid reaches its destination and in the extradition of war crime suspects," the foreign minister emphasised. "Otherwise, we will need to implement sanctions against Sudan," Paet added.

Estonian, Latvian Parliament Speakers Discuss Future of Baltic Assembly

Jan 29 - Future work of the Baltic Assembly was the central topic at a meeting of speakers of the Estonian and Latvian parliaments in Tallinn.

The chairwoman of the Estonian Parliament, Ene Ergma, pointed out the necessity of modernizing the interparliamentary co-operation body and making it an organization capable of responding promptly to new political challenges.

"It often happens at present that the Baltic Assembly makes a delayed response to material events, and because of that it is not sufficiently visible on the real political landscape. The Baltic Assembly should be prompter and more flexible," Ergma said.

In her view, closer cooperation is required primarily at the level of standing parliamentary committees, where specialists could focus together on solving concrete problems.

Speaking about the importance of a common Baltic Sea strategy in the context of the European Union, the Estonian speaker noted that the Baltic Assembly too could address this question.

"We haven't at the political level realized clearly enough what researchers mean when they speak about the agony of the Baltic Sea," she said. "This conclusion is the result of prolonged study and it is very serious. Putting this topic on the front burner could for instance, be raised by the environmental committees of our parliaments."

The speakers agreed that Estonia-Latvia cooperation is good. Gundars Daudze said the trip to Estonia is his second official foreign visit in the capacity of chairman of the Saeima which he said speaks of the importance of bilateral relations.

Ergma underlined the necessity of continued close cooperation among the Baltic States in particular vis-a-vis Russia. In her words, the three countries' shared historical experience is of help in this.

The chairwoman also requested and was promised Daudze's help to ease the problems of the Estonian secondary school in Riga.

Daudze said the school issue was on the agenda of the Latvian Education Ministry before the change of government and promised to remind the new Cabinet about it.

The Baltic Assembly, which brings together lawmakers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, was established on 8 November 1991.

Estonian and Finnish Law Enforcers to Form Joint Task Forces

Jan 28 - Finland and Estonia are going to set up joint task forces to combat crime.

The joint efforts will be primarily targeted against drug-related crime and human trafficking, Finnish news agency STT said.

The countries are also going to step up exchanges of DNA profiles.

The police chiefs of Estonia and Finland signed a cooperation memorandum concerning DNA exchanges in mid-December. Under the scheme DNA samples obtained on crime scenes that cannot be linked to any person in the database of the country where the crime was committed will also be checked against DNA profiles in the other country's database.

The Estonian DNA register has DNA profiles of more than 15,000 individuals as well as 5,000 samples of crime scene DNA that haven't been linked to any person as of yet.

Senior officers of the Estonian police, border service and customs authority held a two-day conference with Finnish colleagues to think through prevention of cross-border crime, steps to cut organized crime, and strengthening of controls on maritime borders.

Some 5.6 million people and 650,000 vehicles cross the Finnish-Estonian border annually.

Winners of Riga Embassy Architecture Contest Chosen

Jan 28 - The jury of the architectural contest to design the new embassy in Riga chose the work entitled „Teele” as the winning design and recipient of the 300,000-kroon prize.

Second place and 225,000 kroons went to the design "Horta", and third place and a prize of 150,000 kroons went to the design called "White Cube.ee". Two other ideas were purchased as well—the designs "Ant" ("Sipelgas") and "AIIR". The cost of each design was 75,000 kroons.

According to the chairman of the jury, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, while choosing a winner the jury considered how well each design would fit into Riga's cityscape. "The winner gracefully accomplishes the integration of modern architecture into a historical residential quarter of the city," said Paet. The foreign minister added that the winning design "Teele" is functional and does not require any major readjustments. "The representative area is compact, and it will be possible to adjoin the rooms if more space is needed," he added.

The Foreign Ministry was also represented on the jury by Secretary General Matti Maasikas, Undersecretary of Administrative Affairs Marten Kokk, and Estonian Ambassador to Latvia Jaak Jõerüüt. The architects on the jury were Andres Põime, Kalle Vellevoog and Eero Endjärv. The jury

also included Viesturs Brūzis, director of the Cultural Monument Protection Department of the City of Riga, Andis Sīlis of the Latvian Architects Association, and Jānis Zilgalvis from the Latvian Cultural Monument Protection Inspection.

DOMESTIC NEWS

Estonia's New Regional Minister Sworn In

Jan 23 - **Siim-Valmar Kiisler, former assistant minister at the Estonian Ministry of Economy and Communications, took an oath before Parliament as the new minister of regional affairs.**

Kiisler, 42, has previously served as a member of Parliament and the Tallinn city council and as head of the borough of Central Tallinn. He has also been active in business.

Kiisler is chairman of the Tallinn chapter of the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL).

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves appointed Kiisler to the office of minister at the proposal of the prime minister on 22 January.

IRL recalled the previous minister of regional affairs, Vallo Reimaa, after its policy-making board had discussed the activity of IRL ministers and reached the conclusion that Reimaa was the only one of them who had not lived up to expectations.

Estonia's Independence Day Parade to be Held in Pärnu 23 February

Jan 28 - **Estonia's Independence Day parade will be brought forward by a day from Feb. 24 and held in the south-western city of Pärnu.**

The organizers of the festivities to mark the 90th anniversary of Estonia underline Pärnu's special role in the republic's becoming independent as it was there, on the balcony of the Endla theatre that the barrister Hugo Kuusner read out the manifesto of independence on Feb. 23, 1918.

The main festivities kick off on the morning of Saturday, Feb. 23, with the laying of a wreath at the birthplace of Konstantin Pats, the head of Estonia's first provisional government and last pre-war president, at Tahkuranna in the Pärnu region.

State Secretary Heiki Loot will present the anniversary stamp at the Endla theatre at 10 a.m. An hour later, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves is going to unveil the Independence Monument at the old site of the theatre, after which the parade in the city center will start.

The changes were prompted by the president's wish to mark the 90th anniversary of the republic precisely in Pärnu, and his corresponding suggestion to the commander of the defence forces, an adviser at the State Chancellery told the paper.

"Furthermore, February 23 is the birth anniversary of the Pärnu man Konstantin Pats," she added.

After the parade around a thousand young activists will gather at the Pärnu Concert Hall for a conference entitled "Young Republic." They will be greeted by the president.

The president is going to hand over state decorations at the Endla theatre at 5 p.m.

The first national flag of Estonia will be on display at Elisabeth Church in Pärnu from 10 a.m. till sunset at 5:40 p.m. on Feb. 23.

The Independence Day flag-raising ceremony at the top of the Pikk Hermann tower in Tallinn will

start at 7:30 a.m. A solemn service will take place at the Tallinn Cathedral.

The History Museum is going to open its new permanent display at Maarjamäe Palace at noon. An hour later, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip will hand over state prizes at the hall of the Academy of Sciences. The president will at the same time open a snow sculpture display in Kadriorg Park.

A concert, followed by the president's reception will begin at the Estonia theatre and concert hall at 6 p.m.

Number of Births Increased Significantly in 2007

Jan 23 - **The decrease in the size of Estonia's population slowed down last year as a result of an increase in the number of births, the Statistical Office said.**

Estonia's population numbered 1,340,600 as of Jan. 1, 2008, according to a preliminary estimate by the office.

The difference between the number of registered deaths and births in 2007 was roughly 1,800 and the size of the population decreased by 0.13 percent due to negative natural growth, compared with a reduction of 0.2 percent in 2006.

Natural increase remained negative, that is, the number of deaths still exceeded the number of births.

However, 864 more births were registered in 2007 than in 2006. A total of 15,741 live births were registered at registry offices in Estonia last year. The number of deaths was 17,548 and their number increased by 232 compared to the previous year.

In the course of the year 7,057 marriages were contracted, which is about 100 marriages more than in the previous year. The number of divorces was 3,810 and their number remained on the same level as the previous year.

DEFENCE NEWS



Sandown class minehunters

Second Sandown Class Minehunter Delivered to Estonia

Jan 24 - **Commodore Charles Stevenson, Commander of the Nordic region of the British Royal Navy, Delivered The second Sandown class minehunter, ENS Sakala, to the Estonian Ministry of Defence. In total, Estonia will buy three Sandown class vessels from Great Britain.**

Secretary general of the Ministry of Defence, Mr. Lauri Almann, officially received the ENS Sakala at the ceremony, which took place at the Babcock

shipyard in Rosyth, and the stern flag of a warship of the Estonian Navy, bow jack and pennant of the commander were hoisted on the vessel for the very first time.

Upon receiving the ENS Sakala, Mr. Lauri Almann said that the new minehunters of the Estonian Navy shall increase the capability of the Estonian Navy to locate and dispose of the sea mines that remain in Estonian waters, as well as increasing its capacity to participate in international operations.

"The Estonian Navy is not completely ready yet, but today's addition to the Estonian war fleet represents great progress in this direction," Mr. Almann said.

According to the contract signed with Great Britain in September 2006, Estonia is to purchase three Sandown class minehunters in all. The total price for the three ships is 800 million EEK, which includes refurbishment and maintenance work for the ships, as well as training for the crew in the United Kingdom. Sandown class minehunters use Seafox undersea robots to locate and dispose of sea mines.

The first Sandown class vessel, ENS Admiral Cowan, was delivered to Estonia in April 2007, and the last one, ENS Ugala, will be delivered in the beginning of next year. ENS Sakala will arrive in Estonia during the spring.

Commander of the Estonian Navy, Commander Igor Schwede and Head of the Procurement Department of the Ministry of Defence Mr. Ingvar Pärnamäe also participated in the formal ceremony in Rosyth.

Estonian Unit in Iraq Finds Explosives

Jan 29 - The Estonian infantry platoon ESTPLA-16 serving in Iraq has seized explosives and detained persons suspected of hiding weapons.

During a patrol operation at the end of last week, the Estonian soldiers discovered shells, a warhead, a detonator, ammunition and a 100-liter container with a substance used to make improvised explosive devices while searching buildings owned by suspects in the villages of Zaydan Jamil and Massara, military spokesperson in Tallinn said.

The Estonian soldiers detained five persons suspected of hiding the weapons and explosives.

"It's better to find shells and explosives before they are planted on roads," the commander of ESTPLA-16, Capt. Raineik Kuura, was quoted as saying.

The light infantry platoon that started service in Iraq in December has since then discovered 14 caches of weapons and ammunition and confiscated numerous light firearms and components of self-made bombs.

The 34-strong light infantry platoon ESTPLA-16 is deployed in the area of Sab al Bor near Baghdad and serves in Iraq as part of the US 1st Cavalry Division.

Estonian military have been participating in the Iraqi mission since June 2003.

Commander of Defence Forces Attending Meeting of Nordic, Baltic Army Chiefs

Jan 28 - The commander of the Estonian armed forces, Maj. Gen. Ants Laaneots, visited Norway for the annual meeting of Nordic and Baltic defence commanders to discuss cooperation in the framework of joint projects and reduction of defence expenses.

The Swedish and Norwegian army chiefs are going to unveil an integration plan whose implementation is expected to cut both countries' defence outlays.

The army chiefs are also going to discuss joint procurements and defence co-operation between countries belonging to different international organizations. Of the Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden are not members of NATO, while Norway and Iceland do not belong to the European Union.

The defence commanders will also review the functioning of the Baltic airspace patrolling mission and the EU's Nordic Battle Group, and consider the participation of the future Baltic battalion in NATO's rapid response force from 2010 onwards.

Defence Minister, Army Commander Praise Defence League in Kosovo

Jan 26 - Estonian Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo and commander of the Defence Forces Maj. Gen. Ants Laaneots have a high opinion of the service of the Estonian Defence League reconnaissance platoon.

"I am really delighted to see our Defence League soldiers' good service in the NATO-led forces and to hear words of praise concerning Estonian soldiers," Aaviksoo said.

"The Danish battalion, in the ranks of which the Estonian reconnaissance battalion serves, uses Estonian soldiers as instructors for the training of Danish, Italian and French men. This is impressive and testifies to our soldiers' high level," the defence minister added.

Maj. Gen. Ants Laaneots said Estonian soldiers stood out for their conscientiousness, discipline and tenacity. "An Estonian soldier perfectly carries out all the duties superiors assign to him," Laaneots said.

"The allies fully trust our unit, and the area of responsibility of our platoon is as large as that of Danish or French infantry companies. Our officers and non-coms have learned to use soldiers sparingly but effectively in the course of field operations that started for them in 1995," Laaneots said.

Estrif-2, built up of members of the paramilitary Defence League, started service in the northern part of Kosovo near the city of Mitrovica five months ago. The next reconnaissance platoon will go to Kosovo in February.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Currency rates in kroons:

http://www.eestipank.info/dynamic/erp/erp_en.jsp

(Bank of Estonia)

Mobile Communication Penetration in Estonia at 136 Percent

Jan 24 - The penetration of mobile communication services in Estonia was 136.4 percent at the end of last year, data by the technical watchdog show.

"According to our data there are 136.4 SIM cards per 100 people in Estonia," deputy director general of the Technical Surveillance Authority Priit Soom said.

Mobile penetration crossed the 100 percent mark in 2005.

Mobile communication operators traditionally release their customer numbers together with economic results.

EU Planning Free Market of Emission Quantities as of 2013

Jan 23 - **The European Union's executive Commission has unveiled plans for combating climate change, according to which national energy sector pollution quotas would be eliminated as of 2013 and companies would have to start buying quantities of greenhouse gases on the EU's common market.**

"Regarding (emissions) trade, the new plan does not embrace our sore point, oil shale, and since around 90 percent of the pollution in Estonia is generated in the energy sector it puts us in a very difficult position," deputy secretary general of the Environment Ministry Allan Gromov said.

In his words, energy companies would under the European Commission's present plan have to buy pollution quantities from the bloc's common pot from 2013 onwards.

Gromov said the ceiling of emission quantities in Estonia could be raised in agriculture and transport. "However, it will certainly take another two to three years before these proposals materialize as concrete decisions and directives," Gromov added.

The Commission's proposals have to be approved both by EU member states and by the European Parliament before coming into effect.

Viru Õlu Brewery Posts 14 Percent Sales Growth for 2007

Jan 24 - **Sales revenue of the Estonian brewer Viru Õlu grew in 2007 by 13.7 percent year-on-year to 157.2 million kroons (EUR 10.04 mln) while export turnover soared by 29 percent.**

Compared with 2006, sale of beer was especially successful in the final quarter of last year. The company also saw the sale of cheaper beers, including private label beers for retail chains, grow in 2007.

Viru Õlu exported beer and soft drinks to Latvia, Lithuania and Denmark last year, and started exporting beer to Italy in the fall.

The company, which estimates its share of the beer market in Estonia to be the third-largest, has been operating at Haljala in the northern Virumaa region since 1975. Its major shareholder is the Danish Harboe group.

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