

# Estonian Review

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## FOREIGN NEWS



The closing session of the 17<sup>th</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council in Athens, 2 December.

OSCE/George Kontarinis

## Paet Discusses European Security with OSCE Foreign Ministers

30 November - **On Tuesday and Wednesday Foreign Minister Urmas Paet is attending the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) taking place in Athens.**

Paet said that topics to be addressed at the meeting in Athens include problems related to the Russia-Georgia crisis and the frozen conflicts in Moldova and South Caucasus.

"In addition to the comprehensive and all-encompassing developments in security dialogue agreed upon in the spring of this year in Corfu, we must continue to move forward with fulfilling responsibilities accepted within the framework of such agreements and resolving crises," said Foreign Minister Paet. "Within the context of the OSCE we must especially pay attention to matters related to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Transnistria as well," he said.

In Athens the foreign ministers will also discuss freedom of the press and human rights as well as increasing the effectiveness of the OSCE's work, election monitoring, and the activities of OSCE missions.

Within the framework of the OSCE foreign ministers' meeting, the Estonian foreign minister also has many bilateral meetings scheduled. Paet will meet with the foreign ministers of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Cyprus.

While meeting with his Moldovan colleague, Paet will sign the implementation protocol for the agreement on the return of illegally residing persons between Estonia and Moldova. There will also be a meeting of the Baltic and Benelux foreign ministers with the foreign minister of Georgia.

In 2010 the chairmanship of the OSCE will go to Kazakhstan.

## FOREIGN NEWS

### Economic Troubles Have Not Weakened Co-operation of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania

27 November - **During the session of the Baltic Council in Vilnius and the meeting of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian foreign ministers, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet emphasised that the difficult economic policy decisions made this year in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have not changed common foreign policy goals and their implementation.**

Paet stated that this year Estonia decided to establish an embassy in Cairo sharing a space with Latvia. "We continued to compile an Estonia-Latvia co-operation report. Estonia also signed agreements with both Latvia and Lithuania for representing each other for the issuing of visas in third countries," said Paet.

Paet noted that next year the Baltic states must work hard to come out of the economic downturn and to implement common energy and defence projects and continue everyday close co-operation. "One of the greatest challenges in Baltic co-operation this coming year will be fulfilling our international goals despite economic difficulties," stated Paet. "We must not, for example, make cuts at the expense of security," he said.

As an example, Paet said that regardless of economic difficulties, the project of the three nations' armies to create a joint battalion is in the final phase. "This allows us to put Baltbat at the disposal of the NATO Rapid Response Force in the first half of 2010, meeting the deadline," asserted Paet.

In addition, a central topic of discussion for the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian foreign ministers was further co-operation in developing a joint Baltic energy market and energy security as well as co-operation in environmental protection in the Baltic Sea region.

Paet emphasised that co-operation in the environmental sector means making an effort to meet climate goals and taking care of the Baltic Sea. "The burden on the Baltic Sea has reached the limit, and every careless step could lead to irreparable damage. We must focus on preventative measures," Paet stated. "For the last few years we have worked together to establish an open Baltic energy market. Meeting our climate goals depends greatly on our ability to develop economical and sustainable energy production," he explained.

Lithuania will give the chairmanship of the Baltic Council over Latvia during the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Baltic Council.

## Paet Discussed New EU Foreign Service with Ashton

25 November - **Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and the new High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton discussed the development of the European Union External Action Service and the unity of European Union foreign policy in a telephone conversation.**

Paet stressed that the formation of a common foreign service will help the European Union's foreign policy to function more effectively. "The implementation of an effective foreign service will provide support to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and help the European Union have more coherent external communication," said Paet. "We would like for the diplomats of all member states to be represented in the External Action Service, and that one of its functions will be providing consular protection for European Union citizens," Paet emphasised.

Paet and Ashton both stressed that the European External Action Service will help to increase the unity of the European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy and ensure the better co-ordination of the EU's external activities. "The development of European Union Eastern Partnership and relations with our close neighbours, and also joint decisions to participate in missions—for example the EU's contribution in Afghanistan—will certainly be implemented more effectively as the foreign service is developed," Paet asserted.

## Kokk: Details of European External Action Service Must Be Decided as Soon as Possible

30 November - **Foreign Ministry Secretary General Marten Kokk met with Spanish Foreign Ministry State Secretary for Administrative Affairs Maria Jesus Figa and political director Alfonso Lucini Mateo in Madrid today, 30 November.** Spain is the upcoming presidency of the European Union. Topics addressed at the meeting were issues related to the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and a European Union IT agency. They also discussed coming to terms with the economic crisis, European Union-Russia relations, and recent developments in Afghanistan.

Foreign Ministry Secretary General Marten Kokk stated that it is important to agree upon the details pertaining to the creation of the common European Union foreign service soon, since prolonging the decisions is harmful to the EU's external activities and to the new foreign service. "We hope that details related to the structure and composition of the External Action Service are decided during the European Council in April of next year," said Kokk.

The secretary general also noted that for Estonia it is important that one of the functions of the EEAS is providing consular protection. "Adding the consular protection function will increase the visibility of the service for European Union residents and will also support member states that do not have extensive networks of foreign representations," said Kokk.

Secretary General Kokk emphasised in his meeting with the high officials of the Spanish Foreign Ministry that Estonia also feels it is important that progress is made in preparations for the European Union IT agency during Spain's presidency. "We hope that Spain includes choosing a location for the IT agency in the plans for its presidency," said Kokk, adding that Estonia feels that the creation of a separate IT agency is necessary because using information technology more effectively than before is important for the European Union internal security sector.

At the meeting they also discussed coming to terms with the economic crisis and issues related to balancing the budget. Secretary General Kokk confirmed that the primary goal of Estonian economic policy is joining the euro-zone. "Estonia is working to fulfil the Maastricht criteria so that we can join the euro-zone on 1 January 2011," said Kokk.

Spain will become the new presidency of the European Union on 1 January of next year.

## Foreign Ministry Supports European Humanitarian University of Belarus

28 November - **The Foreign Ministry is supporting the European Humanitarian University of Belarus with 200 000 kroons.** Belarusian students that have difficulties acquiring higher education in their homeland due to their views can study at the university, which moved from Minsk to Vilnius in 2004.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet stated that Estonia has consistently supported many projects geared towards developing civil society in Belarus. "The Belarusian Humanitarian University provides an opportunity for many young Belarusians to acquire higher education," said Paet. "We hope that the diverse education and broad social experiences gained at the university will also support the opening of Belarusian society," he added.

The European Humanitarian University of Belarus has bachelor, master and doctorate programmes. Within the eight departments of the university one can study philosophy, theology, political science, psychology, international law, international economics, art history, international cultural tourism, or information technology.

The Belarusian European Humanitarian University functions in Vilnius after the school was closed by Belarusian authorities in 2004. Prior to that, the school operated in Minsk with international financial support since 1992.

The Foreign Ministry is supporting the Humanitarian University through the European Humanities Trust Fund, which was created to financially support the university. The fund, which monitors the usage and transparency of monetary support, is overseen by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

## Estonia to Intensify Ties with Moldova

1 December - **Foreign Minister Urmas Paet signed the implementation protocol for the agreement on the readmission of illegally residing persons between Estonia and Moldova with his Moldovan colleague Iurie Leanca today.**

Foreign Minister Urmias Paet stated that the conclusion of an agreement on the return of illegally residing persons is also a step towards further visa facilitation between the EU and Moldova. "Estonia supports further visa facilitation between the European Union and Moldova, because it provides support for Moldova's development towards the European Union," said Paet. "Estonia is also ready to continue contributing to development co-operation with Moldova in both the educational sector and in sectors that help the development of Moldovan civil society," he added.

Estonia and Moldova are also preparing for political consultations that will take place between the two countries at the beginning of 2010 to discuss opportunities for tightening relations between the countries.

### **Estonian Finance Minister Signs Co-operation Accord with Russia on Combating Narcotics Trade**

26 November (BNS) - **Estonian Finance Minister Jürgen Ligi and the head of the Russian federal narcotics control agency, Viktor Ivanov, signed an agreement on Thursday aimed at stepping up co-operation between the countries in the fight against drug crimes.**

The purpose of the agreement is to expand co-operation between the countries in the fight against cross-border narcotics crimes and in information exchanges concerning customs, spokespeople for the Estonian Finance Ministry said.

The agreement makes joint activity against the handling of narcotic and psychotropic substances and their precursors more efficient and ensures faster organisation of co-operation between the Estonian Tax and Customs Board and the Russian federal narcotics control agency.

It also provides the framework for exchanges of know-how and information and the carrying out of customs operations that was lacking so far.

### **President of the Republic Received Credentials of Ambassadors of Guatemala, Bolivia and Namibia**

26 November - **President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met today with the ambassadors of Guatemala, Bolivia and Namibia, who presented their credentials to the Estonian head of state.**

The credentials were presented by Ambassador of the Republic of Guatemala Fernando Molina Girón, Ambassador of Bolivia Milton René Soto Santiesteban, and Ambassador of Namibia Theresia Samaria, who all reside in Stockholm.

The Ambassador of Bolivia, Milton René Soto Santiesteban, and the Ambassador of Namibia, Theresia Samaria, are the first accredited ambassadors of these countries in Estonia.

### **Romania Picks Up Estonia's Idea for National Garbage Collection Day**

28 November (BNS) - **Inspired by the "Let's Do It Estonia 2008" campaign, NGOs in Romania are preparing for a campaign in which volunteers will collect illegally dumped or littered garbage across the country in May 2010.**

The Romanian NGO's behind the initiative have named it "Let's Do It Romania."

The initiative's website at [www.letsdoitromania.ro](http://www.letsdoitromania.ro) says the action was inspired by the Estonian undertaking in 2008.

Geomapping of illegal dumping sites all over Romania is to start soon, with the NGOs saying there are believed to be around 59 000 such sites in the country.

The idea of a nationwide garbage collecting day has also been picked up by Portugal. The campaign in Portugal is titled "Maos a obra!" ("Put Hands to Work!") and the garbage collecting day will be 20 March 2010.

The initiative's website can be found at [www.limparportugal.org](http://www.limparportugal.org).

The authors of the initiative in Estonia, Rainer Nolvak and his team, used special software based on Google Earth, positioning software for mobile phones and mobile phones with GPS to map and photograph illegal garbage dumps across all of Estonia. Having located the dumps, their initiative ended in a one-day clean-up on 3 May 2008.

Fifty thousand volunteers turned out in the country of 1.3 million to collect 10 000 tons of illegally dumped garbage.

"We are now planning the next step -- to share our experience with the international community, so that the software we created and our practice could easily be used to do the same in any other state by volunteers who wish to clean nature," Nolvak was quoted by AFP news agency as saying in 2008.

## **DOMESTIC NEWS**

### **President Ilves: Creative Solutions Will Continue to Bring Estonia Success in the Future**

26 November - **According to President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the European common currency should be seen as something that will improve the quality of life in Estonia.**

At the "Estonia After the Euro" conference yesterday, President Ilves, in his public discussion with Edward Lucas, a journalist from the British journal "The Economist", focused on the key aspects of Estonia's previous success stories of the 1990s and invited the public to discuss how and by which means we could use our relative advantages in the future.

"We turned the size of Estonia into an advantage – we changed rapidly. We chose the way of depoliticised civil servants. We didn't apply all the recommendations given by other countries. We found our own way to reach our targets," Ilves said. According to the head of state, in future Estonia must focus on long-term objectives, as a "project-based" approach cannot be used to accomplish them.

"The transition to the euro is our next 'project' of national scope. Now, we need to think of how to implement our creativity and innovativeness to serve today's objectives and not to become conservative and stick rigidly to solutions that were effective 15 years ago," said President Ilves.

According to the head of state, for that purpose we need to provide the prerequisites in our country for the implementation of long-term policies that would contribute to an improvement in people's quality of life, while making Estonia a more attractive living environment for both our people and skilled specialists from the other parts of the world.

## Estonian Students Rank Third in Europe for Skills, Knowledge

27 November (BNS) - **Estonian students are third in Europe after Finland and Ireland for their reading skills and their knowledge of mathematics and science subjects, it appears from a recent European Commission report.**

According to the Education Ministry the share of students with a poor achievement level in science subjects is three times lower in Estonia than the average in Europe.

The share of adults in life-long learning has sharply increased. Although data from 2000 shows that Estonia's indicator was one of the lowest (6.7%), in 2008 it was firmly among the average countries in Europe with 9.8%.

In terms of the number of persons aged from 18 to 24, Estonia is close to the European average, but the number of people dropping out has contracted. Although the share was still 15.1% in 2000 and 14.4% in 2007, last year it fell to 14%.

The European Commission presented its recent report on the situation of education and schooling in the EU at a meeting of EU education ministers.

The report mentions that although achievement of four of the five education aims set for 2010 seems unlikely in Estonia, the country stands well out with its results.

## DEFENCE NEWS

### Estonian Defence Minister Thanked Members of Afghanistan Mission Unit

25 November (BNS) - **On Wednesday Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo thanked members of the Estonian infantry company ESTCOY-8, who arrived in Tallinn together with the logistical support element NSE-7 after a six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan.**

Aaviksoo said in his speech that the world does not become a safer place by itself and that thanks to the invaluable contribution of members of the Estonian Defence Forces, Afghanistan is a bit more stable a country now than it was before.

The minister said that many of the personnel of ESTCOY-8 were not serving Estonia in Afghanistan for the first time and that many apparently didn't do it for the last time either.

"I wish that in your service you would feel the support of both the government and the parliament. Your contribution made Estonia more trustworthy not only for Afghanistan but for all of our NATO allies," Aaviksoo was quoted by spokespeople as saying.

The commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, Lt. Gen. Ants Laaneots, pointed out in his speech that ESTCOY-8 served in one of the most difficult areas of Afghanistan at a difficult time. The unit was involved in almost one hundred engagements, and casualties were incurred, but despite everything it maintained its professionalism and acted in a poised manner, said Lt. Gen. Ants Laaneots.

During the ceremony of arrival, the personnel were given international peace operation medals and decorations, with 17 personnel getting the Defence Forces' Distinguished Service Decoration for Battlefield Service, nine the Distinguished Service Decoration and 17 the Defence Forces' Meritorious Service Cross.

Following the return of ESTCOY-E and ESTCOY-8 this week, the next regular Estonian Afghanistan mission unit, ESTCOY-9, the support element NSE-8, and staff officers and non-com staff officers remain serving in the NATO operation in Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan.

The Estonian Defence Forces have been taking part in the operation in Afghanistan since 2003.

## Terras: Estonia and Turkey Have Similar Vision on the Future of NATO

25 November (BNS) - **Yesterday Riho Terras, Permanent Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defence, met with his Turkish colleague Lieutenant General Ahmet Turmus in Ankara, with whom the future of NATO and the defence co-operation between the two countries were discussed.**

According to Terras, the positions of Estonia and Turkey are similar with regard to the new strategic concept of NATO – collective defence, according to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, as well as Article 4, are still considered important. "The two countries also agree that a sensible balance must be found between the protection of NATO's own territory and out-of-area operations," Permanent Undersecretary Terras said.

At the meeting, the visibility of NATO and the air policing mission of the Baltic states were also discussed. In 2006, Turkish fighters participated in the air policing operation of the Baltic states. Terras and Lieutenant General Turmus also found that the defence co-operation between the two countries needs to be intensified and the regularity of consultations increased.

"As of today, there have been quite a number of high-level visits between the two countries; now it is time to proceed with more regular working-level communication," Terras said.

Permanent Undersecretary Terras also met with Murad Bayar, Undersecretary of the Defence Industry, with whom opportunities for organising potential joint procurements for weaponry and equipment in the future were discussed. Terras also visited two Turkish defence industry companies.

During the visit, Terras also visited the NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism in Turkey and the training centre for the members of the defence forces of the countries participating in the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme. Terras also laid a wreath at the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

### Cargo Throughput of Port of Tallinn Up By 16 Percent on Year

1 December (BNS) - **The cargo throughput of the Estonian state-owned Tallinna Sadam totalled 2 615 thousand tons in November, 15.8% more than in the same month last year.**

In all, 28.5 million tons of goods passed through the Port of Tallinn in the period of January-November, 7.1% more than in the same period last year.

The carriage of the biggest group of commodities – oil products – increased by 11.8% to 20.7 million tons.

The carriage of bulk cargo increased by 38.6% to 3 875 thousand tons. Carriage of coal increased

five-fold, of chippings by 50% and of fertilizer by 61.9%.

At the same time carriage of ro-ro goods contracted by 26.2% to 2 459 thousand tons and the number of containers by 28.8% to 119 426.

A total of 6 737 thousand passengers passed through the Port of Tallinn in the period from January to November, 0.1% more than in the same period last year.

The number of passengers on the Tallinn-Helsinki route fell by 1.5% to 5 538 passengers. But the number of passengers on the Tallinn-Stockholm route and that of cruise passengers increased.

During January-November 2 404 cargo ships and 4 291 passenger ships called at the Port of Tallinn.

### Estonian Analysts Say Retail Dynamics in Line with Expectations

30 November (BNS) - **The rate of decline in retail sales that Estonia saw in October corresponded to expectations and figures are confirming the previous trends, analysts speaking to BNS said.**

The drop in October was as expected, Nordea Eesti senior analyst Kristiina Kruusa told BNS. Even though the consumer confidence index has kept improving month after month, it remains lower than the historical average and no rapid improvement is due in the coming few months, she said.

Also Ruta Arumäe, analyst at SEB, said that the data for October confirmed the previous trends and corresponded to expectations. Things will remain this way at the end of the year, Arumäe told BNS.

The Ministry of Economy has said that despite the growth in unemployment its impact on domestic consumption has not been as strong as in some other neighbouring countries such as Lithuania, where domestic consumption dropped by more than 25%.

In the coming few months, domestic consumption will continue to be influenced by the labour market situation and changes in people's incomes, the ministry said.

According to a study carried out by the Estonian Institute of Economic Research, the retail confidence index dropped by one point in November, whereas companies' expectations as regards sales in the next three months improved and the number of orders moved up.

Since the month of July, the rate of decrease in retail sales has been relatively stable compared to the same month of the previous year, Statistics Estonia observed.

### Ecolines to Launch Tallinn-Moscow Bus Line

30 November (BNS) - **The operator Ecolines will on 18 December open a regular bus link between the Estonian capital Tallinn and the Russian capital Moscow with stops in Tartu, Estonia, and Pskov, Russia.**

Buses on the once-weekly service will depart from Tallinn on Friday afternoon and arrive in Moscow the next morning.

A one-way ticket for the direct service costs 556 kroons (EUR 35.5).

Ecolines said it thus becomes the only bus company in Estonia offering a direct service to Moscow.

### Estonia Launched Large-Scale Shrimp Fishing in Barents Sea

1 December (BNS) - **Estonian ships last year launched large-scale shrimp fishing in the Barents Sea and the volumes of catch have been growing this year in the catch area where no quota in terms of amounts have been set.**

Estonian ships are fishing shrimp in two areas in the Barents Sea. One of the areas is in the Spitsbergen fishery protection area where Estonia can fish shrimp to the extent of 377 catch days.

The other area is in the sphere of administration of the North-East Atlantic Fishery Commission, and no limits have been set there in terms of the amount caught.

"The catch must only take place in accordance with the NEAFC regulations and the attractiveness of the area has been increasing among our fishermen," said Kaire Martin, chief specialist at the Environment Ministry fishery resources department.

In the NEAFC administration area, Estonian fishermen caught 1 473 tons of shrimp last year; this November the size of the catch was 4 800 tons. In the Northwest Atlantic the catch quota was 11 200 tons last year, but this year the amount has contracted to 3 000 tons as of November.

All the countries that belong to the North-East Atlantic Fishery Committee can catch shrimp without any limitations by volume. These countries are the European Union, Norway, Iceland, Russia, the Faeroe Islands, and Greenland.

According to the information available to the Environment Ministry only Estonian and Norwegian fishing vessels have been catching shrimp without any limitations by amount in the area.

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