

Estonian Review

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FOREIGN NEWS



President Toomas Hendrik Ilves with Serbian President Boris Tadić in Belgrade, 15 October.

President Ilves: Serbia's Path Will Lead to European Union Accession

15 October - **"Serbia has clearly proven to everyone that its path is the path of accession to the European Union and Serbia's persistence and dedication towards achieving this goal deserve respect and recognition,"** said President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is on an official visit to Belgrade, at a meeting with Serbian Head of State **Boris Tadić**. Serbia's remarkable progress is also confirmed by yesterday's European Commission progress report. President Tadić named membership in the European Union a strategic goal of his country.

"The European Union needs to take the next steps in its convergence with Serbia - it is time to start fulfilling the Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed with Serbia last spring. Serbia is already doing so unilaterally, and now, it is the turn of the parliaments and governments of the European Union member states," the Estonian head of state said. "Serbia's co-operation with the international tribunal for capturing war criminals has constantly improved. Estonia finds that Serbia could rapidly move forward with its accession process towards the European Union."

"I am glad for the European Commission's decision to propose to the Council and the Parliament that visa-free travel to the EU be granted to Serbia, as well as to Macedonia and Montenegro. Estonia has always strongly supported this," President Ilves said. "The Commission's decision demonstrates your success story. It also confirms that Serbia has many friends in the European Union and your rational and pragmatic actions will bring even more support - it demonstrates our mutual respect and trust." At the meeting between Presidents Ilves and Tadić, the situation in the Western Balkans was also discussed.

"The stability of this region is part of the stability of Europe, and as we know, a part of much broader stability," the Estonian head of state said while expressing concerns about developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the inability of the various communities to agree on the country's political future and subsequent reforms undoubtedly deserves increased attention from the international community.

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FOREIGN NEWS

Ansip: Estonia Supports Actions of Latvia's Government

14 October - **Today Prime Minister Andrus Ansip met with Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis, who is on a one-day working visit to Estonia, with whom the economic and financial situation of the two countries were discussed.** The meeting also addressed energy issues, the Lisbon Treaty and the future evolution of the institutions of the European Union.

At the meeting, Prime Minister Ansip stressed that Estonia supported the efforts by Latvia's government to stabilise the economic and financial situation of the country and that an improvement in the situation was also in Estonia's interests. "I am certain that Latvia's government is doing very good work right now. Cuts in public sector expenditures and the increasing of state revenues are indispensable now, not only in Estonia and Latvia but also many other countries," he said. "Naturally, these painful decisions are not popular, yet they are indispensable in order to exit the crisis," he added.

Speaking about the principal objective for Estonia's financial policy, Ansip said that Estonia wants to introduce the euro in January 2011, and that today's estimates as to the meeting of the Maastricht criteria indicate that the goal is realistic. "Joining the euro area is, for Estonia, a prerequisite for creating an environment that supports the development of the economy," he said and affirmed that Estonia would continue its strict budgetary policy, which has been successful so far.

Speaking on energy issues, the prime minister noted that in energy relations with Latvia, the placement at the disposal of the market of the capacities of the Estlink 1 power cable by Latvenergo mattered most to Estonia.

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Serbia

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The Estonian and Serbian heads of state called the relations between their countries reliable, while emphasising the great potential in developing economic and trade ties.

"Serbia is already Estonia's largest trading partner in the Western Balkans," President Ilves said.

"Many successful Estonian companies are weighing the possibility of entering the Serbian market," President Ilves added. "Thus, the Viru Keemia Grupp is seriously interested in Serbia's oil shale and is already co-operating with the University of Belgrade." President Tadić called this an important and promising partnership that is closely related to energy security.

Many Estonian information technology companies are also looking for opportunities to start operations in Serbia. For instance, Webmedia has already opened a representative office in Belgrade.

At the meeting, President Ilves also spoke about Estonia's experiences with e-governance and e-elections. He introduced to the Serbian head of state the unique X-Road software solution that was developed in Estonia. This solution brings the citizens closer to the government, makes the functioning of the state more efficient, and facilitates the citizens' communications with the state. Estonia is ready to donate the basic X-Road technology to Serbia.

President Ilves, who is the first Estonian Head of State to visit Serbia, will also meet with the Speaker of the Serbian Parliament Slavica Dukić Dejanović and the Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković. He will also give a lecture on "The Future Enlargement of the European – Estonia's Lesson" at the Belgrade City Hall.

Latvia

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"This will enable the launching of the Nord Pool price area, which in turn will serve as a prerequisite for the establishment of a functioning Baltic electricity market," Ansip said. The prime minister also considered it important for regulation to be introduced with respect to electricity imports from third countries.

Both prime ministers acknowledged the endorsement of the Lisbon Treaty at the referendum in Ireland and expressed hope that from now on practical preparations relating to the Treaty coming into effect would gain added momentum.

At the meeting, diplomatic co-operation between Estonia and Latvia—for instance the establishment of a joint embassy for Estonia and Latvia in Cairo—was addressed as well.

Paet Discussed NATO Enlargement with US Assistant Secretary of State

17 October - **Foreign Minister Urmus Paet spoke with Assistant Secretary of State of the United States for European and Eurasian Affairs Phil Gordon about future NATO enlargement.**

Foreign Minister Paet stated that they discussed opportunities for giving a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Montenegro and continuing close co-

operation with Georgia, Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina. "For Estonia, expanding the circle of nations that share NATO's values and co-operating with nations that are striving to become members is still very important," said Paet. "The nations that have reached the necessary level must receive the opportunity and clear prospects to continue preparing for NATO accession," he added.

"Further NATO expansion and co-operation with potential candidate countries should also be discussed at the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in December of this year," Paet noted.

Paet and Gordon also discussed developments in Belarus and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's recent visit to Russia.

Estonian Introduces e-Government Opportunities to Palestine



Foreign Minister Urmus Paet with Minister of Telecommunications and IT of the Palestinian Authority Mashhour Abudaka, 14 October.

Photo: Peeter Langovits

14 October - **Foreign Minister Urmus Paet discussed the Middle East peace process and Estonia's experiences in developing an e-government with Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology of the Palestinian Authority Mashhour Abudaka, who was in Estonia for a visit.**

Foreign Minister Paet emphasised that the Middle East peace process needs to move forward so that a resolution between the two states can be found. "The resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict must be based upon a two-state solution," stated Paet. "We consider achieving peace in the Middle East to be extremely important from both a regional and global security standpoint," he added.

Minister Abudaka gave an overview of the most recent developments in Palestine's region.

Paet and Abudaka also talked about bilateral relations and spent quite some time discussing Estonia's development co-operation project, within the framework of which 20 officials from the Palestinian Authority will be introduced to the experiences of developing Estonia's e-government.

"Today's information and communications technology solutions offer citizens many opportunities through the creation of essential e-services. These also promote the establishment of good and transparent election standards, which are essential for the development of a nation," said Foreign Minister Paet. Paet added that this first co-operation project creates a good basis for future co-operation projects for updating the public sector in Palestine.

Minister of the Palestinian Authority Abudaka is leading a 20-member delegation which will be participating in an e-government seminar organised by the e-Governance Academy in Estonia. The seminar is part of the Estonian Foreign Ministry's development aid project, within the framework of which leading officials from the Palestinian Authority will be introduced to the experiences of developing Estonia's e-government.

Prime Minister Ansip Opened International Energy Conference at Tallinn University of Technology



Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis at the energy conference in Tallinn, 14 October.

14 October - **Today, when he opened the "Baltic Clean and Green Conference", Prime Minister Andrus Ansip stressed the importance of new energy technologies in the creation of sustainable economic growth.** In addition to the importance of international co-operation, he also talked about the future of Estonian energy.

Ansip stated that Estonia, in its national energy policy, has set ambitious goals that support the climate and energy related agreements of the European Union. "The Estonian energy management development plans prescribe the increase of the use of renewable energy," he stated and added that this will bring about an increase in the use of wind energy in the immediate future.

The prime minister stated that the wellbeing of future generations and the sustainability of economic growth both depend on the success of the use of renewable energy and the implementation of new energy technologies. "I believe that new technologies will positively affect the entire economic situation by promoting economic growth, contributing to the establishment of jobs and increasing productivity."

When speaking about the future, Ansip noted that Estonia plans to supplement its energy production with nuclear energy. The prime minister noted that in addition to the participation in the Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant project in Lithuania, work has already commenced on determining the possibility of establishing a nuclear power plant in Estonia as well. "The existence of domestic low-carbon energy is of the utmost importance in the future for achieving safe and sustainable development," he said.

The prime minister also talked about the importance of co-operation with other countries in the field of energy, both on the regional and global level. Regarding the energy co-operation between Estonia and the USA, the head of government mainly pointed out the co-operation in the field of oil shale energy. "When using this natural resource, it is important to develop environmentally friendly technologies without compromising energy security," he said. From the specific fields of international co-operation, the preparations for the extension of the Nordic power exchange Nord-Pool, the establishment of EstLink 2 and NordBalt power cable, the participation of Estonia in the work of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the establishment of the EU-USA Energy Council were also discussed.

The Baltic energy conference being held today and tomorrow was organised in co-operation with the US Department of Energy. The conference will also be attended by Valdis Dombrovskis, the Prime Minister of Latvia, who is on a one-day official visit to Estonia.

Paet: Visa Freedom With Brazil Will Improve Our Relations

15 October - **While meeting with members of a delegation from Brazil's foreign ministry, who are in Tallinn for political consultations, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet expressed his satisfaction over an agreement finally being reached regarding the visa freedom agreement between the European Union and Brazil.**

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet noted that the text of the visa freedom agreement was approved during the European Union-Brazil summit last week, and after it is implemented citizens of Estonia and the other European Union nations can travel to Brazil for tourism and business purposes visa-free. "Upon its implementation, the agreement allows for Estonian citizens to visit Brazil without a visa. We hope that the Brazilian parliament will sign and ratify the agreement right away so that visa freedom can come into effect in 2010," said Paet.

Another topic discussed at the meeting was the intensification of Estonia-Brazil bilateral relations. "The resolution of the visa issue will certainly give momentum to the development of relations," Paet asserted.

Foreign Minister Paet stated that Estonia is also interested in concluding an agreement for the prevention of double taxation and an agreement for the protection of investments with Brazil. "Brazil is Estonia's most important trade partner in Latin America, and concluding the appropriate agreements would help to develop economic relations and tighten business contacts," Paet added.

During the meeting, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet praised Estonia and Brazil's cultural and education contacts, which have a good base in the cultural and educational co-operation agreement signed in 2006. "However, we could be even more active in developing student and teacher exchanges, which Estonian universities are very interested in," Paet noted.

In connection with the arrival of visa freedom, which will facilitate more Estonians travelling to Brazil, the important role of honorary consuls was also discussed at the meeting. There are three Estonian honorary consuls working in Brazil right now who help to intensify economic and cultural

relations between the two nations and, when necessary, help out Estonia citizens in Brazil.

Foreign Minister to Open Estonian Embassy in Minsk

20 October - **Today Foreign Minister Urmas Paet will open the Estonian Embassy in Belarus in Minsk.** Paet stated that Estonia would like to intensify Estonia-Belarus bilateral relations as well as relations between Belarus and the European Union in order to support Belarusian society continuing to open up to European values. Within the framework of his visit, tomorrow Paet will open an Estonia-Belarus business forum, which will have a 30-member Estonian business delegation in attendance.

While in Belarus the foreign minister will sign an agreement for the facilitation of investments and the protection of reciprocal investments between Estonia and Belarus, which will create equal business opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs in both countries.

Paet emphasised that Estonian entrepreneurs have great interest in Belarus, which is why more attention should be given to promoting economic contacts. "The investments our businessmen are making in Belarus have grown significantly over the past few years. In the future the embassy will help Estonian entrepreneurs establish contacts with the Belarusian side," noted the foreign minister.

Today Paet will also meet with representatives of Belarusian civil society. The Estonian foreign minister emphasised that direct contacts between individuals play an important role in enlivening bilateral relations.

"To develop relations, Belarus must continue to improve the human rights and freedoms situation. This requires the strengthening of civil society," said Paet. "Estonia has supported many projects geared towards developing Belarusian civil society," he added.

Paet said that Estonia and the European Union are interested in Belarus opening up to Europe step by step. "European Union Eastern Partnership offers many practical opportunities for co-operation between Belarus and the European Union," said Paet. "The European Union's technical aid and use of resources require a solid desire to co-operate on the part of Belarus," Paet added.

Paet will present a speech at the University of Belarus. He also has meetings scheduled with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka and Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov.

The visit, taking place from 20-21 October, is the first visit to Belarus by an Estonian foreign minister since diplomatic relations with Belarus were established in 1992.

RSF Ranks Estonia Sixth in Terms of Freedom of the Press Worldwide

20 October (BNS) - **The international media watchdog Reporters Without Borders, RSF, has ranked Estonia 6th among 175 countries in its fresh media freedom list.**

In the list for 2008 published last fall, Estonia was tied in places 4-6 with Finland and Ireland. The year before that it shared places 3-4 with Slovakia.

In this year's rankings Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway and Sweden are tied in places 1-5, ahead of Estonia. Also in a tie are the Netherlands and

Switzerland, in places 7-8, followed by Iceland in 9th place and Lithuania in 10th place.

The bottom 10 countries are Vietnam, Yemen, China, Laos, Cuba, Burma, Iran, Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea, in that order.

The RSF ranks countries after giving them points based on different criteria. The fewer points a country gets, the higher degree of media freedom it is seen to have.

The top five countries all were given 0 points, Estonia 0.5 points, the Netherlands and Switzerland one point, Iceland two points and Lithuania 2.25 points.

Latvia, with three points, was tied in places 13-15 with Austria and New Zealand. The United States, Luxembourg and Britain received four points each and took places 20-22. Of EU countries, the poorest ranking was Bulgaria in 68th.

Russia placed 153rd with 60.88 points while the last country on the list, Eritrea, was given 115.5 points.

Estonian Nature Photographer Wins Prestigious Award

20 October - **Estonian biologist and nature photographer Urmas Tartes won the Animals in their Environment category of the prestigious Veolia Environment Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2009 award.** The WPY competition, now in its 45th year, is owned by BBC Wildlife Magazine and London's Natural History Museum.

He won the category for his image of a springtail, otherwise known as a "snow flea" navigating its way through delicate snowflakes.

When the temperature drops below freezing, the insect climbs down through the frosty crevasses to the warmer soil below.

"But they're only active a few degrees below zero," Tartes told BBC News. "I had to 'ambush' the weather for just the right temperature and conditions.

"I was travelling with my wife and it started snowing slightly," he recalled. "We came to a place where we thought it might be possible [to see the insects] and the thermometer in the car said it was just the right temperature."

Tartes had waited for the perfect weather in which the snow fleas would be active, but the snowflakes would remain frozen.

His patience paid off, and he managed to take over 100 shots while the insects negotiated their way through the tricky terrain.

He believes he captured something truly unique and that this was largely thanks to his knowledge of his country and its climate.

"I think the best of the photos I take are in my homeland," he told BBC News. "There's a saying in Estonia that in order to see new things, you have to follow common paths - paths you know."

Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8318000/8318226.stm

DOMESTIC NEWS

Over 100 000 People Participate in e-Voting for Local Elections

15 October (BNS) - **During the advance voting period for this year's local elections that ended on Wednesday night, 236 386 votes were cast**

in polling stations and over the Internet, which accounts for 21.6% of the Estonian electorate.

The National Electoral Committee said 104 415 people voted electronically during the week this was possible, and in addition 131 971 people cast ballots in polling stations in the three days of advance voting.

During the European Parliament elections in June, substantially fewer voters gave their votes in advance. Electronic votes then numbered 58 669. In the 2007 parliamentary elections 30 275 people and in the 2005 local polls 9 317 people voted online.

In this year's polls 3 076 members of 226 local government councils will be elected.

Estonia Clocks in Highest Ever Local Election Turnout at 60.3 Percent

18 October (BNS) - Sunday's elections saw a higher voter turnout than any local elections in Estonia since the restoration of independence.

The turnout figure released by the national election authority shortly after 9 p.m. was 60.3%.

Voter turnout was highest in the capital Tallinn, where it reached 65.3%. It was also 60 % or higher in Harju County (64.3%), Jõgeva County (62.2%), Põlva County (61.7%) and Tartu County (60%).

The ratio was lowest in Saare County (53.6%) and in the city of Tartu (54.9%).

In the past local elections in Estonia voter turnout has remained close to 50%, being the highest in the first post-independence municipal polls in 1993 and the lowest in 2005.

Estonian residents today elected 3 076 members of 226 local government councils whose term of office lasts four years. From 1993 to 2005 local elections were held in Estonia every three years.

The number of candidates in these elections was 15 322 and that of eligible voters 1 094 625.

Unlike in general elections in which only citizens can take part, holders of permanent residence permits who are not citizens of the country can also cast a ballot in local polls in Estonia provided that they have lived in the territory of the respective local government for at least five years.

President Ilves Cast His Vote in Local Elections by Internet from Macedonia*

14 October - President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who is on an official visit to Macedonia*, participated today in the elections for the local government councils in Estonia at the Estonian Honorary Consulate in Skopje by voting electronically.

President Ilves, who introduced Internet voting to the journalists in Macedonia*, stressed that small countries are the ones that have the flexibility to utilise e-governance, as the co-operation between Estonia and Macedonia* related to information technology proves.

"E-governance, in its broadest sense, provides the opportunity to simplify the life of the citizens and to make their communications with the government faster and more convenient," President Ilves said.

"However, Internet voting is the best way for people who are far from home to securely cast their vote," the Estonian head of state said. "As you can see, there is no difference whether I am in Abja, Tallinn, or thousands of miles away when I cast my vote for the Abja Council, and thereby fulfil my civil

duty and participate in the governance of my home municipality."

President Ilves called on everyone to participate in the elections, saying "Every vote counts." "The dignity and exacting nature of the voters helps to improve the governance of the cities and rural municipalities," the Estonian Head of State said. "Not participating in the elections is not a dignified sign of protest, but just negligence. This is unfair to your home municipality or hometown."

* Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia



President Toomas Hendrik Ilves casting his vote electronically from Macedonia, 14 October.

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Soomaa National Park Joins Distinguished List of European Wilderness Areas

20 October - Soomaa National Park, the so-called kingdom of bogs, last week became the first Estonian nature preserve to make it into the PAN Parks Network, which includes Europe's finest natural areas. This is an acknowledgment of quality that will increase the international notoriety of this unique natural locale. The bogs, which are almost completely untouched by human activity, became the 11th member of PAN Parks.

To get the PAN Parks certification, the Estonian park was subject to independent international verification according to the PAN Parks Principles and Criteria, including environmental and sustainable tourism aspects. Zoltan Kun, Executive Director of PAN Parks Foundation, added, "We are glad to welcome Soomaa National Park in our network as it represents the largest intact peat bog system in Europe preserved as wilderness. The area is also special as it has unique tourism potential with a well-developed trail system providing extraordinary wilderness experience for visitors."

More Births Than Deaths Registered in Estonia This Year

16 October (BNS) - The number of births registered in Estonia during the first nine months of this year was bigger by 48 than the number of deaths, it appears from figures made available by the Interior Ministry.

From January through April the monthly number of deaths was still bigger than that of births. During the four-month period vital statistics officials registered 5 226 births and 5 673 deaths.

From the month of May onwards, however, the number of births has been bigger in each separate month than the number of deaths. During that

period 6 923 births and 6 428 deaths were registered.

For the first nine months of the year the respective numbers were 12 149 and 12 101, meaning that the number of births exceeded that of deaths by 48.

The Interior Ministry pointed out that its figures just show the number of vital events records made, whereas assessments of population statistics and demographics are offered by Statistics Estonia.

According to the latter, 16 028 people were born and 16 675 died in Estonia during 2008. The country thus had a negative population growth of 647 last year. Among ethnic Estonians natural population growth in 2008 was positive for the first time in 17 years.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Eesti Energia Has Highest Market Value Among Estonian Companies

15 October (BNS) - **The weekly Eesti Ekspress has published a list of 100 Estonian companies of the highest market value drawn up by Gild Bankers, with the Eesti Energia power utility at the top.**

The Gild list puts Eesti Energia's market value at 7.4 billion kroons (EUR 473 mln), 26% higher than last year.

On year, the total market value of the 100 most valuable Estonian companies has fallen from 304 billion kroons to nearly 138 billion kroons or by nearly 55%.

Swedbank, top of the list last year, is now in the second place and worth 15.2 billion kroons, only one fifth of its last year's value. Eesti Telekom is third at 8.4 billion kroons, half of its last year's value.

Starting from the fourth place the company values are considerably smaller. The market value of Tele2 Eesti is 4.7 b, that of BLRT Grupp 4.6 b, Tallink Grupp 4 b, SEB Pank nearly 4 b, Elisa Eesti 3.5 b, Tallinna Sadam 3.4 b and Tallinna Vesi 2.8 billion kroons.

The value of all the companies in the top ten has contracted by 25-79%.

Last year Swedbank stood at the top of Gild's list, followed by Eesti Energia, SEB Pank and Eesti Telekom.

September Freight Turnover of Estonian Ports Up 6.6 Percent on Year

19 October (BNS) - **The freight turnover of Estonian ports in September was 3.2 million tons, an increase of 6.6% over the same month last year, Statistics Estonia said.**

The figure was more or less unchanged from August.

In the course of September 2.4 million tons of goods were loaded on ships and 806 200 tons of goods were unloaded, marking increases of respectively 4.3% and 19%.

In the first nine months of the year 21.9 million tons of goods were loaded on ships and 6.6 million tons unloaded. In the same period a year ago goods loaded amounted to 28.1 million tons and goods unloaded to 8.1 million tons.

Over Two Thirds of Estonian Took Trips in Summer

20 October (BNS) - **This summer 71% of Estonians aged 15 to 74 went travelling in their home country, it appears from a study of domestic tourism commissioned by Enterprise Estonia.**

Of ethnic Estonians 77% and of non-Estonian speakers 60% took trips. Compared with the previous year, travelling remained at more or less the same level among ethnic Estonians but declined among members of other ethnic groups, Enterprise Estonia observed.

Although last year young people aged 15-29 were the most active travellers, this year the 20-39 age group had the biggest share of tourists.

According to the survey, the main reason for not taking a trip was lack of money, which was named by 47% of the respondents who stayed at home.

Compared with the survey of 2007, the biggest difference is the increased importance of shortage of money and diminished importance of lack of time.

A significant difference in comparison with last year's study was that residents of Tallinn were less active travellers. The travel rate of people living in rural areas and other cities meanwhile remained almost unchanged from 2008.

In the summer 64% of Estonians aged 15-74 took a several days' domestic trip not related to their work. The number of trips per every domestic tourist increased slightly from last year and so the total number of trips also grew -- overnight domestic trips numbered 1.83 million in 2008 and 1.94 million this year.

The most popular destinations were the capital city Tallinn, Tartu, the island of Saaremaa, the north-eastern region of Ida-Virumaa, the south-western seaside resort Pärnu, and the Võrumaa region in the south of the country.

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