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FOREIGN NEWS



The President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering and Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Tallinn, 16 August.
Photo: Toomas Tuul

European Parliament President Pöttering Invited President Ilves to Speak Before the European Parliament

Aug 17 - **President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Hans-Gert Pöttering, the President of the European Parliament, who invited the Estonian President to speak before a full session of the European Parliament in the spring of 2008.**

At dinner, ideas were exchanged on the future of Europe and the issue of Georgia was discussed at length. Pöttering and President Ilves found that Georgia needs the comprehensive support of the other European countries in both the political and economic spheres of democratic reforms.

The reform process of the European Union's Constitutional Treaty was also discussed, and Hans-Gert Pöttering confirmed that the Constitutional Treaty is the number one priority in the Community today.

Issues related to the energy security of the European Union were also discussed. The Estonian Head of State repeated his conviction that the European Union needs a uniform energy policy and it must spread risks by liberalizing the energy market.

During his visit to the North-East Estonian city of Narva, Pöttering met with representatives of ethnic minorities and leaders of the municipality. The President of the European Parliament said that he found it was positive that representatives of all the communities he met with saw Estonia as their homeland. "I didn't get the impression of Russian-speakers wishing to leave Estonia and they see their future in this country," he said. He underlined that Estonian and Russian communities should communicate with each other and it was only possible to do it by understanding Estonian.

Pöttering also met with parliament speaker Ene Ergma and Prime Minister Andrus Ansip in order to discuss issues of e-elections and e-governance.

FOREIGN NEWS

Foreign Minister Paet: Afghanistan Needs Continued International Support

Aug 17 - **Afghanistan needs continued all-round support by the international community and the role of the United Nations should be stepped up, said Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet.**

Taking the floor at the Baltic and Nordic countries' foreign ministers' meeting, Paet said that Afghanistan needed continued support of the international community. "The best solution is an all-round approach; military success must be supported by civilian reconstruction and methods of diplomatic conduct," the foreign minister underlined.

Stability has to be guaranteed in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which would restrict cross-border movement of Al-Qaeda and Taleban fighters and spread of radical Islamism in Afghanistan's border areas, the Foreign Minister added.

Paet said that thanks to stabilization of the situation Afghans had started to return to their homes. But according to Paet attention of the international community would have to be drawn to avoidance of new domestic tensions.

Paet found that the role of the United Nations in support to Afghanistan would have to be stepped up. "UN presence is certainly a positive signal to local residents and the increasing role of the UN would contribute to better coordination and implementation of reconstruction work," he said.

The foreign minister recognized the brisk activity of the European Union and NATO in Afghanistan, but underlined that to solve problems long-time devotion and patience would have to be displayed.

Paet added that Afghanistan belongs to priority countries of Estonia's development aid.

Estonia has its biggest peacekeeping mission in the country and an Estonian diplomat has been dispatched to Afghanistan.

FOREIGN NEWS

Heads of Estonia's Foreign Missions Convened in Tallinn

Aug 27 - **An annual conference of the heads of Estonian foreign missions took place from 27-29 August in Tallinn.**

Current foreign policy issues were addressed at the conference: basic trends of Estonian foreign policy, issues connected with the European Union and NATO, as well as matters related to energy and economic policy and cultural diplomacy.

The heads of foreign missions also met with members of the government and representatives of government agencies.

On the first day of the conference Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Secretary General Matti Maasikas addressed the diplomats. In the evening the heads of diplomatic missions met with Prime Minister Andrus Ansip.

On 28 August President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Interior Minister Jüri Pihl and head of the energy department at the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Communications Einari Kisel spoke to the diplomats. On the same evening the president gave a reception to participants in the conference.

On the last day of the conference Culture Minister Laine Jänes, director of the Institute for Economic Research (EKI) Marje Josing, Bank of Estonia Governor Andres Lipstok and Vice-Governor Märten Ross and Chairman of the supervisory board of the Estonian Development Fund Indrek Neivelt spoke to heads of the foreign missions.

President of the Republic: The European Union Should Stand up for Georgia

Aug 7 - **President Toomas Hendrik Ilves expressed support to Georgia in a telephone conversation with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.**

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves called the air incident on the territory of Georgia unwarranted and a step that brutally trampled on Georgian sovereignty.

"I call upon the presiding country of the European Union to take this incident very seriously and not to be as apathetic as after the helicopter attack that befell Georgia in March," said President Ilves.

Estonian Foreign Minister Raised Issue of Missile Incident in Georgia at Baltic, Nordic Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Aug 17 - **Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet raised the issue of the Georgian missile incident at the Baltic and Nordic countries' foreign ministers' meeting.**

The Baltic and Nordic countries' foreign ministers' meeting focused on achievements and future outlooks of the cooperation so far.

Paet, on whose initiative the Georgian missile incident was discussed, expressed the hope that a speedy, thorough and independent study would establish the perpetrators and circumstances of the incident.

"The incident proves one more time how important it is to withdraw Russian forces from

Georgia's territory and to solve frozen conflicts in the region," Paet underlined. He added that nothing of the kind would have happened if the Istanbul obligations had been carried out in time and Georgia's territorial integrity had been respected.

Paet regarded it as important that the group of experts, which includes also Estonian specialists, could carry out the investigation under the auspices of some international organization, for example the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The foreign minister found that the countries' cooperation would help ensure stable and sustainable development and security of the Baltic rim countries. Paet said that the activity of the Council of Baltic Sea States had many good and successful results, but there were also areas where efforts were required to achieve aims. Among those spheres he mentioned the environment, energy, economy, transport and border crossing issues.

It was agreed at the meeting that next year Estonia would coordinate cooperation and that the next foreign ministers' meeting would take place next year in Estonia.

Prime Minister Andrus Ansip Receives Polak Award

Aug 6 - **Prime Minister Andrus Ansip was handed over this year's Vašek and Anna Maria Polak Award at Charles University, Prague for the promotion of freedom, democracy and market economy in Estonia.**

The Prime Minister confirmed in his speech that all the three values praised by the award are extremely important for Estonia. The Prime Minister especially emphasized the importance of freedom.

"Freedom means something very special to Estonia," Ansip said. "It means the right to decide on our own future, the right to choose our own path. We know what it means to live without freedom."

According to the Prime Minister, Estonia now has the moral duty to help others who are still building their country, but all countries have to make their own decisions and do their homework. This is what the Prime Minister considers the greatest lesson for Estonia when joining NATO and the European Union.

Estonian Parliament Speaker Met with Nordic, Baltic Colleagues

Aug 23 - **Speaker of the Estonian parliament Ene Ergma attended a meeting of the Nordic and Baltic parliament speakers in Uppsala, Sweden.**

The meeting was hosted by chairman of the Swedish parliament Per Westerberg.

Issues of the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly, role of national parliaments with regard to the European Commission and joint support for the development of democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were discussed.

Together with Soren Holmberg, Professor of Gothenburg University, the participants mulled over reliability of national parliaments.

In addition to Ergma, the meeting was attended by Christian Mejdahl of Denmark, Sauli Niinisto of Finland, Helgi Berndsson of Iceland, Endulis Emsis

of Latvia, Viktoras Muntianas of Lithuania and Thorbjorn Jagland of Norway.

DEFENCE NEWS

Afghan Defence Minister Thanks Estonian Colleague for Assistance

Aug 25 - **Estonian Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo met in Kbul with Afghanistani Defence Minister Gen. Abdul Rahim Wardak, who thanked Estonia for assistance.**

Wardak thanked Estonia for development cooperation and financial support given as humanitarian assistance, the aim of which is to support anti-drug struggle in Afghanistan, as well as assistance given to the construction of the Afghanistan armed forces.

"We are grateful for your contribution in ensuring the security and development of Afghanistan. Thank you for supporting us and helping us to fight against the inhuman Taleban," the Afghanistan defence minister said.

Aaviksoo said support to the construction of the Afghanistani security forces with equipment and training was of vital importance, "Independently operating Afghanistani security forces that are able to ensure security in the country are a sign that our work has been done well," said Aaviksoo, adding that it was Estonia's duty to assist Afghanistan in the achievement of democracy and stability also in the future.

The Afghanistan's defence minister gave a high opinion of the efforts being taken for the construction of the Afghanistan's society, finding that the work carried out by NATO countries' construction teams and the experience acquired was of particular importance.

Wardak also expressed deep condolences to the families of the Estonian soldiers killed and wounded in Afghanistan in June.

At the end of the meeting Aaviksoo extended to Gen. Wardak an invitation to visit Estonia. Besides he informed his colleague of the Baltic defence issues conference to take place in September, which will this time focus on Afghanistan, one of its aims being to speak more about civilian operations that often remain in the shadow of military operations. An Estonian civilian representative and head of the special mission continue their work in Afghanistan.

Besides, Aart Nõmm, an official of the Estonian Defence Ministry, works as an adviser in Afghanistan. The Estonian side expressed the wish to fill the post also in the future.

Nordic Battle Group to Have up to 55 Estonians

Aug 27 - **The Estonian Defence Ministry sent to a round of endorsements a bill according to which Estonia will assign up to 55 members of the defence forces to the Nordic battle group of the European Union.**

In the Defence Ministry's opinion it is important for Estonia to take part in the EU battle group as this enables urgent and flexible participation in international crisis management. Besides, it is an important military cooperation project between Estonia and the Nordic countries.

The Cabinet decided the country's contribution to the battle groups and opening of respective talks back in November 2004. Two months later Sweden

extended an invitation to Estonia to take part in its battle group and in April that year participation in the Nordic battle group was endorsed by the government.

The Nordic Battle Group will be in 15-day readiness from next January 1 to June 30. It will be in readiness simultaneously with the EU battle group under Spanish command in which France and Germany will also participate.

The Nordic battle group is made up of units from the leading country of the group, Sweden, as well as from Norway, Finland, Ireland and Estonia; besides, Great Britain will be involved via its contribution to the commanding headquarters.

NATO Mine Ships Dispose of 31 Mines in Estonian Waters

Aug 25 - **During a mine hunting operation vessels of the NATO mine hunting squadron found a total of 31 mines in Estonian waters.**

During the operation that started on August 10 NATO ships and mine divers of the Estonian Navy found 21 German World War Two period contact mines, eight German and two Russian bottom mines.

Participants in the exercise disposed of all the mines. Most of the mines were found in the operation area in the Irbe Strait off Sõrve Spit.

Mine divers of the Estonian navy cooperated with the Belgian unit that uses autonomous underwater robots. Unmanned underwater robots are used to collect data from the see floor, after the processing of which mine divers can be used to identify the objects found and to dispose of the mines.

The NATO mine hunting squadron is currently composed of the Belgian staff and supply ship Godetia, which is also the flag ship of the unit, the mine ships Primula from Belgium, the Middleton from Great Britain, Datteln from Germany, the Maassluis from the Netherlands and the Czajka from Poland. Commander of the unit is Cmdr. Serge Ots from Belgium.

President Ilves: The Defence League is Capable of Participating in Estonia's Security Cover

Aug 22 - **"The Defence League deserves serious recognition and support from all of us for their actions during civil crises and natural disasters, as well as a national defence organization," said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at the meeting of the Council of the Defence League.**

"We have repeatedly seen how the Defence League is able to take part in Estonia's security cover," said President Ilves. "I am glad that during the last few months, I have heard that many people wish to join the Defence League."

According to the Head of State, cooperation needs to be intensified between the Defence League and local governments in order to be prepared to prevent and hinder civil crises, and the joint activities of the police, border guards and units of the Defence League need to be effectively coordinated.

"Together, honourable council members, we must regularly make sure that the reputation and authority of the Defence League increases, and that people who are important to the society join the Defence League and—this is very important—that all

the members of the Defence League are necessary to the country and have an activity that is appropriate for them," said President Ilves.

At the meeting of the Council of the Defence League, Major-General Ants Laaneots, the Commander of the Defence Forces, spoke about the short-term development plan for the Defence Forces, and Lieutenant Colonel Raivo Lumiste, Commander of the Defence League, spoke about the future of his organization, for which the keywords remain military capability, civil support and the will to defend.

Estonia, Finland to Carry out Joint Observation Flights in Russian Air Space

Aug 12 - The Estonian and Finnish defense forces will together from August 13 to 17 carry out joint observation flights in the Russian air space under The Open Skies Treaty, the defence forces headquarters said.

Maj. Villu Tamul, head of the general staff weapons control group, said it was the first such "active mission" for Estonia.

The crew of the observation flights is headed by Estonia and it has five soldiers and officials from both the countries. The head of the mission is Tamul, and commander of the Finnish observation group, Col. Arto Kupiainen, serves as his deputy.

Tamul underlined the exceptionally good cooperation with Finnish colleagues in the preparation of the joint flights.

That the detailed route of the flights would be decided on the spot and the photographs taken on the flights developed in Finland.

The Open Skies flights will be made by means of an internationally certified Saab 340B (OS-100) aircraft together with the crew rented from Sweden. The twin-engined propeller aircraft is provided with a vertical optical panoramic camera, the defense forces said.

The Open Skies Treaty is part of the security and confidence-building measures of member countries of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The aim of the treaty is to promote openness, security and confidence between countries. The narrower aim is to collect information on military forces and military activity.

The Open Skies Treaty was signed in 1992 in Helsinki and entered into force in 2002. Thirty-three OSCE countries, including all members of NATO, have acceded to the treaty.

Estonia acceded to the Open Skies Treaty in 2005 and must receive up to four observation flights by other member countries over its territory every year. Russia carried out observation flights in the Estonian air space in 2005 and 2006.

DOMESTIC NEWS

President Attended Miners' Day Events in North-East Estonia

Aug 24 - President Toomas Hendrik Ilves visited the small town of Toila in north-eastern Estonia to attend the events of Miners' Day, the largest public festival of this region.

"Today oil shale is the basic energy source of Estonia and will remain so in the near future; in the foreseeable future, it will continue to be a very important energy source, and therefore miners are really needed by all of us," said President Toomas

Hendrik Ilves in Toila, when he greeted the thousands of people that had gathered for the Miners' Day.

Ida-Viru was also the county to host the first regional visit by the president after Ilves took office last fall.

Miners' Day is one of a host of so-called professional days that used to be celebrated in the Soviet Union. The tradition to mark it was revived at the Estonian state-owned mining company in 1999, and it has since emerged as the largest annual public festival in the region. Miners' Day is celebrated on the last Sunday of August also in Russia.

President Ilves Calls for Monument to Victims of Communism

Aug 23 - Speaking at a meeting to mark the 20th anniversary of a key pro-independence demonstration in Tallinn, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves called to put up a monument to victims of communism.

"The events of recent years have convinced me that Estonia, just like the other European countries which suffered from crimes against humanity, need a memorial to the victims," Ilves said.

He cited a recent research which indicates that crimes against humanity affected more than 60 percent of Estonians.

"If so big a share of our citizens has suffered under communism, we cannot let it simply to be forgotten, we mustn't allow it to be downplayed," the head of state said.

The president expressed regret that until this day one can witness attempts to whitewash everything that Estonians and other nations living under communism had to live through.

"I wouldn't be upset so much if the ones who downplay it were neutral bystanders," Ilves said. "But why is it that namely former members of the CPSU, including senior members of the party, are permanently justifying or downplaying the sufferings that befell others because of communists?"

Speaking of the 1987 meeting in Hirvepark, which at the time focused on the demand that the Soviet Union admit the existence of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, which carved up Central and Eastern Europe, Ilves said that the open protest 20 years ago brought together people who wanted to restore Estonia's belonging to the Western cultural space along with the freedom of expression that this entails.

At President Ilves's Meeting with the Estonian Language Council, the Future of the Estonian Language Was Discussed

Aug 22 - President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with the Estonian Language Council, with whom the development strategy for the Estonian language, and issues related to language research and Estonian-language higher education and science were discussed.

President Ilves stated that keeping the future of the Estonian language in mind, it is important to clarify whether linguists should actively direct language development or just register the reforms that have occurred.

"To my mind, in respect to the enrichment of the Estonian language, we should pay more attention to

the creation of native language concepts for new things and developments and not borrow them directly from foreign languages," stressed the Estonian Head of State.

The issue of Estonian as a scientific language was discussed at length. At the meeting, it was acknowledged that an important role in the survival of a language is played by the development of scientific language, and therefore, for instance, doctoral studies should include dealing with specialized Estonian-language terminology. It is also important to send lecturers in the Estonian language to universities around the world and to promote the study of the Estonian language by foreign students.

The participants in the discussion included, among others, Tõnis Lukas, the Minister of Education and Research, Professor Birute Klaas of the University of Tartu, the Chairman of the Estonian Language Council, Jüri Valge, the adviser of the Ministry of Education and Research, Professor Karl Pajusalu of the Universities of Helsinki and Tartu, Professor Martin Ehala of Tallinn University, academician Haldur Õim, Urmas Sutrop, Director of the Estonian Language Council, and Ilmar Tomusk, Director General of the Language Inspection Office.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Currency rates in kroons

(Bank of Estonia)

Number of Unemployed Stays Low in July

Aug 9 - **There were 12,887 unemployed registered with the Estonian Labor Market Board as of the end of July, 2 percent of the labor force from age 16 to pension age.**

Compared with June 30, there were 247 people more registered at the end of June. But against August 1 the number of jobless fell by 4.3 percent, the Labor Market Board said.

The board registered 2,159 new unemployed in July. There are 1,450 young jobless people (aged 16 to 24) and 4,178 jobless people aged above 50 registered with the Labor Market Board.

Of the jobless registered 62.3 percent were women. As of August 1 the Labor Market Board had information about 8,216 vacancies.

Estonia, EU Agree on Priorities for Use of Cohesion Policy Funds

Aug 14 - **Estonia and the European Commission have agreed on the priorities for the use of the 3.4 billion kroons (EUR 217 mln) to be allocated to Estonia as part of the EU Cohesion Policy over the years 2007-2013.**

Under the agreement, Estonia will use the money to boost growth of the economy and employment, strengthening of human capital and reducing regional differences, the European Commission said.

The EU commissioner for employment and social affairs, Vladimir Spidla, said the Estonian strategy reflects the country's resolve to improve the quality and effectiveness of investments made in human resources.

Estonia's strategic priorities for the years 2007-2013 are an educated and active population, increasing of capacity in the area of research and development, improving innovation and

productiveness, creating better connection opportunities, sustainable use of environmental resources, balanced regional development, and better administrative capacity.

Estonia is planning to divide the funds between three operational programs, dealing respectively with the development of human resources, development of the economic environment and development of the living environment.

TeliaSonera Raises Holding in Eesti Telekom to 59 Percent

Aug 24 - **The Scandinavian telecom group TeliaSonera has increased its holding in Eesti Telekom by about 0.9 percentage points to 59.25 percent since the beginning of May.**

The other big shareholder in Eesti Telekom apart from TeliaSonera and the Estonian State were Deutsche Bank Trust Company with 2.65 percent, and clients represented by Danske Bank with 1.05 percent. The holdings of other shareholders are smaller than one percent.

TeliaSonera has earlier made several offers for the takeover of shares in Eesti Telekom with the aim of acquiring all shares in the company, but because of their low price the attempts have not been successful.

In the last major deal 2.6 million shares, 1.9 percent of the stock capital of the company, changed hands between unidentified partners in an offboard deal.

Indonesian Parliament Mission Learns About Estonia's Economic Policy

Aug 23 - **A delegation from the Indonesian parliament that met with Estonian deputies in Tallinn showed interest toward Estonia's economic policy.**

The Indonesian delegation led by Didik J. Rachbin met with members of the Estonian parliament's standing committees for economy and foreign affairs, who spoke about the work of the Estonian parliament.

Rachbin said that the trip to Estonia was prompted by the wish to learn more about Estonia's successful economic policy and develop relations with Estonia. The delegation also wants to get ideas how to better hold negotiations with the European Union.

Ekspress Grupp Acquires Delfi Portals for EUR 54 Million

Aug 2 - **The Estonian media holding Ekspress Grupp concluded a contract with Interinfo Baltic on the acquisition, for the sum of 846 million kroons (EUR 54.05 mln), of 100 percent of the Delfi group operating Internet portals in the three Baltic states.**

Subject to the Competition Board's approval, Ekspress Grupp will acquire Interinfo Holding SCA's 99.75 percent holding and Interinfo Finland Oy's 0.25 percent holding in Interinfo Baltic, the group informed the stock exchange.

Delfi and its subsidiaries operate seven Internet portals in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Russia.

Sales revenue of the Delfi group reached 89.3 million kroons in 2006. Delfi's websites are visited by approximately 700,000 people on a daily basis,

the company said. According to Delfi, the group's portals have 45-48 percent of the Baltic online advertising market. The Delfi portals operate as three local companies in the respective Baltic countries.

"The acquisition of Delfi is the next step of the strategy we presented during the public offering of shares when we pledged to expand Ekspress Grupp's operations in the Baltic states as well as on the Internet," the majority owner of the group, Hans H. Luik, said.

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