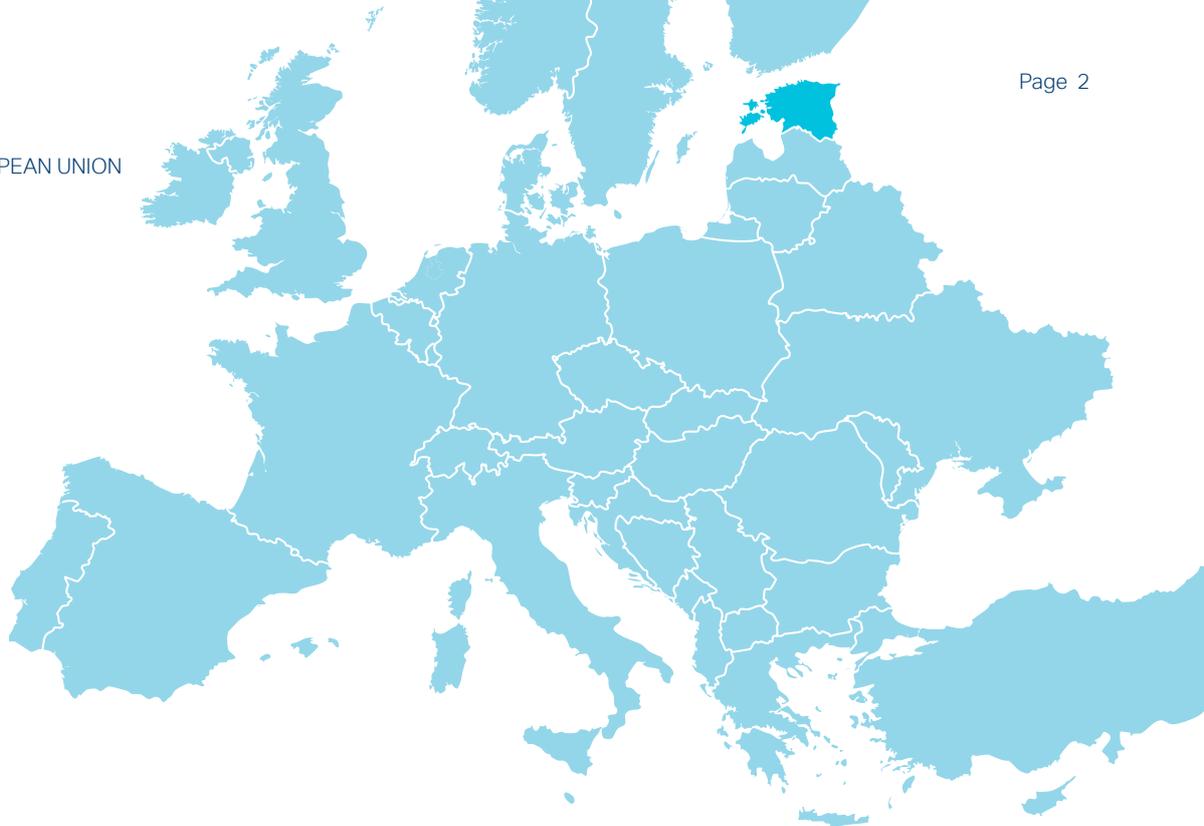

**ESTONIAN
PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE
EUROPEAN
UNION**





GENERAL INFORMATION

The Republic of Estonia has been an independent state since 1918. Interrupted by German and Soviet occupation, Estonia restored its independence in 1991 after issuing the Estonian Sovereignty Declaration. Estonia was among the group of ten countries admitted to the European Union on 1 May 2004. The country is a Schengen Area member since 2007 and adopted the euro as its official currency in 2011. With a population of around 1.3 million inhabitants living in an area of 45.227 km², it is one of the Union's least-populous Member States. It is the most northerly of the three Baltic States and its official language Estonian is closely related to Finnish. Estonia is a representative republic that includes a multi-party system in which the Prime Minister of Estonia, currently Jüri Ratas from the Estonian Centre Party (Eesti Keskerakond), is the Head of Government. The former Prime Minister of Estonia, Andrus Ansip, is currently European Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market. ■

ECONOMY

Estonia has an advanced, high-income economy that is, with an estimated GDP of €20.461 in 2015, among the fastest growing economies in the EU. Although the country has one of the highest per capita income levels in Eastern Europe, there are vast disparities in GDP per capita between different regions. Because of its rapid growth, Estonia has often been described as a Baltic Tiger besides Lithuania and Latvia, pursuing the goal of bringing Estonian GDP per capita into the top 5 of the EU by 2022. The Estonian economy is well integrated with its Nordic neighbours and the euro area while it is especially influenced by developments in Finland, Russia, Sweden and Germany – its four main trading partners. The close relationship is characterised by a large share of intra-industry trade flows as well as through relatively large foreign direct investments and credit inflows.

Estonian governments traditionally pursue free-market economic policies, privatising state enterprises, introducing a flat-rate income tax, liberalising regulation, encouraging free trade and keeping public debt low. Estonia aims at becoming a world leader in technology by creating the world's fastest broadband network, offering widespread free wireless internet, encouraging technology start-ups and providing government services online. In 2005, Estonia held the first online elections and it is the first country to offer an e-residency. Due to locally mined oil shale, Estonia is nearly energy independent. Besides telecommunications, textiles, chemical products, banking, services, food and fishing, timber, shipbuilding, electronics, and transportation are key sectors of the economy. ■



PRIORITIES

AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EUROPE

Estonia wants to promote an inclusive and sustainable Europe with equal opportunities for high quality education, employment, access to services and development of skills and highlights the importance of a cleaner environment. Therefore, the Presidency will focus on modernising rules to promote labour mobility and the free movement of persons. Ensuring equal opportunities in the labour market and advancing social inclusion will also be key priorities for the Estonian Presidency. Finally, Estonia will make an effort to secure a more sustainable environment. ■

AN OPEN AND INNOVATIVE EUROPEAN ECONOMY

The Estonian Presidency seeks to develop a business environment, which supports knowledge-based growth and competitiveness to create an open and innovative European economy. Therefore, Estonia intends to promote and protect the EU's four freedoms, the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital, to ensure that providing services and starting a business in the EU is as easy as possible. By creating new funding opportunities for companies and by ensuring a stable banking sector, Estonia will not only boost innovation but also

enhance financial security for EU citizens. Establishing a stable and well-functioning electricity market as well as empowering consumers will be further key issues during the Estonian Presidency in the second half of 2017. Further, the Presidency aims at ensuring fair competition by preventing tax evasion. ■

A DIGITAL EUROPE AND THE FREE FLOW OF DATA

With Estonia being a strong digital society and economy, the Presidency will push forward the promotion of e-solutions. The agenda of the Estonian Presidency in the field of digitisation will thus include the development of cross-border e-commerce and e-services for the benefit of consumers, producers and businesses. In order to exploit the benefits of technological progress, Estonia furthermore seeks to ensure the availability of modern and secure electronic communications across Europe and quick, high-quality and widely-available internet connections to support a smart and data-based economy. The Presidency will also work towards the development of cross-border digital public services and the creation of a favourable environment for new innovative services to facilitate the everyday life of EU citizens. ■

A SAFE AND SECURE EUROPE

The EU needs to act together and must preserve its unity on the global stage to keep its citizens safe. The Estonian Presidency is thus committed to strengthen the fight against terrorism and organised crime by offering concrete and modern answers, such as IT-solutions. By improving cooperation and using cutting-edge information systems, Estonia intends to strengthen the internal security as well as the protection of the EU's external borders. With regard to the migration crisis, the Estonian Presidency seeks to reform the Common European Asylum System. Moreover, it aims to support and strengthen the EU relations with Eastern Partnership countries to further promote peace and stability. For making Europe safe and secure, it will also focus on increasing defence expenditures, developing European defence cooperation and the EU-NATO partnership. ■



WHO IS WHO

FOR MORE
INFORMATION,
CLICK ON THE
PICTURES 

EK = **Estonian Centre Party**
(Eesti Keskerakond)

SDE = **Social Democratic Party**
(Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond)

IRL = **Pro Patria and Res Publica Union**
(Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit)

EK

SDE

SDE

JÜRI
RATAS,
Prime Minister

SVEN
MIKSER
*Minister of
Foreign Affairs*

EK

IRL

IRL

KADRI
SIMSON
*Minister of Economic
Affairs and Infrastructure*

TOOMAS
TÕNISTE
Minister of Finance

URMAS
REINSALU
Minister of Justice



>> WHO IS WHO

IRL

SDE

SDE

SIIM
KIISLER
*Minister of the
Environment*

JEVGENI
OSSINOVSKI
*Minister of Health
and Labour*

URVE
PALO
*Minister of
Entrepreneurship and
Information Technology*

SDE

IRL

EK

INDREK
SAAR
Minister of Culture

KAIA
IVA
*Minister of Social
Protection*

MAILIS
REPS
*Minister of Education
and Research*

IRL

EK

EK

JÜRI
LUIK
Minister of Defence

JAAK
AAB
*Minister of Public
Administration*

TARMO
TAMM
Minister of Rural Affairs



POLICY FIELDS

EUROPEAN SINGLE MARKET AND TRADE

The Estonian Presidency highlights the importance of a transparent, simple and unbureaucratic business environment for a European economy that creates growth and jobs. Estonia identifies especially the provision of cross-border services, the opportunities of digitisation and a harmonised legal framework as adding to a flourishing economy. Hence, the Presidency will inter alia drive forward negotiations about the services package, harmonised rules for cross-border mergers and get engaged in the reform of the company law. Estonia will further advocate for free trade and new trade agreements, also within the WTO. ■

BUDGET

Based on the Commission's interim reports on the Horizon 2020 Programme, the Connecting Europe Facility, Cohesion Policy Funds and the Common Agricultural Policy Funds, the Estonian Presidency will initiate a debate about the simplification of research and innovation instruments, the future of EU cohesion policy and the next Multiannual Financial Framework. Economic growth, employment, migration and security will be focal points of the 2018 budget. Estonia will pursue the simplification of the EU Financial Regulation and promote the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor's Office. ■

BANKING, TAX AND FINANCE

The Estonian Presidency will support the extension of the Strategic Investment Fund mandate and work towards the completion of the European Banking Union. Building on the Commission's mid-term review of the Capital Markets Union, Estonia will define the next steps and new goals in the Council. Estonia will initiate talks about the definitive cross-border VAT-system, conclude negotiations about VAT rates for e-books and modernise VAT for cross-border e-commerce. Further, it will address tax avoidance by discussing mandatory rules for financial intermediaries and a joint list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions. ■

MIGRATION

As migration policy needs a long-term approach combining internal and external factors, Estonia will promote the implementation of the partnership frameworks with third countries and development cooperation with the countries of origin. The Estonian Presidency is committed to implement the Valletta Action Plan, the European Union Action Plan on Return as well as to reinforce the EU's external borders. Estonia will also focus on legal migration by renewing the European Union Blue Card Directive and harmonising rules for asylum seekers with a modernised Common European Asylum System. ■

LABOUR, EDUCATION AND YOUTH

The Estonian Presidency wants to focus on modernising and inter-linking the labour and education markets. So as to ensure the free movement of persons, workers and services, Estonia aims at the modernisation of the Social Security Coordination Rules and at advancing the negotiations on regulating the Posting of Workers. Further, the Presidency intends to create more opportunities for young people to engage in the discussions on the common ground for EU cooperation in the field of youth work. ■

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

The Estonian Presidency is committed to enhance security in the Schengen Area by focusing on control and surveillance of the external borders, introducing modern IT-solutions and a more efficient information exchange via a modernised Schengen Information and Criminal Records Information System. Discussions about the new European Entry/Exit system and the Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) will be pursued. To fight organised crime and terrorism, cross-border cooperation and capacities to counter money laundering shall be reinforced. Estonia will evaluate the collection and use of e-evidence and the retention of communication data. ■



>> POLICY FIELDS

ENERGY

With view to energy, the Estonian Presidency will focus on coordinating the Clean Energy Package. Guided by the Principles of the Energy Union, Estonia intends to put the consumers at the heart of the system. Therefore, distribution networks and retail markets will have to be adapted to the needs of all customers. To make the integration of European energy systems and markets a reality, the Presidency highlights the need for cooperation and investment in both production and interconnection. A major target is also the synchronisation of the Baltic energy system with the European system. ■

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The Estonian Presidency will continue the implementation of the objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy and actively promote an effective Eastern Partnership. Estonia intends to promote continued political dialogue and cooperation with the EU's southern neighbourhood. In addition to economic cooperation, the focus will be on the fight against terrorism and combating human trafficking. Outside Europe, the Presidency aims at strengthening partnerships with African, Latin American and Caribbean countries. Finally, Estonia stresses the importance of close transatlantic cooperation and wants to support dialogue. ■

DIGITAL SERVICES

Estonia will focus on cross-border e-commerce and e-services. In order to stimulate cross-border trade, it wants to continue negotiations about a contract law package, the copy right reform and an update of the Audiovisual Media Service Directive. An agreement on the Geo-blocking Regulation shall be reached. To foster digital public services, Estonia aims for a quick implementation of the eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 and wants to support the adoption of electronic identification (eID). Estonia will further advocate e-health and e-justice. The efforts shall culminate in the Tallinn declaration on eGovernment. ■

ENVIRONMENT

In order to contribute to the EU's target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030, the Estonian Presidency wants to focus on the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Estonia identifies the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) as the main tool to cut emissions and thus aims at its revision. Further, Estonia wants to make substantial progress on the negotiations on waste legislation and, in the context of circular economy, reach an agreement on the Fertilising Products Regulation. Finally, the Presidency plans to launch a debate on the protection of agricultural soil. ■

IT AND INNOVATION

The Estonian Presidency is committed to support the EU in becoming a data-driven economy and a digital society. It advocates the abolishment of unjustified data location restrictions, the clarification of legal requirements for data ownership and the enforcement of the so-called once-only principle in the public sector. Estonia will promote the establishment of a European Electronic Communications Code and a Single Digital Gateway, as they are crucial for a universal digitisation of the economy. In the field of IT-security, the Presidency aims at modernising the European Union Cybersecurity Strategy, renewing the mandate of the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA) and forwarding the discussion about the ePrivacy Regulation. ■



#THEUBERSICHT

ESTONIAN PRESIDENCY OF
THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



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