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ESTONIAN FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS PALESTINE AND ISRAEL



Estonian Foreign Minister Urmás Paet in a press conference with Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Maliki, 18 November.

Estonia Offers Diplomat Training and IT Experiences to Palestine

18 November - **In his meeting with Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority Salam Fayyad as well as Foreign Minister Riad Al-Maliki in Ramallah, Foreign Minister Urmás Paet discussed the development of Estonia-Palestine relations, Estonia's support for Palestine's IT projects and foreign service, possibilities to revive the Middle East peace process, and matters related to presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in Palestine in 2010.**

Foreign Minister Urmás Paet stated that Israel and Palestine reaching a two-state solution is an essential part of achieving peace in the Middle East. At his meeting with the Palestinian leaders, Paet confirmed that Estonia would continue to support the Palestinian Authority and is prepared to offer its know-how to help build up Palestine.

The foreign ministers recognised Palestine's progress in ensuring security on the West Bank. Paet stated that Estonia feels it is important to continue helping to increase the capability of Palestine's public sector. "In Estonia we have successfully built up IT solutions that significantly simplify the work of state officials and increase their productivity. We offer this experience to our Palestinian colleagues as well," said Paet. In the middle of October a 20-member delegation led by the IT minister of the Palestinian Authority was in Estonia learning about the experiences of developing Estonia's e-government. Prime Minister Fayyad stated that Palestine is interested in concrete IT-related co-operation with Estonia.

At his meeting with his Palestinian colleague al-Maliki, Paet offered the opportunity for Palestinian diplomats to receive training at the Estonian School of Diplomacy.

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Paet Met With Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman

19 November - **At his meeting with Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Urmás Paet expressed hope that regardless of difficulties, Israel and Palestine would continue their efforts to achieve a two-state solution that would reduce the tension in the Middle East as a whole.**

Paet and Lieberman also emphasised the necessity of achieving complete openness in regard to Iran's nuclear programmes, because Iran's nuclear ambitions are one of the primary sources of tension in the region.

Both Estonia and Israel would like to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010. Paet and Lieberman stated that co-operation among the nations that received an invitation to join the OECD has been helpful. Estonia's accession negotiations with the OECD are reaching the final stage. "We hope to sign the accession agreement in May of 2010 and become a full member in the fall of the same year," stated Paet.

The ministers also discussed matters related to the Estonian Jewish community. Foreign Minister Urmás Paet said that Estonia highly values the work of the International Holocaust Task Force and has participated in its work since 2007.

Paet stated that the Jewish community in Estonia is visible and active and at the end of last year a Jewish museum was opened, which gives an overview of the history of the Jewish community and its role in Estonia since the 19th century. The Estonian government has supported the renovation of the Jewish School and in 2007 a synagogue was opened in Tallinn.

The Estonian Jewish community celebrated its 20th anniversary last year.

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Palestine

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"We are prepared to organise a training programme next year for 15 young Palestinian diplomats. We have organised similar trainings for diplomats from Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Kosovo and Iraq, and our training programme has received high international recognition," said Paet.

In talking about the Middle East peace process, the Estonian foreign minister emphasised that the EU and the rest of the international community must continue making efforts that will lead to the peaceful creation of a Palestinian state, as was agreed in the Annapolis conference. "It is necessary for Israel to end its colonisation activities and for Palestinian to reach a domestic political agreement," Paet added.

Foreign Minister Urmast Paet stressed that Estonia shares in the concern over the worsening of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza sector. "It is vital to move forward with the Middle East peace process so that it would be possible to begin building up Gaza. We hope that this will happen very soon," said Paet.

Lieberman

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The Jewish community was one of the first to restore their cultural autonomy, which was originally granted in 1925, in 1988. In 1925 Estonia approved its cultural autonomy act, which provided the basis for the declaration on 6 June 1926 of Jewish cultural autonomy, which at that time did not yet exist in other European nations.

Paet and Lieberman also discussed Estonia-Israel economic co-operation. The Estonian foreign minister noted that Israel is an appealing tourism destination for Estonians. "This summer the organisation of charter flights from Estonia to Eilat began, and it has proved to be a popular destination for travellers," he added.

Foreign Minister Paet also visited the Jewish Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv.

Estonia Opens Embassy in Israel

19 November - **Foreign Minister Urmast Paet opened the Embassy of the Republic of Estonia in Tel Aviv, Israel. Israel was represented at the opening of the embassy by Internal Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch.**

Foreign Minister Urmast Paet stated that the opening of the first Estonian embassy in the Middle East is an important step for Estonian foreign relations and citizens. "The embassy allows us to help those travelling in the region or Estonian citizens who would like to do business there. It creates better opportunities for bilateral co-operation in many areas. There is also a strong bond between Estonian and Israeli societies, considering that more than a thousand people of Estonian origin live in Israel," Paet explained. "An Estonian representation in the Middle East also facilitates our participation in the European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy. In addition, Estonia will be the European Union presidency in 2018, and European Union relations with Israel and other nations in the Middle Eastern region will be a priority subject," he added.

At the opening of the embassy, Israeli Minister Aharonovitch emphasised the importance of the further growth of Estonia-Israel relations.

Foreign Minister Paet added that Estonia plans to assign a residing ambassador to Tel Aviv in 2010. The current Estonian ambassador to Israel is Aino Leppik von Wirén, who resides in Tallinn. Estonia has had a special mission in Tel Aviv since 2007, and one goal of this was to prepare for the opening of an embassy. The Estonian charge d'affaires in Tel Aviv is Marin Mõttus.

FOREIGN NEWS

Secretary General Kokk: European Union Enlargement Five Years Ago Has Benefited Everyone

20 November - **At the informal meeting of European Union foreign ministry secretaries general in Limassol today, Secretary General Marten Kokk emphasised the positive effects of the European Union enlargement on the entire region.**

Foreign Ministry Secretary General Marten Kokk stated that the further enlargement of the European Union is very important. "The European Union enlargement process must continue, as it is still one of the strongest motivators to carry out democratic reforms in countries that wish to join," noted Kokk. The secretary general added that if the current EU candidate states and states with the prospect of joining the European Union achieve readiness for accession, everyone will win both politically and economically.

During the meeting Secretary General Kokk also emphasised that the round of European Union enlargement that took place five years ago was particularly successful. "Enlargement has been useful for both new and older member states," Kokk asserted. "The Commission report on the effects of the global economic crisis, which was completed this year, confirms that the crisis would have hit Europe much harder if the enlargement had not taken place," Kokk added.

Kokk said that the next important milestone was also the enlargement of the euro-zone. "Estonia has set the important goal of joining the euro-zone on 1 January 2011," Kokk said.

The informal meeting of the secretaries general of the European Union foreign ministries is taking place from 20-21 November in Limassol, Cyprus. Topics to be discussed at the meeting include the Treaty of Lisbon and issues related to the enlargement of the European Union.

Estonia-Latvia Co-operation Projects to Get EUR 4.8 Mln EU Support

24 November (BNS) - **Latvia and Estonia are set to start active co-operation in sea transportation, enterprise and social matters, with seven projects in these spheres to get 75 million kroons (EUR 4.8 mln) in European Union support.**

For instance, the small ports of Mersrags in Latvia, Ringsu on the Estonian island of Ruhnu and Roomassaare on the island of Saaremaa are to get funds for additional investments so small passenger

ships could start running between them in the future, Enterprise Estonia said.

The reorganisation works are planned to be completed in the next two years.

To improve the efficiency of rescue works in the twin cities of Valga in Estonia and Valka in Latvia, the two countries' rescue services are going to work closely together in the framework of the Valka-Valga common rescue service project.

Aid will also be given to joint projects for a small enterprise support network, development of a regional biosciences and medicine cluster, not-for-profit organisations helping disabled children and their families, energy-saving construction, and community groups for people aged 45 and above.

The co-operation programme is implemented by the Interior Ministry and Enterprise Estonia on the Estonian side, and the ministry for regional development and local government on the Latvian side.

The budget of the programme until 2013 is close to 600 million kroons.

DOMESTIC NEWS

EUR 107 Million Hospital Extension to Open in Tallinn

23 November (BNS) - **The Regional Hospital of North Estonia (PERH) is about to inaugurate a brand new section on 11 December as part of a 1.682 billion kroon (EUR 107) project that also involves the reconstruction of two existing units.**

The new section is an innovative complex for diagnostics and active treatment where the most technology-intensive part of treatment will take place, spokespeople for PERH told BNS.

All conditions have been created in the new complex to be able to increase the hospital's capacity for the admittance of emergency room patients by up to 50% within 1-2 hours in the event of a large-scale accident, board chairman of PERH Tõnis Allik said.

This includes the possibility to create 38 additional patient places for level 3 intensive care in the two atriiums of the new unit.

"That shows our potential to serve as the centre for emergency medical aid in Tallinn and in the event of a nationwide emergency," Allik said.

The five-story building has 29 807 square meters of floor area and it will host the emergency rooms, an operating unit with 17 operating theatres, a 40-bed intensive care unit, the radiology centre, the department for nuclear medicine and radiation treatment. The hospital's pharmacy and sterilisation department will also work on the new premises.

The project received 1.035 billion kroons in support from the European Regional Development Fund and the total estimated cost of the project is 1.682 billion kroons without VAT. As part of the project the new unit for tech-intensive treatment was erected and the existing unit C and pathology unit will be rebuilt.

The hospital situated in the south-western Tallinn borough of Mustamäe was built in the late 1970s and admitted its first patient on the last day of 1979.

DEFENCE NEWS

Meeting of EU Defence Ministers Concentrated on Operation in Somalia

18 November - **Yesterday, Minister of Defence Jaak Aaviksoo attended a meeting of EU defence ministers in Brussels that concentrated on the EU's anti-piracy naval operation Atalanta and the EU's broader involvement in Somalia.**

The meeting discussed EU activity to train the Somali security forces and approved the EU's crisis management concept for a possible new training mission which will allow, if needed, for the planning of the training of the security forces of the Somali transitional government.

According to Aaviksoo, the EU's activity in Somalia to date may be considered a success in general. "Military vessels of different member states regularly sail the Somali waters and this has reduced the number of piracy incidents significantly. Also, Somalia has proven a successful example of EU co-operation with other international organisations," Aaviksoo said. Estonian participation in the Atalanta operation is being considered in the long-term perspective.

The meeting also discussed the development of the military capabilities of the European Union, took note of the 2009 annual report of the European Defence Agency (EDA), issued guidelines and approved the 2010 budget.

The joint meeting of EU foreign and defence ministers concentrated primarily on the Althea operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the possible transformation of the operation into a training mission was the principal issue.

Yesterday evening, Aaviksoo attended a meeting of the EU foreign and defence ministers with NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, where the need to contribute various civil programmes in addition to military capabilities in Afghanistan was stressed.

Extra Estonian Unit ESTCOY-E Returns from Afghanistan

24 November (BNS) - **The additional Estonian infantry company ESTCOY-E, which was dispatched to provide security during the elections in Afghanistan, as well as the Estonian logistical support element NSE-E arrived home from their mission Monday night.**

Meeting the soldiers, Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo gave the arriving personnel international peace operations medals, military spokespeople said.

"The Afghanistan that you left behind is little bit safer, better and more optimistic a place than the one that you went to," the minister was quoted as saying.

"What you have done for us, for our allies and for everyone who sent you on the mission puts an obligation on the decision-makers -- the government and the parliament -- to stand for your interests," Aaviksoo said.

"I'm offering you my heartfelt thanks for accepting the challenge to fulfil the combat assignment you were given unexpectedly -- to go to Afghanistan again and risk your lives," said the commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, Lt. Gen. Ants Laaneots.

The defence chief gave the Defence Forces' Distinguished Service Decoration to three members of the returning contingent and the Defence Forces' Meritorious Service Decoration to five others.

Six officers and soldiers were decorated with the Ground Forces' Decoration by Commander of the Army Col. Indrek Sirel.

ESTCOY-E ended its operations in Afghanistan on 15 November. The 134-strong company operated in the composition of the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Regiment of the 2nd US Marine Brigade in the Garmshir area in the southern part of Helmand Province.

Upon the ending of operations, Brig. Gen. Lawrence D. Nicholson, commander of the 2nd Brigade of the US Marine Corps, decorated the commander of the Estonian company, Maj. Ain Tiidrus, with the US Navy and Marine Corps service medal. The brigadier general recognised five soldiers with Navy and Marine Corps commendation medals and presented NATO mission medals to members of ESTCOY-E.

The company was set up on the basis of the Scouts' Battalion. It is the same unit that will be brought into the Baltic countries' joint infantry battalion, NRF-14, in the first half of 2010.

After the return of ESTCOY-E, the regular Estonian Afghanistan mission unit ESTCOY-9, the support element NSE-8 and staff officers and non-com staff officers will remain serving in NATO operations in Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan.

Estonia's previous regular mission unit, ESTCOY-8, and the support element NSE-7 are due home in the coming few days.

The Estonian Defence Forces have been taking part in military operations in Afghanistan since 2003.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Estonia's Webmedia Ranked 2nd on Baltic IT Services Market

19 November (BNS) - **The software developer Webmedia placed second in the latest list of the Baltic countries' top IT companies compiled by the investment bank Prime Investment, one notch higher than in the previous semi-annual ranking published in spring.**

The revenue of Webmedia Group in the first half of 2009 was 112 million kroons (EUR 7.16 mln), exceeding the revenue of the first half of 2008 by 9.4%, it appears from a press release by Webmedia. Prime Investment observes in the survey that Webmedia is the only company in the top 3 that was able to show revenue growth in the first half of this year.

The leader's position in the Baltic IT services market is still held by the Riga-based development centre of the US company Exigen Service. In third place comes Alna Group of Lithuania. In places 4-6 follow Microlink Eesti, Baltic Data Center, and Latt telecom Group.

"When a year ago the long-time sovereign market leaders Exigen and Alna posted half-year sales of 234 and 140 million kroons they looked to be too far for one to catch up with quickly. Yet by now the leader's position is within our reach," Webmedia Group CEO Priit Alamäe said.

Webmedia Group's revenues in 2008 grew 34% year on year to 219 million kroons and profit totalled 14.8 million kroons.

Webmedia is an international software development group with headquarters in Tallinn and offices in various countries of Europe and the Middle East. Its Estonian holding AS Webmedia has offices in Tallinn, Tartu and Narva.

Compiled since 2001, Prime Investment TOP 20 is a proprietary ranking of the leading Baltic IT service companies by their revenues from in-house developed IT services and added value effectiveness. The ranking does not include any sales of hardware, distribution of software other than developed in-house, office equipment or other products.

Cruise Passengers Leave Estimated EUR 6.7 Mln in Tallinn During 2009 Season

19 November (BNS) - **A total of 416 000 cruise passengers passed through the Port of Tallinn during the past season, making purchases worth an estimated 105 million kroons (EUR 6.7 mln) here, the state-owned port company said on Thursday.**

Other revenues earned by Estonian businesses from cruise tourism include port fees, pilot fees and charges of the Maritime Administration, payments made to ship agents, travel agencies, bus companies and the tourist sites visited, Port of Tallinn said.

The number of cruise passengers was 10% greater than in 2008.

The number of cruise ship calls during the season was 310, made by 70 different ships representing 44 operators, with the passengers coming from 150 countries.

In the peak month of July, 80 cruise ships brought 114 537 passengers to the Estonian capital. The busiest day was 19 July, when six cruise ships were berthed in the harbour.

The largest number of passengers arriving with a single ship was 3 298, brought here by the M/L Emerald Princess on 11 July.

The cruise ships calling in Tallinn mostly had US nationals, Britons, Germans and Spaniards as passengers.

The best remembered tourist sites for cruise passengers were the Old Town of Tallinn as a whole, the Town Hall Square, the churches of Tallinn, the Kumu art museum and the Open Air Museum, according to surveys carried out among passengers.

In 2010 a similar number of ships and a similar number of cruise passengers are expected to visit the Estonian capital, the port company said.

Sales Proceeds of Ekspress Media Group Total EUR 5.6 Mln in October

23 November (BNS) - **The consolidated sales proceeds of the Estonian media group Ekspress Grupp totalled 88.3 million kroons (EUR 5.6 mln) in October, 6% more than in September, the company said.**

The group's operating profit before depreciation (EBITDA) was 8.5 million kroons in October. The normalised September EBITDA was five million kroons, the company informed the stock exchange.

The sales proceeds of AS Eesti Ajalehed (Estonian Newspapers Ltd) grew by 11% compared with the previous month, totalling 11.8 million kroons.

The sales proceeds of AS SL Õhtuleht was 10.5 million kroons, up 8% compared with September. The EBITDA of the company was 1.6 million kroons, up 77%.

In the publishing sector the amount of advertisements increased by 19.8% against September, Eesti Ajalehed and SL Õhtuleht increased the sale of advertising the most, by respectively 75% and 20%.

In the printing services sector the EBITDA of Printall AS grew by 60%, totalling six million kroons. The sales proceeds of the company were 31.7 million kroons in October.

The sales proceeds of online media totalled ten million kroons in October, up 8% compared with September.

Saku's New Canning Line Cost EUR 2 Mln

24 November (BNS) - **On Tuesday the Estonian beverages maker Saku Õlletehas put into operation a new canning line that cost two million euros and allows the company to produce more than half a million cans of beer a day.**

Launching the line is part of Saku's investment programme for this year, the company said.

CEO Veli Pekka Tennila said the maximum capacity of the new line is 200 million cans a year, which exceeds the volume of the Estonian market.

"The new filling line enables us to can in Estonia all the output for the Estonian and export markets and I'm pleased to say that we hope to double our exports next year," Tennila said.

Saku Õlletehas has invested a total of 70 million kroons (EUR 4.47 mln) in new brewing equipment and technologies this year. It installed a crystal filtering system in the first phase of investment in April.

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ISLANDI VÄLJAK 1, TALLINN, ESTONIA 15049

TEL +372 637 7600

FAX +372 637 7617

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