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FOREIGN NEWS



Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Milošoski

Prime Minister Reaffirms Estonia's Support for Macedonia's NATO Aspirations

Mar 25 - Meeting with his Macedonian counterpart Nikola Gruevski, Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip reaffirmed Estonia's continued support for the endeavours of Macedonia to become a member of NATO.

Both heads of government said that while five years ago bilateral relations between the countries were virtually non-existent, now relations are very good.

Ansip said that as a member of the European Union and NATO, Estonia pays a lot of attention to the Western Balkans as a future partner.

Macedonia has emerged as the country with which Estonia has the best relations in the region, and being a supporter of the open door policy Estonia favours Macedonia's aspirations with regards to the EU and NATO, Ansip said.

"I hope that Macedonia, together with Croatia and Albania, will get an invitation to join NATO at the summit to be held in Bucharest next week," he said, adding that the invitation for membership had to be a decision made by alliance members by consensus.

Ansip described the preparation process of Macedonia as very successful. Macedonia's defence expenditure, for instance, already now stands above two percent of the GDP, and the country also takes part in missions.

The Estonian leader hailed Macedonia's economic development as impressive, while the prime minister of Macedonia said Estonia was a co-operation partner for his country in information technology.

Ansip started a two-day working visit to Macedonia on 25 March. The purpose of the trip is to support Macedonia in the implementation of extensive reforms.

FOREIGN NEWS

Angolan, Cuban Ambassadors Present Credentials to Estonian President

Mar 20 - The Cuban Ambassador to Estonia Sergio Conzález Conzález and the Angolan Ambassador Domingos Culolo presented their credentials to President Toomas Hendrik Ilves.

Meeting with the Cuban ambassador, Ilves said that contacts between the two countries have been scarce, but Estonia is ready to share its positive reform experience with Cuba. Ilves added that Estonia shares the priorities of the European Union with respect to Cuba and supports efforts to ensure human rights and basic liberties as well as raise the people's living standards.

Meeting with the Angolan ambassador, the president said that Estonia observes developments in that country with great interest and welcomes the efforts and political will of the Angolan government to hold the first general elections in that country since 1992 this September.

Ilves said that fast development of Estonian society had created good preconditions for co-operation in the spheres of economy, trade and technology with African countries as well. "Our non-profit organisations are more and more prepared to mediate countries of the African continent in different projects of democracy and construction of the state, including IT solutions," the president said.

The Cuban ambassador resides in Helsinki and the Angolan ambassador in Stockholm.

FOREIGN NEWS

Estonian Ambassador to Afghanistan Presents Credentials

Mar 24 - **Estonian Ambassador to Afghanistan Harri Tiido presented his credentials to President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai.**

In the discussions following the credential presenting ceremony, topics of discussion were Estonian and Afghan history, occupations, and chances for small nations to provide aid based on their experiences to nations that are just beginning to build themselves up. They also briefly spoke about Estonia's support of Afghanistan through the European Union and NATO.

Ambassador Harri Tiido also met with Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Mohammad Kabir Farahi, with whom he discussed opportunities for increasing the European Union's role and visibility in Afghanistan. The two also exchanged thoughts on how Pakistan's post-election developments will affect Afghanistan.

Afghanistan recognised Estonia's restored independence on 7 September, 1991. Diplomatic relations between Estonia and Afghanistan were initiated on 1 July, 2005. Estonia's first ambassador to Afghanistan resides in Tallinn.

Afghanistan remains one of Estonia's top priorities for civil and military aid. Estonia opened a Special Diplomatic Mission in Afghanistan in September of 2006, which is currently overseen by chargé d'affaires Andres Kolk.

Harri Tiido was born on 8 October 1953 in Jõhvi. He completed secondary school in Tallinn and graduated from Tartu Ülikool with a degree in Romance and Germanic philology. In 1980 Tiido began working as a journalist for Estonian Radio and KUKU Radio, and from 1996-1997 he also worked for Voice of America. He was the editor-in-chief at KUKU Radio from 1997-2000.

Undersecretary for Security Policy Harri Tiido has worked for the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2000. From 2003-2007, Harri Tiido was the Estonian ambassador to NATO. Ambassador Tiido speaks English, Finnish and Russian.

UN Special Rapporteur Recognises Tolerance of Estonian Society

Mar 19 - **Doudou Diene, special rapporteur of the United Nations on racial discrimination expressed satisfaction with the strong political will of the Estonian government in the solution of problems connected with racism and discrimination.**

Presenting his recommendation report at a session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva Diene said that the problem had been acknowledged at a high level in Tallinn. He also underlined the work of government institutions and agencies actively dealing with the respective issues in Estonia.

The special rapporteur recommended that Estonia strengthen the justice chancellor's institution, which should deal with cases of racial, ethnic or religious discrimination. He suggested that the government should set up an independent institution with the power to fight against

discrimination next to the justice chancellor's office. To avoid replicating the justice chancellor's functions, Diene said, the new institution should be responsible for fighting against discrimination and promote multiculturalism.

Diene thanked the Estonian government for its co-operation and openness during the visit. The special rapporteur said that Estonia had acceded to all the main international human rights instruments. The report recognised the tolerance of Estonian society, on the basis of which solutions to the given questions could be further improved.

Diene said that the Soviet Union's long occupation left a contradictory legacy, and encouraged Estonia in his recommendation report to solve these problems by means of consistent integration policy and social dialogue.

Diene viewed the situation of the Russian-speaking minority, non-European immigrants, and Roma people.

The special rapporteur said that there should be an open and democratic debate on the issue of language policy, with representatives of ethnic minorities and human rights organisations involved.

Diene also underlined that two principles would serve as guidelines in language policy. First, the Estonian government has the legitimate right to spread the Estonian language among all the people living in the country and avoid bilingualism, which was characteristic of the Soviet occupation period. But second, the state must admit the existence of minority languages. The rapporteur referred to the declaration of the rights of minorities, according to which countries must take measures to provide minorities with adequate opportunities to study and receive instruction in their native language.

In the opinion of the special rapporteur, the issue of stateless persons is awaiting a solution, and this requires the government's increased attention.

Diene recommended revising the terms of granting citizenship to stateless persons. In his opinion the government should simplify citizenship procedures for the more vulnerable groups of residents, such as the elderly and least privileged people. In addition, free language courses should be made available for citizenship applicants. The rapporteur pointed out that this had been foreseen in the integration program for the years 2008-2013.

Diene also recommended granting automatic Estonian citizenship to children born after August 20, 1991. Under the present law parents of such children must submit an application to get citizenship for their child.

The problem is under the constant attention of the Estonian government and last year more than 4,000 people were granted Estonian citizenship. Also, Estonia is about to adopt an integration program for the period of 2008-2013, which has the aim of maintaining the increase in the number of citizens.

Margus Kolga, director of the first political department at the Estonian Foreign Ministry, spoke on behalf of Estonia in Geneva.

"It is pleasing that the special rapporteur has approached the topic in a balanced way and has taken into consideration the historical context that has influenced Estonia," Kolga said.

Estonia Accedes to Several Countries' Letter to NATO Secretary-General

Mar 20 - **Together with several other countries, Estonia sent a letter to NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer to support presenting the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine.**

Estonia has expressed a will to give the MAP to these two countries at the Bucharest NATO summit in April on several occasions.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet confirmed this at a meeting of the New Friends of Georgia in March, adding that the Membership Action Plan is a good opportunity to support new democracies that share the same values with us.

The letter was also signed by Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Canada, a founding member of the alliance.

According to the letter, such a decision would help increase stability and security in Europe, and refraining from it would place NATO's traditional open door policy in doubt.

Tartu University Council Decorates Swedish Ambassador with Johan Skytte Medal

Mar 20 - **The Council of Tartu University has decided to award the Johan Skytte medal to Swedish Ambassador Dag Hartelius.**

The medal was awarded on 25 March, which Tartu University marks as Johan Skytte Day. Johan Skytte was the founder of the university in 1632 and its first chancellor.

Tartu University Rector Alar Karis said that during his service in Estonia, Hartelius has underlined the importance of the teaching of Swedish, bearing in mind the historical togetherness of Estonia and Sweden.

"In 2007, Dag Hartelius made a very significant contribution to the organisation of the Tartu University anniversary events. All through the term of his service, he has supported the continuation of studying Scandinavian languages and cultures at Tartu University," Karis said.

The Johan Skytte medal is awarded to public figures or statesmen who have made the biggest contribution to the development of Tartu University and Estonian higher education during the past year. Previously, the Skytte medal was awarded in 2005 to then first deputy chairman of the Supreme Court Andres Lipstok. Earlier the medal has been given to Mart Laar, Marju Lauristin, Mihkel Parnoja, Lennart Meri, Andrus Ansip, Jüri Raidla, and several countries' ambassadors.

DEFENCE NEWS

Baltic Defence Ministries to Renew Co-operation Pact

Mar 21 - **The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian defence ministries are going to renew a three-way co-operation agreement this spring.**

The updated agreement on defence co-operation will be signed at the Baltic defence ministers' next meeting, which will take place in Latvia this spring.

The original agreement was concluded in 1995. The need to revise it stems primarily from the fact that the Baltic States have joined NATO.

The adapted pact changes the financing of joint events held in the framework of the co-operation agreement. While earlier the expenses of a delegation, such as accommodation, were paid by the receiving country, under the renewed accord each country shoulders the expenses itself.

The agreement deals with the Baltic states' co-operation in such areas as collaboration within NATO and the European Union, defence policy and planning, development of defence capabilities, training of military and civilian personnel, communication and information systems, and logistics and procurement.

The pact also covers co-operation in legal issues, crisis management, civilian and military co-operation, defence forces-related environmental protection, and other questions of mutual interest.

Second Sandown Class Mine Hunter to Arrive in Estonia Next Month

Mar 24 - **Sakala, the second of three Sandown Class mine hunters acquired by Estonia from the British Royal Navy, will arrive in Estonia in mid-April.**

The ship was formally delivered to Estonia in Rosyth, Scotland, in late January, after refitting at the Babcock shipyard.

The Estonian crew finished testing the vessel last week and will this week be taking care of the shortcomings revealed by the tests. New tests at sea and an inspection are planned to be carried out next week.

The ship is scheduled to set sail for Estonia in the second week of April. The journey to Estonia takes about a week.

It is the second of the three 52.5-meter mine hunters the Royal Navy sold to Estonia for 800 million kroons.

The first of the vessels, Admiral Cowan, was delivered last April, whereas the third, to be renamed Ugandi, is slated for delivery in 2009.

The three vessels constitute one of the biggest defence procurements for Estonia since the country's accession to NATO and will considerably step up the capabilities of the Estonian navy.

DOMESTIC NEWS

Full House of Parliament to Consider Ratification of Lisbon Treaty

Mar 18 - **The standing Constitutional Committee of the Estonian Parliament supported ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and sent the respective bill to the full house.**

Väino Linde, the Reformist chairman of the committee, said that although critical questions were asked about the treaty during the meeting, the majority of the committee favoured its ratification. If the ratification bill should come on the agenda on April 9, he said then, the second and last reading could take place already in May.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, who also attended the committee meeting, gave an overview of the contents and effect of the treaty and underlined that it would increase the strength of the European Union and Estonia's position on the international arena. He said the treaty would expand the role of national parliaments in the solution of substantial issues by legislative means as well as in shaping the common foreign and security policy.

Speaking about the need to propagate the Lisbon agreement more widely, Urmass Reinsalu from the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union suggested a thorough discussion of the future of the EU, while Linde proposed a round table and the involvement of experts into the ratification process.

The aim of the Lisbon Treaty is to strengthen the efficiency and democratic legitimacy of the European Union and to increase its unity. In Estonia the document will be ratified by the parliament, as the Constitution does not permit holding a referendum over an international treaty. A simple majority is required to pass the act.

The Lisbon Treaty has been ratified by Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Malta and France.

The document will enter into force on January 1 if all 27 member states have ratified it and have deposited their ratification letters with the Italian government. Otherwise, the treaty will come into effect on the month following the deposition of the last ratification letter.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Average Wages Up to 13,997 Kroons

Mar 24 - **The Estonian Statistical Office released information on gross average wages by county for Q4 last year; in the Estonian capital the gross average monthly wages went up to 13,997 kroons.**

In the metropolitan Harju County, which also includes the figures for Tallinn, the average gross wages in Q4 2007 stood at 13,804 kroons. The growth in the wages on year was 18 percent both in Tallinn and the county as whole in Q4 - the lowest annual growth in the gross monthly wages among Estonian counties.

Tartu County, where the climb was 20 percent to 12,213 kroons in Q4 2007, followed Harju in terms of the average monthly wages.

The average wages were the lowest in Valga County at 8,988 kroons.

The growth in the average wages was the fastest in Saare and East-Viru counties by 29 and 28 percent higher respectively than in Q4 2006.

The average gross wages in Estonia in Q4 stood at 12,270 kroons in Q4, 20 percent higher than in Q4 2006.

Estonian Investment Bank Gild Bankers Triples Profit in 2007

Mar 25 - **The investment bank Gild Bankers made a net profit of around 81 million kroons last year, more than tripling the 2006 result.**

Consolidated net income from service fees amounted to 134 million kroons, compared to 60 million kroons a year ago, a representative of the bank said.

Last year was the most successful in the company's history, senior partner Rain Tamm said. "Among other things, the year 2007 marks the expansion of Gild's international reach. In addition to opening offices in Sofia and London, we increased the share of fund investments outside the Baltic region," he said.

Last year Gild also laid the foundation of private banking, a new business line, and acted as consultant in almost twice as many consolidations and takeovers as in 2006. Gild's assets in funds surged by almost 30 percent to 2.2 billion kroons in 2007.

Gild Bankers is an independent investment bank with offices in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Bulgaria and the United Kingdom. Gild manages alternative funds, advises mergers and takeovers, attracts capital and provides private banking services.

Automobile Industry Electronics Maker Stoneridge to Build Factory Outside Estonian Capital

Mar 24 - **Stoneridge Electronics AS, builder of electronic components for the automobile industry will build a factory in the Tännassilma technical park in the Saue rural community outside Tallinn, providing jobs for 260 people, 60 of them new workers.**

According to plans the new facility will be completed in August; at present it operates in the Järve area of Tallinn.

The company that assembles electronic components for motor vehicles such as MAN, Volvo, Daimler-Benz and Scania will lay the corner-stone of its new facility on 26 March. In addition to assembly work the facility will also go into the product development line, the company said.

Stoneridge-Pollak, a company of US owners, would close its facility in England and transfer production to Estonia and China.

According to the report for the financial year 2006 Stoneridge Electronics posted sales proceeds of 448 million kroons and a net profit of about 46 million kroons.

Volume of Estonian Security Market Over 2 Billion in 2007

Mar 25 - **The aggregate volume of the security services market in Estonia amounted to 2.1 billion kroons in 2007.**

The turnover of guarding services accounted for 0.9 billion kroons of the total. Installation and maintenance of security equipment contributed 0.6 billion kroons, the industry body said.

The turnover from other security services, including transportation of money and valuables, consultations, express delivery services and public services, totalled 340 million kroons.

The year-on-year growth in the sale of security services and products was 26 percent, which has been relatively stable in the last few years. In guarding services a growth of 16.5 percent and in equipment installation and maintenance 33.3 percent were recorded.

There are around 6,000 security workers in Estonia at present. Last year 1,026 new jobs were created. The average salary in the sphere of security increased by 27.5 percent in 2007.

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