

*Translation of an interview with Mr. Tanel Saarmann on Wed 10<sup>th</sup> June, published in Ärileht (business supplementary of 2nd largest newspaper Eesti Päevaleht)*

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## **Irish Minister in Estonia: you could say, I'm doing a market research**

Today, trade relations between the two EU border countries are quite modest and the Irish Government is very serious about improving the situation.

Currently, a delegation from Ireland, headed by the Irish MoS Seán Sherlock (Minister for Development, Trade Promotion and Cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland), is visiting Estonia. According to the Minister, trade relations between Estonia and Ireland must improve because our countries have many similarities and common interests. The Minister is in Estonia for the first time, but he has heard a lot about Estonia and is very positively-minded. 'Estonia has something magical and we're here to see and experience this,' he said.

### **Seán Sherlock – what's the purpose of your visit to Estonia?**

This is the first ever trade mission to Estonia on ministerial level. We're here to explore how to further develop communication between the two countries. Besides this, we're also searching for opportunities to help Estonian and Irish companies both here and in Ireland, irrespective of their commerce sector.

Ireland is situated on the west border of Europe and Estonia is on the east border and we have a lot in common. For example, one of Ireland's strongest trade sectors is the ICT, likewise Estonia's. Branches of several world's biggest and well-known technology companies are based in Ireland. Irish software sector is of world class. I believe we can cooperate in the field of agricultural machinery, medical technology, cyber security and elsewhere. You could say, I'm doing a market research at the moment. The Irish Government takes improvement of our mutual relationship very seriously.

### **Ireland is on place 34 in the list of Estonia's trade partners. There's quite a lot of room for development.**

Certainly. Estonians are looking outside the borders and so are we. We're exploring whether we can find cooperation possibilities also in sectors in which nothing much is happening at present. For example, in culture tourism and processing industry. This year, we've helped to establish an Irish Estonian Business Network. Irish Government is very supportive of building such networks. The Irish Embassy in Estonia has an important role in this. In Ireland today, the number of companies with Estonian 'roots' is relatively small, but it could become a lot bigger.

### **Where do you see the win-win factor?**

Our message here is that Ireland could be a good place for your company – a place from where you could enter to other markets, the U.S. for example. In turn, Irish companies could come to Estonia to be closer to Nordic and Baltic markets. Ireland has a small and open economy and skilled labourers. We also speak English. (Laughs.) Estonians do too.

I've heard that one of the topics in Estonia today is milk processing. You're trying to find new options due to instability in Russia. Ireland's dairy sector is developing very quickly and we have many innovative ideas. We think there's an opportunity for cooperation with Estonian dairy companies. We also have a strong food industry which offers numerous cooperation opportunities. We're here to make a start.

### **Why are there so few Irish tourists in Estonia despite direct Ryanair flights?**

I believe my visit to Estonia will make the Irish better aware of your country. If you ask an average Irish what comes first to his mind when Estonia is mentioned, you'll probably hear about your successful ICT sector, young generation and modern state. But indeed, not much thought about visiting Estonia. Likewise, not many Estonians visit Ireland. I believe we're still in the beginning of forming close relationship between our countries. We have a good Ambassador in Estonia and we're convinced communication between our countries should be closer. I'll deliver many good messages to Ireland from my visit here.

### **You've said you're fascinated by Estonia. Anything in particular?**

It's impressive how far Estonia has developed in the field of technology, engineering and mathematics.

It seems to me that you've put a blank sheet of paper on the desk and written a completely new digital agenda from Estonia's perspective. You've engaged your educational system in this as well. Ireland is trying to do the same. If we speak about digital agenda of Europe, it begins with education. From very early age. Estonia is a pioneer in this and I hope I will learn more about it while I'm here.

### **What's economic situation in Ireland at the moment? You've survived a heavy crisis.**

Within four years we've managed to completely reform our economy. Now we have a stable 4 % growth. We're a small yet successful country looking outwards. Ireland has highly educated labour force. Name any global enterprise and I can assure you they have a branch in Ireland. World's biggest medical equipment companies are based in Ireland. Hence, big enterprises wouldn't come to Ireland if they didn't believe in the state.

### **There was a time when Estonians went to pluck hens in Ireland. Now there are new times and new opportunities.**

Traditionally, Irish have also worked all over the world. We helped to build New York and London. We built railways in many corners of the world. We did jobs which nobody else wanted to do.

I think Estonians are similar – you're very hard-working and dare to look farther. Yes, Estonians came to Ireland and did simple work, but I believe both our countries are mature and equal partners. We both have opportunities in and outside Europe.

### ***Cooperation still in an early stage***

*Ireland is Estonia's no 34<sup>th</sup> trade partner. In 2014, bilateral trade operations between the countries amounted 60.6 mln euros, of which exports was made up by 24.5 mln and imports by 36.1 mln. Last year, main export articles from Estonia to Ireland were machinery and equipment, wood and wood products. Estonia imported from Ireland machinery and equipment, chemical products, beverages and food products.*

*According to the Central Bank of Estonia, as per data of Dec 2014, Ireland's direct investments to Estonia amounted to 29 mln euros. As of April 2015, there are 90 Estonian businesses with Irish roots registered in the Estonian Business Registry. Estonian businesses have invested only 800,000 euros in Ireland.*

*Tourism interest towards Estonia is small. In 2014, 2,983 Irish citizens stayed in Estonian accommodation units despite Ryanair direct flights between Dublin and Tallinn.*