

Commercial Update

A publication of the U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Central and Eastern Europe Business Information Center in cooperation with the U.S. Agency for International Development

November/December 2000

Estonia an International Gateway

Estonia is the northernmost of the three Baltic states and is bordered by the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Finland, Latvia, and Russia. Since it regained its independence in 1991, Estonia has become one of Europe's most progressive and open economies. U.S. companies exploring commercial opportunities in Europe and Russia and the Newly Independent States (NIS) should not overlook Estonia.

U.S. Nonagricultural Exports to Estonia

Estonia has one the world's most liberal trade regimes. Currently, nonagricultural products are not subject to any duties. They are subject to a customs handling fee of approximately \$30 and a value added tax (VAT) of 18 percent.

The best prospects for U.S. nonagricultural exports to Estonia are telecommunications, maritime transportation services and port management, and construction and related services. Estonia has one of the world's highest Internet penetration rates and has the highest ratio of computers per inhabitants in Central and Eastern Europe. Connection rates to the Internet are even higher than in some Western European countries. Rising living standards and fierce competition among Internet services providers is helping increase the number of Internet users at a rapid pace.

Estonia has become a global transit center. Its location is ideal for the creation of efficient transportation links and distribution chains of goods and services for companies in Europe and in other parts of the world. The Estonian transportation and logistics sector is comprised of a successful combination of transportation services, transit trade, distribution centers, and value-added logistics. The major part of transportation income comes from international transit and port services.

Estonia has captured an increasing share of the rapidly growing Baltic Sea trade. Its three major cargo ports the Port of Tallinn (which includes the harbors of Muuga, Old Town, Paljassaare and Paldiski South), the Port of Parnu and the Port of Kunda, offer easy navigational access, deep waters, and good ice conditions. Overall, Estonian ports provide excellent opportunities for value-added logistics services and can serve as distribution centers for the Baltic Sea region. The port of Tallinn is the biggest cargo and passenger port in Estonia, and has been expanding at an annual rate of 20 percent during the past two years. Tallinn's Mugga

harbor holds a leading position in the handling of cargo flows between Russia and Western Europe.

The Port of Muuga Free Zone is designed to increase competitiveness of the transit sector in Estonia by granting more flexible customs procedures for companies offering transit and distribution services. The Port of Muuga in the free zone regime is especially attractive to high value container distribution operators. Procedures in the zone, such as simplified customs paper handling, easy transfer of ownership rights, and value-added operations, are designed to foster the development of distribution centers. Continuous investment into new infrastructure provides additional expansion opportunities in Muuga Port, which is one of the deepest and most modern ports in the Baltic Sea region.

The Estonian construction industry has successfully grown in recent years and it is an important branch of the Estonian economy; construction contributes about 5.5 percent to the total GDP. The share of subcontracting activity in the construction market has been increasing constantly, from 23 percent in 1994 to 32 percent in 1998. The increase is caused by the high level of competitiveness in the market, which forces companies to specialize in a selected field. Specialization is also driven by the fact that many new construction materials require special training for installation. Subcontracting is likely to continue growing in the future as the number of construction projects performed solely by the main contractor is reduced.

There are about 2,700 firms and sole proprietorships involved in construction activities in Estonia. Of the total firms, seven are subsidiaries of foreign enterprises, and 170 employ more than 50 people.

Although involvement of foreign capital in the Estonian construction industry is still relatively modest, there is excellent potential in the industry. Larger companies have successfully penetrated the civil engineering market, but need additional financing for the development of new technologies and/or new markets.

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Eye on Southeast Europe

Croatia Offers Investment Opportunities for U.S. Companies

Croatia is emerging as a serious competitor for U.S. investment capital in Central and Eastern Europe. It is quickly developing into a gateway for business into other areas of Central and Southeast Europe. The government of Croatia expressed its desire to expand commercial ties with the United States when Prime Minister Racan and President Mesic met with President Clinton and Secretary of State Albright during a visit to the United States in August 2000. Given the political changes and the new government's commitment to economic reform, Croatia has taken a number of concrete steps to enhance its attractiveness to foreign investors and is determined to increase American foreign direct investment (FDI).

Croatia officially became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in September 2000. Membership in the organization reduces trade barriers and enables Croatia to negotiate Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with the members of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), thereby enlarging the size of its market for investors. The U.S. Congress recently ratified the Bilateral Investment Treaty with Croatia for investment protection for U.S. companies.

Croatia has relatively liberal investment policies. The following laws are ones that potential investors should be familiar with

- **Law on Commercial Companies** extends national treatment and defines the forms of legal organization for foreign investors.
- **Law on Property** permits acquisition/ownership by foreigners (subject to the approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) although not in certain geographic areas due to national security concerns; a foreign investor, incorporated as a Croatian legal entity, to acquire/own property without restriction.
- **Constitution (Article 49)** guarantees the free transfer and repatriation of profits from invested capital for foreign investors. This provision also states that the rights acquired through capital investment cannot be reduced by law or any other legal act.

The Croatian government recently added a new Investment Incentives Law, which provides significant tax relief (even tax holidays in some cases), limited employee subsidies and assistance with training, customs relief for capital equipment; and even investor access to government-owned real estate and construction rights on preferential terms.

How to Invest?

The primary channel for foreign direct investment in Croatia is through the national privatization programs. In the early 1990s the privatization program got off to a slow start, with most participation coming from domestic investors. Most privatizations were conducted through employee or management buyouts. The new government is revising the privatization framework and information on government owned assets is being consolidated in the Croatian Privatization Fund (CPF) web site at www.hfp.hr. The goal of the CPF is to actively search for foreign investors and turn government assets over to private management ownership. (Please visit CEEBICnet for the latest list of companies for privatization from the CPF.)

The CPF is now focused on some of the following state-owned enterprises: Croatian Insurance Company, the Electric Utility (HEP), the Oil and Gas Company (INA), Dubrovacka and Istarska banks and Postanska Banka. In 2001, Croatian Telecom (HT) will enter a second round of privatization through an IPO.

Investment Insurance Programs

The U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) provides insurance for investors against political risk, expropriation of assets, and damage due to political violence and currency convertibility. In addition, OPIC also provides insurance coverage for certain contracting, exporting, licensing, and leasing transactions.

OPIC opened a Southeast European regional office in Zagreb, Croatia in March 2000. OPIC can now provide debt and equity financing for American investors in Croatia. Additionally, Croatia is an eligible beneficiary country for OPIC's new \$150 million Southeast European regional equity investment fund that was started in July 2000.

The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), a World Bank affiliate, also provides political risk insurance.

Conclusion

Croatia is aware that the level of foreign direct investment is below levels recorded elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. Understanding that FDI can assist with the restructuring of Croatia's industry and create new jobs, Croatia is keen on attracting American investors into the region.

Most of the information in this article is taken from "Croatia Investment Climate Report 2000" prepared by the U.S. Embassy in Zagreb, Croatia. To obtain a full copy of this report, please visit www.mac.doc.gov/eebic/ceebic.html or call (202) 482-2645.

The Baltic-American Enterprise Fund Providing Financing for Baltic Ventures

The Baltic-American Enterprise Fund is a private corporation founded in 1995 and capitalized with a \$50 million grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Its primary objective is to promote democracy and private sector business development by providing cost-effective loans and other financial instruments to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Typically, the fund seeks to invest in SMEs that have been profitable for more than one year. Ideally the company should occupy a unique market or export oriented niche and the management team should have a clear vision for the company's future. In some cases, the fund will consider green field and startup investments.

The Baltic-American Enterprise Fund has offices in Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius, and Washington, D.C. For more information, go to www.balaef.com.

There are similar enterprise funds for Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. More information on these enterprise funds can be obtained from CEEBICnet at www.mac.doc.gov/eebic/finangov/rfunds.htm

The American Chamber of Commerce in Estonia

The American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Estonia is part of an international AmCham network found in over 80 countries. AmCham Estonia's membership is comprised of U.S. and Estonian business executives. The main objectives of the AmCham are to promote U.S.-Estonian trade, to encourage U.S. investment in Estonia, and to forge partnerships between U.S. companies and local Estonian partners.

The AmCham also provides a forum for members' views on policy matters in the United States and Estonia. To learn more about the American Chamber of Commerce in Estonia visit their web site at www.acce.ee. For a complete list of AmChams in Central and Eastern Europe, visit CEEBICnet at www.mac.doc.gov/eebic/amchams.htm.

Estonia an On-Line Country

Estonia is one of Europe's top information technology hubs. It has one of the most developed telecommunications backbones in all of Central and Eastern Europe. The country's telecommunication sophistication is reflected in a recent survey conducted by the *Petroleum Economist* in which Estonia was ranked 19th in the world for Internet penetration.

Large investments have been made in modernizing the telecommunications industry in Estonia. There are now direct fiber-optic connections to Sweden and Finland. Three mobile communication networks cover the whole country.

To foster growth in the information technology sector and telecommunications industry the government of Estonia has instituted a number of innovative programs and policies. The Tiger Leap program has wired every school in the country to the Internet and set up public internet access nodes throughout the entire country so that every Estonian can have access to the Internet. The government has also passed digital signature legislation to facilitate the growth of e-commerce.

Central and Eastern European Commercial Update

The *Central and Eastern European Commercial Update* is produced by the Central and Eastern Europe Business Information Center (CEEBIC). For more information, or to subscribe, contact CEEBIC at: phone (202) 482-2645, fax (202) 482-3898, or e-mail ceebic@ita.doc.gov:

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Central and Eastern Europe Commercial Opportunities

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Klas, a Sarajevo based commercial grain processor and baker is seeking to import 12,000 tons of corn. Klas has impressive storage facilities that can accommodate 65,000 tons of grain and over 8,000 tons of other goods. They produce a wide range of baked goods and pastas and import, corn, wheat, sugar, coffee, edible fats, yeast, and bread additives. Interested companies should go to CEEBICnet at www.mac.doc.gov/eebic/frmsrc/part/partfrm.htm or call CEEBIC (202) 482-2645 for more detailed information on this opportunity.

Contact:
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Fax: (387-33) 204-219

*Submitted by Edin Fetahovic,
CEEBIC Trade Specialist Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Bulgaria

ADA - 90 is a private company established 1990 and currently employing 18 people. The main business activity of the company is the import of different kinds of paper, cardboard, and stationary. In 1999, its turnover was \$1 million. ADA - 90 is looking to import on a regular basis a wide range of paper and paper products like carbonless copy paper, offset paper, label paper, thermal paper, and newsprint paper.

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Fax: (359-2) 962-5960
E-mail: ada90@datacom.bg

*Submitted by Georgi Peev, CEEBIC
Trade Specialist Bulgaria*

Croatia

The Croatia Privatization Fund (CPF) is seeking bids to purchase up to 61 percent of AD Plastic, a producer of plastic automobile parts, equipment, and other plastic products. The company currently employs over 800 works and its turnover in 1999 was \$34,504,800. The initial price of the bid is \$17,970,200. Bid documents may be obtained after Dec. 15, 2000 from contact listed below.

Contact:
Croatian Privatization Fund
Ivana Lucica 6
Zagreb, Croatia
Tel: (385-01) 4596-352

*Submitted by Miroslav Nikolac,
CEEBIC Trade Specialist Croatia*

Estonia

Established in 1998, Demidov Industries is a manufacturer of secondary aluminum alloy products. It currently employs 53 workers and is seeking to purchase aluminum alloy from a U.S. producer. Specifically, Demidov is seeking to purchase the following aluminum alloys: Al-Si (50%-50%), Al-Mg (10%-20% Mg), Al-Mn, (Mn 10%-20%) and Al-Ti(10% Ti).

Contact:
Michael Terehov
Valukoja 18
Tallinn 11415, Estonia
Tel: (372-6) 093-326
Fax: (372-6) 381-636
E-mail: sinques@sinques.ee

AS Ferdida, a CAD Engineering and drawing company established in 1995 and currently employing 12 people, is seeking to purchase electrostatic photocopying equipment used in the reproduction of technical drawings. It would also be interested in developing long-term relationship with a U.S. company that works with technical drawings.

Contact:
Endel Linask
AS Ferdida
Kopli 25
Tallinn 10412, Estonia
Tel: (372-6) 603-030
Fax: (372-6) 603-052

Elmosport, an importer and retailer of sporting goods and equipment established in 1995, is seeking to develop a long-term relationship with a U.S. manufacturer of bicycles and track and ski suits.

Contact:
Urmas Ktsing
N. Triigi 8
Tartu, Estonia
Tel: (372-7) 425-972
Fax: (372-7) 387-901

*Submitted by Reene Sepp, CEEBIC
Trade Specialist Estonia*

Lithuania

Established in 1992, Eva is a private company involved in manufacturing metal components used in the production of furniture. Recently EVA started a new production line that has greatly increased electricity

consumption. In order to reduce its electricity costs it is thinking of building wind powered generator plant. EVA is looking for U.S. manufacturers and/or suppliers of wind power generators with power output ranging from 1 to 100 kilowatts.

Contact:
EVA
Naujoji Uosto 2-1
Naujoji Uosto 2-1
Klaipeda 5800
Tel: (370-6) 314-480
Fax: (370-6) 314-480

*Submitted by Jonas Vasilevicius,
CEEbic Trade Specialist Lithuania*

Slovakia

Salviafarm, a privately owned pharmaceutical company established in 1997, is seeking a U.S. joint venture partner or investor. The amount of the investment needed is \$600,000 and in return the company is willing to sell shares in the company. Salviafarm produces vitamins and tea products. In 1999 annual sales reached \$480,000. The company currently exports to Germany, Czech Republic, and Croatia.

Contact:
Vladimir Bozek, Sales Manager
Salviafarm
Mnesicka 11
915 01 Nove Mesto nad Vahom
Slovakia
Tel: (421-834) 710-087
Fax: (421-834) 710-087

Satel Slovakia is a hotel management and services company with 136 employees. It owns three large hotels in Poprad, Levoca, and Bardejovske Kupele. In 1999, its annual sales were \$1.12 million. It is seeking an investor to increase its working capital.

Contact:
Mr. Ladislav Germat
Deputy Director
Satel Slovakia
Mnohelova 826/5
058 01 Poprad
Slovakia
Tel: (421-92) 7161-111
Fax: (421-92) 7721-120

*Submitted by Pavol Matusek,
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Additional commercial opportunities are available on CEEbicNet
(www.mac.doc.gov/eebic/ceebic.html)

Rail Estonia Wins the Bid for Estonian Railway

On December 13, the supervisory council of the Estonian Privatization Agency announced that Rail Estonia's \$96 million bid for 66 percent of Estonian Railway was successful. Rail Estonia is a consortium of the international consulting firm, the Kingsley Group and two U.S. companies – CSX Corporation, and Rail America. According to Transportation and Communications Minister, Toivo Jurgenson, Rail Estonia has a clear vision for the future. Moreover, the government of Estonia believes that the company's expertise and experience will greatly improve the efficiency of the country's railway system and make Estonia a much more effective transshipment point for goods traveling throughout Europe.

Around the Region . . .

Slovenia: New Telephone Codes

On November 20, Slovenia introduced new telephone area codes. The new codes are: Ljubljana (01), Maribor, Murska Sobota, and Ravne (02), Celje and Trbovlje (03), Kranj (04), Nova Gorica, Koper, and Postojna (05), Novo Mesto and Krsko (07), Reserved for mobile and business networks, (06) reserved/special numbers (08) and (09). In addition six-digit telephone numbers are being phased out in favor of seven digits. Callers are advised of new numbers by an automatic message system in four languages.

Croatia: Ex-Im Bank and City of Zagreb to Cooperate on Financing U.S. Exports and Infrastructure

On November 20, Ex-Im Bank and the city of Zagreb signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in financing infrastructure or other projects using U.S. goods and services. According to Ex-Im Bank board member D. Vanessa Weaver, "by signaling Ex-Im Bank is increasing its presence in Croatia and our commitment to expanding support for creditworthy transactions in this market, we hope that this agreement will further encourage trade

between our countries. We are particularly interested in promoting exports in such sectors as tourism, rail and port infrastructure, agribusiness, environmentally-related projects, energy, power, health care and education, which are vitally important to Croatia's economic success." The Ex-Im Bank is an independent U.S. government agency that assists in financing the export of U.S. goods and services to developing markets around the world, through export credit insurance, working capital guarantees, loan guarantees, and direct loans.

Croatia: Investment Risk Rating Improves

According to report Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) representative in Zagreb, Croatia is moving out of a state recession, which has a direct affect on the country's investment risk profile. Croatia's D&B rating remains at DB5a, which is the best rating mark for high risk investment countries but continues to move toward the next category of lesser investment risk (DB4). (Source: *Hina*)

Estonia (Continued from page 1)

U.S. Agricultural Exports to Estonia

The most successful U.S. agricultural export to Estonia is meat. In 1999, the United States exported \$81 million in meat to Estonia. Other significant U.S. exports include vegetables and fruits, beverages and alcohol, and fish and fish products.

Goods in high demand are livestock genetics, dairy related equipment, livestock feeds, and pet food. Other products in demand are nuts, health food products, and convenience foods.

U.S. Investment in Estonia

Estonia offers a number of advantages to the U.S. investor, including its strategic location, progressive economy, and relatively low corporate taxes. In addition, Estonia is expected to be one of the first countries from the former Soviet bloc to be admitted to the EU. Some examples of U.S. companies that have invested in Estonia include Avon, NRG, and Hewlett-Packard.

Estonia's government maintains a highly favorable attitude toward foreign direct investment. Foreign investment in Estonia is governed by the law on foreign investments, enacted in 1991 shortly after regaining independence. The law's intent is to affirm the liberal treatment of foreign investments in Estonia and to

provide potential investors with detailed information on investing in Estonia. The government has sought to maintain liberal policies and establish free trade agreements in order to attract investments that could produce exports directed to the European Union, the developing markets of Central and Eastern Europe, and the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union.

U.S. Software Company AXS-One Opens Office in Tallinn

On November 21, the U.S. company AXS-One, which provides finance area IT solutions, opened an office in Tallinn and is planning to use it as a foothold for entering the Baltic and Scandinavian markets. The aim of AXS-One is to meet the needs of the local business and public sectors, but in the future the parent company also sees its Tallinn office as a place to enter also other Baltic markets as well as Scandinavia. AXS-One regards Estonia as a very good market, because the local environment is very innovative and among the best developed in the region. In Estonia, EXS-One's software solutions are now being used by the Bank of Estonia and Estonian Telekom. Other major clients in the region include Polish Telekom, Bank Handlowy, and Bulgarian Railways.

Key Contact for Doing Business In Estonia

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Calendar of Events



January

1/16–1/17 The Sixth Annual Central and Eastern Europe Issuers & Investors Forum, Vienna, Austria
Contact: Euromoney Conferences, Tel: (44-020) 7779-8475, Fax: (44-020) 7779-8396,
E-mail: chjames@euromoneyplc.com

February

2/3–2/12 U.S. Department of Agriculture Agribusiness Investment & Trade Mission to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
Contact: Jim O'Meara, Tel: (202) 690-3982, Fax: (202) 690-3982, E-mail: omearaj@fas.usda.gov

For a more complete list of events, go to CEEBCnet, www.mac.doc.gov/eebic/ceebic.html

This notice is provided solely as an informational resource and does not constitute U.S. Department of Commerce endorsement of these events. All information published in the Commercial Update regarding trade events is subject change without notice by the organizers of those events.

Agribusiness Investment and Trade Mission U.S. Department of Agriculture Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania February 3-12, 2001

Looking for a low-cost, business-friendly hub with terrific links to millions of new customers in Europe and the Former Soviet Union?

Need an established local partner, fluent in local languages, and up to speed on local and regional regs?

If you are considering markets in Central and Eastern Europe, you should not miss this opportunity, particularly if you produce, process or market in the following areas: wood, dairy, fish, poultry, seed, grain, feed, fruits/vegetables, cattle/swine breeding, greenhouse operations, meat processing, food processing, wine, beer and soft drinks.

Contact: Jim O'Meara, USDA/FAS, Tel: (202) 690-2895, Fax (202) 690-3982,
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