

Representatives of 24 Countries Gather at the “Baltic IT&T 2004: eBaltics” Forum

The International “Baltic IT&T 2004: eBaltics” forum took place in Rīga from April 21–24 of this year. It was organised by the Latvian Information Technology and Telecommunications Association (LITTA) in co-operation with the Information Technology Committee of the Baltic Council of Ministers, the Latvian Information Society Bureau and Data Media Group. The honorary chairman for the event was the deputy prime minister and transport minister of Latvia, Ainārs Šlesers. The motto for the forum was “Building Effective Partnership Networks”.

The “Baltic IT&T 2004: eBaltics” forum is one of the main IT&T events in the Baltic Sea region and in Central and Eastern Europe. This year it brought together more than 500 people from 24 different countries. Among those who took part were specialists and business leaders from the leading IT&T companies in the Baltic Sea region, as well as from government organisations, state-owned companies and international organisations. Also among participants were politicians from the Baltic Sea region.

FORUM EVENTS

The annual “Baltic IT&T 2004” conference is one of the most important IT&T forums in the Baltic Sea region. Major subjects this year included E-government, E-services, E-health, E-skills, Networks, EU funds and programmes and Internet regulation. The primary focus at the E-services session was on the technologies and solutions which relate to E-government. At the E-skills section, people debated policies and strategies for ICT competence assessment and for the development of co-operation.

The session on EU funds focused on various EU programmes, projects and opportunities for co-operation, as well as the experi-

ence of the private and the public sector in this area.

One special theme this year was a two-day session on E-health, organised for the first time in the Baltic States. Representatives were on hand from the relevant ministries in the Baltic States and from the eHealth Unit of the European Commission, joined by senior officials and specialists from all around the Baltic Sea region. The discussion focused on various ways of informatising health care – information systems for hospitals and physicians, standards for exchanging patient records and images, etc.

A conference called “Human Language Technologies: The Baltic Perspective” was attended by more than 100 language technology experts from the Baltic States, the Czech Republic, Russia, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Poland, Finland and Sweden. Delegates discussed the use of human language technologies in the Baltic States, language corpora and content development, multilingual language resources, cross-lingual and multilingual processing, the generation and understanding of human speech, as well as speech and language processing. For the Baltic States, human language technologies are a new and emerging sector. This

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conference allowed people to take stock of the existing situation, and it served as an important stimulus for the study, development and implementation of language-related computer technologies in the Baltic States.

Another workshop, the “Baltic Sea State ICT Partneriat”, was organised with the support of the Latvian Investment and Development Agency, the Latvian Economics Ministry, the United Nations Development Programme and the IT&T Cluster’s development project. The main goal for the partneriat was to share experience, to create opportunities for partnership networks and to look at the possibility of joint projects.

There was also a “Global Cities Dialogue Workshop”, which was set up in collaboration with the Riga City Council and the Global Cities Dialogue (GCD) network. It represents more than 100 cities from 38 different countries. Delegates exchanged experiences in relation to such issues as E-cities, E-learning, training for the knowledge society, state register systems, etc.

A part of the forum was also the 11th annual “Baltic IT&T 2004” exhibition – the largest springtime ICT exhibition in the Baltic region.

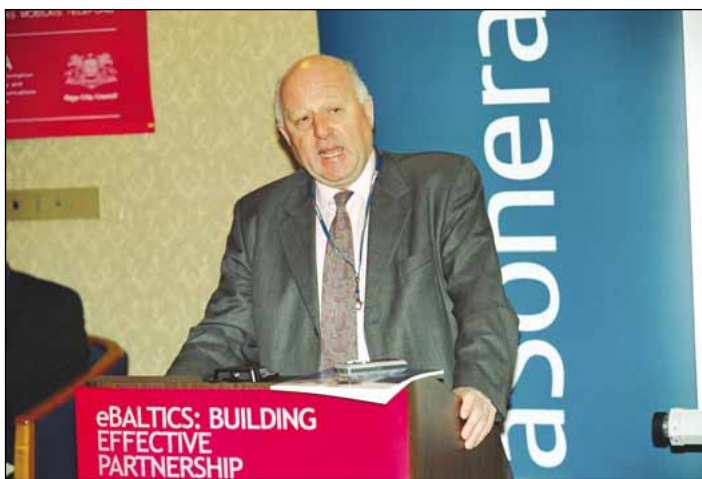
All of the forum materials, presentations, events and related publications can be studied in more detail at www.ebaltics.com/forum2004. Planning is already underway for next year’s “Baltic IT&T” event, which will take place from April 6–9, 2005, in Riga. □



The plenary session of the forum was attended by Imants Freibergs, the president of LITTA (left); John Gole, telecommunications programme manager for Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa for the IDC company in the Czech Republic; Erik Hallberg, senior vice president and head of the Baltic market for TeliaSonera AB; Bror Salmelin, director of the New Working Environments Unit of the European Commission's Information Society Directorate-General; Ainārs Šlesers, deputy prime minister of Latvia and honorary chairman of the "Baltic IT&T 2004: eBaltics" forum; and Andrew Rasbash, the European Union's ambassador to Latvia.



Bror Salmelin, director of the New Working Environments Unit of the European Commission's Information Society Directorate-General, used his presentation to analyse the EU's policies in the development of the Information Society.



Dr John S. Beale, a representative of the European Commission's "eTEN" programme, announced that Latvia would be able to take part in the programme now that it has become a full member of the EU.

The "Latvija@Pasaule" project was presented to the international audience by the president of LITTA, Imants Freibergs.



The goal of the project is to help the people of Latvia to overcome the digital gap which presently exists, guaranteeing access to state and private companies through the use of the Internet. When this goal is reached, that will mean that the development of the Information Society in Latvia has been more successful.



Erik Hallberg, senior vice president of TeliaSonera, which was the general sponsor of the forum, discussed the importance of telecommunications in the establishment of the Information Society.



The IST Programme has supported the "Baltic IT&T" forum for three years now, and a representative of the programme, Jacques Babot, confirmed the desire of further co-operation in the future, too.

Jorn W. Phigalt, a Danish representative of the Transatlantic Small Business Initiative, has had more than 20 years of experience as a consultant and expert. He was attending the "Baltic IT&T" forum for the third time, and his views have been of great use to the directors of IT companies in Latvia.



Druvis Mūrmanis, a board member of the Hansabanka bank, talked about ways in which the EU's structural funds can be used at the "EU Funds and Programmes for Cross-Border Co-operation" session of the forum.



Primary topics in the E-health session included E-health as a strategic plan in developing health care information systems, these information systems as such, Digital Imaging and COMMunication in Medicine (DICOM), patient records

and Health Level 7, as well as possible projects related to and examinations of health care information systems. The opening address at the session was delivered by the Latvian health care minister, Rinalds Mucins.



Participants in the networks session, which was sponsored by the mobile phone company LMT, analysed trends in the mobile communications market in Latvia and in the rest of the world, and they also discussed changes in the business environment for mobile services providers.



The Swedish Agency for Public Management organised a seminar called "Strategies for an Open Infrastructure" as part of the E-government sessions at the conference. The focus was on open infrastructure, the various applications, E-service solutions and processes which it involves, and ways in making it work. The opening address at the session was delivered by the director general of the Swedish agency, Knut Rexed.

For the first time in the history of the Baltic States, a conference called "Human Language Technologies – the Baltic Perspective" was organised at the forum with the support of the National Language Commission of Latvia. The opening address was delivered by



Latvian Culture Minister Helēna Demakova.



Professor Andrejs Veisbergs, a representative of the National Language Commission which serves under the auspices of the Latvian president's chancellery, emphasised the importance of human language technologies in the Baltic States.

New technologies offer new opportunities and challenges that are of key significance for the future of languages. The conference allowed participants to gain a sense of the existing situation, and it served as an important stimulus for the study, development and introduction of language-related computer technologies in the Baltic States.



In the SOIS Meeting participated Senior Officials of the Information Society of the Northern eDimension – from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden.



The 11th international information technology, telecommunications and office equipment exhibition “Baltic IT&T 2004” was opened by the honorary chairman of the “Baltic IT&T” event – Deputy Prime Minister Ainārs Šlesers (left), as well as by the deputy mayor of the city of Riga, Aivars Kreituss (centre).



MicroLink Latvija has changed its name, it has improved itself in quantitative and qualitative terms, but it remains faithful to tradition. This year, too, the president of MicroLink Latvija, Jānis Bergs, presented his company's traditional cake for the visitors and participants of the exhibition. This was the 11th time that he had done so.



Exhibitors included telecommunications, software development and system integration, banking and eBusiness, security technologies of different computing platforms, information services for society, digital entertainment and other sectors.



The exhibition this year was attended by 113 participants from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Sweden. The exhibition attracted more than 25,000 visitors over the course of four days.