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2025 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Estonia

Accompanying the document

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

2025 Rule of Law Report The rule of law situation in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

The level of digitalisation of the justice system in Estonia remains among the highest in the EU, with further steps triggered to digitalise criminal proceedings. A reform of the Council for the Administration of Courts has been launched. A reform to merge all courts of the same instance is being prepared. The high workload of the judiciary remains a challenge and confirmed budget cuts could amplify it. A draft law envisages a new increase in court fees for certain procedures, including for business-related matters. The courts generally perform efficiently, though there have been slight increases in disposition time in civil and commercial litigious cases. Several draft laws aiming to improve the efficiency of justice in the areas of criminal, civil and commercial law are being discussed.

The implementation of the 2021-2025 Anti-Corruption Action Plan is on track and the next strategic framework is being prepared. Measures were introduced to foster the investigation and prosecution of financial crime, with an impact on corruption. The Government is expected to approve the reform of the political party financing framework. All political parties in Parliament agreed on a framework on lobbying in Parliament and the rules for lobbying for the Government are being assessed. Rules on revolving doors at high-level positions are also subject to a debate. New legislation on whistleblower protection and existing rules of conflicts of interests are being implemented. A number of high-risk areas for corruption are being addressed by the authorities.

The national media regulator maintains its independence and its staff has increased. The Government is working towards enhancing the long-term financial stability and independence of public service media through legislative reforms, but implementation of the overall budget cuts represents a growing challenge. Legislative reforms to strengthen media regulation and address national security concerns, while also seeking to further advance transparency, are in preparation. Efforts to ensure a consistent and effective implementation and enforcement of the right of access to information are being made. The framework for the protection of journalists remains favourable.

There has been no more recourse to procedures allowing substantial delays to the legislative process, following a decision on the constitutionality of this approach. A reflection process by the Government has identified areas for further improvement in the consultation process for legislation. The financial autonomy of the Chancellor of Justice and the National Audit Office has been strengthened. An amendment to the Auditing Activities Act is easing reporting obligations for civil society organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia has (made):

- Some progress on continuing the efforts to reform the Council for the Administration of Courts, taking into account European Standards on councils for the judiciary.
- Some further progress on advancing with the efforts to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- Fully implemented the recommendation to ensure effective public consultation in the context of the legislative process.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, it is recommended to Estonia to:

- Continue the ongoing efforts to reform the Council for the Administration of Courts, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.
- Further advance with efforts to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information taking into account European standards on access to official documents.

I. JUSTICE SYSTEM¹

Independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in Estonia is now average among both the general public and companies. Overall, 59% of the general population and 47% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2025². The perceived judicial independence among the general public has significantly decreased in comparison with 2024 (67%) and has decreased in comparison with 2021 (66%). The perceived judicial independence among companies has also significantly decreased in comparison with 2024 (58%), as well as in comparison with 2021 (57%).

Some progress has been made with the launch of the reform of the Council for the Administration of Courts³. On 10 October 2024, the Government approved the legislative intent⁴ to reform the Courts Act and to transfer powers from the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs to the Council for the Administration of Courts, to make the Council a permanent body, and to amend its composition⁵. The draft law proposed the future Council would be made up of 11 members, including five peer-elected judges and at least two active politicians⁶. The draft law is being discussed in the Parliament including as regards the composition of the Council. Therefore, the final composition of the Council is yet to be decided. Further steps in the process will be determined in autumn 2025. The reform process provides an opportunity for further improvements taking into account European standards, which recommend that at least half the members of the Council should be judges chosen by their peers, and that there are no active politicians with the right to vote in such councils⁷. Given the efforts made to advance the reform, some progress has been made on this recommendation.

¹ An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

² Figures 51 and 53, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard and Figures 49 and 51, 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard. The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30% of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39%), average (between 40-59%), high (between 60-75%), very high (above 75%).

³ The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Estonia to ‘[c]ontinue the efforts to reform the Council for the Administration of Courts, taking into account European Standards on councils for the judiciary’, 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 2.

⁴ Legislative intent is the initial step for drafting legislation and it serves as a pre-consultation process on the problem identification, purpose of the policy, compatibility with existing laws and the general idea of the draft amendments that are about to be drafted.

⁵ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 3.

⁶ Five peer-elected judges from first and second instance courts; two members of Parliament; one member either the Minister of Justice and Digital Affairs or an elected representative; one member elected by the Estonian Bar Association; one member either the Chancellor of Justice or an elected representative; and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who would be an ex officio member. Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, Supreme Court, Estonian Judges Association. The Venice Commission clarified since 2020 that ex officio Council members do not count as part of the peer-elected judges, see Venice Commission (2020), para. 44, also referenced in Venice Commission (2023), para. 47.

⁷ Committee of Ministers (2010), paras. 26-29, which recommends that “*Not less than half the members of such councils should be judges chosen by their peers from all levels of the judiciary and with respect for pluralism inside the judiciary*”. See also CCJE (2021), p. 4, B. b): “*prospective members, whether judges or not, [...] should not be active politicians or members of the executive or the legislature;*”

Quality

A reform to merge all courts of the same instance is being prepared. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs is preparing a legislative proposal to merge all courts of the same instance⁸. The idea originated from a working group under the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The goal is to distribute the workload among the different courts more evenly and increase specialisation with fewer management posts⁹. At the same time, rationalisation of resources also means that certain courthouses are being closed. On 6 December 2024, the Council for Administration of Courts gave its consent to the Minister of Justice and Digital Affairs to change the geographical location of courthouses. In 2025, the Tartu District Court's Võru courthouse merged Võru and Põlva buildings and Pärnu District Court's Rüütli courthouse was closed¹⁰.

The level of digitalisation of the justice system remains among the highest in the EU and further developments in the digitalisation of criminal proceedings have been initiated. In 2024, the process of full digitalisation of the criminal proceedings started. The goal is to allow the entire process, from the police to the court, to be conducted entirely in digital form. The first roll-out is ongoing and concerns only minor criminal cases (fast-track procedure)¹¹. The justice system remains among the most advanced in using digital technology in courts and prosecution services and offering a variety of digital solutions to conduct and follow court proceedings. These include the use of distributed ledger technologies (blockchain) both in the courts and prosecution services for storing data and registers¹².

The new draft law, which aimed to unfreeze the indexation of judges' salaries was withdrawn. On 16 September 2024, a draft law was tabled to amend the law on Salaries of the Higher State Servants Act¹³. As reported in 2024, in 2023 Parliament adopted amendments that cut in half the indexation of salaries for most civil servants and froze the indexation for the next four years¹⁴. These amendments entered into force on 15 March 2024 and will remain in force until 31 March 2028, when the previous method of calculating salaries will be restored. A group of judges has challenged the constitutionality of this amendment¹⁵. While the decision on the constitutionality is pending, the Government

⁸ Estonian Government (2025a), written input, p. 11.

⁹ Country visit Estonia, Supreme Court.

¹⁰ The Pärnu District Court's Pärnu courthouse buildings at different addresses in the same city will be merged. Additionally, the Pärnu courthouse of the Tallinn Administrative Court will be closed from 30 June 2025. Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 5. See also Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), written input, pp. 6-7. Country visit Estonia, Supreme Court, Estonian Judges Association, and Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs. It is noted that according to the Court of Justice of the EU, the transfers without consent of a judge to another court, or between two divisions of the same court are potentially capable of undermining the principles of the irremovability of judges and judicial independence. Judgment of the CJEU, Case C-487/19, W.Z., para. 114. According to the Council of Europe standards a judge should not receive a new appointment or be moved to another judicial office without consent, except in cases of disciplinary sanctions or reform of the organisation of the judicial system. The decision for a transfer should also be open to judicial review. See Committee of Ministers (2010), para. 52. See also Judgment of the ECtHR, (Application no. 1571/07), *Bilgen v. Turkey*, paras 63 and 96.

¹¹ Estonian Government (2025), p. 5.

¹² Figures 44 to 48, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

¹³ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 4. Supreme Court (2025), written input, p. 9. Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), written input, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 6.

¹⁵ Supreme Court (2025), written input, p. 9.

proposed a draft law which would unfreeze the indexation for judges only, but for now this draft law has been withdrawn.¹⁶

Initiatives to increase the attractiveness of the judicial profession are ongoing, while high workload remains a challenge, and confirmed budget cuts could amplify it. As mentioned in the 2024 Rule of Law Report, the high workload of judges has been identified as a source of concern. Both the judicial representatives and the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs found that certain procedural provisions¹⁷, in combination with increasing caseload and retirement forecasts, are among the main causes of this high workload¹⁸. The authorities are undertaking several initiatives to recruit personnel for the justice system¹⁹. In the next five years, 53 out of 261 judges will be eligible for retirement²⁰. This situation could be exacerbated by further budget cuts over the next 3 years intended to address the economic situation in the country and to reallocate budget for defence²¹. The budget of the justice system, as in the entire public sector, will be cut by 10% in total²². Some stakeholders argue that to achieve this result without disrupting the output of the justice system, further courthouses would need to be closed or merged, or support staff in courts would have to be reduced²³.

A draft law, which envisaged a new increase of fees for certain court procedures, including for business-related matters has been put on hold for further analysis. On 16 September 2024, a draft law amending the State Fees Act was submitted to the Government. The draft law would increase court fees based on the value of the claim in the business register, the commercial pledge register, the ship mortgage register, the land register²⁴, the register of non-profit associations and foundations²⁵, and civil proceedings²⁶. Stakeholders have explained that the increase of fees is necessary as the previous increase from 2022 has not fully taken account of the economic situation in the country²⁷. In June 2025, the draft law

¹⁶ Country visit Estonia, Estonian Judges Association, Supreme Court and Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs. According to European standards, judges' remuneration should be commensurate with their profession and responsibilities and be sufficient to shield them from inducement aimed at influencing their decisions. Committee of Ministers (2010), para. 54, and CJEU, C-64/16, para. 45, and Joined Cases C-146/23, paras. 62, 71-75. When a Member State adopts budgetary restriction measures affecting its officials and public servants, it may decide to apply those measures also to national judges, while the preservation of judicial independence requires that the level of remuneration of judges is always commensurate with the importance of the functions they carry out.

¹⁷ These include clarifying the provisions regarding the replacement of a defence attorney and expanding the possibilities for judicial discussion in situations where the accused is absent from court.

¹⁸ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹ Estonian Government (2025a), written input, p. 11. Circuit Courts offer training programmes for clerks to become judges; envisaged legislation would ease the restrictions on judges' professional activities, making the profession more attractive; introducing feedback from higher courts judges to lower court judges.

²⁰ Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), written input, pp. 7-8.

²¹ Country visit Estonia, Supreme Court, and Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

²² More precisely, 5% in 2025, 3% in 2026, and 2% in 2027. Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 3.

²³ Country visit Estonia, Supreme Court. See also Committee of Ministers (2010), para. 54, and CJEU, C-64/16, para. 45, and CJEU, case Joined Cases C-146/23, paras. 62, 71-75.

²⁴ State fees for entries in the land register, commercial pledge register, and ship mortgage register will increase by an average of 56%.

²⁵ State fees for registration activities will increase by 25-50%.

²⁶ State fees based on the value of the claim would increase by an average of 18%. Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 4.

²⁷ Country visit, Supreme Court, Estonian Bar Association, Estonian Judges Association.

has been paused for additional analysis. It is recalled that any party to a case may challenge court fee rates before the Constitutional Review Chamber of the Supreme Court²⁸.

Efficiency

The courts generally perform efficiently while there are slight increases in disposition time in civil and commercial litigious cases. According to the 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, the length of proceedings in disposition time in 2023 continues to be among the shortest in the EU, despite some slight increases in the area of civil and litigious cases²⁹. For 2024, the average length of proceedings in days for civil cases is similar as in previous years³⁰. In criminal cases the length of proceedings also remained stable³¹. In the first instance courts, the length of administrative procedures decreased, close to the level of 2022³². The number of pending cases is low, and compared to 2023, the clearance rate remained stable at 100%; this means that courts continue to be able to cope with incoming cases³³.

Discussions are ongoing for several draft laws aiming to improve efficiency, with a possible positive effect on business-related proceedings. On 14 January 2025, the Parliament tabled amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code to optimise court proceedings³⁴. Similar legislation to make the use of procedural resources in civil and administrative proceedings more efficient is also being prepared³⁵. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs has been preparing the drafts for approval by the Government.

II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that the level of corruption in the public sector remains relatively low. In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, Estonia scores 76/100 and ranks 7th in the European Union and 13th globally³⁶. This perception has been relatively stable over the past five years³⁷. The 2025 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 49% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 69%) and 25% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30%). As regards businesses, 32% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 63%) and 9% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 35%).

²⁸ See Art. 15, para 1, second sentence and Art. 152 of the Constitution.

²⁹ 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard, Figures 6-10 and 16-23.

³⁰ For 2024, 123 days on average; for 2023, 108 days on average; for 2022, 102 days on average.

³¹ For 2024, 298 days in general criminal proceedings, 47 days in simplified proceedings and 43 days in misdemeanour cases; for 2023 310 days in general criminal proceedings, 34 days in simplified proceedings and 44 days in misdemeanour cases; for 2022, 245 days in general criminal proceedings, 33 days in simplified proceedings, and 44 days in misdemeanour cases.

³² For 2024, 153 days; for 2023, 162 days; for 2022, 149 days.

³³ Figures 11-16, 2024 EU Justice Scoreboard.

³⁴ See footnote 20 for more detailed information on the concrete measures that are tabled.

³⁵ Estonian Government (2025a), written input, p. 11. See also, Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), written input, pp. 8-9.

³⁶ Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 (2025). The level of perceived corruption is categorized as follows: low (the perception among experts and business executives of public sector corruption scores above 79); relatively low (scores between 79-60), relatively high (scores between 59-50), high (scores below 50).

³⁷ In 2020 the score was 75, while, in 2024, the score is 76. The score significantly increases/decreases when it changes more than five points; improves/deteriorates (changes between 4-5 points); is relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years.

Furthermore, 38% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 36%), while 49% of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 33%)³⁸.

The implementation of the 2021–2025 Anti-Corruption Action Plan is on track and the next strategic framework is being prepared. While the report on the monitoring of the implementation of the Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2021–2025 is expected for the first quarter of 2025, the initial conclusions are positive³⁹. In parallel, the next Action Plan expected before summer 2026 is being prepared and consultations with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders are under way. The timeframe of the new strategic framework is expected to be shortened from five to three years. Some of the expected target areas are corruption investigations in the private sector, regulation of lobbying in Parliament, revision of the Anti-Corruption Act, as well as fighting corruption in the municipalities⁴⁰.

A number of measures were introduced to foster investigation and prosecution of financial crime, including corruption. In 2024, a number of corruption cases were investigated and prosecuted⁴¹, while (as in 2023) there were no cases regarding foreign bribery or in relation to cooperation with the EPPO⁴². In 2024, the District Prosecutor's Office for Economic Crime and Corruption was established at the Prosecutor's Office⁴³. As of 30 January 2025, the Office employs 45 staff members, including 22 district prosecutors and 11 deputy prosecutors and consists of three departments⁴⁴. According to the authorities, the creation of the district service dedicated to fighting economic crime, including corruption, led to better streamlining of activities, ensuring consistency and easier access to tools, including training⁴⁵. In 2024, the Ministry of Interior published a report on how to improve the effectiveness of investigation and prosecution of financial crimes, including corruption. The report includes recommendations regarding mainly initiatives of a horizontal procedural nature, such as enhancing the functioning of the freezing and confiscation system, that are expected to have an impact also on corruption cases. On 7 February 2025 the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Tallinn Circuit Court of March 2024, which convicted a political party, its former secretary general and a businessman of trading in influence. In another case, a member of the same political party was convicted for embezzlement and fraud for offences committed while serving as Minister of Education and Research. Another high-level corruption case pending before the court is related to the local municipality in Tartu.

³⁸ Data from Special Eurobarometer 561 (2025) and Flash Eurobarometer 557 (2025).

³⁹ According to the OECD criteria, Estonia scores 5 out of 7 on the coverage of strategic framework and 56 out of 100 on implementation of activities (both beyond the EU average).

⁴⁰ Estonian Parliament (2025), written input, and Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice.

⁴¹ In 2024, nine cases of passive bribery were registered while in six cases statements of charges was sent to the court. 14 cases of active bribery were registered while in six cases statements of charges was sent to the court. One case of influence peddling was registered while no statement of charges was sent to the court. Two cases of arranging of receipt of gratuities were registered while in two cases statements of charges was sent to the court. Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁴² EPPO (2025), Annual report, -p. 27.

⁴³ The Prosecutor's Office role includes leading pre-trial criminal proceedings, ensuring their lawfulness and effectiveness, representing the public prosecution in court, and participating in the planning of surveillance activities required for the prevention and detection of criminal offences.

⁴⁴ Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁴⁵ Country visit Estonia, Prosecutor's Office.

Some legislative initiatives are ongoing with the aim of improving the prosecution of criminal cases, including corruption cases. Efforts are being made to address the procedural challenges linked to the length of court proceedings in criminal cases, including those related to corruption. The aim is to make the processing of criminal cases in court faster and more cost-effective. The draft also addresses delaying manoeuvres by defendants in criminal cases. The draft law was approved by the Government in January 2025 and has undergone the first reading in the Parliament. The draft amendments to the Anti-Corruption Act⁴⁶ submitted in May 2024 remain under consideration in Parliament⁴⁷. The reform of the Police and Border Guard Act⁴⁸ for a more efficient approach to the prevention of corruption is ongoing while there is no clear timeline for its adoption⁴⁹.

The authorities report a good implementation of the rules on conflicts of interest. This implementation continues to be carried out through the anti-corruption contact points in every Ministry in view of supporting the ministers and their advisors in getting acquainted with the relevant standards⁵⁰. It includes the compulsory e-training and the raising of awareness among ministers and political advisers⁵¹. According to the authorities⁵², those rules helped to establish a common practice in view of corruption prevention, which varied in different institutions before they were introduced.

All political parties in Parliament agreed to establish a framework on lobbying in Parliament and the rules on lobbying for the Government are being assessed. In early 2025, representatives of all political parties agreed to elaborate a framework for lobbying in Parliament. As a result, the Anti-Corruption Select Committee has been discussing possible options in view of presenting a draft law, but by June 2025 the timeline for this initiative has not yet been set⁵³. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs has also submitted a proposal to amend the Anti-Corruption Act concerning meetings with tobacco industry lobbyists⁵⁴. While the rules on lobbying for the ministries⁵⁵ are implemented, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs is currently conducting an analysis of the implementation in all the ministries, aiming to determine the extent to which it ensures transparency in lobbying activities and to identify any necessary future amendments⁵⁶.

Rules on revolving doors at high-level positions are subject to a debate. While rules on post-employment activities with a cooling-off period⁵⁷ are in place for members of the Government⁵⁸, other holders of high-level public positions can move to the private sector without restrictions. A discussion has therefore started on broadening the scope of application

⁴⁶ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 9.

⁴⁷ This bill is currently under review by the Constitutional Committee of the Riigikogu. It has been discussed in two committee sessions, in October and December 2024. Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁴⁸ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹ Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁵⁰ Estonian Government (2021a).

⁵¹ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 11.

⁵² Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁵³ Country visit Estonia, Anti-Corruption Select Committee.

⁵⁴ This amendment would implement Article 5.3 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which requires parties to take measures concerning policymaking in health. Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁵⁵ Estonian Government (2021).

⁵⁶ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁷ Amendment to the Government of the Republic Act (GRA) adopted on 1 August 2022.

⁵⁸ 2023 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 11-12.

of the existing rules⁵⁹ but until June 2025 no steps have been taken in this regard⁶⁰. Specific guidelines on revolving doors with instructions on how to mitigate risks are currently being developed by the Civil Service Ethics Council and are expected in 2025⁶¹.

The new legislation on protecting whistleblowers is being implemented. The new law on whistleblower protection entered into force on 1 January 2025⁶² and is now being implemented. Under the new law, every state authority and local government is competent for receiving and handling reports and there are no plans to establish a central reporting channel⁶³. The Transparency International Estonia's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC), established in view of providing advice to potential whistleblowers under the whistleblowers law⁶⁴, also provides advice to whistleblowers reporting other cases of misconduct occurred in the workplace, falling outside the application of the rules of whistleblowing⁶⁵. Since the law as adopted did not extend protection beyond reports on breaches relating to the areas of EU law⁶⁶, civil society raised the need to extend the protection also to persons reporting breaches of national law and to increase awareness raising.

The Government has approved the draft reform of the political party financing framework. The Government approved the amendments of the Political Parties Act⁶⁷ in February 2025 and in March 2025, the first reading of the draft was held in the Parliament. The draft law addresses the main shortcomings of the rules in place with regard to the political party financing framework. It foresees extending the investigative powers of the Political Parties Financing Surveillance Committee, regulating the return of prohibited donations as well as clarifying financial reporting obligations of political parties⁶⁸.

A number of high-risk areas for corruption are being addressed by the authorities. Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU show that 17% of companies in Estonia (EU average 25%) think that corruption has prevented them from winning a public tender or a public procurement contract in practice in the last three years⁶⁹. 31% of businesses perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (Public Procurement

⁵⁹ A debate on revolving doors and a cooling-off period was triggered following the move of senior Ministry of Defence officials to join a private defence company on leaving the Ministry.

⁶⁰ Transparency International (2025), written input.

⁶¹ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice.

⁶² National law transposing Directive (EU) 2019/1937 on the protection of persons reporting on breaches of Union law. In a judgment of 6 March 2025 (Case C-154/23, Commission v Estonia, ECLI:EU:C:2025:148), the Court of Justice found that Estonia had failed to transpose Directive by the deadline of 17 December 2021 and ordered Estonia to pay financial penalties.

⁶³ Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁶⁴ No cases for whistleblowing in the meaning of the national legislation transposing the directive. Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁶⁵ The Centre provides general information on the rights and obligations of whistleblowers depending on the sector, organisation, nature of the violation, legal framework as well as guidelines on corruption prevention, procedures and instructions for reporting of cases. Transparency International (2025), written input.

⁶⁶ The draft law reported on last year envisaged an extended scope, with protection granted also to whistleblowers who reported violations of the national legislation. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Bill: Political Party Act, Local Government Council Election Act and Credit Institutions Act Amendment Act.

⁶⁸ Estonian Government (2025a), p. 5.

⁶⁹ Flash Eurobarometer 557 on Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU (2025). This is 8 percentage points below the EU average.

Review Committee) as very or fairly good when it is reviewing public procurement cases⁷⁰. The Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard on access to public procurement in Estonia reports 26% of single bids for 2023 (EU average 29%). In addition to the previously identified areas of high-risk of corruption⁷¹, in 2024 the authorities added EU funding, energy, construction, and corruption in the private sector⁷². According to the Estonian Institute of Economic Research⁷³ corruption is not identified as a serious obstacle to companies⁷⁴. Nevertheless, the authorities plan to focus on fighting corruption in the private sector in the coming years⁷⁵. Ensuring transparency of management of state assets, in particular in relation to the state-owned companies and partially state-owned companies, remains a current focus of the activities of the Anti-Corruption Select Committee⁷⁶. In 2024, a number of recommendations stemming from an audit of the National Audit Office was formulated in relation to internal control system of a municipality⁷⁷ and to public procurement as regards ensuring clarity and transparency were formulated with regard to the sales of timber in view of promoting competition⁷⁸. In June 2025, one audit was ongoing⁷⁹.

III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

The regulator maintains its independence and its staff has increased. The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) 2025 continues to report low risk as for the independence and effectiveness of the media authority – the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority, operating independently from political and economic influences – with no evidence of government overreach⁸⁰. Its human resources have been increased from 12 to 14 members of staff, primarily for tasks linked to the enforcement of EU sanctions. The national media regulator is able to carry out its main functions⁸¹. However, as highlighted by MPM 2025, there are certain concerns regarding the financial resources of the media regulator, subject to the government financing decisions in light of the enhanced media regulator responsibilities⁸².

The Government is engaged in efforts to enhance the independence and financial stability of public service media in the long term through legislative reforms, although the public service media budget has been affected by public spending constraints. The Government is preparing a reform to strengthen the independence of the public service

⁷⁰ Figure 59, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

⁷¹ Healthcare, the local government and political party financing, public procurement, obtaining residence and work permits. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 13-14.

⁷² Country visit Estonia, Police and Border Guard.

⁷³ Estonian Institute of Economic Research (2024).

⁷⁴ Statistically, the most common types of corruption in Estonia are bribery, taking bribes, bribe facilitation and influence peddling. In addition, surveys show that the most common situation in Estonia, according to residents and businesses, is the use of a company car for personal purposes. Estonian Parliament Government (2025), written input.

⁷⁵ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice.

⁷⁶ Estonian Government (2025), written input.

⁷⁷ According to the National Audit Office, the Kohtla-Järve municipality has problems primarily with the key elements of the control system – risk assessment, transparency of activities and their monitoring. National Audit Office (2024)

⁷⁸ National Audit Office (2024).

⁷⁹ Management and supervision of private entities under the control of the city of Narva. Country visit Estonia, National Audit Office.

⁸⁰ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 13.

⁸¹ Country visit Estonia, the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority.

⁸² Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 13-14.

media. This would guarantee better financial stability of the public service media and address the composition of the Public Broadcasting Council, which is responsible for appointing and dismissing members of the Management Board of the public service media⁸³. The rules aim to protect the public service media against politicisation⁸⁴. MPM 2025 already notes the high credibility and political independence of the management of public service media⁸⁵. The corresponding reform of the Public Broadcasting Act is still ongoing, with the aim for the new rules to come into force by autumn 2025⁸⁶. The public service media budget has been reduced by some 5% as part of general public spending constraints⁸⁷. While MPM 2025 notes low risk for independence of public service media, it highlights that cutting of the funding poses a threat to the viability of public service media and hinders its ability to fulfil all legal obligations⁸⁸. There are concerns that this will make it more challenging for the public service media to fulfil its statutory tasks at the current level⁸⁹. The public service media has had to lay off members of its staff and end some of its programmes. It considers a lack of sufficient funding its biggest challenge at the moment⁹⁰.

Legislative changes are being prepared to strengthen media regulation and address national security concerns, while also seeking to improve transparency. The Ministry of Culture, also in view to implement the European Media Freedom Act, continues to prepare legislative changes aimed at strengthening the independence of the public service media and guaranteeing their more robust financial stability⁹¹. Large online platforms remain dominant in the digital market of Estonia⁹² and, while the media market is highly concentrated, in the assessment of MPM 2025, the market plurality remains the main problematic area for Estonia scoring the medium-high risk band⁹³. Estonian law does not provide for specific rules to control it on top of general competition law⁹⁴. The Government is working on a draft law implementing the European Media Freedom Act that would address the media market concentrations and their impact on media pluralism⁹⁵. Information about the ownership of broadcasting companies, including beneficial owners of all types of media companies, is widely available⁹⁶. A complaint mechanism is in place for incomplete or inaccurate information. However, there are certain shortcomings usually deemed to pertain to transparency of foreign media ownership⁹⁷.

⁸³ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 15-16.

⁸⁴ Country visit Estonia, Association of Journalists.

⁸⁵ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 23.

⁸⁶ Eesti Rahvusringhääling (2024).

⁸⁷ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture; Eesti Rahvusringhääling (2024a).

⁸⁸ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 19.

⁸⁹ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture, Association of Journalists and Public Service Media.

⁹⁰ Country visit Estonia, Public Service Media.

⁹¹ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture; 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 15.

⁹² Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 18.

⁹³ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 9.

⁹⁴ Lauk, E., Oller Alonso, M. & Harro-Loit, H. (2024), p. 111; 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 15.

⁹⁵ Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture.

⁹⁶ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 36.

⁹⁷ Country visit Estonia, Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority and Estonian Association of Media Enterprises.

Some further progress has been made on the recommendation to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information⁹⁸. Estonia has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents⁹⁹. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs has prepared an analysis regarding the implementation of the Public Information Act, based on proposals from a dedicated working group¹⁰⁰. The analysis suggests examining the implementation of access restrictions, in addition to adopting clearer rules on information management. Based on this analysis, the Ministry aims to prepare a legislative proposal, to be followed by a public consultation¹⁰¹. Implementation and enforcement of the right of access to information remains stable. In parallel, the baseline evaluation report on the Convention implementation of the Council of Europe has found that the Public Information Act is mostly in line with the Convention¹⁰². However, it notes that the proactive classification of documents as internal may restrict access to official documents and should be revised¹⁰³. The authorities aim to deal with the recommendations of the Council of Europe in the legislative proposal¹⁰⁴. Media stakeholders would welcome changes to make information more available to journalists¹⁰⁵. In the meantime, a greater amount of public information with unrestricted access has been made available by public authorities through an open data portal. In addition, its reuse has been popularised with events, hackathons, public communications and collaborations with academia and the private sector¹⁰⁶. MPM 2025 notes the low risk as for the protection of right of information, a decrease from the last-year's risk assessed as medium¹⁰⁷, however, it highlights that particular attention should be paid to cases where public authorities have unreasonably refused to provide information to journalists or delayed processing requests for information¹⁰⁸. Overall, there has been some further progress on the recommendation to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information.

The framework for the protection of journalists remains favourable. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs has started the process to transpose the EU's Anti-SLAPP Directive into national law¹⁰⁹. In the meantime, the Ministry of Culture and the Estonian Association of Journalists have entered into an agreement designating the Association of Journalists as the national contact point for SLAPP issues, responsible for providing advice to journalists facing SLAPP cases and raising awareness¹¹⁰. Since the 2024 Rule of Law report, no new alerts for Estonia have been published on the Council of Europe's Platform to

⁹⁸ The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended to Estonia to: “[a]dvance with the efforts to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information taking into account European standards on access to official documents”.

⁹⁹ The Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS No. 205), also known as the *Tromsø Convention*, entered into force on 1 December 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs (2025).

¹⁰¹ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 9.

¹⁰² Council of Europe (2024).

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 20. Similarly, the Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 12, and Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 14-15.

¹⁰⁴ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Country visit Estonia, Association of Journalists and Estonian Association of Media Enterprises.

¹⁰⁶ Estonian Open Data Portal is a comprehensive portal designed to provide unrestricted access to public sector data.

¹⁰⁷ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 11.

promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists¹¹¹. One alert was registered on the Mapping Media Freedom Platform¹¹², concerning an Estonian news portal targeted by a cyber disinformation campaign. The MPM 2025 highlights the increase in the number of attacks against journalists that qualify as SLAPP incidents as for the year 2024¹¹³. According to the MPM 2025, the protection of freedom of expression is the only area assessed as medium-low risk in the category of fundamental protection (with other areas scoring low or very low risk) due to a rise in SLAPP cases and the current lack of regulatory measures to protect journalists from such lawsuits¹¹⁴.

IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

There has been no more recourse to procedures allowing substantial delays to the legislative process and the recommendation on this issue has been fully implemented¹¹⁵. The frequent use of procedures leading to substantial delays in the legislative process in Parliament, which prompted the Government to use the accelerated legislative workflows more often, has subsided¹¹⁶ after the Supreme Court ruled that tying the adoption of legislation to a confidence vote was unconstitutional. The core of the judgment was not focused on the substantive issues related to legislation at hand but rather the extensive use of procedures delaying the process that resulted in barriers for the proper work of Parliament. Consequently, Parliament adapted its practice both on tabling amendments and handling them¹¹⁷. The 2024 recommendation has thus been fully implemented.

A reflection process by the Government has led to identifying areas for further improvement in the consultation process for legislation. In 2024, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs conducted an analysis of consultation periods during the preparatory phase of legislation and identified ensuring sufficient time for stakeholders as an area for further improvement. The analysis identified the laws linked to the state budget as the most difficult ones to ensure sufficient time for stakeholders' participation¹¹⁸. Stakeholders have also identified issues in this respect. For example, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner has expressed his concerns about the decline of transparency and engagement in the public consultation process of legislative proposals, citing as an example the proposal to merge Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Acts. The initial drafting of the proposal included an important consultation process, but in September 2024 the process was interrupted, and the drafting was outsourced to a private law firm¹¹⁹. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs justified this step by citing critical legal feedback on the initial draft, the need to ensure alignment with constitutional principles while avoiding excessive administrative burdens, and the Ministry's overall workload. The Ministry also informed

¹¹¹ Council of Europe, Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.

¹¹² European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (2025).

¹¹³ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 10.

¹¹⁵ The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Estonia to "[e]nsure effective public consultation in the context of the legislative process", 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 11. Country visit Estonia, Office of the Chancellor for Justice.

¹¹⁷ Judgment of the Supreme Court, case 5-24-1/23, Office of the Chancellor for Justice (2025), written input, p. 17, and Office of the Chancellor for Justice (2024), Annual Report.

¹¹⁸ Estonian Government (2025), written input, pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁹ Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner (2025), written input, pp. 1-2. Country visit Estonia, Office of the Chancellor for Justice and Ministry of Justice.

about plans to resubmit the draft for consultation with all stakeholders¹²⁰. The Chancellor of Justice and other stakeholders criticised short deadlines and some of the procedural rules used for minor amendments (i.e. legislative intent¹²¹ used for minor amendments)¹²². The Chancellor of Justice has recommended to save time by replacing the ‘legislative intent’ by a clearly worded small-scale draft law and explanatory memorandum in cases where it is necessary to correct an error in a law or to solve a small issue that has arisen¹²³.

Less than half of the companies surveyed in Estonia express high levels of confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection. 43% of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts¹²⁴. The main reason among companies for their lack of confidence is the difficulty to obtain a fair compensation to protect property when something goes wrong (25%)¹²⁵. As regards authorities relevant for economic operators, 37% of companies perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (the Competition Authority) as very or fairly good¹²⁶. A number of judicial mechanisms are in place at the level of the Supreme Court to ensure the implementation of administrative court judgments, including disciplinary actions against the responsible officials, the possibility to quash administrative decisions for continued non-compliance with court’s instructions, and the possibility to award direct and consequential damages as well as compensation¹²⁷.

The financial autonomy of the Chancellor of Justice and the National Audit Office has been strengthened. As mentioned in the 2024 Rule of Law Report, the Government was planning to improve the financial autonomy of these two institutions¹²⁸. In June 2024, an amendment to the state budget law, which provides for such a financial autonomy of the Chancellor of Justice and the National Audit Office entered into force. The amendment allows the two institutions to discuss their budgets directly with Parliament without the need for a prior review by the Government. The budgets of the two institutions for 2025 have been prepared according to the new procedure¹²⁹.

On 1 January 2025, Estonia had 5 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, an increase of 2 compared to the previous year¹³⁰. At

¹²⁰ Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), written input, p. 16. Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

¹²¹ Legislative intent is the initial step for drafting legislation and it serves as a pre-consultation process on the problem identification, purpose of the policy, compatibility with existing laws and the general idea of the draft amendments that are about to be drafted.

¹²² European Civic Forum (2025), written input, pp. 7-8.

¹²³ Chancellor of Justice (2025), written input, p. 16.

¹²⁴ Figure 54, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

¹²⁵ Figure 55, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard. 25% of the surveyed investors perceive the difficulty to obtain a fair compensation to protect property when something goes wrong as the main reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection. 23% and 24% of the surveyed investors perceive the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about quality of law-making process, and the quality, efficiency or independence of justice, respectively, as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

¹²⁶ Figure 60, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

¹²⁷ Figure 49, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard. The data presented reflects exclusively the mechanisms in place at the level of the highest administrative jurisdictions; the same or other mechanisms may be in place at lower instance administrative courts.

¹²⁸ 2024 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 18.

¹²⁹ Estonian Government (2025), written input, p. 12. Chancellor of Justice (2025), written input, p. 19. Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, Chancellor of Justice and National Audit Office.

¹³⁰ For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

that time, Estonia's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 74% (compared to 85% in 2024; 26% remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 1 years and 10 months (compared to 1 years and 5 months in 2024)¹³¹. The oldest leading judgment, pending implementation for 3 years, concerns the failure to conduct an effective criminal investigation into the applicant's allegations of sexual abuse by her father, who had been acquitted in domestic criminal proceedings following a breach of the procedural rules in the collection of evidence¹³². As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2024 there was no case awaiting confirmation of payments (the same as in 2023)¹³³. On 16 June 2025, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had decreased to 4¹³⁴.

An amendment to the Auditing Activities Act has eased the reporting obligations for civil society organisations. The civic space in Estonia is considered to be open¹³⁵. In 2024, Parliament began discussions on a draft law easing the reporting obligations for civil society organisations by raising the threshold for mandatory auditing requirements for foundations. Previously, any foundation with an annual turnover or asset volume exceeding EUR 15 000 was required to undergo a mandatory financial review. Under the new law, this threshold will increase to EUR 1 million. The law is set to apply retroactively to the financial reports for the 2024 fiscal year¹³⁶. In parallel, some stakeholders have reported issues with funding due to the public spending cuts¹³⁷.

¹³¹ All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2025. EIN (2025), written input, p. 3.

¹³² Judgment of the ECtHR, 22597/16, *R.B. v. Estonia*, pending implementation since 2021.

¹³³ Council of Europe (2025), p. 156.

¹³⁴ Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

¹³⁵ See rating given by Civicus, Estonia. Ratings are on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

¹³⁶ European Civic Forum (2025), written input, p. 5. Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), written input, p. 19.

¹³⁷ European Civic Forum (2025), written input, pp. 6-7. Civil Society Europe (2025), written input, p. 14. Country visit Estonia, Human Rights Centre Estonia, Estonian Institute of Human Rights.

Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order*

* The list of contributions received in the context of the consultation for the 2025 Rule of Law report can be found at https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2025-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation_en

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Annex II: Country visit to Estonia

The Commission services held virtual meetings in February 2025 with:

- Anti-corruption Select Committee
- Consumer protection and Technical Regulatory Authority
- Constitutional Review Chamber of the Supreme Court
- Council for the Administration of Courts
- Estonian Association of Journalists
- Estonian Association of Judges
- Estonian Association of Media Enterprises
- Estonian Bar Association
- Estonian Internal Security Service
- Estonian Institute of Human Rights
- Estonian Public Broadcasting
- Estonian Press Council
- Human Rights Center Estonia
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs
- National Audit Office
- Office of the Chancellor of Justice
- Open Estonia Foundation
- Political Party Financing Surveillance Committee
- Police and Border Guard Board
- The Chamber of Commerce
- The Prosecutor's Office
- The Supreme Court
- Transparency International – Estonia

* The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Amnesty International
- Araminta
- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- European Youth Forum,
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- JEF Europe
- Philea – Philanthropy Europe Association.
- Transparency International