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2026 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

2026 Rule of Law Report
The rule of law situation in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

Estonia continues innovating as regards the digitalisation of its justice system, including by introducing a virtual AI assistant in the court's digital case file. The reform of the Council for the Administration of Courts was adopted maintaining the same structure for the Council as reported in the previous year, which does not take account of European standards. The proposed reform to merge all courts of the same instance has been withdrawn. The indexation for judges' salaries remains frozen, while court cases contesting the measure are still pending. The high workload within the judiciary remains a challenge. Courts continue to perform efficiently, while a trend of increasing disposition time can be observed. Draft laws aiming to further improve efficiency of justice have been tabled at Parliament. A new draft law further increases the court fees in certain civil proceedings.

The new strategic framework on anti-corruption is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. A comprehensive revision of the Anti-Corruption Act is planned to be completed in the next four years. With additional resources allocated to the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, new initiatives to prevent corruption are planned. Corruption cases continue to be handled efficiently. Challenges remain in the detection and enforcement of foreign bribery cases. Introduction of legal rules on lobbying for both government officials and for Parliament is being considered in the framework of the revision of the Anti-Corruption Act. The Advisory Centre is expected to support the implementation of the whistleblowing rules. The amendments to the Political Parties Act have been approved by Parliament. The high-risk areas for corruption are being monitored by the authorities and the first assessment of anti-corruption efforts at the local level delivered positive results.

The regulator for audiovisual media services continues to operate independently. The budget of the Estonian public service media broadcaster has again been affected by procedures to constrain public spending. Estonia provides a high level of transparency regarding media ownership structures but still does not have a law on media market concentration, while market plurality remains the biggest challenge. There have been positive developments to improve the implementation of the right of access to information. The safety of journalists continues to be high and SLAPP threats towards journalists decreased, although the online threat environment is deteriorating.

The Government is preparing concrete steps to improve the public consultation process. Some independent authorities have received more tasks, while additional resources have not been allocated. The Strategic partnership funding programme for civil society organisations entered into force.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- Limited progress has been made to continue the efforts to reform the Council for the Administration of Courts. Therefore, it is recommended to Estonia to *take steps to adapt the composition of the Council for the Administration of Courts, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.*

As regards the other 2025 recommendations, the Commission concludes that:

- The recommendation to 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 has been fully implemented, as the reform of the Public Information Act will enhance access to and the reuse of open data.

I. JUSTICE SYSTEM[1]

Independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in Estonia continues to be average among the general public and is now high among companies. Overall, 59% of the general population and 71% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be 'fairly or very good' in 2026[2]. The perceived judicial independence among the general public remains at the same level as in 2025 (59%), and has slightly decreased in comparison with 2022 (60%). The perceived judicial independence among companies has significantly increased in comparison with 2025 (47%), as well as in comparison with 2022 (47%).

There has been limited progress on the recommendation to reform the Council for the Administration of Courts taking into account European standards[3]. On 19 March 2026, after public consultations, the Government tabled a new draft Courts Act at Parliament following the withdrawal of the previous one. The new draft, similarly to the one presented last year, still proposes 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 composition[4]. The draft law also maintains the same structure for the reformed Council as in the legislative intent[5] and it envisages a composition of 11 members, including five peer-elected judges and at least two active politicians[6]. This is the same composition as the one referred to in the previous report, meaning that it does not take 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 should be no active politicians with the right to vote in such councils[7]. On 17 June 2026, the Parliament adopted the law and the final composition of the Council remained unchanged[8]. Given that the reform was adopted but the composition of the Council remains the same as during the previous reporting period, limited progress has been made on this recommendation.

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1 An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found here.

2 Figures 48 and 50, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard and Figures 51 and 53, 2024 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 2025 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', 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 2. Some progress was previously assessed on this recommendation in 2025.

4 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 2.

5 The legislative intent is the first step of the legislative process.

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 already clarified 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.*"

8 Stakeholders informed that they were given a short deadline to comment on the draft before it was sent to Parliament, therefore, they would provide their comments and suggestions before the Parliament. Country visit, Estonia, Supreme Court and Estonian Judges Association.

Quality

The reform to merge all courts of the same instance has been withdrawn, and the establishment of a new governing body within every court is being proposed. In the same draft law tabled on 19 March 2026, the Government abandoned its plan to merge all same-tier courts into single national entities. This decision followed input from judges, legal academics, and stakeholders who argued that it was potentially unconstitutional, lacked clear benefits for efficiency, and risked distancing the court system from the public[9]. The draft law also dropped the idea of mandatory specialised chambers in each court and proposes the specialisation of judges as well as new provisions regarding the creation of a Court Presidium in each court. The latter would overtake the powers of the plenary of the Court in certain matters, such as the work distribution plans and the structure of the court (e.g. establishing new chambers). It would be composed of the President of the Court, the Presidents of Chambers and an equal number of judges elected by the Plenary of the Court[10]. The objective of this new body would be to streamline the decision-making within the courts, while taking away powers from the Plenary of the Court.

Estonia continues innovating in the digitalisation of the justice system, including by introducing a virtual AI assistant in the court's digital case file. At the end of 2025, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs added a virtual assistant to the court's digital case file. This virtual assistant enables users of the case file to analyse the contents of the file, generate summaries, and produce translations. In addition, the Ministry is currently developing further interoperability between the Court Information System, and the population register for automatic transfers of court decisions[11]. The justice system remains among the most digitalised in the EU and keeps innovating even though there is already a wide availability of digital solutions to conduct and follow court proceedings, and to communicate securely within and outside of the justice system[12].

The indexation for judges' salaries remains frozen while court cases contesting the measure are pending. As reported in the 2025 Rule of Law Report, the draft law unfreezing the salaries was withdrawn[13]. Challenges to the initial law freezing the indexation were filed before the Administrative Court, which ruled that the reduction in judges' salaries was lawful, did not violate the principle of judicial independence and was in accordance with the Constitution. However, the court warned that although the temporary salary cut for 2024-2027 was permissible, the dignity of the judicial office must be preserved and must continue to be monitored. The court decision is not final as it has been challenged before the Circuit Court of Appeal, while a separate decision on the constitutionality of the measure is still pending before the Supreme Court's Constitutional Review Chamber[14].

9 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 5.
10 Country visit, Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.
11 Estonian Government (2026), written input, pp. 6-7.
12 Figures 41 to 45, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.
13 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 4-5.
14 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 6. See also Estonian Judges Association (2026), written input, p. 10. Estonian Bar Association (2026), written input, p. 12. 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 Court of Justice, case C-64/16, para. 45, and Joined Cases C-146/23 and C-374/23, 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

The workload within the judiciary remains a challenge, while competitions to fill-in vacancies have been announced. As mentioned in the 2025 Rule of Law Report[15], the high workload of judges has been identified as a source of concern. According to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, judges are facing high workloads, growing backlogs, and increasing complaints about long proceedings, all of which are contributing to a risk of stress and burnout[16]. The causes for the high workload remain the same, in particular certain procedural provisions[17] in combination with increasing caseload and budget cuts[18]. An additional challenge that has been identified by stakeholders is the 14 vacant judicial positions in the last year[19] representing about 6% of all judges' positions in the country. As of 2026, competitions have been announced for 18 vacant judicial positions, which are still ongoing. Moreover, in the next five years, 53 out of 261 judges will be eligible for retirement.

A new draft law further increases the court fees in certain civil proceedings. On 1 January 2026, the state fee for submitting claims in public procurement cases doubled, making it the highest fee for administrative cases in the country[20]. The aforementioned new draft Courts Act includes a third increase of court fees over the last three years[21]. This increase, which in some cases could reach up to 50% of the existing court fee[22] would affect civil and commercial proceedings. Nonetheless, under the current legal framework any party to a case may challenge court fee rates before the Constitutional Review Chamber of the Supreme Court[23].

Efficiency

Courts continue to perform efficiently, while a trend of increasing disposition time, including in civil and commercial cases, can be observed. According to the 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard, the length of proceedings in disposition time in 2024 continues to be among the shortest in the EU[24]. For 2025, the average length of civil proceedings is similar to previous years, but the upward trend in the time required to resolve cases continues[25]. In criminal cases, the length of proceedings also remained stable, with slight improvements[26]. In

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requires that the level of remuneration of judges is always commensurate with the importance of the functions they carry out.

15 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 5.

16 Supreme Court (2025), Country visit, Estonia, Estonian Judges Association, Supreme Court.

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

18 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 5.

19 See Estonian Judges Association (2026), written input, p. 10 and Estonian Bar Association (2026), written input, p. 12.

20 Estonian Bar Association (2026), written input, p. 12. The fees are between 1280 and 2560 EUR depending on the value of the contract. The reasoning behind the increase of the fee was case overload in the review committee (and courts).

21 Estonian Bar Association (2026), written input, p. 11. Country visit, Estonia, Estonian Judges Association, Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs. See also 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 5-6.

22 Country visit, Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

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

24 Figures 6-14, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.

25 For 2025, 129 days, for 2024, 123 days on average; for 2023, 108 days on average; for 2022, 102 days on average.

26 For 2025, 263 days in general criminal proceedings, 38 days in simplified proceedings and 47 days in misdemeanour cases. 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.

the first instance courts, the length of administrative proceedings further decreased, improving efficiency[27]. The number of pending cases is increasing, and compared to 2024, the clearance rate remained stable at 110% in civil and commercial cases; this means that courts continue to be able to cope with incoming cases[28].

Draft laws aiming to improve the efficiency of the justice system have been tabled in Parliament. The new draft law of 15 January 2026 contains amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure and the Code of Administrative Court Procedure. These amendments aim to reduce the workload of courts by improving the efficiency of civil and administrative court proceedings[29]. They will streamline the procedures identified as being one of the causes for a high workload, including by reducing the number of judges sitting in certain panels from three to one, and by reducing the number of steps in appeal procedures in certain cases[30].

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 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, Estonia scores 76/100 and ranks 7th in the European Union and 12th globally[31]. This perception has been relatively stable over the past five years[32]. The 2026 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 53% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 71%) and 25% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30%). As regards businesses, 33% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 65%) and 13% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 37%). Furthermore, 41% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 38%), while 51% of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 31%)[33].

The new strategic framework on anti-corruption is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. While the Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2021–2025 is yet to be evaluated, consultations on the upcoming strategic framework are ongoing[34]. In this process, various stakeholders, including the Anti-Corruption Network, are consulted with the aim to finalise the new Anti-Corruption Action Plan by the end of 2026. Some of the expected target areas include awareness raising, transparency in decision-making and stakeholder involvement[35].

A comprehensive revision of the Anti-Corruption Act is planned to be completed in the next four years. While the Anti-Corruption Act establishes rules to prevent conflicts of interest[36], the Parliament is currently in the process of amending some of its technical aspects

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27 For 2025, 142 days, for 2024, 153 days; for 2023, 162 days; for 2022, 149 days.
28 Figures 11-16, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.
29 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 8.
30 Country visit, Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.
31 The level of perceived corruption is categorized as follows: low (above 79); relatively low (between 79-60), relatively high (between 59-50), high (below 50).
32 In 2021 the score was 74, while, in 2025, 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.
33 Data from Special Eurobarometer 573 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026).
34 Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.
35 Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.
36 RT I, 29.06.2012, 1, as amended by RT I, 13.04.2021.

in view of clarifying and harmonising them[37]. In parallel, the authorities started discussions regarding an overall revision of the Anti-Corruption Act, which is expected to bring significant changes to the current rules on integrity over the next four years. In particular, current rules are expected to be streamlined, and some soft law is intended to be integrated into the legislative framework[38].

With additional resources allocated to the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, new initiatives to prevent corruption are planned. Following additional resources in the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs for anti-corruption measures dedicated to both staffing and activities, new initiatives are being launched. The authorities are currently developing tools to help identify and prevent corruption risks across different sectors. Beyond the revision of the Anti-Corruption Act, the e-learning course on conflict of interest and corruption prevention is to be updated by July 2026, alongside the expected establishment of a new asset declaration register[39]. The authorities are also developing an e-learning course for law enforcement, with a focus on corruption in the private and financial sectors[40].

Corruption cases continue to be handled efficiently. In 2025, the Police and Border Guard Board initiated a total of 13 criminal cases[41], while the EPPO reported no cases[42]. Three cases on high-level corruption were ongoing in 2025, and one is still ongoing. In September 2025, the Tallinn Circuit Court handed down a conviction for embezzlement. Between 1 July 2025 and 7 April 2026, cases of passive and active bribery, trading in influence and arranging the receipt of gratitudes continued to be investigated and prosecuted, with multiple statements of charges sent to the courts.[43].

Legislative changes were introduced in the foreign bribery legal framework, while challenges remain in the detection and enforcement of foreign bribery cases. Despite advancing in reforms, including by clarifying the definition of the foreign bribery offence, revising the criminal corporate liability framework and significantly increasing the sanctions for legal persons[44], Estonia has not detected, investigated or prosecuted a foreign bribery case since 2014[45]. The OECD considers that detection and enforcement of foreign bribery cases should be further enhanced[46].

Introduction of legal rules on lobbying for both government officials and for Parliament is being considered in the framework of the revision of the Anti-Corruption Act.

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37 Act on Amendments to the Anti-Corruption Act, the Penal Code and the Taxation Act 442 SE. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p.8.

38 This concerns, among others, rules on post-employment activities with a cooling-off period for guidelines were issued by the Civil Service Ethics Council in 2025. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 8-9.

39 Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

40 Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

41 This includes one bribery case, three cases on official forgery, four cases on the violation of public procurement requirements and five cases on violation of procedural restrictions. Estonian Government (2026a), written input.

42 EPPO (2026), p. 23.

43 Prosecutor’s Office, written input.

44 OECD (2025).

45 Despite one conviction on foreign bribery in 2018, OECD (2025).

46 The OECD recommended, among other measures, a systematic assessment of the foreign bribery risk profile, increased detection of foreign bribery, and clarification of the availability of whistleblower protections for reporting foreign bribery. In its view, the absence of a systematic and comprehensive risk assessment may limit the extent to which foreign bribery risks faced by Estonian businesses are fully identified and assessed. OECD (2025).

According to the analysis of the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs and Transparency International Estonia, 978 lobby meetings with government officials were registered in 2025[47]. While lobbying rules for the government officials are currently covered by soft law, the same rules in relation to Parliament remain non-existent despite past discussions[48] on the publication of information about meetings with lobbyists on its website. In accordance with the GRECO recommendation[49], the introduction of legal rules on lobbying is considered in the context of the future revision of the Anti-Corruption Act[50].

The Advisory Centre is expected to support the implementation of the whistleblowing rules. As of January 2026, the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs concluded a contract with Transparency International Estonia, which is expected to provide whistleblowing advisory services over the next four years, both to reporting persons and to public authorities and companies that are mandated to receive reports[51]. Civil society noted that currently, due to the narrow scope of the whistleblowing rules[52], there are no cases within the scope of the whistleblowing law, therefore, the tasks of the Centre are expected to focus more on awareness raising[53].

The amendments to the Political Parties Act have been approved by Parliament. On 6 May 2026, the Parliament adopted the revision of the Political Parties Act[54] which was published on 27 May 2026 in the State Gazette. In particular, the new rules address the issue of illegal donations specifying the relevant definition and the catalogue of prohibited donations, amending the consequences applicable to the acceptance of a prohibited donation[55] as well as setting a deadline to returning the donation[56]. In addition, the new rules extended the investigative powers of the Party Financing Supervision Committee[57], clarified the

47 1045 in 2022; 1057 in 2023; 1193 in 2024. Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, Register of Lobby Meetings. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 8.

48 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 8.

49 GRECO 2026, point 89. GRECO recommended that lobbying should be regulated at the national (central) level through a clear legal framework to ensure transparency of interactions between lobbyists and public officeholders, manage conflicts of interest and enable meaningful public scrutiny.

50 Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs.

51 GRECO (2026). GRECO recommended that the national (central) authorities to support the effective implementation of the whistleblower protection framework by providing practical guidance and training to relevant actors, ensuring access to confidential advice for potential whistleblowers, clarifying the scope, roles and procedures within the framework, and establishing regular evaluation of the law's effectiveness through data collection and analysis with a view to identifying any need for future amendments.

52 The new law on whistleblower protection entered into force on 1 January 2025. The law does not extend protection beyond reports on breaches relating to the areas of EU law.

53 Transparency International – Estonia (2026), written input. The Transparency International Estonia's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC), established in view of providing advice to potential whistleblowers under the whistleblowers law, also provides advice to whistleblowers reporting other cases of misconduct occurred in the workplace, falling outside the application of the rules of whistleblowing. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p.9.

54 Act on Amendments to the Political Parties Act and the Credit Institutions Act (585 SE).

55 Donations from foreigners, with the exception of citizens of the European Union permanently residing in Estonia, are prohibited. Funds intended for the exercise of the mandate of a member of the European Parliament or a member of the Parliament or for supporting the activities of European-level political parties and political foundations are not considered as donations from a legal person. Furthermore, they cannot be used for an election campaign.

56 Upon expiry of the 30-day deadline when the donation can be returned to the donor, the prohibited donation is transferred to state revenue. An exception is a prohibited donation made from the funds of the European Parliament, which must be returned to the European Parliament.

57 Among others, it created the possibility of obliging the affiliated organisation of a political party and third parties to submit documents, information and explanations to the commission.

financial reporting obligations of political parties[58] and expanded the definition of the party affiliate[59].

The high-risk areas for corruption are being monitored by the authorities and the first assessment of anti-corruption efforts at the local level delivered positive results. Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU show that 19% of companies in Estonia (EU average 30%) think that corruption has prevented them from winning a public tender or a public procurement contract in practice in the last three years[60]. 60% of businesses perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (Public Procurement Review Committee) as very or fairly good which has significantly increased in comparison with 2025 (31%)[61].The Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard on access to public procurement in Estonia reports 30% of single bids for 2023 (EU average 27%). Business stakeholders consider that corruption does not constitute an obstacle to doing business in Estonia[62]. In 2025, in addition to the previously identified[63] high-risk areas for corruption, the authorities add also defence[64]. Public procurement remains highly digitalised[65] with increasing competition[66]. At the sub-national level, GRECO[67] found that Estonia has put in place a robust anti-corruption and integrity system at the municipal level. In this context, GRECO highlighted several good practices[68]. It also issued a number of recommendations to address outstanding challenges[69].

III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

The regulator for audiovisual media services, the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority (CPTRA), continues to operate independently. The CPTRA has become a competent authority under the Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising. Its human and financial resources remain unchanged since 2025[70], while the need for additional resources to fully address its expanding tasks has been

58 Parties are expected to disclose also the costs of research and data collection under political expenses.
59 A party affiliate is a foundation or non-profit organisation of which the party is the founder or member and whose activities are aimed at achieving the party's political goals.
60 Flash Eurobarometer 557 on Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU (2025). This is 11 percentage point above the EU average.
61 Figure 59, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.
62 Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2026), written input.
63 Those being: healthcare, the local government, political party financing, public procurement, obtaining residence and work permits, EU funding, energy, construction, and corruption in the private sector. 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, pp. 9-10.
64 Public Prosecutor's Office, written input.
65 Overall, 98% of public procurement is carried out as e-procurement. Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 9.
66 The average number of bidders rose from 3.6 in 2023 to 4.4 in 2024 and reached 4.8 by April 2025. Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 9.
67 GRECO (2026).
68 This concerns various areas, including public procurement, value-based organisational culture, e-trainings, access to information, and participatory budgeting. GRECO (2026).
69 These address a range of issues, including the appointment of supervisory board members of municipal companies and foundations, the development of guidance on procedural restrictions, and the formulation of guidance on secondary activities. These also cover the establishment of a system for risk-based verification of declarations of assets and interests, the assessment of citizens' participation in the decision-making process, the regulation of lobbying, the reinforcement of Internal Audit Services, the rotation of external audit firms, and the strengthening of the whistleblower protection law. GRECO (2026).
70 Country visit Estonia, CPTRA.

acknowledged[71]. The CPTRA continues to monitor the media market and websites providing access to media services., In cooperation with the Estonian Financial Intelligence Unit, it has notified Estonian telecommunications providers of 75 TV channels and 320 websites for which there is evidence that the media service or members of its management body are sanctioned in the EU[72]. The 2026 Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) continues to report a medium-low risk as for the independence and effectiveness of the CPTRA[73].

The Estonian public service broadcaster (ERR) operates independently. Efforts are ongoing to enhance the independence and financial stability of public service media in the long term. While the ERR's general budget was frozen at the 2024 level, the Ministry of Culture provided some additional funds for the increase of journalists' salaries[74]. The practical impact of the freeze is the difficulty to produce programmes and exercise editorial responsibility in allocating resources[75]. The Government is finalising amendments to the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act to introduce a four-year framework agreement model for stable, predictable and transparent financing of ERR, aimed at strengthening institutional independence and with a view to the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) requirements on public service media funding[76]. While the 2026 MPM continues to note a low risk for independence of public service media, it highlights that the budget freeze constitutes a difficulty for the day-to-day operation of ERR[77]. The lack of sufficient funding to exercise editorial independence remains the biggest challenge for ERR.

While Estonia has a high level of transparency of media ownership structures, the law on media market concentrations is still under preparation and market plurality remains the main challenge. Information on media ownership is widely available and the beneficial ownership data is accessible, supported by a complaint mechanism[78]. At the same time, the Government has not yet finalised legislative amendments, including measures on concentration-related assessments and related procedural safeguards, with a view to the implementation of EMFA[79]. For the time being, there are no media-specific concentration rules beyond general competition law[80]. The amendment to the competition law is under discussion by the Government[81]. According to the Estonian Association of Journalists, the concentration of the newspaper market is very high with only one printed daily newspaper left, apart from tabloid printed press[82]. Large online platforms remain dominant in the digital market of Estonia, capturing a significant share of digital advertising revenues and thereby reducing the income available to domestic media outlets[83]. However, stakeholders note that the loss of revenues from advertising to Estonian media houses is compensated by the rising

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[71] Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 10.
[72] Country visit Estonia, CPTRA.
[73] Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 14.
[74] Country visit Estonia, ERR.
[75] For example, budget constraints can limit decisions when it comes to hiring foreign correspondents (Country visit Estonia, ERR).
[76] Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 11.
[77] Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), pp. 30-31
[78] Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 10.
[79] Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture.
[80] Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 10
[81] Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture.
[82] Country visit Estonia, Estonian Association of Journalists.
[83] Country visit Estonia, Ministry of Culture, Estonian Association of Journalists.

number of paid subscriptions[84]. In the assessment of 2026 MPM, market plurality remains the main problematic area for Estonia, assessed at medium-high risk[85].

There has been significant progress on the recommendation to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information[86]. Changes to the Public Information Act[87], which entered into force in March 2026, have been made to improve access to information. A data consent system, enabling individuals to grant, manage, and revoke their consent, an authorisation management system, allowing businesses to manage permissions, and a Translation Gateway to enhance transparency and language support have been introduced. These amendments are considered to enhance access to and reuse of open data. Stakeholders do not report particular difficulties with the application of the law on access to official information by journalists and highlight that much information is provided online without a need for requests[88]. Furthermore, the Government has submitted two legislative proposals for public consultation: one to mandate data trackers in state information systems, enhancing transparency by enabling individuals to monitor access to their personal data, and another to modernise database requirements, ensuring lawful data processing and providing stakeholders with an accurate overview of state-held data while addressing current inefficiencies. Hence, significant progress has been made on the recommendation to 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.

The safety of journalists is generally high in Estonia, the online threat environment is deteriorating. The Parliament has recently adopted amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure and the Law of Obligations Act, which aim to transpose the Anti-SLAPP Directive into national law[89]. The new amendments cover both cross-border and domestic cases. The Estonian Journalists Association has been designated as the anti-SLAPP national contact point[90]. According to stakeholders, no cases of physical violence towards journalists were reported. At the same time, the safety of journalists online is reportedly deteriorating, and threats of violence are increasing[91]. Since the 2025 Rule of Law Report, no new alerts for Estonia have been published on the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists[92], nor on the Mapping Media Freedom Platform[93]. The 2026 MPM notes SLAPP cases are very rare[94].

IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

The Government is preparing concrete steps to improve the public consultation process for legislation. Following last years’ reflection process, which led to identifying areas for

84 Country visit Estonia, Estonian Association of Journalists. Ministry of Culture.
85 Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 7.
86 The 2025 Rule of Law Report recommended to Estonia to “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.” Some progress was previously assessed on this recommendation in 2023, 2024 and 2025.
87 2025 Rule of Law Report, p. 12.
88 Country visit Estonia, Estonian Association of Journalists, Estonian Press Council. ERR.
89 Estonian Government (2026).
90 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 11.
91 Country visit Estonia, Estonian Association of Journalists, Estonian Press Council.
92 Council of Europe’s Safety of Journalists Platform.
93 Mapping Media Freedom Platform.
94 Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 11.

further improvement in the consultation process for legislation[95], the Government is working on concrete proposals that would improve the inclusive nature of law-making. As part of their 2025-2029 Open Government Action Plan, the Government will prioritise enhancing public sector openness through skills development and strengthening data-driven governance. The Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs reformed legislative drafting rules by streamlining legislative intent requirements to focus on substantive analysis and flexibility. The length of consultation periods was identified as requiring further improvement. A three-phase regulatory revision was undertaken. It resulted in the removal of more than 300 obsolete regulations, a ministerial review of burdensome rules, and an ongoing inter-agency bureaucracy reduction[96]. Despite these improvements, some stakeholders have criticised the lack of inclusiveness of the law-making process and the shorter consultation deadlines for certain pieces of draft legislation[97].

Some independent authorities have received more tasks, while additional resources have not been allocated. Over the last years the workload of the equality body (the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner) has been increasing, and this trend is expected to continue as the Government is planning to extend the list of tasks and mandates of the Commissioner. However, no additional budget is foreseen to fulfil these tasks. Moreover, in 2025 the Government continued to implement austerity measures, where public sector institutions are expected to cut their budgets 10% over three years[98], leading to cuts in the budget of the Commissioner's office. At the same time, implementing new legislation for more financial independence, the budget of the Chancellor for Justice[99], which is the National Human Rights Institution accredited with A-Status, was directly reviewed by the Finance Committee of the Parliament. The Chancellor's budget in 2026 increases only by the resources allocated for the performance of additional tasks and does not take into account the increase in workload in other areas[100].

Less than half of companies surveyed in Estonia express confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection. 47% of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts, a figure which has increased in comparison with 2025 (43%) [101]. The main reason among companies for their lack of confidence is the difficulty to obtain a fair compensation to protect property (27%) [102]. As regards authorities relevant for economic operators, 63% of companies perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (The Competition Authority) as very or fairly good, a figure which has significantly increased in comparison with 2025 (37%)[103]. Stakeholders also assess the work of the oversight bodies as positive, while noting that businesses occasionally point out to regulatory

95 2025 Rule of Law Report, Estonia, p. 13.
96 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 13.
97 Civil Liberties Union for Europe, Liberties Rule of Law Report 2026, Estonia, p. 18. Country visit, Estonia, Human Rights Centre and Open Estonia Foundation. See also a reference in pillar I regarding the draft law for the reform of the Council for the Administration of Courts.
98 Estonian Government (2026), written input, p. 14. Countr visit, Estonia, Open Estonia Foundation.
99 The Chancellor of Justice, which is the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI), has an A-status accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).
100 ENNHRI (2026), p. 122 or 416.
101 Figure 52, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.
102 Figure 53, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard. 20% and only 17% of the surveyed investors respectively perceive the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about the quality of the law-making process and concerns about quality, efficiency or independence of justice as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.
103 Figure 60, 2026 EU Justice Scoreboard.

interpretations and consistent enforcement practices as areas for improvement. The Supreme Court has jurisdiction in several business-related cases, including in cases related to public procurement, public concessions, public contracts and economic regulation[104]. A number of judicial mechanisms to improve efficiency are available in these cases, including the possibility to apply interim measures, joint examination of similar cases and the consolidation of multiple appeals [105].

On 1 January 2026, Estonia had two leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, a decrease of three compared to the previous year[106]. At that time, Estonia's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 87% (compared to 74% in 2025; 13% remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 4 years and 1 month (compared to 1 year and 10 months in 2025)[107]. The oldest leading judgment is pending implementation for almost 5 years[108]. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2025 there were no cases awaiting confirmation of payments (the same as in 2024)[109]. By 17 June 2026, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had remained at 2[110].

The Strategic partnership funding programme for civil society organisations entered into force. The funding programme entered into force in July 2025. This will allow the important source of funding for civil society organisations to continue[111] and support the civic space in Estonia which is rated as 'open' by Civicus[112]. Moreover, the Parliament adopted amendments to the State Budget Act in December 2025 which limit eligibility for operating grants primarily to legal bodies of the central government, effectively leading civil society organisations towards project-based funding. The proposal is being justified by a need for uniform rules and oversight. Civil society organisations reported not having been involved in the drafting of this part of the proposal[113].

[104] Country visit, Estonia, the Chamber of Commerce.
[105] Figures 66 and 67, 2026 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.
[106] For an explanation of the supervision process, see the website of the Council of Europe.
[107] 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 2026. EIN (2026), written input, p. 3.
[108] Judgment of the ECtHR, 22597/16, *R.B. v. Estonia,* pending implementation since 2021.
[109] Council of Europe (2026), p. 162.
[110] Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).
[111] Country visit, Estonia, Human Rights Centre.
[112] Estonia's score is 96/100. Ratings by Civicus are on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.
[113] Estonian Government (2026), written input, pp. 16-17.

Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order*

** The list of contributions received in the context of the consultation for the 2026 Rule of Law Report can be found at https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2026-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation_en.*

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European Public Prosecutor’s Office (2026), *Annual Report 2025.*

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Media Pluralism Monitor (2026).

OECD (2025), *Anti-Bribery Convention Phase 4 Report on Estonia Implementing the Convention and Related Legal Instruments*, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-anti-bribery-convention-phase-4-report-on-estonia_890a016f-en.html.

Transparency International (2026), *Corruption Perceptions Index 2025.*

Annex II: Country visit to Estonia

The Commission services held physical and virtual meetings in September 2025 and March 2026 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 Bar Association
- Estonian Internal Security Service
- 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
- 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:

- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- End FGM EU
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- Human Rights Watch
- ILGA-Europe
- International Federation for Human Rights
- Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association
- Transparency International EU