Overview of bilateral relations

Northern Europe

Constant and active communication with the Nordic and Baltic states is a natural part of Estonian foreign policy. Frequent contacts and close co-operation continued throughout 2009. Regional NB8 co-operation was in 2009 co-ordinated by Iceland, which organised a meeting of foreign ministers in Reykjavik. The traditional fall meeting of the NB8 prime ministers convened in Stockholm.

In addition to regional co-operation, 2009 was marked by the further development of close mutual relations with all Nordic countries, including Finland. According to an established custom, reciprocal working visits by the Estonian and Finnish prime ministers took place. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip was in Finland in May, accompanied by a business delegation, and Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen made a return visit to Estonia in November. The central theme of both visits was opportunities for future co-operation between Estonia and Finland. Co-operation is continuing in the three priority fields of activity: information and communications technology; mobility of people and knowledge; a secure and stable business environment and innovation – issues that were highlighted in the Estonian-Finnish strategic co-operation report that was prepared in 2008.

Foreign Minister Urmas Paet made a working visit to Finland in June, during which he discussed topical foreign policy issues with his Finnish colleague Alexander Stubb and opened an exhibition entitled “Quarry Stones in Estonian Jewellery Art”. A noteworthy event was the joint visit of the Estonian and Finnish foreign ministers to Syria and Lebanon in May. Contacts between the Estonian and Finnish foreign ministries have become more frequent over the years. Consultations between various departments and offices take place regularly, and co-operation has been started in the field of reciprocal visa representation. In 2009, the network of honorary consuls was expanded by both sides – in June, an Estonian Honorary Consulate was opened in the Åland Islands, and in December, a Finnish Honorary Consulate was opened in Pärnu.

The global financial and economic crisis has impacted both the Estonian and Finnish economies, as well as bilateral economic and trade relations. Regardless of the crisis, Finland remains Estonia’s most important trading partner, although the reciprocal trade volumes have declined. For Estonia, this has been a somewhat stabilising development, i.e. the trade balance has become more favourable for us and Estonian businesses have considerably increased their interest in the Finnish market.
The number of Estonians living in Finland has grown significantly through the years. We are pleased that the possibilities to obtain a portion of one’s education in Estonian have considerably increased as well. As of the fall of 2009, there are already five combined Estonian-Finnish classes in Helsinki schools. A co-operation project entitled “Estonia Goes to School”, which was organised by the Estonian Institute and the Archimedes Foundation, was initiated in the spring of 2009. The opening salvo for the project was provided by President Toomas Hendrik Ilves with a public lecture on Estonian identity at the University of Turku. The project will continue in 2010.

Cultural exchange was also as eventful as usual in 2009. There were many events that deserve to be mentioned: the performance of Estonian Theatre Songs by the Tallinn City Theatre at the Helsinki Temppeliaukio Church; the European premiere of Arvo Pärt’s Symphony No. 4 at the Finlandiatalo; the commemoration of the deportations that took place in March at the Orion Cinema in Helsinki; and the premiere of the Estonian-Finnish documentary film (directed by Imbi Paju) Sisters Across the Gulf of Finland at the beginning of November. In May, an event entitled “Estonia Comes to Visit” took place in the centre of Helsinki – on Senate Square – where, for two days, visitors had the opportunity to become acquainted with Estonia’s tourist attractions, sample Estonian food, buy Estonian handicrafts, and enjoy performances by Estonian dancers and popular musicians.

Estonia’s relations with Sweden continued to be friendly, work-related and close. This was also evident during the preparatory period for the Swedish EU presidency, as well as during the presidency in the second half of 2009. Along with the Eastern Partnership, Lisbon Strategy, and many other issues, Estonia and Sweden have co-operated successfully in working out the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which was approved by the member states in the fall of 2009. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves spoke at the opening event for the Strategy in Stockholm, where he also met with Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and representatives from the Swedish business community.

Prime Minister Andrus Ansip visited Stockholm in June, discussing the priorities of the Swedish EU presidency and economic issues with Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. The friendly and close relations between Estonia and Sweden are also demonstrated by the fact that during the intensive and successful EU presidency, Sweden’s top politicians still found time to visit Estonia. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt visited Tallinn at the end of March, spoke at the Lennart Meri Memorial Conference, and met with the Estonian president and foreign minister. In the fall, Swedish Minister for Trade Ewa Björling visited Estonia and participated in the presentation ceremony for the Swedish Business Awards, which took place in Tallinn for the first time. The ministers from several other branches also exchanged visits.
In 2009 Estonia and Sweden also continued successful joint projects to support the EU’s eastern neighbours – Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. These projects included the training of young diplomats from these countries at the Estonian School of Diplomacy.

Sweden is Estonia’s largest foreign investor and an important trading partner although investment and trade volumes both decreased in 2009 compared to the previous year.

Close co-operation is also characterised by contacts between local governments and individuals. The year 2009 marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of friendship ties between the Uppsala Municipality and the City of Tartu, as well as the Gotland Municipality and Saare County.

The 100th anniversary of the Cultural Society of Estonian Swedes (Svenska Odlingens Vänner) was celebrated on both sides of the Baltic Sea. Mrs. Evelin Ilves attended the ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the Stockholm Estonian Kindergarten. The celebration of Marie Under’s 125th birthday with an exhibition dedicated to the poetess in Gothenburg deserves special mention. Estonia’s participation at the Bread Festival, which was held at the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm and where visitors had the chance to taste Estonian bread, was also very popular. Numerous concerts by musical ensembles, as well as poetry and literary evenings, took place in both countries.

Relations with Denmark continued in the form of close and business-like communication and co-operation. Climate policy and co-operation in Afghanistan were the recurrent themes during bilateral visits and meetings in 2009.

Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Tallinn on 24 March – immediately before he was elected Secretary General of NATO. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves presented Rasmussen with the Order of the Cross of Terra Mariana First Class. In August, Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller met with his Estonian colleague in Tallinn. Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo visited Denmark in August and Chief of Defence Ants Laaneots in September. Also the network of Estonian honorary consulates in Denmark was expanded – Bo Stærmose in Odense started work as the sixth honorary consul.

At the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen at the end of 2009, Estonia was represented at the prime ministerial level. We also had a booth at the international exhibition to introduce climate issues in Fredriksberg. Earlier, The Danish Embassy organised an energy-related seminar at the Riigikogu.
Cultural ties continued to be traditionally close, which is illustrated by several concert tours and co-operation projects organised between the musicians of the two countries. Poet and translator Doris Kareva made a presentation at Scandinavia’s largest book fair in Copenhagen. Among several exhibitions, one in Aarhus about Arvo Pärt is worth mentioning as well.

**Norway** is an important ally for Estonia in NATO, and there are also close relations in the European Economic Area (EEA) and within the NB8 framework. In 2009, projects supported by Norwegian and EEA funds continued to be carried out, including the renovation of three historical manor houses and the West-Tallinn Central Hospital Centre for Infectious Diseases.

At the beginning of the year, a visit to Tallinn was made by Thorbjørn Jagland, President of the Norwegian Parliament, who was elected Secretary General of the European Council in September. The fourth Estonian Honorary Consulate in Norway was opened in Kristiansand in November. Active cultural exchanges also continued – Estonian books and architecture were introduced in Norway and performances by Estonian musicians took place. A reciprocal competition for Wikipedia articles also deserves mention – it resulted in several Norwegian-languages articles introducing Estonia and information for Estonian-language readers about Norway.
Today, the primary point of contact between Estonia and Iceland is relations within the framework of NATO, NB8, and the European Economic Area (EEA). Since July 2009, when Iceland applied to join the EU, an EU dimension has also been added to relations between the two countries. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet visited Reykjavik on 20 August. At the meeting with Icelandic Foreign Minister Össur Skarphéðinsson the discussions focused on the prospects for Iceland’s EU accession. Estonia has expressed its support for Iceland’s wish to start EU accession negotiations in 2010. In addition, Minister Paet thanked Iceland for being the first country to officially recognise the restoration of Estonian independence 18 years ago.

In 2009 the Baltic co-operation was chaired by Lithuania. The three Baltic presidents convened in Szawle (Šiaulai) in March, in Riga in October, and in Vilnius in mid-December in order to discuss political and economic co-operation in the region. The prime ministers met three times during the year. Meetings took place in Tallinn in January and in Vilnius in April and November. Lithuania handed the presidency over to Latvia for 2010 on 27 November at the Baltic Council meeting in Vilnius. Special attention should be paid to the meeting between the prime ministers and parliament speakers of the three Baltic countries on 23 August in Vilnius, when the 20th anniversary of the Baltic Way was celebrated. In 2009, the Baltic Way was also entered in the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register.

In 2009, bilateral relations with Latvia developed in their traditionally active and concise manner. The primary topics of discussion included the economic situation, energy, and issues related to the European Union. On 27 February Presidents Toomas Hendrik Ilves and Valdis Zatlers met in Tartu and participated in the ceremonies to mark the 10th anniversary of the Baltic Defence College. President Zatlers made a state visit to Estonia in April, while President Ilves made a working visit to Riga in October. Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis arrived in Estonia on a working visit in April, immediately after assuming office as prime minister. The prime ministers met for a second time in Tallinn in October. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet made an official visit to our southern neighbours in February. Latvian Foreign Minister Maris Riekštins made a working visit to Estonia in June, and also attended the final concert of the Estonian song and dance festival as an honoured guest.

In the fall, the prime ministers appointed the rapporteurs for the Estonian-Latvian co-operation report, who were assigned the task of drafting possible fields of activity for future co-operation. The year 2009 will also be remembered for the founding of the Estonian-Latvian/Latvian-Estonian translation award. During the year, the translated works of about 10 different Estonian authors were made available to Latvian readers. Journalist Ragnar Kond was named by Estonian National Broadcasting as their correspondent in Latvia, which will bring the life of our southern neighbours even closer to us.
Active bilateral contacts also describe the nature of Estonian-Lithuanian relations. Ms. Dalia Grybauskaitė, who assumed office as the new president of Lithuania in July, met with President Toomas Hendrik Ilves for the first time on 8 October when the Lithuanian president made her first working visit to Tallinn. The new Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius visited Tallinn on an official visit at the beginning of the year. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip’s working visit to Vilnius took place on 6 July. He attended the ceremonies celebrating Lithuania’s 1,000th anniversary, and gave a speech in Lithuanian. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Vygaudas Ušackas made an official visit to Tallinn in February.

In addition to close exchanges at the political level, close co-operation also occurred in other fields of activity. One could highlight the fact that Eesti Energia will start to supply Lithuania with 10% of its electricity next year to compensate for the closing of the Ignalina nuclear plant. In the cultural field, one should mention that part one of Tammsaare’s Truth and Justice was published in Lithuanian and the Estonian National Men’s Choir (RAM) gave several concerts in Lithuania during the year.

**North America, Western and Southern Europe**

2009 will go down in the history of the United States as the first year of President Barack Obama’s term of office. The excellent relationship between Estonia and the U.S., which is based on a strong foundation that has been established throughout the years, was further cemented during this last year.

The joint operations in Afghanistan are an example of the effective co-operation between the two countries, which both parties value highly. The United States has acknowledged Estonia’s contribution in Afghanistan, which is one of the largest if calculated on a per capita basis. Or, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said, “...Estonia is punching above its demographic weight.” The good allied relations between Estonia and the United States are also demonstrated by the visit of the American naval ship USS Cole to Tallinn in October.

At the principal meetings between Estonia and the U.S. in 2009, in addition to good mutual relations and co-operation in Afghanistan the other topics under discussion included the future of NATO and cyber security. This is also true of the meeting that took place at the White House between Presidents Barack Obama and Toomas Hendrik Ilves in June. During his visit, President Ilves also gave a speech on trans-Atlantic relations at the World Affairs Council in San Francisco, and, accompanied by a business delegation, visited the state of California and Silicon Valley. The aforementioned subjects were also discussed during Foreign Minister Urmas Paet’s meeting with his U.S. colleague Hillary Clinton in September. In addition, Foreign Minister Paet participated in discussions at two think tanks – the Atlantic Council and the Centre for
Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He also inaugurated the Honorary Consulate of Estonia in Houston, Texas, which became Estonia’s fifth honorary consulate in the United States.

In October, Minister of Defence Jaak Aaviksoo paid a visit to his American colleague Robert Gates. There were also frequent communications between the legislators of the two countries. In March, the Riigikogu National Defence Committee visited Washington; in April, members of the U.S. House of Representatives visited the Riigikogu. There is also active communication at the regional level, and in 2009 a co-operation agreement was concluded between Harju County and the state of Maryland.

Estonia has multi-faceted co-operation with the United States, and during the last few years energy and related fields have become some of the most important areas of co-operation. In October, a conference on green energy was organised in Tallinn in co-operation with the U.S. Department of Energy.

The success of Estonian conductors, music and musicians in the U.S. continued in 2009. In the spring, the Estonia National Symphony Orchestra (ERSO) held a concert tour, and in the summer the Kalev Chamber Choir toured the U.S. In addition, an increasing number of Estonian films are arriving in the U.S.; both Veiko Õunpuu’s Autumn Ball and Artur Talvik’s Against the Headwind Hall were screened there. The Estonian Puppet Film, Cinema Bus team and the documentary Disco and Atomic War were all featured at American festivals.

Both Estonia’s and Canada’s foreign policy priorities continue to include achieving stability in Afghanistan. That is why both countries’ contribution in southern Afghanistan remains one of the most important points of contact at the bilateral level as well.

Bilateral exchange of people-to-people contacts was further enhanced in December by the signing of a Youth Mobility Agreement. Under this agreement, Canadian and Estonian youths between the ages of 18 and 35 can more easily travel and work in each other’s countries for up to one year. The most important bilateral visit in 2009 was in November, when the Transport and Communications Committee of the Canadian Senate came to familiarise themselves with Estonia’s achievements in the development of telecommunications and e-services.

Another significant point of contact between Estonia and Canada is the large expatriate Estonian community in Canada. In addition to cultural events organised by the expatriate community, Canadians had the opportunity to see the Estonian film Georg at the European Film Festival and A Wish Tree and Bank Robbery at the Montreal World Film Festival.
In 2009, Estonia co-operated closely with the **United Kingdom** to shape policies in both NATO and the EU.

The co-operation between Estonia and the United Kingdom has been especially active in the field of defence. The British have repeatedly acknowledged the actions of the Estonian units on the mission in southern Afghanistan, and the topic was also under discussion on 1 September in Gdansk when Prime Minister Andrus Ansip met with United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Miliband. In June, the aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious visited Tallinn on two occasions. In September, Sir Mark Stanhope, the First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, visited Estonia, and expressed his esteem for the British seamen who supported the achievement of Estonia’s independence. One sign of the close co-operation in the field of defence was the decision by the United Kingdom to appoint a defence attaché to Tallinn starting in November 2009, who will represent the U.K. in all three Baltic countries.

In 2009, the parliaments of Estonia and the United Kingdom also associated closely. In March, the Defence Committee of the U.K. Parliament visited Estonia, in June the Welsh Affairs Committee, and in October, the Foreign Affairs Committee followed suit.

There is still room for development in the field of economic and trade relations between the two countries, whereas the balance of trade has strongly favoured the British for the last three years. In 2009, Enterprise Estonia strengthened its representation in London, where in addition to a representative for the promotion of export and investments, a tourism representative also started work. In May, Estonia concluded investment protection and double taxation avoidance agreements with the Isle of Man. At the initiative of the Estonian Embassy, a seminar to introduce Estonia’s IT sector was organised in London, and the Estonian Guild, an association uniting Estonian entrepreneurs and enterprising people, was founded in London.

Cultural exchanges between Estonia and the United Kingdom continued to be varied and close, especially in regards to concert activities. In June, Toomas Edur and Agnes Oaks, who had danced as the leading couple of the English National Ballet for 20 years, bid a fond farewell to the British ballet public. Estonia and its capital Tallinn were among the spotlights at the City of London Festival from 23 June to 9 July. In March, a festival of Estonian films took place in Glasgow.

In 2009, a dozen Estonian literary works were translated and published in the United Kingdom, and an Estonian Library was opened at the University of Glasgow. With the support of the Estonian Embassy, the Estonian School in London started functioning in 2009 to provide supplementary education in the Estonian language and culture. In October, Minister of Education and Research Tõnis Lukas made a visit to the school.
During his visit to the United Kingdom, Mr. Lukas also gave a speech at Cambridge University about Estonia’s experiences in the field of education. The Estonian children’s camp in England celebrated its 60th anniversary.

The eyes of Europe were on Ireland at the beginning of October, when a referendum was held on the Lisbon Treaty. On the second try, the Irish people approved the treaty and thereby opened the way for the future development of the European Union.

Among bilateral issues, development co-operation became more active in 2009. From July 2009 to June 2010, Ireland and Estonia are co-chairing the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) group.

In the field of education, the visit of the Estonian university rectors to the umbrella organisation of Ireland’s universities deserves to be highlighted. Cultural exchange was enhanced by the publication of Kristiina Ehin’s *Burning the Darkness*, the first trilingual (Estonian-English-Gaelic) collection of poetry. In October, the first-ever Estonian Language Day took place in Ireland. The Irish public also had the opportunity to visit two exhibitions – “Arvo Pärt: Known and Unknown” and “History Reflected in Architecture”. Estonian conductors continue to be welcomed in Ireland – in September, Tõnu Kaljuste conducted at the Music Days in Drogheda, and in October Kristjan Järvi conducted the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin.

Bilateral relations between Estonia and Germany continued in a friendly and business-like atmosphere. Among many visits, the foremost was the attendance of President Ilves and Prime Minister Ansip at the celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves also visited Germany in February. At that time, he gave a speech on European security at the annual Wehrkunde Security Conference in Munich and met with President Horst Köhler. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet also participated in the conference. In June, German Defence Minister Franz Joseph Jung visited his Estonian colleague in order to discuss NATO’s strategic concept and issues related to the NATO Response Forces (NRF).

With the goal of enlivening economic relations, two high-level visits were made to German states. In November, President Ilves along with a business delegation visited the state of North Rhine-Westphalia – Germany’s largest economic area – and opened the new Estonian Honorary Consulate in Düsseldorf. At the invitation of the Prime Minister of Baden-Württemberg, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip made a working visit to Stuttgart in July. The business delegation accompanying the prime minister established contacts to strengthen mutual economic relations.
Several enjoyable events will be remembered from the bilateral cultural exchanges. In November, Minister of Culture Laine Jänes opened an exhibition of the works of Estonian artists in Düsseldorf. At the Heidelberg Stückemarkt 2009 drama festival, Estonia won three of the five awards (Jim Ashilevi, Andrus Kivirähk, Urmas Lennuk). Last but not least, the tenth ESTO, the world festival of Estonians, took place in Münster, Germany.

The excellent and friendly relations between Estonia and Austria were affirmed by the official visit of Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger to Estonia in August. In the course of the visit, the Estonian and Austrian foreign ministers signed an agreement regarding the exchange and mutual protection of classified information and a visa representation agreement. Barbara Prammer, the Speaker of the Austrian Parliament, visited Estonia in August in order to participate in a meeting of the Women Speakers of Parliament of the EU Member States.

There was also no lack of bilateral cultural exchanges, whereby the Austrian public had the opportunity to become acquainted with various areas of Estonian culture. The numerous cultural events include the Estonian-Austrian gala evening in Salzburg, a series of concerts by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, and an introduction to works by Estonian artists at the Vienna Modern Art Museum.

The most notable event in relations with Switzerland was the working visit by Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves to Switzerland in May. During the visit, the president spoke at the St. Gallen Symposium on economics and politics, where he made a presentation on the challenges facing Europe and the opportunities emerging from the current economic crisis. To promote bilateral economic relations, a Swiss-Baltic Day was organised in Zurich in June, where, among other things, an overview was provided of Estonia’s plans to adopt the euro and investment opportunities in Estonia.

In March, Minister of the Interior Jüri Pihl participated in an official ceremony in Zurich that marked Switzerland’s entry into the Schengen area. Consultations between the foreign ministers of the two countries took place on two occasions – in August in Bern and in December in Tallinn.

Cultural exchanges concentrated primarily on music. In October, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and Tallinn Chamber Orchestra gave successful concerts in three cities – Montreux, St. Gallen, and Lucerne. In August, the Estonian jazz ensemble Ajavares performed at the Sonvico Jazz Festival, and in November, Navitrolla’s solo exhibition opened in Langenthal.

Relations between Estonia and France continue businesslike. Ene Ergma, the Speaker of the Riigikogu, visited Paris on two occasions, including for a colloquium dedicated
to the Baltic Way in September, where Chairman of the Senate Gérard Larcher gave the opening speech.

The regular co-operation between the foreign ministries also continued, and consultations were held on various topics. Political consultations took place in Paris, EU consultations between the Baltic countries and France took place in Tallinn, and a meeting of the secretaries general of the foreign ministries was held in Paris. Security policy issues were discussed at a French-Baltic foreign policy and security seminar in Riga and during bilateral political-military negotiations in Paris.

To reciprocate State Secretary Heiki Loot’s visit of 2008, a delegation from the French State Secretariat visited Estonia in January in order to become acquainted with the organisation of Estonia’s e-government. In France, Estonia has acquired the reputation of a country with a well-developed IT sector.

Cultural co-operation between Estonia and France continues to be close. In 2009, recognised conductors Paavo Järvi and Vello Pähn conducted famous orchestras in Paris. Exhibitions by Estonian artists have also been popular. The introduction of an Estonian language class and Estonian language curriculum at the INALCO (National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations) resulted in a record number of students (14) signing up to study Estonian during the next academic year.

Relations between Estonia and the Netherlands will be remembered for Prime Minister Andrus Ansip’s visit on 12 October, which was the first time an Estonian head of government has made an official visit to the Netherlands. The discussions at the bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende included issues related to bilateral relations as well as the future of Europe. In August, Gerdi Verbeet, the Speaker of the Dutch Parliament, participated in the meeting of the Women Speakers of Parliament of the EU Member States. During 2009, the network of Estonian honorary consulates in the Netherlands was expanded: a second honorary consulate was inaugurated by Foreign Minister Urmas Paet in Zwolle in July, and third honorary consul was appointed to Amsterdam in December.

Excellent contacts also continued between the foreign ministries. In June, a meeting of the secretaries general of the Estonian and Dutch foreign ministries took place in The Hague. EU topics were under discussion at the bilateral EU consultations in Tallinn in September.

Cultural exchanges between Estonia and the Netherlands are increasingly lively. In February, organist Andres Uibo and violinist Mari-Liis Ulbo performed in Amsterdam. On 26 February, Estonian Independence Day was celebrated in The Hague with a spirited
jazz concert by the Tallinn Saxophone Quartet. In July, the Viljandi Music School gave an outdoor concert in The Hague’s city centre; in December, an exhibition of Estonian mittens opened in the atrium of The Hague’s City Hall.

The most important event in relations between Estonia and Belgium was Prime Minister Andrus Ansip’s visit on 30 June. At meetings with Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy, Finance Minister Dider Reynders and the director of the Bank of Belgium, the primary topics under discussion were related to the EU and the economy.

The intensification of varied co-operation between Estonia and Belgium has been aided by the regional co-operation agreements signed with Flanders and Wallonia, based on which a series of co-operation projects have taken place in the fields of environment, economics, research and culture.

Lively cultural exchanges have occurred in all cultural genres. In the field of music, numerous concerts took place during 2009, including the performance by the Tallinn Philharmonic at the KlaraFestival in Brussels, which introduces unique musical ensembles. Several Estonian poets – Karl Martin Sinijärv, Jürgen Rooste, Indrek Hirv – visited the capital of the European Union, where they met with their readers. On 1 May, a workshop under the auspices of the “My Estonia” brainstorming bee was held at the Estonian Embassy in Brussels, where the discussions focused on Estonia’s image abroad and opportunities to shape it. In October, a formal evening dedicated to Estonia, called the “Soirée estonienne”, was organised at the Club Diplomatique de Belgique in Brussels. In November, Imbi Paju’s film Sisters Across the Gulf of Finland, which deals with the Estonian and Finnish voluntary auxiliary organisations for women, had a successful screening at the European Parliament.

Considering the size of the countries, the bilateral relations between Estonia and Luxembourg are close and active. In July, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip made a visit to Luxembourg, and at a meeting with Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker discussed issues related to the EU. They discussed the same topics at the bilateral EU consultations in May. In 2009, Vahur Kraft assumed the position of Honorary Consul of Luxembourg in Estonia.

The cultural exchanges between Estonia and Luxembourg will be remembered for the large number of concerts. In April, a concert was given by the folk music group The Aken Sisters and Friends; in May, the jazz singer Maria Faust with her group performed; in November, guitarist Jaak Sooäär and zither player Tuule Kann gave concerts in Belgium and Luxembourg.

In addition to bilateral co-operation with Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, relations at a regional level (between the three Baltic countries and three Benelux
countries) have also gained momentum during the last few years. This creates fertile ground for dealing with international and regional issues among countries with similar interests. In 2009, two meetings were conducted in the 3+3 format.

In 2009, relations with Italy were especially active. On 13–15 July, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves made a working visit to Rome, during which he met with President Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Gianfranco Fini, and Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. The latter visited Estonia for the first time in September, when a co-operation agreement was signed between Estonia and Italy for combating organised crime.

EU-related issues were also discussed with Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Alfredo Mantica during his visits to Estonia in January and March, as well as during the EU consultations in February. On 18 March in Tallinn, a joint declaration for strengthening co-operation between the foreign ministries of Estonia and Italy was signed. The network of honorary consuls was also expanded. In December, an Estonian Honorary Consulate was opened in Bari, which is the sixth Estonian honorary consulate in Italy.

In October, representatives from Estonia’s business and public sectors made a study trip to Italy. During the trip, a visit was made to the European Space Agency’s Earth Observation missions and the headquarters of the Italian Space Agency. This was an important fact-finding mission for Estonia in order to increase its understanding of the opportunities available in international space co-operation. In June, a business seminar dedicated to Estonia was held in the city of Erba, in the region of Lombardy, and in September, a delegation from Tallinn visited Lombardy.

As a sign of solidarity, Estonia contributed to the fund for the restoration of cultural monuments that were damaged during the earthquake in the Abruzzo region. In the cultural field, Estonia’s participation in the 53rd Venice Art Biennale with Kristina Norman’s project “After-War” should be mentioned.

The most important event in relations between Estonia and Spain was the state visit by King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain to Estonia from 4–5 May. In addition to official meetings, the programme included a visit to the NATO Co-operative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, to which Spain has substantively contributed.

The large delegation that accompanied the king included Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, who, along with the Estonian foreign minister, signed a joint declaration strengthening co-operation between the foreign ministries of Estonia and Spain. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet made a working visit to Spain in February. In the course of the visit a visa representation agreement was signed. In 2009 two new Estonian honorary
consulates also started operations – one on Gran Canaria for the consular region covering the Canary Islands, and the other in Valencia.

Communication became especially frequent and active in the second half of 2009 in connection with Spain’s EU presidency in the first six months of 2010. Estonia’s EU priorities and the programme for the Spanish presidency were discussed at numerous bilateral meetings in both Tallinn and Madrid. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip was in Madrid on a working visit at the beginning of December, when he met with Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, as well as the president of the Bank of Spain. In December, EU consultations were held in Madrid. Both Minister of Foreign Affairs and a delegation from the Riigikogu EU Affairs Committee visited Madrid in November.

In the economic sphere, a remarkable event was the establishment of the Spanish-Estonian Chamber of Commerce in Tallinn, which has actively started brokering business contacts.

Two important visits were exchanged with Portugal in 2009. In July, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves made a visit to Lisbon, during which he met with Portugal’s President Aníbal Cavaco Silva and Foreign Minister Luís Amado. In March, Foreign Minister Amado made his first official visit to Estonia. In addition to official meetings, Amado also participated in the Lennart Meri Conference with a presentation on trans-Atlantic relations.
In the fall, Madeira Week was organised in Tallinn and the minister of tourism and transport for the region of Madeira participated at the opening. In Portugal recently, Estonia has been mentioned in connection with the Limpap Portugal cleanup campaign, which the media has noted is an idea that originates in Estonia. In the cultural sphere, the Helin-Mari Arder Trio gave successful concerts in Lisbon and Taviras in southern Portugal, and a joint exhibition by six Estonian photo and video artists, entitled “Mosses and Lichen”, took place in Coimbra.

The political contacts between Estonia and Greece in 2009 were mostly made within the framework of Greece’s OSCE presidency. The Estonian Embassy in Athens organised and facilitated several cultural events, concerts, exhibitions, and the participation of Estonian performers in various festivals.

The Prime Minister of Malta, Lawrence Gonzi, made a visit to Estonia in July, accompanied by a delegation that included Tonio Borg, the Maltese Foreign Minister. At the meeting with Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, discussions focused on issues related to illegal immigration and Estonia’s aspirations to enter the euro zone.

It was a historical year in relations with the Holy See. For the first time, a visit to Estonia was made by the Vatican’s Secretary for Relations with States Dominique Mamberti, who is essentially the Vatican’s foreign minister. During the visit in September, Archbishop Mamberti met with Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, visited the Tartu Catholic School and gave a lecture on the Vatican’s foreign policy at the University of Tartu.

Estonia’s relations with Turkey are active and good. Estonia supports Turkey’s prospects for EU membership. Several high-level visits occurred during 2009. Foreign Minister Paet made an official visit to Ankara in December. At his meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, co-operation opportunities, including joint cultural projects related to Istanbul and Tallinn being European Capitals of Culture respectively in 2010 and 2011 were discussed. Both ministers expressed their anticipation in connection with the opening of a direct flight connection between Tallinn and Istanbul in the coming spring that will bring the two countries even closer together. The foreign minister was also in Turkey in April, when he participated in the meeting of the UN Alliance of Civilisations.

A bilateral co-operation memorandum was signed in July during the visit of the Turkish minister of agriculture to Estonia. Ms. Kristiina Ojuland, Deputy Speaker of the Riigikogu, made a working visit to Ankara in March. Ojuland also participated in the second Anatolian Ski Marathon, the organisation of which is becoming a tradition for the Estonian Embassy in Ankara and which received great media attention in Estonia as well as in Turkey.
In 2009, the most noteworthy event in Estonian-Turkish relations was undoubtedly the celebration of the 180th anniversary of the conquest of Mt. Ararat. On 9 October 1829, Johann Jakob Friedrich Wilhelm Parrot (1792–1841), professor of physics and later the rector of the University of Tartu, became the first person to scale the legendary Mt. Ararat. On 4 October, the current rector of the University of Tartu and the governor of Ağrı County inaugurated an exhibition in the fortress at the foot of Mt. Ararat to mark the 180th anniversary of the initial conquest of the mountain. The event was also marked by the ascent of 60 mountaineers from Estonia, Turkey, Iran, Greece and Poland to the top of Mt. Ararat. Great public attention was garnered for Estonia by the World Cup qualification match that took place in September between Turkey and Estonia in Kayseri (which ended 4:2 for the hosts).

Central Europe

Relations between Estonia and Poland are based on similar historical experiences and coinciding interests in guaranteeing security and the future of Europe.

The frequent high-level visits are testimony to the close and active political and economic relations. Heads of State Lech Kaczyński and Toomas Hendrik Ilves met on two occasions in Warsaw in 2009. During his working visit that took place at the beginning of the year, Poland presented President Ilves with the highest business award of the Polish Business Club, the so-called “Polish business Oscar”. In December, the President of Estonia gave a lecture on the experiences of Estonia and Poland as EU members at the College of Europe Natolin Campus in Warsaw. On 1 September, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip participated in the events commemorating the 70th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, while Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk made an official visit to Estonia in April. In February, Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo participated in an informal meeting of the ministers of defence from NATO countries, and in June he attended the events marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the communist regimes in Europe. During the year, bilateral consultations were also conducted on policy, consular, and security matters, as well as EU and Eastern Partnership issues. During 2009, regional co-operation, energy and climate-related issues were also discussed, as well as economic co-operation.

Poland is Estonia’s largest foreign trading partner among the Central European countries. In connection with the global economic recession, trade decreased by 40% for the year. At the same time, Estonian investments in Poland increased, as did the number of companies established in Estonia with Polish capital.

In the cultural field, Estonia attracted attention in Poland with its cinematic art, with almost all the larger film festivals featuring Estonian films in their programmes. The Estonian documentary Lotman’s World was screened at the International Film Festival
Jewish Motifs and received a special award for the documentary film that best introduced Jewish culture. At the Animated Film Festival Animator held in Poznan in August, Rao Heidmets’s puppet film *Inherent Obligations* received the Bronze Pegasus. In October, Jaak Kilmi and Kiur Aarma’s documentary *Disco and Atomic War* won the award for the best full-length documentary at the prestigious Warsaw Film Festival.

Estonia’s relations with **Hungary** were marked by numerous visits from the Estonian side. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves’s state visit to Hungary in October can rightly be considered the top event of Estonian-Hungarian relations during the last few years. In the course of the visit, a co-operation programme was signed between the ministries of education for 2010–2012. During his visit to Hungary in May, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet inaugurated a new building for the Estonian Embassy in Budapest. In May, the secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also visited the Hungarian capital.

Cultural relations between the two related nations continued to be close. A concert tour by the Hale Bopp Choir to Budapest and Nyiregyhaza took place in connection with the opening of the Estonian Embassy in May. In spring, the Estonian Institute organised an Estonian Culture Week in Hungary, which focused on Estonian film. For the first time in a long while, it was again possible to see Estonian theatre in Hungary – VAT Theatre’s *Pál Street Boys* was performed in Budapest. The “Living Ornament” exhibition introduced the work of Estonian artists in Budapest, as did Ülle Marks and Jüri Kass’s joint exhibition at the Győr Art Museum.
In July, a bust of Ellen Niit, the long-time translator of Sándor Petőfi’s poetry, was inaugurated at the sculpture park in Petőfi’s hometown of Kiskőrös. September 2009 marked the beginning of a broad-ranging Baltic Sea Festival in Budapest, where Estonia was represented by film, music, and design programmes.

The Czech EU presidency during the first half of the year left its stamp on Estonia’s relations with the Czech Republic, when meetings with the Czechs became more frequent primarily between politicians and officials. Thus, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip met with his Czech colleague Mirek Topolánek in Prague on 4 April in connection with the subsequent EU-US Summit and EU Eastern Partnership Summit. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves was the main speaker at the inauguration ceremonies for the new Radio Free Europe headquarters in Prague in May, and Riigikogu Speaker Ene Ergma attended the Out of Fetters Conference that took place in Prague in November.

From the Czech side, Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra visited Estonia in March and was one of the main speakers at the Lennart Meri Conference in Tallinn. Štefan Füle, Czech Minister for European Affairs, visited Estonia in May. Consultations related to political and security policies took place between the foreign ministries; meetings also occurred between the defence ministers, agricultural ministers, and regional ministers, as well as the ministers of the interior, education and environment. In respect to defence-related co-operation, it is worth mentioning that from May to August, the Czechs were responsible for carrying out the NATO’s Baltic Air Policing Mission.

In the Czech Republic the success of our IT and other projects are recognised. Cultural exchange was especially rich and this covered all genres. Estonia’s cinematic art was represented again at the European Film Days that took place in April – this time, by Rene Vilbre’s feature film I Was Here. The documentary film Disco and Atomic War was screened at the Jihlava Documentary Film Festival in October.

The Czechs had the opportunity to become familiar with the works of poet Jan Kaus within the framework of the international book fair held in Prague in May. Doris Kareva appeared at the Days of Poetry and Wine 2009 held in Valtice, South Moravia. In October, the Baltic Literature and Film Festival was held at the Prague City Library, where Estonia was represented by writer Arvo Valton. In November Jaan Tätte’s The Highway Crossing premiered, under the title The Story of the Gold Fish in Estonian Style. On the musical side, Vaiko Eplik with the pop-group Elite, as well as the Tallinn University of Technology Women’s Choir and Engineers’ Male Choir gave successful concerts in Prague.

Estonia and Slovakia are united by similar positions regarding EU and NATO issues, which create a wonderful opportunity to strengthen bilateral co-operation. Estonia is
interested in Slovakia’s experiences related to the adoption of the euro on 1 January 2009 and its activities in international organisations. Slovakia is interested in Estonia’s e-governance experiences. The aforementioned topics were also under discussion during the meetings with Estonia’s president, prime minister and foreign minister that took place in connection with Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák’s visit to Tallinn in August. In the course of the visit, the minister also inaugurated a Slovakian Honorary Consulate in Tallinn. In the spring, bilateral consultations related to EU issues took place in Bratislava.

There are varied cultural exchanges between the two countries. In 2009, one should mention the performance of How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Rabbit by the NO99 Theatre at the Nitra Theatre Festival in September. In addition, Estonian filmmakers are frequent and welcome visitors at Slovakian film festivals.

In 2009, a new nuance was added to the spectrum of good relations between Estonia and Bulgaria, when the first Bulgarian ambassador to permanently reside in Estonia was appointed in August. This creates good conditions for the diversification of relations between the two countries.

The high-level visits that took place included an official visit by Riigikogu Speaker Ene Ergma to Sofia in March. One should also mention the visit of Tsetska Tsacheva, Chairwoman of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, to Tallinn in August in connection with the meeting of the Women Speakers of Parliament of the EU Member States. The traditional political consultations between the foreign ministries took place in Sofia in May. One should also mention the co-operation between the Bulgarian and Estonian Border Guards, especially in connection with the enlargement of the Schengen zone, and the fact-finding trip made by a Bulgarian Border Guard delegation to Estonia in March.

Estonian music was introduced in Sofia by Villu Veski and Tiit Kalluste; a photo exhibition entitled “Unique Kihnu” was on display at a Sofia business centre; and two Estonian films – Autumn Ball and Magnus – were screened at the Northern Lights Film Festival.

Relations between Estonia and Romania are good and in the process of developing. The potential exists for the future development of political, economic and cultural relations. Bilateral EU consultations took place in Tallinn in June. In July, the first Estonian honorary consul was appointed in Romania, located in Bucharest.

Relations between Slovenia and Estonia have become more active in connection with the OECD accession negotiations of both countries, which started in 2007. In 2009,
several expert meetings occurred on this topic. In addition, a delegation of secretaries general from Estonian ministries visited Slovenia in October in order to become familiar with Slovenia’s experiences related to the adoption of the euro and the EU presidency. In May, political consultations between the foreign ministries took place in Ljubljana and Chief of Defence Ants Laaneots visited Slovenia in February. A bilateral agreement on the exchange and mutual protection of classified information was signed by the foreign ministers in October.

Active bilateral dialogue continued with Croatia against the background of their EU accession negotiations. In March, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves made an official visit to Croatia, in the course of which an agreement on the exchange and mutual protection of classified information was signed. Defence-related co-operation between Estonia and Croatia has become significantly more active in connection with Croatia’s accession to NATO in April 2009. In January, consultations were held between the defence ministries in Tallinn; in April Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo visited Croatia.

**Western Balkans**

In 2009, the common denominator in the foreign policies of the Western Balkan countries was the continuation of reforms and moving towards Euro-Atlantic structures. On 19 December, visa-free travel to the EU came into force for Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Thanks to vigorous reforms, Macedonia received a recommendation from the European Commission to commence accession negotiations in 2010, and an Interim Agreement was implemented for Serbia that essentially constitutes the trade-related provisions of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

In respect to NATO integration, Montenegro entered a new phase in 2009. At the 60th anniversary NATO summit in the spring, Albania participated for the first time as a full-fledged member of the alliance.

Relations between Estonia and Albania acquired a new dimension in 2009 when the first ever Estonian honorary consul in Albania was appointed. No high-level visits occurred in 2009, but preparations were started for the visit of the Estonian prime minister to Albania in 2010.

Bilateral contacts with Bosnia and Herzegovina became more frequent and more work-related. There exists a mutual desire to strengthen co-operation in the field of e-governance and to share reform experiences.

The given co-operation was under discussion when Sven Alkalaj, the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited Estonia in August, and when a delegation from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina
visited Tallinn in May. Bilateral security policy consultations took place in March and political consultations were held in May. Estonia continued to contribute to the European Union’s police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Police Director Joosep Kaasik successfully executed the tasks of the EU chief adviser in the Tuzla region.

Thousands of tourists from Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived in Estonia to attend the football World Cup qualification match between Estonia and Bosnia Herzegovina that took place on 10 October (which ended with a 2:0 win for the visitors). Several ministers from Bosnia and Herzegovina attended the game, including Mustafa Mujezinović, Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Kosovo, which celebrated its first independence day on 17 February 2009, continued to develop its institutions and international associations’ network. In the summer, Kosovo joined both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. On 15 November, the first local government elections took place, and in the spring the civilian EU mission, EULEX Kosovo, was fully implemented.

In the beginning of 2010 Estonia ended its military contribution to the NATO mission in Kosovo (KFOR). We continue our contribution to the EULEX mission which included 6 Estonian experts at the end of 2009: police officers, customs officials and legal experts. As a Kosovo donor, Estonia also directed monetary funds to Kosovo through various
channels. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in the Trust Fund for the Development of Sustainable Kosovo Employment Policy, and a contribution was made to the activities of the International Civilian Office (ICO).

Estonia and Kosovo continued co-operation in the field of information and communications. Kosovan local government officials, for example, were trained at the Estonian e-Governance Academy. Estonia also participates in the training of Kosovan diplomats, and a 7-member delegation from the Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in a course organised at the Estonian School of Diplomacy. The last important assignment of late Ambassador Karin Jaani, in the course of her long and productive career in the Western Balkans, was the presentation of her credentials to President of Kosovo Fatmir Sejdiu on 2 April as the first Estonian ambassador accredited to Kosovo.

The momentum that has been gained in relations between Estonia and Macedonia continued throughout 2009. Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves was the first Estonian head of state to make an official visit to Macedonia on 13–14 October. The president met with George Ivanov, the newly elected President of Macedonia. President Ilves visited the Estonian Honorary Consulate in Skopje, which received extensive coverage as the head of state used the opportunity there to vote in the Estonian local government elections via the internet. In March, Macedonian Foreign Minister Antonio Milošoski visited Estonia. In January, bilateral consultations on European Union issues took place in Tallinn, and in November, Macedonian State Secretary Abdulkadar Memedi visited Tallinn.

Estonian companies continue to enter the Macedonian market. Co-operation in the field of information and communications, which has become quite lively, was further enhanced in 2009. Mirjana Sekulovska, Macedonian Deputy Minister of the Information Society, visited Estonia in March accompanied by a large delegation of experts. In cultural exchange, the photo exhibition about Kihnu and Estonia’s nature that toured several Macedonian cities deserves mention.

In 2009, Montenegro moved significantly closer to its main foreign policy goal – accession to the EU and NATO. Montenegro’s endeavours to integrate with Euro-Atlantic structures were also a recurring topic during the historical visits that took place in 2009 – the first ever reciprocal visits of the heads of both states. President Toomas Hendrik Ilves’s working visit to Montenegro was made in September and Montenegro President Filip Vujanović’s first-time visit to Estonia took place in November.

Estonia exchanged EU integration-related experiences with officials from Montenegro during their fact-finding trips to Estonia in March and April. Montenegro in turn has trained young Estonian diplomats – in 2009, as in 2008, an Estonian diplomat...
participated in the Young Diplomats’ Summer School in Montenegro. Close defence-related co-operation continued. In addition to Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo’s visit to Montenegro in April, Estonian defence experts have made advisory trips to Montenegro, and Montenegro military personnel have participated in various training programmes at the Baltic Defence College.

Relations between Estonia and **Serbia** in 2009 were marked by an Estonian head of state visiting Serbia for the first time. In the course of the visit that took place in October, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves gave a lecture to Serbian students and government officials about Estonia’s experiences related to European Union accession. Serbia’s European Union prospects have been the main topic during bilateral meetings as the country has increasingly focused on EU integration and presented its official EU accession application in December 2009.

Good conditions for the intensification of economic co-operation between Estonia and Serbia were created by the conclusion of a bilateral agreement for the avoidance of double taxation. Estonian companies are interested in Serbia’s oil shale reserves and co-operation also progressed in the field of information and communications technology.

**Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

The **Eastern Partnership Initiative** that was adopted during the Czech EU presidency in the first half of 2009 opened the way for the target countries – Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus – to integrate more closely with the EU. The eastern partners will have the opportunity to conclude Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with the EU. In connection with this, Georgia, for instance, is interested in Estonia’s expertise and experiences in the fields of free trade and agriculture. Co-operation and partnership agreements will be replaced gradually by Association Agreements. Ukraine has made the greatest progress in this regard.

The relations between Estonia and **Ukraine** are very good and close co-operation exists in many fields of activity. Estonia consistently supports Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration. Closer co-operation is being planned in Crimea in connection with the preservation of the Estonian language and culture in the Estonian villages located there.

Co-operation in international organisations and bilateral interagency contacts are very active. In 2009, reciprocal visits took place between the delegations from the Border Guard, Tax and Customs Board, and other governmental agencies. Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with Petro Poroshenko, his Ukrainian colleague who assumed office in October, twice during November and December in the course of EU and NATO events.
Ukraine is one of four priority countries for our development aid. Estonia has carried out training projects for Ukrainian officials and diplomats. In 2009, a pilot project was launched to introduce the use of pedestrian safety reflectors in Ukraine. A good example of partnership was Estonia’s assistance in the prevention of the spread of the swine flu pandemic in Ukraine.

The European Union is providing technical and financial aid to Ukraine to increase energy efficiency, which should preclude gas supply problems and reduce dependency on foreign energy carriers. Estonia supports the EU’s Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (EEEEEP) and plans to contribute 2.5 million EEK for projects in Ukraine over five years.

The economic crisis also impacted trade between Ukraine and Estonia. Estonia’s exports and imports with Ukraine decreased noticeably. According to data from the Bank of Estonia, the volume of direct Estonian investments in Ukraine as of the end of June 2009 was 2.5 billion EEK, which is 3.5% of Estonia’s direct investments abroad. Officially, 260 companies with Estonian capital participation are operating in Ukraine. The Baltika Group opened three more clothing shops in the newest shopping centres, increasing its chain to 23 shops.

Cultural exchange between Ukraine and Estonia is very close. The Estonian animated films Inherent Obligations and Lili won the two most important awards at the International Animated Film Festival KROK in Kiev. EstFest, a film festival of Estonian films, took place for the first time in Kiev and Kharkov.

For Estonia, relations with Georgia are one of our foreign policy priorities, and Estonia’s political support for the country has been consistent. Estonia supports the territorial integrity of Georgia and is contributing to the post-war construction and security of the country. Georgia is the largest recipient of Estonia’s bilateral development aid. Several co-operation projects have been and are being carried out, including projects that deal with the training of Georgian police officers, government officials, young diplomats and students; the reformation of vocational education; and increasing the administrative capacities of the government. The recently completed project for the identification of stolen vehicles is a vivid example of the implementation of Estonian expertise in Georgia. The work of the demining experts and crisis psychologists that helped Georgia after the August War is well-known and greatly appreciated in Georgia today.

In 2009, Estonia was visited by Georgian Prime Minister Nikoloz Gilauri (in September), Speaker of the Parliament David Bakradze (in February), Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze (in August) and Minister of Economic Affairs Lasha Zvania (in May). The members of the Estonian government that visited Tbilisi included Foreign Minister
Urmas Paet (in June), Minister of the Interior Marko Pomerants (in October), and Minister of Economic Affairs Juhan Parts (in November). Close political relations continued when President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili paid a working visit to Estonia in January 2010. In addition to very active co-operation between the central governments, both countries wish to develop co-operation at the local government level as well.

The economic recession and the events of August 2008 have set the economic relations between Estonia and Georgia back to 2005–06 level. The Estonian investments in Georgia have so far been focused on real estate development and construction, agriculture (winemaking and nut cultivation), and retailing. At the beginning of 2009, Estonian direct investments in Georgia totalled 32.8 million EEK, while Georgian investments in Estonia totalled 2.2 million EEK. To promote investments, an investment protection treaty was signed in November, which will hopefully enter into force in spring 2010.

Cultural exchange has enlivened through the years. In connection with Tallinn being named European Capital of Culture for 2011, a Georgian cultural week is also planned. A performance by talented jazz singer Nino Katamadze and a Georgian Film Week in Tallinn already enriched the cultural exchange in 2009, as did the opening of an exhibition of Ilon Wikland’s drawings in Tbilisi at the end of the year.
Estonia has good relations with all the Transcauscasus countries, among them Armenia. Political contacts, which have been infrequent to date, intensified in 2009. The foreign minister made a working visit to Armenia at the beginning of June along with a large business delegation. In order to develop business contacts, an Estonian-Armenian business forum took place in Yerevan. Armenia has expressed active interest in the development of Estonia’s e-democracy and information technology, as well as the organisation of Estonia’s pension insurance system. In the fall, negotiations were started to conclude a treaty for the promotion and protection of investments.

Numerous meetings took place within the framework of various international forums: the foreign ministers, for example, met at the OSCE foreign ministers meeting in Athens in December. In addition to bilateral topics, other matters that have been discussed include developments in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Several development co-operation projects are underway between Armenia and Estonia. Armenia has sent its young officials and diplomats to Estonia in order to obtain experience and is very interested in our ID card system. There are plans to continue training programmes, such as the establishment of an Armenian School of Diplomacy, which should start operating already in 2010. In November 2009, Armenia celebrated the 200th birthday of Khachatur Abovyan, who was an enlightener of the Armenian people and creator of their written language, and also a student at the University of Tartu (1830–1836).

Recently, relations between Estonia and Azerbaijan have intensified somewhat. In January 2009, the President of the Republic Toomas Hendrik Ilves made the first visit ever by an Estonian president to Azerbaijan, accompanied with a 20-member business delegation. The fact that Estonia is interested in the development of bilateral economic contacts is demonstrated by the information technology forum that took place in the course of the visit, during which Estonian IT entrepreneurs introduced the possibilities of the X-Road, among other things. At the UN General Assembly in New York in September, Foreign Ministers Urmas Paet and Elmar Mammadyarov signed an information and communication technology co-operation agreement between Estonia and Azerbaijan. Estonia is interested in the further expansion of the bilateral contractual basis.

Azerbaijan, which has demonstrated rapid economic growth, has been an attractive target country for Estonian businesses, especially in the telecommunications and real estate sector. In 2009, Estonian direct investments in Azerbaijan reached 312.7 million EEK.

Several co-operation projects continued with Moldova, primarily in support of good governance and democracy, including the establishing of a modern and integrated
information system for prisons. The Rescue Board carried out a project in the course of which the possibilities for Estonian and Moldovan population protection were mapped. Training was organised for foreign trade representatives from Moldova, in order for them to acquire knowledge about the fields of foreign trade and foreign investments. The Estonian School of Diplomacy continued to organise training for young diplomats and government officials from Moldova in order to introduce Estonia’s experience with EU and NATO integration.

Relations between Estonia and Belarus, which have been modest to date, gained momentum in 2009. In March, the first political consultations between the foreign ministries were held in Tallinn. In October, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet visited Belarus, where he met with President Alexander Lukashenko and Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov and inaugurated the Estonian Embassy in Minsk. He was accompanied by Minister of Agriculture Helir-Valdor Seeder. The size (30 members) and activeness of the business delegation that accompanied the foreign minister demonstrate the great interest of entrepreneurs in this neighbouring country.

Expanding relations with Belarus definitely does not mean turning our back on Belarus’s civil society. Estonia continues to support the studies of Belarusian students in Estonia who are persecuted for political reasons in their home country, as well as the activities of the European Humanities University that operates in Vilnius.

The bilateral relations between Estonia and Russia concur with the endeavours of the European Union and NATO to create a mutually beneficial partnership while also recognising the differences of opinion that exist. Estonia’s approach to bilateral relations is to develop practical co-operation that would be beneficial to the people of both countries. Last year several bilateral agreements were signed: in September, a co-operation agreement related to competition policy was signed in Kazan; in November, two agreements were signed to curb cross-border drug trafficking.

Although no high-level visits took place, one should mention the bilateral meeting between the foreign ministers in June in the margins of the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Council of Baltic Sea States in Denmark. A meeting between Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Vladimir Titov took place during the bilateral political consultations that were held in Tallinn at the beginning of the year. At the end of August, Foreign Minister Paet met Valentina Matviyenko, the governor of St. Petersburg, at the Estonian Culture Days held in St. Petersburg for the first time. During the year, several important meetings between government agencies were held. In the end of the year, the visit of a delegation from Tyumen Oblast and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug to Estonia took place, during which the representatives became acquainted with Estonian IT-development.
An important step was taken at the EU-Russia Summit on 18 November in Stockholm, where a financing agreement was signed for the Cross-Border Co-operation Programme of Estonia, Latvia and Russia. This means that joint projects can be implemented in various fields of social and economic development, including business and trade, transportation, information and communications technology, and science and research, among others. Regional co-operation was also discussed at the meeting of regional ministers in St. Petersburg.

The number of tourists from Russia increased compared to 2008. During the first eight months of 2009, 61,800 Russian tourists were accommodated in Estonia, which is 14% more than the year before. Tourism has certainly been enlivened by the opening of flights between Tallinn and St. Petersburg in the summer of 2009. At the same time, there have been practical areas of co-operation where progress has not been made, including issues related to transport infrastructure – long lines continue to exist on the border between the EU and Russia.

Cultural contacts between Estonia and Russia have intensified and excellent co-operation exists between institutions of higher education. Close contacts have been established between the ministers of culture, who met twice in 2009. At the beginning of the year, Ministers Laine Jänes and Aleksader Avdeyev signed the Estonian-Russian Cultural Co-operation Programme for 2009–2011.

In addition to the Estonian Cultural Days in St. Petersburg, the cultural events that deserve special mention include the Tomsk Oblast Cultural Days and the first festival for Slavic song, dance and applied culture, Slavic Light, which took place in Estonia. Estonian and Russian theatres participate reciprocally in the theatre festivals of the other country. Estonia became the first EU country where virtual representations of The Russian Museum were opened. In March, reconstruction work started on the Estonian St. John’s Church in St. Petersburg. In the course of the reconstruction, the church, which has been used for secular purposes for almost 80 years, will regain its original function and appearance. There are plans to reopen the church for its 150th anniversary in November 2010.

At a time when Europe is increasingly recognising the threats resulting from energy security, interest in the gas- and oil-rich Central Asian countries is on the rise. Estonia is no exception – relations with the countries in this region have noticeably intensified in the last few years. In September, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip made an official visit to Kazakhstan, accompanied by a 20-member business delegation. In the course of the visit, meetings took place with President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Prime Minister Karim Massimov. The prime minister inaugurated Estonia’s first Honorary Consulate in Central Asia – in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. In addition, an economic co-operation
agreement, co-operation agreement between the ministries of education, and a visa waiver agreement for diplomatic passports were also signed during the visit.

President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan made a working visit to Estonia in February 2009. Within the framework of the UN General Assembly in New York in September, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Turkmenistan’s President Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov, and discussed the possibilities of developing bilateral relations.

Asia
In 2009, Estonia diversified both its military and civil contributions in Afghanistan and there is a plan to continue also in 2010. Estonia is prepared to increase its contribution with an improvised explosive device disposal (IEDD) team, by deploying an adviser to the CSTC-A/NTM-A (Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan /NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan) and adding a third police official to the European Union police mission. Estonia continues to contribute an average of 150–165 Defence Force members to the NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF).

Afghanistan is also a priority partner country of Estonian bilateral development cooperation. Estonia focuses primarily on the following fields of activity: health care, education, the needs of women and children, democracy building, and the promotion of good governance. In 2009, first aid training for adults and supplementary training for health care workers in Helmand Province was started up as a project of the non-profit organisation Mondo. Estonia introduced the working principles and advantages of e-governance, e-elections, and the digital shorthand system used by the Riigikogu to the members and officials of Afghanistan’s parliament. The development work in Kabul focuses on the field of education – Estonia is supporting the construction of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University and the preservation of informational materials at the Afghanistan National Archives, as well as the acquisition of new books.

Estonia supported the presidential and provincial elections that took place in 2009 with its military and civil contribution. High-level contacts also continued. In March, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet made a visit to Afghanistan, where he met with Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister Rangeen Dadfar Spanta and the speaker of parliament, as well as with the UN and EU special representatives in Afghanistan and high-level military personnel.

China, which continues to strengthen its position in the world, is also one of Estonia’s most important co-operation partners in Asia. In 2009, the most outstanding event in bilateral relations was the visit of Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Zhang Dejiang to Estonia together with a high-level official delegation and 60-member business delegation. The Estonian-Chinese business seminar was very well-attended. During the visit, a memorandum of reciprocal understanding on co-operation for promoting
investments between the ministries of the two countries was signed, as was a co-operation memorandum between Enterprise Estonia and the trade development division of the Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China.

Active communications continued between the parliaments. During the second half of 2009, a delegation from the Chinese parliament’s committee on agriculture and rural life visited Estonia and delegations from the Riigikogu foreign affairs and finance committee as well as from the Social Democratic Party of Estonia visited China for fostering the economical and cultural ties. In April, a delegation from the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, headed by the deputy minister, visited Estonia, and met with the foreign minister, speaker of the Riigikogu, and representatives of various political parties.

In relations with Japan, the visit made by Riigikogu members Kadri Simson and Urmas Reinsalu to several Japanese cities at the beginning of the year is worth special mention. They participated in a Japanese-Baltic seminar and enlivened relations between the parliaments of the two countries. Of the interesting Estonian cultural events that took place in Japan during 2009, the following are worth highlighting – the tour by the Ellerhein Girls’ Choir during the summer and the Laputa International Animation Festival in March-April that focused on Estonian animation.

In September Minister Urmas Paet and his South Korean colleague Yu Myung-hwan signed an agreement for avoidance of double taxation between the two countries.

In May, Foreign Minister Paet visited Vietnam in connection with the foreign ministers’ Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Minister Paet also had a bilateral meeting with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Phạm Gia Khiêm, whom he also met in New York in September, when a bilateral investment protection treaty was signed. The second round of political consultations between Estonia and Vietnam took place in June.

The political and economic influence of India in the world is growing, and Estonia is actively developing bilateral relations with this great power. Estonia’s first ambassador to India, Merike Kokajev, presented her credentials to the President of India, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, in February. The economic and trade relations between Estonia and India are modest, and therefore there is a lot of room for growth. For the promotion of business contacts, a well-attended seminar took place in the Foreign Ministry in October for introducing the business environment in India and for fostering the bilateral economic relations.

In 2009, bilateral political consultations took place with Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand.
The Middle East, Persian Gulf region and Northern Africa

In 2009, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet made visits to several countries in the Middle East – Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and the Palestinian National Authority. The visit to Lebanon and Syria was carried out in co-operation with Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb. In Lebanon, Ministers Paet and Stubb met with President Michel Suleiman, the foreign minister and speaker of parliament. The discussions focused on bilateral relations and the opportunities for assisting the Middle East peace process. The same topics, as well as issues related to Iraq and energy, were also covered in the meetings in Syria with President Bashar al-Assad, the prime minister and foreign minister.

In November, during a visit to Israel, Minister Paet inaugurated the Estonian Embassy in Tel Aviv, which is Estonia’s first embassy in the Middle East. He also met with Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman and discussed bilateral relations, co-operation with the OECD upon Estonia’s accession, and the stabilisation of the Middle East region. In June, an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation between Estonia and Israel was signed.

From Israel, Foreign Minister Paet headed to the Palestinian National Authority. In Ramallah, a meeting with the Palestinian prime minister and foreign minister took place. The discussions included Estonian support for Palestinian foreign service and IT projects, the possibilities for resuming the Middle East peace process, and issues related to the Palestinian presidential and parliamentary elections in 2010. In October, a 20-member delegation from the Palestinian National Authority, headed by the IT and telecommunications minister, attended a seminar on e-governance organised by the e-Governance Academy in Tallinn. At a meeting with Foreign Minister Paet, future possibilities for IT-related co-operation were discussed.

In May, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves participated in the meeting of the World Economic Forum on the Middle East in Amman, Jordan, and met with His Majesty King Abdullah II. Topics of discussion included the development of economic relations and the establishment of the necessary contractual basis for bilateral relations.

Relations also developed with the Persian Gulf countries. In April, at the Ministerial Meeting of the Gulf Co-operation Council1 in Muscat, the capital of Oman, Foreign Minister Paet gave a presentation on recovering from the global economic crisis. He also met with his colleagues from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. With the latter, discussions focused on opportunities for closer economic ties. The minister together with the Estonian business delegation also paid a visit to the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

1 The Gulf Cooperation Council includes the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia.
In the summer, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, paid a visit to Estonia, which is the first time that a high-level visit was made to Estonia from a country in the Persian Gulf region. It was agreed to hold regular bilateral political consultations and to establish a legal basis for developing the relations between the two countries. The ministers met again in September within the framework of the UN General Assembly in New York. At the World Economic Forum on the Middle East President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with the UAE minister of foreign trade, discussing the co-operation in the field of e-governance. The UAE is the first Persian Gulf country who has decided to accredit a non-residing ambassador to Estonia.

2009 also marks the intensified contacts between friendship groups of Estonian and Saudi Arabian parliaments.

Estonia completed its military mission in Iraq at the end of 2008. In connection with that, Defence Minister Jaak Aaviksoo visited Baghdad in February and attended the official ceremony marking the end of the Estonian military mission. However, co-operation is continuing for the civil reconstruction of Iraq. In May, a 10-member delegation of Iraqi diplomats participated in a training programme organised by the Estonian School of Diplomacy. In June, training was organised for two high-level Iraqi prison officials in the framework of the EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX). At the World Economic Forum on the Middle East, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves met with Iraqi Vice President, with whom he discussed opportunities for co-operation related to information technology.

Estonia continued strengthening the relations with the countries in North Africa. On 1 March, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with his Egyptian colleague Ahmed Aboul Gheit at the Gaza reconstruction conference held in Sharm el Sheik. In November, the third round of bilateral political consultations took place, during which Estonia announced its plans to open an embassy in Cairo in the first half of 2010. This will be the first Estonian embassy on the African continent.

The foreign ministers of Estonia and Morocco signed the agreement on the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments in September in the course of the UN General Assembly in New York.

**Sub-Saharan Africa**

2009 marked the first-ever visit of a foreign minister of Botswana, Phandu Tombola Chaka Skeleman, to Estonia. The visit brought about the establishment of visa-free travel for Estonian citizens to Botswana. At a meeting with Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, the topics under discussion included bilateral co-operation, developments in Southern Africa, and Africa in general.
In the framework of the UN General Assembly in New York in September, Foreign Minister Paet met with José Brito, his colleague from Cape Verde and discussed opportunities for co-operation in the field of information technology. The performance by Cape Verde’s famous singer – “barefoot diva”, Cesária Évora, at the Jazzkaar festival in Tallinn undoubtedly brought Africa closer to Estonia.

In February in Nairobi, Minister of the Environment Jaanus Tamkivi inaugurated Estonia’s first honorary consulate in Kenya, headed by entrepreneur Kadri Humal-Ayal. In November, Theresia Samaria, the first Namibian ambassador to Estonia, presented her credentials to President Toomas Hendrik Ilves. In 2009, Estonia established the diplomatic relations with two Portuguese-language countries – São Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique.

**Latin America**

Visa-free travel for Estonian citizens is already a reality with the majority of the region’s countries. In 2009 Estonia strengthened its efforts toward achieving visa-free travel to Brazil. This issue was discussed between Foreign Minister Paet and his Brazilian colleague Celso Nunes Amorim in April in the framework of the Alliance of Civilisations meeting in Istanbul. Supported by Estonia’s contribution, the negotiations on visa waiver agreement between the European Union and Brazil were finalised in September.
The main multilateral event of 2009 was the ministerial meeting of the European Union and the Rio Group\(^1\) that was held in Prague. At the meeting, the main topics under discussion were the ways to recover from the economic recession, energy security, renewable energy, and mitigating the consequences of climate change. At the conference, Minister Paet made a presentation underlining the need to avoid protectionism and to enhance the international co-operation for the economic recovery. He also met with José García Belaúnde, the Foreign Minister of Peru, with whom a co-operation protocol was signed between the ministries of the two countries. Estonia’s first honorary consul was appointed in Lima, the capital of Peru.

**Chile’s** Deputy Foreign Minister, Carlos Furche, visited Estonia in 2009 and political consultations were held with Brazil and **Mexico**.

Together with the whole international community Estonia made its contribution to the alleviation of the effects of the earthquake that struck **Haiti** in January 2010. Estonia had by end-January contributed 160 000 EUR through the Red Cross. Estonia also sent an IT expert and a 3-member logistics team with supplies to Haiti to support the activities of international organisations and provided supplies to the humanitarian operations information centre (two 45 m\(^2\) tents).

The IT experts of the Haitian government attended a training programme on e-governance in Estonia in August, discussing also the future co-operation possibilities in this field.

Within the framework of the UN General Assembly in New York, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet met with Rufus Bousquet, the Foreign Minister of **Saint Lucia**. During the meeting a joint communiqué on establishing diplomatic relations was signed. Diplomatic relations were also established with **Saint Kitts and Nevis**. Estonia’s first honorary consul was appointed in Curaçao, the capital of the **Netherlands Antilles**, for covering the consular area of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

**Australia and Oceania**

In April, the Estonian foreign minister made his first visit to **New Zealand** and **Australia**. In Perth at the meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, the discussions included preparations for the establishment of a bilateral social security agreement. In addition, Minister Paet along with his Australian colleague inaugurated the Estonian Honorary Consulate in Perth (for the consular area covering West Australia). He also participated in the ceremony in Sydney to give the new honorary consul the appointment.

---

\(^1\) An organisation assembling 23 Latin American and Caribbean countries: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.
consul her credentials. In addition, a meeting was organised with Estonians living in Australia at the Sydney Estonian House. Since almost 10 000 Estonian citizens live in Australia, the Foreign Ministry sent a consular mission to Australia’s larger cities at the end of the year.

In Wellington, New Zealand, Minister Paet met with his colleague Murray McColly, with whom he signed a consultation agreement between the two foreign ministries and opened an Estonian Honorary Consulate (for the consular area covering all of New Zealand). The foreign minister also participated in a colloquium in Auckland, New Zealand organised by the International Relations Institute regarding security issues in the Baltic Sea region. He also met with members of the European Business Chamber in order to introduce Estonia’s economic environment and investment opportunities.

In January 2009, Estonia established diplomatic relations with the Independent State of Samoa.