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FINNISH FOREIGN MINISTER IN ESTONIA



Alexander Stubb and Urmass Paet on the Roof of Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 April

Estonian, Finnish Ministers Stress Importance of Common EU Foreign Policy

Apr 23 - Foreign ministers Urmass Paet of Estonia and Alexander Stubb of Finland stressed the importance of the European Union pursuing a common foreign policy.

Other matters discussed during the meeting in Tallinn included bilateral relations, the Lisbon Treaty, the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy, relations with Russia, energy policy and energy security, as well as developments in Georgia, the situation in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and international issues.

Paet described bilateral relations between Estonia and Finland as being extremely close and very good and expressed confidence that relations will remain this way.

Stubb said that if the EU wishes to be a considerable force, it has to speak in one voice in foreign policy, including in relations with Russia. He didn't rule out bilateral relations of individual countries with Russia, but said that a common EU foreign policy stance must dominate over such relations.

A strong EU with a strong foreign policy is in the interest of Estonia and Finland, he said.

Paet acknowledged a recent statement by his Finnish colleague concerning the situation of Georgia. Both ministers expressed hope that the situation will not escalate further and that Russia will refrain from staging new provocations.

Both foreign ministers underlined the importance of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea, with Paet voicing hope that the strategy will be adopted during the Swedish EU presidency.

The new Finnish foreign minister met also with Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, chairman of the parliament's foreign affairs committee Sven Mikser and chairman of the EU affairs committee Marko Mihkelson. Before arriving in Tallinn, Stubb met with Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Helsinki.

FOREIGN NEWS

Estonia Enters into Diplomatic Relations with Republic of Kosovo

Apr 24 - Estonian Foreign Minister Urmass Paet and Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo Ramë Manaj initiated diplomatic relations between the two nations in Tallinn.

Following the signing of the diplomatic relations communiqué, Estonian Foreign Minister Urmass Paet emphasised that the best plan for Kosovo is the status settlement and time schedule proposed by UN Special Envoy of the Secretary General Martti Ahtisaari. The Estonian foreign minister feels that initiating diplomatic relations was the logical step to take after Estonia recognised Kosovo's independence.

Kosovar Deputy Prime Minister Manaj thanked Estonia in the name of the people of Kosovo for recognising the independence of Kosovo, and expressed his gratitude for the help that Estonia has given to Kosovo since 1999.

According to Foreign Minister Paet, Estonia hopes for rapid normalisation of the situation in Kosovo, as well as in relations between Kosovo and Serbia and the continuation of co-operation with the EU. Manaj affirmed that Kosovars hold pro-European values and the nation is firmly on the course of integration into the EU.

Kosovo declared its independence on 17 February, and Estonia recognised it on 21 February.

FOREIGN NEWS

Paet: We must Find a Peaceful Solution to Conflict Situation in Georgia

Apr 29 – **During the council of foreign ministers in Luxembourg the situation in Georgia and the issue of a mandate for negotiations for a new EU-Russia framework agreement was discussed.**

The European Union foreign ministers discussed the tense political situation in Georgia and once again expressed concern over the most recent developments. They called on the parties involved to refrain from exacerbating the situation further. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet feels that the European Union should take a leading role in mediating and advising at this time, increasing its efforts to resolve the conflict. "We must find a peaceful solution to the increasingly tense situation," Foreign Minister Paet emphasised. The EU presidency will soon be travelling to Georgia to learn more about the situation.

The EU foreign policy leaders expressed their support of the new Abkhazia peace plan presented by the Georgian president at the end of March. According to the Estonian foreign minister, this plan needs the support of the international community, as it could be an opportunity to begin a practical dialogue.

The Estonian foreign minister also stated that Georgia, with its currently strained relations with the Russian Federation, needs the European Union's firm support. "We must continue to support Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity with our actions," said Foreign Minister Paet. The Estonian foreign minister feels that the European Union should send its experts to investigate the airplane incident in Georgia. "An Estonia radar specialist will be heading to Georgia soon to analyse the missile incident," Paet noted.

The foreign ministers also discussed the issue of a mandate for negotiations for a new EU-Russia framework agreement, but did not reach an agreement. The council of foreign ministers hopes that the European Union will soon accept the mandate to begin negotiations for a new partnership agreement with Russia, so that a practical negotiation process could begin. "Negotiation talks would be a good opportunity for discussions and exchanging ideas," said Foreign Minister Paet. "It's the only way to find a solution to the problematic issues plaguing EU-Russia relations," Paet added.

Estonia Supports Cyclone Victims in Madagascar with Half a Million Kroons

Apr 28 - **The Estonian Foreign Ministry is supporting victims of the aftermath of cyclones Ivan and Fame in Madagascar, particularly children, by donating 500,000 kroons to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The sum was allocated from the Foreign Ministry's development and humanitarian aid budget.**

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet stated that the natural disaster in Madagascar has taken the lives of more than 100 people, and almost 200,000 people have been forced to leave their homes. "Estonia's aid will help to alleviate the situation of those in

need. It will also improve their chances of being able to return to a normal life," said Paet.

Estonia's donation is primarily intended to take care of the basic needs of children and to restore schools and lessons. Hundreds of school buildings were severely damaged or destroyed by the cyclones. Their interiors, along with school supplies, were also ruined.

UNICEF is implementing the education projects "Back-to-School" and "Rehabilitating and increasing the capabilities of local education", which require a total of 46 million kroons. UNICEF is also implementing programmes intended for children that focus on health care, food supplies, and improving hygienic conditions. Other projects include the construction of temporary homes and camps for victims of the cyclones.

Madagascar was assaulted by Cyclone Fame from 27-29 January and Cyclone Ivan from 17-19 February. The storms resulted in widespread destruction, and this year's crops were also lost. There are massive problems with hygiene and drinking water, and there is danger of an epidemic.

Azerbaijan to Open Embassy in Tallinn

Apr 25 - **Azerbaijan in planning to open its embassy in Tallinn later this year.**

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov said that Azerbaijan was planning to open its embassy in Tallinn within this year.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet said that Estonia was busy looking for an honorary consul in Azerbaijan.

At present, the Azerbaijani ambassador to Estonia resides in Riga and the Estonian ambassador to Azerbaijan resides in Turkey.

The meeting between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Estonia focused on bilateral relations and co-operation, the situation in Southern Caucasus, including in Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh question, issues connected with the European Union's neighbourhood policy, energy and energy security, and Azerbaijan's relations with the European Union and NATO.

Paet pointed out that relations between the two countries have become considerably closer recently. He also mentioned Azerbaijan's important role for Europe as an alternative energy supplier.

Mammadyarov expressed thanks to Estonia for the position it took in connection with the tense situation in Southern Caucasus. He expressed the hope that the situation in Georgia would be solved peacefully and by diplomatic means. Mammadyarov underlined that his country supports Georgia's territorial integrity.

Paet said that Estonia wanted to see a peaceful solution of the Karabakh conflict, with respect to the countries' territorial integrity. Paet expressed the hope that the conflict would soon find a solution.

Mammadyarov also underlined the need for the abolition of visas between Azerbaijan and Estonia.

Estonian, Russian Border Guards Hold Joint Exercise

Apr 23 - **The first joint exercise of border guards of Estonia's north-eastern border guard district and the Russian Sosnovyi Bor border service was held last week.**

According to the statement about the exercise, a criminal group was attempting to set up a channel for smuggling illegal immigrants across the border on the dry river bed of the Narva River. The border may be crossed by perpetrators of serious crimes wishing to hide from law enforcement in the territory of the neighbouring country, the legend said.

An operation for the detention of individuals was started by Russian border guards in collaboration with their Estonian colleagues after receiving the message from Estonia.

Emergency exchanges of information were conducted and a plan of action worked out. Soon the border guards in Russia detained two individuals.

The chief of the exercise in Estonia was Maj. Harry Kattai and in Russia Col. Igor Yuvshenko.

DOMESTIC NEWS

Tallinn Reports 18 Percent Rise in Number of Tourists in February

Apr 28 - **The number of tourists accommodated in the Estonian capital Tallinn during February 2008 was 72,500, marking an 18 percent increase over the same month a year ago.**

Of that figure, foreigners made up 57,250 and tourists from Estonia 15,250.

The number of foreign visitors grew 17 percent year on year and the number of domestic visitors was up 25 percent, the city government said.

"It was surprising that even though we've forecast a reduction in the number of Finnish visitors, in the month of February 26 percent more people from that country visited our capital than a year ago," Vice Mayor Jaanus Mutli said.

The number of visitors from Russia, Latvia and Germany has been stable, Mutli added.

Mart Laar Receives Norwegian Prize for Activities in Democracy and Human Rights

Apr 27 - **Estonian MP and former prime minister Mart Laar has received the Sjur Lindebraekke Prize for activities in the fields of democracy and human rights.**

The prize was conferred on Laar for the economic reforms carried out under his leadership in Estonia, which have become an example for many countries in transition, and also for his advisorship in economic reforms in Georgia and support for the Cuban opposition.

Laar said in his speech at the ceremony in Oslo that the fact that Communism, one of the bloodiest totalitarian regimes that the world has ever seen, has not been condemned internationally is one of the obstacles hindering an effective struggle against totalitarian regimes in today's world. He urged people to intensify co-operation in raising awareness about the crimes of Communism, which should lead to its condemnation on the international level in the same way as it did for Nazism.

Sjur Lindebraekke (1909-1998) was a Norwegian banker and politician. Having previously worked in top executive positions with Bergen Privatbank, Lindebraekke was chairman of the Norwegian Banking Association from 1954-1960 and a member of the Storting from 1945-1953. He sat on the board of the Conservative Party from 1950-1982 and was chairman of the party from 1962-1970.

Anniversary of Chernobyl Catastrophe Marked in Estonia

Apr 26 - **Various events took place in Estonia on the 22nd anniversary of the catastrophe of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.**

There was a remembrance evening in Pärnu to which members of the local Chernobyl veterans' organisation were invited. Similar meetings took place in other Estonian towns. There have also been activities in schools, where children were informed of the catastrophe and the efforts to control the disaster.

According to the Ukrainian embassy, there are currently more than 4,000 people in two Chernobyl veterans' organisations in Estonia. This includes men who took part in collecting debris and in sealing the damaged reactor.

The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant took place on 26 April 1986. The fallout contaminated more than 145,000 square kilometres in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and its effects were felt in Poland, Sweden, Finland, and even Great Britain.

Five million people suffered as a result of the catastrophe and 2.3 million people in Ukraine have been given the status of Chernobyl catastrophe victim.

CULTURE NEWS

Arvo Pärt to Get High Austrian Award

Apr 25 - **Austrian President Heinz Fischer decided to award the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt the Class One Honour Cross of Austrian Science and Art.**

Anne Laur, representative of the Austrian Embassy in Tallinn, said it is Austria's highest recognition for high-level achievements in creative activity, in science or in the arts.

The award will be handed over to Pärt in Kadriorg Palace on 8 May by Austrian Ambassador to Estonia Dr. Angelika Saupe-Berchtold.

The same honour was previously given to translator Rita Tasa in 2000.

DEFENCE NEWS

Finland's Armed Forces Bestow Medals on Estonians who Fought Alongside Finnish Troops in WWII

Apr 27 - **The defence forces of Finland decorated Estonians who fought for Finland's independence in World War II with medals, on the occasion of Finnish Veterans Day.**

Arja Korhonen, of the embassy of Finland in Tallinn, said that Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim 140-year anniversary medals were given to about 70 Estonians in a ceremony in the hall of the Estonian Academy of Science.

A reception at the embassy followed. Korhonen said that a few hundred men who fought on the side of Finland in World War II live in Estonia at this point.

Several thousand young men not willing to fight in Nazi German uniform fled to Finland during World War II to fight against the Soviets as part of the Finnish forces. The Estonian regiment, JR 200,

fought in the area of Vyborg, present-day Russia. There were also numerous Estonians in the Finnish navy.

The regiment returned to Estonia in August 1944, fighting against Soviets on the line of Emajõgi River and elsewhere.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Currency rates in kroons:

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

(Bank of Estonia)

Estonia has Lowest Government Debt in EU

Apr 24 - **Estonia continued to have the European Union's lowest government sector debt burden in 2007, or 3.4 percent of GDP compared with 4.2 percent of GDP in the year before, Eurostat said.**

Other countries with low ratios of government debt to GDP were Luxembourg (6.8 percent), Latvia (9.7 percent) and Romania (13.0 percent).

Eight member states had government debt ratios higher than the maximum 60 percent of GDP allowed by the Maastricht treaty. These countries were Italy (104.0 percent), Greece (94.5 percent), Belgium (84.9 percent), Hungary (66.0 percent), Germany (65.0 percent), France (64.2 percent), Portugal (63.6 percent) and Malta (62.6 percent).

In 2007, the government deficit of both the euro area (EA15) and the EU27 fell compared with 2006, while the government debt increased in absolute terms, Eurostat said.

The government deficit in the EU 27 fell from 1.4 percent in 2006 to 0.9 percent in 2007. The EU27's government debt to GDP ratio declined from 61.2 percent at the end of 2006 to 58.7 percent at the end of 2007.

Enterprise Estonia Appoints Representatives for Ukraine, Sweden

Apr 28 - **Enterprise Estonia, one of the largest state-supported institutions for business in Estonia, has appointed Denis Priimägi as its new representative in the Ukrainian capital Kiev and Henrik Gothlin as its second representative in Stockholm.**

The plan for expansion of the missions of Enterprise Estonia was approved in principle by the Cabinet on 13 April, 2006.

As a result, offices were set up in Kiev, Tokyo, Shanghai, and in the San Francisco Bay Area. Each of these offices, just like the offices of Enterprise Estonia in Moscow, St. Petersburg and London, currently employ one person. The offices in Hamburg, Helsinki and Stockholm have two staff each.

Casino Operator Olympic Sees 18.6 Percent Growth in Operating Profit in Estonia

Apr 23 - **The business income of Olympic Casino Eesti in Q1 this year totaled 196.1 million kroons (EUR 12.5 mln) according to non-**

audited figures, 18.6 percent more than in the same period last year.

Olympic said that it published the Q1 business income figure of its Estonian subsidiary separately from those of the whole group with the obligation of making the information available to the Estonian Gaming Operator Association and its members.

Eesti Telekom Sees Increase in Profit

Apr 23 - **In the first three months of this year Eesti Telekom earned a net profit of 452 million kroons, 2.8 percent more year on year.**

Eesti Telekom's net profit per share was 3.27 kroons in Q1 2008.

Operating profit of the group increased by 2.8 percent to 436 million kroons in the first three months of this year, with the operating profit margin being 29.4 percent.

Before the depreciation of fixed assets the group's operating profit totalled 576 million kroons, 6 percent more than in the same period last year. The margin of the operating profit before depreciation was 38.8 percent.

During the first quarter of 2008 TeliaSonera, the majority owner of Eesti Telekom, increased its holding in the company to 60 percent. 24 percent of shares in Eesti Telekom belong to the Estonian State.

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ISLANDI VÄLJAK 1, TALLINN, ESTONIA 15049

TEL +372 637 7600

FAX +372 637 7617

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