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FOREIGN MINISTER IN AFGHANISTAN



Foreign Minister Urmass Paet and President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai in Kabul, 15 January.

Estonia to Send Health Care Specialist to Helmand

Jan 15 - Estonian Foreign Minister Urmass Paet, on a visit in Afghanistan, met with President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai.

At the meeting, the parties discussed Estonia's military and civil contributions to the stabilisation and building up of Afghanistan.

President Karzai highly values Estonia's participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). "We are very grateful that this tiny nation so far away from Afghanistan is helping us in as complicated a region as Helmand province," said President Karzai. The President of Afghanistan was interested in Estonia's assessment of the security situation in Helmand province.

According to Foreign Minister Urmass Paet, the security situation in the southern part of Afghanistan is difficult and complicated. "Trust and cooperation with the local population are necessary in order to achieve stability," Paet emphasized. "One possibility for increasing trust would be expanding development cooperation, which would help improve the standard of life for the people of Afghanistan," he added.

Foreign Minister Paet confirmed that Estonia plans to significantly increase its civil contribution. "We're sending a medical expert to Helmand, who will be responsible for developing the medical system for the whole province and coordinating international aid," Paet said.

President Karzai believes that the European Union should focus first and foremost on training the Afghanistani police, and NATO should focus on training the Afghanistani army. Foreign Minister Urmass Paet said that Estonia is sending one police officer to join the ranks of the European Union Police Mission. Last year Estonia gave 469,000 kroons (30,000 EUR) to support the EU Police Mission EUPOL Afghanistan, which aims to help the development of the Afghanistani police force.

ISAF Commanding Officer Praises Contribution of Estonian Armed Forces

Jan 16 - During his visit to Afghanistan, foreign minister Urmass Paet met with commanding officer of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) General Dan McNeill and EU Special Representative in Afghanistan Francesc Vendrell.

In the meeting with General McNeill, the security situation in Helmand province and in southern Afghanistan in general was discussed. According to Foreign Minister Paet, gaining as much control as possible over the border areas is vital. "Cooperation with Pakistan will be necessary in order to have as much control as possible over border crossings," Paet stated.

General McNeill highly acknowledged the contributions of the Estonian armed forces in Afghanistan. "Estonian soldiers do a very good job with a high level of professionalism, and they complete the most difficult tasks," said McNeill.

Paet also met with Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Kabir Farahi. The two parties discussed bilateral relations and the return of Afghanistani refugees from neighbouring countries. According to the Estonian foreign minister, the fact that refugees are being sent out of Iran is proving problematic, because Afghanistan's ability to receive the returning refugees is limited. "Afghanistan's neighbouring nations should be called on not to send the refugees back to where the proper conditions for receiving them do not exist," said the Estonian foreign minister. Paet added that in its support of Afghanistan, Estonia has also contributed to helping to alleviate the situation for refugees. Currently there are an estimated 2 million Afghanistani refugees both in Iran and Pakistan.

In the meeting with EU Special Representative in Afghanistan Francesc Vendrell, the battle against narcotics and corruption in Afghanistan was discussed. Other topics included the importance of a well-functioning police force and the development of the justice system.

FOREIGN NEWS

Estonia Supports Helmand Province Central Hospital in Afghanistan

Jan 21 - **The Estonian Foreign Ministry is supporting the improvement of electrical power supplies in Bost Hospital in Afghanistan's Helmand province.**

The central hospital will receive 400,000 kroons for the project. The sum is being allocated from the Foreign Ministry's development and humanitarian aid budget.

Afghanistan has some of the lowest human development indicators in the world. In order for the reconstruction of the nation to be successful, much cooperation is urgently needed in the realm of health care. "Supporting the Helmand province central hospital will improve the availability of medical care for the local population," said Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet. "It will also help to create decent conditions for those who are in need," he added.

The Foreign Ministry is helping to supply the Helmand central hospital with electricity during the winter period. The necessary supply of diesel fuel will be obtained to power the hospital's electric generators. There are serious problems involved with supplying electricity to the hospital during the winter as electricity from the city's grid is only guaranteed for a few hours each day. The rest of the time, a separate electric generator must be used to light and heat the hospital rooms, as well as keep medical equipment running.

President Ilves Called on Co-operation between Georgian Government and Opposition

Jan 22 - **Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Nino Burjanadze, the Georgian Parliament Speaker, who spoke about the preparations for the parliamentary elections and the changes planned by the authorities to make sure that the elections planned for the spring will take place in a better political climate and are technically correct.**



Georgian Parliament Speaker Nina Burjanadze and Estonian President Toomas-Hendrik Ilves in Tbilisi, 22 January.

"Estonia is ready to help Georgia in every way possible, and also to send experts," said President Ilves. "Estonia like all the countries that are interested in Georgia's democratic development, hopes that your parliamentary elections will be free, transparent, and democratic in respect to the campaign and the technical execution," President Ilves affirmed to Parliament Speaker Burjanadze.

At the meeting, the strengthening of civil society in Georgia was also discussed, and especially increasing the significance of the institution of ombudsman and the creation of public broadcasting. In case of both topics, the President thought it possible that Estonia could send recognized people in these fields to advise Georgia.

"For instance, I cannot think of a better person than Allar Jõks, who has served successfully for seven years as Estonia's Chancellor of Justice, to assist in the development of Georgia's ombudsman institution," said the Estonian Head of State.



President Toomas Hendrik Ilves meeting with Georgian opposition leaders Levan Gatsetšiladze, Salome Žurabišvili and David Usupašvili.

President Ilves also met with Levan Gatsetšiladze, Salome Žurabišvili and David Usupašvili, leaders of the Georgian opposition.

The Estonian Head of State stressed the importance of communications between the opposition and the authorities, and noted that Estonia supports Georgia's reform aspirations, not specific individuals.

According to President Ilves, the relations between the authorities and the opposition should be characterized by co-operation, mutual respect, and avoidance of steps that would push society beyond the boundaries of peaceful political contest.

The Estonian Head of State told the opposition leaders about Estonia's readiness to send experts to Georgia to promote the strengthening of the activities of the national election commission and the institution of ombudsman, as well as the rapid creation of public broadcasting, and invited representatives of the opposition to Estonia to become familiar with the organization of elections as well as the activities of public broadcasting.

The Estonian Head of State also participated in the inauguration ceremonies of Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili and met with Georgian Prime Minister Lado Gurgenidze.

US President Congratulates Baltic Nations on 10th Anniversary of US-Baltic Charter

Jan 16 - **US President George W. Bush congratulated the Baltic nations as the 10th anniversary of the US-Baltic Charter.**

"On this occasion, we appreciate the peoples of the Baltic states who endured tyranny and struggled for independence. They earned their freedom through courage and perseverance, and today they stand with us as partners in this great alliance contributing to our common security," said the statement by the US president released by the US Embassy in Latvia.

Bush said that the US and the Baltic states by signing the charter and becoming full members of Europe and the transatlantic community, demonstrated the commitment to achieve an integrated Europe in which the security and sovereignty of each nation would be realized.

The Charter of Partnership among the United States of America and Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania was signed on January 16, 1998 in the White House by the presidents of the four countries. The document ensured increased political, security and economic cooperation with the US and also helped the Baltic States in their EU bid.

Joint Statement of the Baltic Presidents on the 10th Anniversary of the U.S.-Baltic Charter

Jan 16 - **In a White House ceremony on January 16, 1998, the Presidents of the United States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia signed the U.S.-Baltic Charter of Partnership.**

Celebrating its 10th anniversary, we recall the document as a historic political landmark in the relations between our countries.

With this Charter, we set up a framework for co-operation that has ultimately helped us achieve the strategic goal of stability and security through NATO membership. It significantly enhanced U.S.-Baltic co-operation in political, security, and economic areas.

The partnership, based on common values and continuously maintained between the United States of America and the Baltic States since 1922 is an intrinsic part of Baltic independence. The Charter was a consistent continuation of the U.S. policy of non-recognition of the forceful incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, as well as of political and practical support for the restoration of our independence.

The Charter also highlighted the moral and strategic imperatives of the real, profound, and enduring American engagement in Europe, making the Baltic States part of the irreplaceable transatlantic link that will always remain at the core of security and stability in Europe. Such stability also assisted the Baltic States in becoming the fastest-growing economies in the European Union, and the United States remains among their most significant investors. We also do hope that the extension of the Visa Waiver Program to the proven friends of the United States in Europe will further the spirit of modern partnership between our countries and fulfil the vision of transatlantic alliance.

With the accession of the Baltic States to NATO in 2004, immediately followed by their accession to the European Union, the principal goals of the U.S.-Baltic Charter were accomplished. Nonetheless, the

spirit of the U.S.-Baltic Charter lives on in the unchanged commitment of our four nations to the shared values of liberty, democracy, human rights, and a free market, as well as in our ongoing contribution to the NATO and U.S.-led coalition operations and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Balkans.

The Charter continues to give us inspiration and a strong sense of responsibility for helping and supporting those who choose to embark on the path of democratic transformation and Euro-Atlantic integration. With this responsibility in mind, we support Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and other new democracies in their reform process and aspirations for future membership in the key institutions of the Western democratic community. The historic NATO Summit in Riga also testifies to the fundamental changes on the continent.

We feel proud that the U.S.-Baltic Charter has served as a model in setting up an analogous U.S.-Adriatic Partnership. And we look forward to the continued reform efforts of Albania, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with a view to welcoming them to NATO in the very near future. Hopefully, the Charter may serve as a blueprint for a U.S.-Black Sea partnership and possibly other regional partnerships to accomplish our shared vision of a Europe whole and free.

Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Valdis Zatlers and Valdas Adamkus

Estonian PM Criticized Russia's Conduct Regarding British Council

Jan 17 - **Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip criticized Russian conduct with respect to the British Council, saying it was unacceptable to the civilized world.**

Ansip said that he had stated his view also to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, saying that Estonia was certainly standing side by side with Great Britain in the issue of the British Council activity.

"We cannot accept that obstacles are set against the activities of the British Council in Russia. The British Council has been doing very praiseworthy work," Ansip said, adding that simple Russian people would lose the most due to obstructions to the work of the British Council.

Last December the Russian Foreign Ministry told London to close British Council offices in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, referring to their lack of the necessary legal status. At the beginning of this week Russia said that it would stop issuing visas to British Council employees dispatched to work in St. Petersburg or Yekaterinburg.

Yuri Drozdov, founder of the Namakon analysis center and former intelligence chief of the KGB, said the activity of the British Council in Russia was directly connected with British and US special services. British authorities have categorically denied connection of the British Council with intelligence.

Estonia Supports Azerbaijan's WTO Aspirations

Jan 22 - **Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with Azerbaijani Minister of Economic Development Heydar Babayev.**

Minister Babayev is in Estonia for the Azerbaijani business forum taking place in Tallinn.

At the meeting, the two discussed economic relations between the two nations, as well as future co-operation opportunities. Minister Babayev noted that the areas of particular interest to Azerbaijani businessmen are construction, oil processing, and infrastructure.

According to Foreign Minister Paet, Estonian businessmen in turn are interested in Azerbaijan's real estate, food industry and information technology. Estonia is also prepared to share its experiences with developing e-services, and to offer training to Azerbaijani officials on the subject. "Successful implementation of internet-based services has a positive impact on the entire economic environment," said the foreign minister. "A good example is the e-Tax Board, which greatly simplifies communication between people and the state."

The ministers also spoke about Azerbaijan joining the WTO, which is a top priority for the country. Foreign Minister Paet confirmed that Estonia supports Azerbaijan's aspirations to join the WTO, and he expressed the hope that Azerbaijan would become a member of the organisation as soon as possible.

Estonia Waives Visa Requirement to UN Laissez-Passer Holders

Jan 17 - **The Estonian government decided to waive the visa requirement to citizens of foreign countries holding UN passes (laissez-passer) in order to simplify UN officials' contacts with Estonia.**

Estonia will waive the visa requirement for persons holding a UN pass and staying in Estonia up to 90 days within six months.

The UN laissez-passer is a pass with blue or red covers issued to senior UN officials, officials of subordinate institutions, and other officials appointed by the secretary-general for the period when they are on official duty.

At present, Estonia requires visas from those holders of UN passes who are citizens of countries obliged to have a visa to enter Estonia.

Estonian Ambassador to Slovenia Presents Credentials

Jan 17 - **Estonian Ambassador to Slovenia Miko Haljas presented his credentials to President of Slovenia Danilo Türk. The ambassador resides in Budapest.**

In the discussions following the credential presenting ceremony, both parties emphasised the good standing of Estonia-Slovenia relations. They also discussed co-operation in international organisations and Slovenia's European Union Presidency.

Miko Haljas was born on 20 January 1967. He graduated from Tallinn University of Technology in 1994 and from the Estonian School of Diplomacy in 1995. Miko Haljas has worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1995. He worked in the Estonian embassy in Helsinki from 1999-2000 and in Washington from 2000-2002, where he was the Second Secretary. Since 2006, Haljas has been the ambassador to both Hungary and Croatia.

DOMESTIC NEWS

Estonian President Appoints Kiisler Regional Affairs Minister

Jan 22 - **President Toomas Hendrik Ilves appointed Siim-Valmar Kiisler, assistant minister at the Estonian Ministry of Economy and Communications, as minister of regional affairs.**

Kiisler may take his minister's oath before parliament as early as Wednesday, spokespeople for the government have said.

Kiisler will replace Vallo Reimaa, who was recalled from the office by the governing board of the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL) party over insufficient performance.

The post of regional affairs minister is one of two junior minister jobs in the Estonian government besides that of the minister of population.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Currency rates in kroons:

http://www.eestipank.info/dynamic/erp/erp_en.jsp
(Bank of Estonia)

Riga-Valga Rail Passenger Service Likely to be Opened in March

Jan 21 - **It was agreed at a meeting of Estonian and Latvian railway managers at the Valga railway station that a rail passenger service between Riga and Valga would be opened this March.**

Ivars Zalais, head of the passenger department of the Latvian passenger train company Pasazieru Vilciens, said the service would be opened within 20 days of coming to terms on the details of the agreement and signing of the contract.

According to the Valga county government, Estonia would ensure safe conditions for those waiting for the train and the Valga city government would refurbish the accommodation of the train crews. Informing the passengers at the Valga station would be the concern of Edelarauttee.

At the moment three passenger trains a day go from Riga to Lukazi, a station seven kilometers from Valga.

Rail passenger service between Estonia and Latvia was interrupted on the Valga-Tartu-Tallinn route in 2001, and as a result passengers arriving from Riga could no longer change for Tartu or Tallinn in Valga.

Estonian Funds May Get Right to Invest on Alternative Market

Jan 21 - **The finance committee of the Estonian parliament has initiated a bill on amendments to the investment funds bill so it would permit funds to invest money also on the alternative market.**

The alternative market is an analogue of the securities' market where it is possible to substantially trade with securities in the same way, but at the same time the requirements to the issuers of these securities are lower than on the securities exchange, as one of its main aims is to

make it possible for small companies to get access to additional capital.

Besides, according to the European Union's investment funds directive, investment funds can invest their assets into securities traded on the alternative market in case such a market is recognized by the member country, regularly organized, and it is possible for the public to obtain or expropriate securities through its medium.

The Financial Supervisory Authority has also given its endorsement to the amendment.

In Estonia preconditions for the establishment of an alternative market at the Tallinn stock exchange have been created, but until the present no company has listed its shares on it.

Sales by Estonian Retailer Tallinna Kaubamaja up 39 Percent in 2007

Jan 16 - **Consolidated sales revenues of the Tallinna Kaubamaja Group in 2007 amounted to 5.9 billion kroons (EUR 375.4 mln), a 39 percent increase over the year before.**

In 2006, the annual rate of increase in revenues was 49 percent.

Sales revenues in the business segment of supermarkets amounted to 3.7 billion kroons in 2007, which is 28 percent more than in the preceding year.

Sales revenues in the business segment of department stores amounted to 1.5 billion kroons, an increase of 19 percent compared to 2006. "The sales results of Tallinna Kaubamaja for the past year, which once again set a record, showed an overall solid state of affairs in the retail sector here despite the slowdown of economic growth at the end of the year," Tallinna Kaubamaja CEO Raul Puusepp said.

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