

Jaan Tõnisson Institute

PRESS RELEASE

Railroad Development Corporation of the U.S. Makes Grant to Support Anti-Corruption Movement in Estonia

Tallinn, Estonia, 21 January 2008 — Due to a generous gift by Pittsburgh-based Railroad Development Corporation (RDC), the Jaan Tõnisson Institute (JTI) of Estonia can increase its work in combating corruption in that Baltic country.

Because of his experience with the privatization and subsequent renationalization of the Estonian railway system, RDC Chairman Henry Posner III has agreed to support the Jaan Tõnisson Institute (JTI) in fostering anti-corruption strategies for Estonia. The JTI is well-equipped to manage such efforts: it began combating corruption in Estonia in 1998 when the Corruption Analysis Centre was established, and in 2000 JTI initiated a society, Corruption Free Estonia. At the same time the Jaan Tõnisson Institute was accredited as a member of an international anti-corruption movement, Transparency International. Agu Laius, Manager of the JTI, was appointed an active member of Transparency International Estonia. By 2006 the Jaan Tõnisson Institute managed to widen its anti-corruption activities to a point where there was a need to establish an independent organization to deal with corruption analysis, distribute information and combat corruption. Therefore the non-registered organization Corruption Free Estonia was re-organized and formally registered as a Non-Government Organization (NGO). The first supporter of the new organization was the Soros Foundation, through the Open Estonia Foundation.

Mr. Laius commented, “The affiliated NGOs Corruption Free Estonia and Jaan Tõnisson Institute are well-positioned to operate in parallel in the fight against corruption in Estonian society. Their efforts will now be enhanced and increased, thanks to the generosity of RDC.”

Activities that will be accomplished with the donation by RDC include creation of a website regarding anti-corruption in Estonia, cooperation with journalists in order to achieve a thorough reflection of corruption cases in media channels, participation in international seminars and conferences to introduce worldwide the fight against corruption in Estonia, and support of the JTI operations in Tallinn.

Additional activities will focus on an analysis of activities of the Estonian Government, to influence Estonian anti-corruption policies; monthly radio broadcasts that deal with actual problems of corruption and raise public awareness; and the research and publication of a book, tentatively titled the Story of the Estonian Railway, which will chronicle the privatization of the Estonian Railways, the largest act of privatization after the restoration of independence in Estonia. The process of the subsequent renationalization of the Estonian Railways has not been transparent and has raised many questions, and a thorough analysis of the process has not been made. Part of the RDC grant will bring to light the problems associated with this privatization and suggest significant changes.

RDC’s donation was facilitated through the cooperation of Washington-based Counterpart International (www.counterpart.org).

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