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FOREIGN NEWS

EU Has to Stand United on Kosovo Issue - Estonian Foreign Minister

Jul 23 - **The European Union must stand united on the Kosovo issue, Estonia's foreign minister said after discussions with his colleagues.**

"Unity is of essence in each phase of the discussion about Kosovo's future," Urmas Paet said.

Estonia supports launching new negotiations with the active participation of the European Union, the minister added.

"We back the proposals on the status of Kosovo made by the UN special envoy Martti Ahtisaari that serve as the basis for the talks," Paet said.

European foreign ministers voiced firm support to Britain in the Litvinenko issue in a situation where Russia refused to extradite its citizen suspected of the ex-spy's murder and is not showing readiness to cooperate with the British authorities.

The bloc's foreign policy leaders weighed the situation in Sudan and neighboring territories and the EU's possible future action in the crisis area.

In Paet's words, Estonia backs drawing up a Darfur crisis regulation plan in view of the EU's potential military operation.

"This does not mean an automatic decision to start the Chad operation but offers an opportunity to thoroughly analyze the situation and possible actions," he explained.

The EU ministers at the same emphasized the need of continued support for the African Union mission in Sudan until the arrival of African Union and UN forces. Estonia in March allocated 500,000 kroons (EUR 32,000) to the mission.

The EU's Portuguese presidency briefed the ministers about preparations for an EU-Ukraine summit in the Ukrainian capital Kiev in September.

The ministers acknowledged Ukrainian political forces' agreements on early parliamentary elections and stressed the need to stick to the agreements made.

Paet said in Estonia's view it is important to reach agreement on material institutional questions before the elections.

The minister observed that a genuine democratization process is underway in Ukraine and it is vital for Ukraine to see a clear prospect of further convergence with the EU.

"It has to be kept in mind that possible crises too are a part of the democratic process and successful exit from them strengthens democracy," Paet said.

FOREIGN NEWS



The handing over of the newborn baby care equipment to the Bost Hospital in Helmand, Afghanistan.

Estonia Donates Medical Equipment to Afghan Hospital

Jul 25 - **Estonia's charge d'affaires in Afghanistan Andres Kolk has delivered to the central hospital of the Helmand province, Bost Hospital, medical apparatus procured in the framework of the Foreign Ministry's and the Red Cross society's development aid project.**

The portable oxygen generators and warming cribs for underweight and premature newborns are meant for the children's ward of the hospital situated in the province center Lashkar Gah to reduce the newborn and infant mortality rate.

The newborn and infant death rate is very high in Afghanistan, reaching up to 20 percent. According to the head physician of the Helmand central hospital, Enaytullah Ghafary, one out of four babies born at Bost Hospital dies before his or hers first birthday.

The hospital in Lashkar Gah was built and equipped by the US administration in 1965 and most of its equipment dates from that time.

The hospital employs 34 doctors who treat besides hospitalized people about 90 ambulatory patients a day. There are only around 100 practicing doctors in the Helmand province.

With a territory slightly bigger than Estonia's 45,000 square kilometers, the province in the south of Afghanistan has a population of 1.4 million of whom roughly one third are children. Most Estonian soldiers serving in the NATO-led international stabilization force are deployed in Helmand and they provided logistic support to deliver the consignment.

Afghanistan is a priority area of Estonian development aid and since last September a civilian representative has been working there to arrange the implementation of aid projects.

FOREIGN NEWS

EU Reform Treaty Hopefully Ready in October - Estonian Foreign Minister

Jul 23 - **Estonian foreign minister Urmas Paet expects the European Union reform treaty to be ready in October.**

Urmas Paet took part in a meeting of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels at which an intergovernmental conference called to reform the treaties underlying the bloc was inaugurated and the Portuguese presidency of the EU presented the draft treaty.

In Paet's words, Estonia hopes the intergovernmental conference will work efficiently.

"Serious disputes in the preparation of the treaty are not foreseen any longer because the mandate for drawing up the treaty agreed upon at the June European Council was detailed and precise," Paet said. "The reform treaty could thus be approved at the fall session of the Council and ratified by the 27 member states during next year."

In Paet's view, the treaty could step into effect on Jan. 1, 2009.

Foreign Minister: Estonia is Helping Georgia Closer to NATO

Jul 24 - **Estonia is helping Georgia on its road to NATO and hopes the Caucasian state will be given a membership action plan at the 2008 summit of the alliance, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet wrote in an opinion piece.**

"We're working to make sure that NATO's next summit in Bucharest next spring decides to give Georgia a membership action plan which would be a significant step forward in Georgia's approach to NATO membership," Paet said.

The minister added that "despite domestic policy turbulence" in Ukraine Estonia considers it important for this country, one of the largest in Europe, to stay also on a course toward NATO. "And, of course, we hope that also Western Balkans countries Croatia, Macedonia and Albania can soon be invited to join NATO," he said.

Estonia welcomes the open doors policy of the European Union and NATO so that all countries that wish to and are ready to meet the requirements would have an opportunity to join those organizations, the minister said.

"Sixteen years after the restoration of independence Estonia is not only thinking and speaking about freedom but is also acting to ensure its spread," Paet says. "We received assistance to restore and strengthen our freedom from the United States and other countries, and now the only way for us to act is to help secure the independence and freedom of the countries that have the same desire."

In Paet's words, this is the goal of Estonia's work to support Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Macedonia, Montenegro and other new democracies. "Estonia is seen as credible and trustworthy in those countries because of our recent experience of getting free from tyranny and building up a free society in less than a decade," he says.

Foreign Ministry Supports the Training of Georgian, Moldavian and Ukrainian Diplomats, Civil Servants and Professors

Jul 21 - **Foreign Minister Urmas Paet signed a directive according to which 670 250 kroons will be allocated from funds earmarked in the Foreign Ministry budget for development and humanitarian assistance for the short term training of the Ukrainian, Moldovan and Georgian young diplomats and civil servants and for the apprenticeships scholarships to the Ukrainian professors.**

According to Foreign Minister Urmas Paet Estonian help is needed because in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova there is a shortage of civil servants who have good knowledge in the subject-field of European Union. "Many young specialists who have basic knowledge about EU and NATO work in public offices, but they need more thorough information about the nature of integration, about the logics of integration process and about the co-operation methods with candidate and member states," Paet said.

Ukrainian, Georgian and Moldavian young diplomats and public officers take part in a three-week course organized by the Estonian School of Diplomacy during which they are provided with information about Estonian integration with EU and NATO, about co-operation among member states, about decision-making processes and about European Neighborhood Policy with its eastern partner states.

In the framework of this project also two professors from the Ukrainian Academy of Diplomacy will be invited to Tallinn for a one-month apprentice. They will give lectures about Ukrainian domestic and foreign politics, meet with Estonian professors, civil servants and politicians and gather materials for their lectures, which will be held in the Ukrainian Academy of Diplomacy as well for their own research.

The volume of funds earmarked for development and humanitarian assistance in the Foreign Ministry budget is 23 million kroons in 2007.

Foreign Minister Paet: Cyprus Could Become One of the Favorite Tourist Destinations Among Estonians

Jul 23 - **Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, the new Foreign Minister of Cyprus.**

At the meeting bilateral relations, reunification of Cyprus and topics related to European Union were under discussion.

The foreign ministers found that the relations between the two countries are good and tight, but at the same time co-operation could be made even more effective. Urmas Paet said that development could be seen in the field of science and economy.

"Estonia is also interested in developing more efficient co-operation in the field of tourism," Paet said. "Cyprus could become one of the favorite tourist destinations among Estonians," he added.

Paet also expressed his satisfaction at the fact that Cyprus has decided to open their embassy in Tallinn next year. At the moment the ambassador resides in Helsinki.

Foreign minister Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis gave an overview of the latest developments in the Cyprus reunification question.



Foreign Minister Urmass Paet and his Cypriot colleague Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis in Brussels, 23 July.

According to Urmass Paet the Cyprus question could be solved under the aegis of UN and according to a plan, which is acceptable for both sides. The foreign ministers also affirmed that Turkey's accession negotiations with EU are a good idea. They also aroused hope that Turkey will soon open its ports and airports to the ships and airplanes of Cyprus.

Urmass Paet congratulated his counterpart on imminent implementation of Europe's single currency Euro from January 1st 2008.

The President of the Republic: Estonia and Greece are Mentally and Spiritually in the Center of Europe

Jul 18 - President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Greek President Karolos Papoulias in Athens.

"This was a very pleasant meeting between two European-minded presidents," said the Estonian Head of State. "We spoke at length about the future of the European Union, and recognized once again that countries that may not be in the geographic center of Europe can still be countries that are mentally and spiritually in the center of Europe."

Both heads of state are optimistic about the future of the European Union and increasing the internal strength of the Community. "We see how the European Union is moving in the right direction, moving toward solutions," said President Ilves.

Among other things, the Estonian and Greek Presidents discussed the Kosovo question, which affects all of Europe, and reiterated the need for great diplomacy, but also internal consensus within the European Union, in finding a solution to the problem.

The heads of state also spoke about the future enlargement of the Community, which both view positively. "The boundaries of the current European Union are not the boundaries of Europe," said President Ilves. "We support the continuation of the Community's enlargement process, so that the applicant states, and those who aspire to be applicant states, maintain their motivation for reforms, which is necessary not only for them, but also for the well-being and stability of all of Europe."

President Ilves invited the Greek Head of State to visit Estonia at a time convenient for him.

The Estonian Head of State is in Greece in connection with his participation in the Tenth Annual Sympoium that is focusing on climate change this year.

Hungary's Prime Minister Briefed Estonian Counterpart on Russia Meetings

Jul 20 - Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany made a phone call to his Estonian counterpart Andrus Ansip to brief him on the Finno-Ugric festival that kicked off in Russia in the presence of Gyurcsany and the presidents of Russia and Finland.

Ansip told Gyurcsany he did not agree with those who suggested that Gyurcsany should not have accepted Russian President Vladimir Putin's invitation to attend the event in Saransk, Mordva.

Ansip said he had nothing against the fact that both Gyurcsany and Finnish President Tarja Halonen took part in the festival.

Gyurcsany told his Estonian counterpart that the Hungarian government supports and defends the culture and identity of national minorities and that the same should be done by Russia.

Estonia, too, supports brothers and sisters living in Russia as well as their cultural progress, said Ansip, adding that he's confident that Hungary's contribution to helping fellow Finno-Ugric peoples living in Russia is substantial.

Gyurcsany also updated Ansip about his talks with Putin and Halonen.

The opposition Fidesz party earlier had called on Gyurcsany not to participate in the meeting, arguing that it would isolate Estonia rather than strengthen the identity of Finno-Ugric peoples.

Hungary regretted that Estonia was not invited to the summit, but noted that the prime minister would have no reason to stay away from the event.

In a letter sent to Ansip, Gyurcsany reaffirmed Hungary's keen interest in Finno-Ugric affairs, with special regard to ethnic minorities living in the territory of present-day Russia.

Estonian Foreign Minister Hopeful of US Visa Waiver Soon

Jul 24 - Estonia's foreign minister hopes that visa-free travel to the United States will become possible before this year is over.

"Estonian citizens pose no threat to the United States and relying on the assurances of the US president, secretary of state and many senators and congressmen I hope the start of visa-free travel from Estonia to the United States is a matter of months rather than years," Urmass Paet said.

The main emphasis in Estonian-US relations on their 85th anniversary is next to security cooperation on the free movement of ideas, capital and people, the foreign minister says.

"Consequently, we regard visa-free movement between the United States and all European Union member countries including Estonia as highly important," Paet said.

Earlier this month the question of visa waiver was raised in meetings with a visiting delegation of congressmen by both President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Paet. Ilves then also recalled his June meeting with President George W. Bush in whose words the US administration is interested in as

speedy as possible extension of the visa waiver program to Estonia.

The decision on lifting the visa requirement for Estonian citizens rests with the US Congress.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Currency rates in kroons

(Bank of Estonia)

Estonia Has over 1,000 Public WiFi Networks

Jul 20 - **There are at present 1,092 certified WiFi networks in Estonia meant for public use.**

Thanks to competition, free wireless Internet networks by now outnumber those made available to users for a charge, initiator of the nonprofit association Wi-Fi.ee Veljo Haamer said. In his words, a WiFi network in hotels and restaurants is the rule rather than the exception.

Haamer said that the latest trend in Internet penetration is integration of different technologies and the spread of new services which improve the accessibility of the web across the country.

In his view, new technologies do not directly offer competition to wireless Internet as WiFi is primarily meant for the end user and it is simple and easy to use as the receiver is incorporated into most computers.

The first public WiFi network in Estonia was launched in May 2001. Estonia currently ranks among the top five European countries by WiFi availability.

Eesti Telekom Profit up by One Fifth on Year

Jul 19 - **The net profit of Estonia's leading telecommunications group Eesti Telekom in the first half of this year grew by 21.7 percent to 548 million kroons (EUR 35 mln) against the same period a year ago.**

The group's six-month revenues exceeded three billion kroons, a year-on-year increase of 12 percent.

In the second quarter the group netted 108 million kroons on revenues of 1.58 billion kroons. Compared to Q2 2006, revenues grew by 11 percent and net profit, by 22 percent.

The group's operating expenses in Q2 grew by 12 percent year-on-year to 994 million kroons. Earnings per share, at 0.77 kroons, showed an increase of 20.3 percent compared to the second quarter of 2006.

The group paid shareholders a record dividend of 1.31 billion kroons in June. Mostly on account of the dividend payment Eesti Telekom's assets decreased from 4.81 billion kroons at the beginning of this year to 4.39 billion kroons at the end of June.

Of Eesti Telekom shareholders, the majority owner TeliaSonera purchased 6.35 million shares, raising thereby its holding in the company to 58.33 percent. The Estonian state holds 27.17 percent of the group's shares.

Estonia Leads Baltic States by Export Growth

Jul 19 - **Estonian exports have in the last five years grown 2.1 times compared to twofold growth in Latvian and Lithuanian exports, the Statistical Office reports.**

Imports have at the same time increased 2.1 times in Estonia and Latvia and 1.9 times in Lithuania. While import continued growing at a fast pace also in 2006 the growth in exports slowed down somewhat which had a negative impact on the countries' foreign trade balance.

The trade shortfall grew over the last five years 2.1 times in Estonia, 2.3 times in Latvia and 1.7 times in Lithuania. According to data by Eurostat, the Baltic States' export turnover in 2006 totaled 373 billion kroons (EUR 23.83 mln) of which Lithuania contributed 47 percent, Estonia 32 percent and Latvia 21 percent.

The three Baltic countries accounted for only a marginal 0.7 percent of the European Union's aggregate export turnover.

Estonian exports separately made up 0.2 percent of EU exports, ahead of only Latvia, Malta and Cyprus.

The Baltic States' imports were worth 549 billion kroons last year. In this, too, Lithuania had the biggest share with 44 percent, followed by Estonia (30 percent) and Latvia (26 percent).

Baltic imports formed 0.9 percent of the EU total and Estonia's share was 0.3 percent.

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