Estonian Review

FOREIGN NEWS
Economic Co-operation Between Estonia and Kazakhstan to Intensify

28 May - During his meeting with Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan Rapil Zhosbybayev, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet thanked the country for implementing visa facilitation for Estonian citizens.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet expressed satisfaction over Kazakhstan’s step towards abolishing registration and visa invitation requirements for Estonian citizens. “We highly appreciate this step, and it will surely help intensify our bilateral relations. We also hope that visa freedom for diplomatic passport holders will soon become a reality,” Paet noted.

In talking about bilateral relations, the focus was primarily on economic co-operation. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan Rapil Zhosbybayev agreed that both nations are interested in actively developing and intensifying bilateral economic relations.

Foreign Minister Paet brought up information technology and transit as the primary sectors for economic co-operation.

“Kazakhstan has showed a lively interest in co-operating with Estonia in the area of information technology. In addition, Estonian harbours can provide excellent opportunities for Kazakh goods,” said Paet. Rapil Zhosbybayev also emphasised during the meeting that Estonian entrepreneurs are very welcome in Kazakhstan and that Kazakhstan would like to develop all aspects of economic co-operation with Estonia.

According to Foreign Minister Paet, Kazakhstani’s presidency of the OSCE in 2010 will give the nation an important responsibility and opportunity to shape international development and will also serve as recognition of past reforms.

Paet stated that Estonia supports the conclusion of a new partnership agreement between the European Union and Kazakhstan.

In addition to the meeting, political consultations between the foreign ministries of Estonia and Kazakhstan also took place in Tallinn. The leader of the Estonian delegation at the consultations was Foreign Ministry Secretary General Marten Kokk.

Kokk and his colleague Zhosbybayev affirmed Estonia-Kazakhstan relations by approving the Estonian draft of an economic, educational, and technological co-operation agreement between the Government of the Republic of Estonia and Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

“The draft is the first step towards creating an economic and trade co-operation commission between the governments of Estonia and Kazakhstan,” said Foreign Ministry Secretary General Kokk.

FOREIGN NEWS
Estonia Hopes for European Commission President to be Named at Upcoming Council

29 May - Talking to Czech Minister for European Affairs Štefan Füle in Tallinn about the preparations for the European Council in June, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet expressed hope that a resolution could be found during the Council regarding Ireland’s Treaty of Lisbon referendum and the guarantees being promised to Ireland. “It would be very good if we also found a solution concerning the selection of the next Commission president at the June Council,” stated Paet.

In addition to matters related to the Treaty of Lisbon, the ministers also discussed other EU institutional issues, energy security, and the financial and economic crisis at their meeting.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet stated that facilitating trade is one important factor in resolving the crisis. “Adopting protectionist measures must be avoided and the openness of markets should be supported instead,” Paet emphasised. The foreign minister added that in order to restore trust in the financial sector, emerge from the current situation and ensure that the situation does not repeat in the future, multi-faceted co-operation among nations on all levels will be necessary.

While talking about the situation in Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Paet emphasised the need to increase the EU’s contribution and visibility in stabilising the country’s situation. Paet highlighted the upcoming presidential election as the most important event in Afghanistan in the near future. “Carrying out the elections without significant problems would be an important step in the development of Afghan institutions and in increasing the peoples’ trust in the central authorities. We feel it is necessary to send an international observation team to Afghanistan for the presidential election,” said the Estonian foreign minister.

The ministers also addressed climate change during their meeting. Foreign Minister Paet feels it is essential to achieve a Post-Kyoto global climate agreement this fall in Copenhagen. “In order for the agreement to work, it must include all the large developed nations, who with their interest and positive example will help to guarantee the effective participation of developing nations in the Post-Kyoto climate agreement,” said Paet.
Paet: Azerbaijani Energy Supplies to EU Increase Energy Security

28 May - Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with Vice-Speaker of the Azerbaijani Parliament Valeh Alasgarov in Tallinn. Topics discussed at the meeting included the development of Estonia-Azerbaijan economic relations and Azerbaijan’s future opportunities for energy-related co-operation with the European Union.

According to Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, Azerbaijan, as the leading nation in the Caspian Sea region, plays a vital role in increasing the European Union’s energy security. “Azerbaijan's active participation in implementing the ‘Southern Corridor’ projects—the Nabucco gas pipeline and the Odessa-Brody-Plock oil pipeline—is extremely important and highly valued,” stated Paet. “Azerbaijani energy supplies in the European Union would also satisfy Europe's growing need for natural gas,” added the foreign minister. Azerbaijan is an important energy partner of the EU and exports more than 90% of its energy carriers to the EU.

Paet and Alasgarov also discussed the economic relations between the two nations and future opportunities for co-operation. “Azerbaijan’s rapidly growing economy has been an attractive destination for investments by Estonian companies,” said Paet. As of 30 September last year, Estonian direct investments in Azerbaijan totalled 312.7 million kroons.

Vice-Speaker of the Azerbaijani Parliament Valeh Alasgarov is in Estonia to participate in the international conference “The European Union’s Common Energy Policy and Energy Security”.

President of the Republic Accepted Credentials from Ambassador of Georgia and Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See

28 May - In Kadriorg today, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with the Ambassador of the Republic of Georgia and the Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See, who presented their credentials to the Head of State.

Credentials were presented by Ruslan Abašidze, the Ambassador of the Republic of Georgia who resides in Tallinn, and Luigi Bonazzi, the Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See who resides in Vilnius.

Estonia to Drop Invitation Requirement for Visa Applications from End of July

29 May (BNS) - Foreigners applying for an Estonian visa will be no longer be required to have an invitation from an Estonian resident after the corresponding legal amendments step into effect on 30 July.

According to the package of amendments adopted by parliament on 7 May, the Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board will from 30 July stop endorsing visa invitations from Estonian legal and physical persons and no such invitation will be required when an Estonian visa is applied for, spokespeople for the Citizenship and Migration Board said.

Relinquishing the requirement to have a visa invitation will make application for a visa simpler and faster for those foreigners who turn directly to an Estonian consular office, as they must no longer wait for the visa invitation to be endorsed by the Citizenship and Migration Board.

All other requirements will remain as they are. Like before, an applicant must show with relevant documents the purpose of his or her visit, place of accommodation in Estonia, and that the costs of his or her stay in Estonia will be covered.

Estonian Embassy Gave Books to Glasgow University

27 May - Estonian Ambassador to the UK Margus Laidre presented around one hundred books to the University of Glasgow at the Estonian Embassy in London. The Estonian translations of British authors were received by the lecturer in Estonian language, society and culture at the University of Glasgow, Lea Kreinin. The books will primarily be used for teaching Estonian in Scotland.

According to Estonian Ambassador Margus Laidre, Estonia’s beautiful mother tongue sustains Estonian culture and books in Estonian are a true testament to this. “Hopefully these books will help with teaching our mother tongue and promoting Estonian language and culture in Scotland,” he said.

The books will be kept at the university, where Estonian language students, local Estonians and Estonian students in Scotland meet and organise film evenings. The books will also be available for borrowing from the campus.

Estonian language, society and culture have been taught at the University of Glasgow for three years already. Lecturer Lea Kreinin joined the Central and East European Studies Department in September 2006. Since then, Scottish, English, Finnish and German students have studied Estonian in Glasgow. Starting from next year the Estonian language will also be taught as one of the contemporary European languages at the university’s language centre. The Estonian lecturer’s work at the University of Glasgow is supported by the Estonian government as a part of a wider programme for teaching Estonian in academic establishments abroad.
The books were donated to the embassy by Andrew Nurnberg Associates and the Estonian publishers who visited the London Book Fair this year.

Tallinn University and Moscow State University Sign Co-operation Accord

29 May - Rector of Tallinn University Rein Raud and the rector of the Moscow Lomonosov State University, Viktor Sadovnichi, signed a framework agreement on Thursday aimed at promoting co-operation in research and education between the two universities.

The concluding of the co-operation agreement was prompted by the necessity to strengthen and promote co-operation and joint development work between Estonian and Russian scholars in the area of research work and curricula, give an impetus to bilateral exchanges of information, professors, scientists, administrative and technical personnel, as well as students, spokespeople for Tallinn University said.

"Moscow State University is the largest and the most respected university in Russia and we are glad that the long-term process was completed with the signing of the agreement. By today concrete contacts for co-operation have already been established, including on the level of students from both universities," Raud said.

Detailed co-operation programmes are to be agreed for concrete periods.

The framework agreement remains in force for three years and may be extended after that.

In addition to the framework agreement accords on co-operation were signed also between Tallinn University’s Catherine College, the university’s institute for Slavic language and cultures, and the student councils of Moscow State University.

Estonian School Opened in London

31 May - Estonian Ambassador to the United Kingdom Margus Laidre officially opened the Estonian School in London on Saturday, 30 May. At the opening ceremony in the London Estonian House, the school’s founders introduced preparations for lessons and the future teachers to parents.

Ambassador Margus Laidre stated that this was an important cultural historical milestone and one of the most important events in the lives of Estonians in England since Estonia’s re-independence in 1991. "The establishment of an Estonian School not only shows the vitality of the Estonian spirit here, but also that people still desire to preserve their language and culture while living abroad,” said Laidre.

The Estonian School in London is an Estonia-language school founded by parents with the support of the Estonian Embassy in the spring of 2009. It plans to begin regular lessons this fall for 3- to 14-year-old children twice a month. The lesson plans are based on Estonian state lesson plans and teaching materials. The children will be taught by qualified instructors who all have experience working in Estonian schools.

The Estonian language has previously been taught in Estonian Houses in London, Bradford and Leicester. In London, language lessons and a children’s nursery have been held for years, and the children’s summer camp held in Catthorpe in Central England will celebrate its 60th anniversary this year.

Everyone who is interested in the Estonian School in London or who would like to support the school can contact the school at the email address eestikool.london@googlemail.com or through the Estonian Embassy. Information about the school can also be found from the embassy’s webpage prior to the completion of the school’s own webpage: http://www.estonia.gov.uk/est/eestikoollondonis.

Nearly 6 000 People Participated in Foreign Ministry’s Spring Quiz

2 June - Foreign Minister Urmas Paet randomly selected the winners of the Foreign Ministry’s Estonia-themed web-based spring quiz today.

The grand prizes of the Foreign Ministry’s web-based quiz were trips to Estonia, which went to Kazimierz Poplawski of Poland and Natalja Furso of Russia. The consolation prizes went to winners in Romania, Finland, the United States, Italy, Russia, and Ukraine.

In this year’s spring quiz, there were 5 970 participants from 88 countries, which is a record for the number of participants and for the number of countries represented among quiz participants. The most responses came from Russia, the USA, Canada, Poland, and Italy, but responses were also received from Ghana, Peru, and Sri Lanka. There were 4 404 participants in the English-language quiz and 1 566 in the Russian-language quiz. The total number of people that answered all the questions correctly was 4 353.

All winners who visit Estonia during this summer’s Song and Dance Celebration will receive
The Estonian infantry company is serving in the composition of the British unit of the international security assistance forces in Helmand.

The Defence Forces have taken part in the NATO-led military operation in Afghanistan since 2003. At present there are nearly 150 Estonian soldiers serving in Afghanistan. Commander of the Estonian contingent in Afghanistan is Major Janno Mark.

**Minister of Defence Aaviksoo Visited US Pre-positioning Ship**

1 June - At the Tallinn Bay anchorage area on Friday, Minister of Defence Jaak Aaviksoo visited the US Navy pre-positioning ship USNS 2nd Lt. John P. Bobo, which is used for heavy equipment transport of the US Marine Corps to potential crisis areas.

USNS 2nd Lt John P. Bobo arrived in Tallinn on 18 May for the routine taking on of stores and for allowing a rest for the crew.

According to Jaak Aaviksoo, Minister of Defence, the visit of the vessel is a sign of the co-operation between Estonia, the USA and other NATO allies, which is deepening and becoming more regular. "I am very much impressed by the ship, not only due to the level and amount of military equipment, but also due to the extremely well implemented and strategically efficient logistic organisation," said Aaviksoo.

USNS 2nd Lt. John P. Bobo belongs to the US Maritime Pre-positioning Ship Squadron 1, the ships of which visit several European ports throughout the year. The squadron vessels sail in European waters and in case of a potential military or humanitarian crisis, the heavy equipment on board the ships is used for supplying US forces on shore.

Over the past few years, the ships of the squadron MPSRON 1 have often visited the ports of the Baltic States. The ships are used throughout the year and they have no home port, which is why they depend on European ports for refuelling, getting equipment and for repairs.

USNS 2nd Lt. John P. Bobo accommodates general military cargo and equipment for the US Marine Corps, including tanks, armoured vehicles and containers with various kinds of equipment. The vessel was named after the US marine and the bearer of the US Medal of Honour, second lieutenant John P. Bobo, who fell in the Vietnam War in 1967.

**ECONOMIC NEWS**

**SEB to Establish Separate Baltic Division**

29 May (BNS) - The Swedish SEB bank will bring its banking operations in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania under a separate unit, SEB Baltikum, to be headed by Martin Johansson, the bank said in a press release.

"Our activity in the Baltic countries is long-term and we regard the area as our domestic market. At the same time the next few years will be difficult for the three Baltic countries and will demand a lot of attention from our management. As a result we have decided to bring responsibility for the Baltic operations into one unit," said Annika Falkgren, managing director of the SEB Group.

Silver Vohu, head of communications of SEB Pank, told BNS that if until the present the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian banks were subordinated to one, retail banking unit, then in the future they...
would come under separate management in the fifth division.

Vohu underlined that all the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian managers of SEB would keep their positions.

SEB has 200 bank offices and 5,800 employees in the Baltic countries, the loan portfolio in the area is 166 billion kroons (EUR 10.6 b), making up 13% of the total loan portfolio of the group.

Port of Tallinn’s May Freight Handling Up 5.2 Percent on Year

2 June (BNS) - The volume of freight handled at ports of the Estonian state-owned port company Tallinna Sadam (Port of Tallinn) in May was 2.46 million tons, which is 5.2% more than in the same month a year ago.

In the first five months of the year the ports handled 12.92 million tons of goods, one percent more than during the same period of 2008, the company said on Tuesday.

Oil products, the leading category of cargoes for Port of Tallinn, amounted to 10 million tons, which is 11.3% more than in the same period a year ago.

Bulk cargoes declined by 14.7%. The handling of coal meanwhile soared nearly fourfold and the handling of crushed stone shot up 69%.

Container shipments through the ports dropped by 21.5% to 57,534 TEU-s.

The number of passengers served during the first five months of the year was up by 1.6% at 2.58 million.

Estonian Air to Add Flights on Tallinn-Moscow Route

28 May (BNS) - Estonian Air will from June 4 increase the frequency of flights between Tallinn and Moscow to four times weekly from June 4 and to seven times weekly from July 7.

From the beginning of June, Estonian Air will add Thursday return flights and in July Tuesday return flights on the Tallinn-Moscow route, Estonian Air said on Thursday.

At present Estonian Air flies from Tallinn to Moscow three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Owners of the Estonian national carrier Estonian Air are the Estonian state, SAS Group and the Cresco Investment bank.

Estonia Produces 92 Percent of Milk Quota

29 May - It appears from an overview drawn up by the Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board (PRIA) on the milk quota year ending on March 31 that 607,200 tons of milk, 92.1% of the quota, was produced in the country.

The volume is 5,881 tons higher than in the previous quota year.

According to the PRIA information the growth in the amount of milk produced while the number of quota owners has contracted means that milk is increasingly produced on large farms. Also, the average yield per cow is increasing, as it was 7,424 kilograms in the previous quota year.

In the new quota year that started from 1 April, the milk quota of all EU member countries once again rose by one percent with that supply quota at 657,000 tons and the direct marketing quota at 8,908 tons, a total of 665,900 tons.