




## **Weekly Briefing**

**Estonia external relations briefing:  
Estonia as an international actor in 2018: an overview  
E-MAP Foundation MTÜ**

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## **Estonia as an international actor in 2018: an overview**

Evidently, from the times when Estonia had been attempting to regain its independence back in 1990s, the country **has never been more visible internationally** than it has been during 2018. Partially, it was due to the factor of the centennial – while celebrating its big anniversary, Estonia seized the moment to ‘tell’ its comprehensive story to the world. At the same time, there were other factors, which ‘shaped’ the Estonian Republic’s actions on the international stage, and they could be singled out in the following three ‘baskets’ – **the country’s application for the UN Security Council membership** in 2020-2021 and its **special attention paid to the Russian Federation’s** aggressive stance in Europe.

### **Estonia to the UN Security Council 2020-2021**

Even though it was not a founding member of the organisation, Estonia managed to join the League of Nations in 1921, presumably anticipating its long-term active involvement in the complicated process of solving different issues of international significance. It did not go according to the plan, because the country had a bit less than 19 years of its existence as an independent state before it was occupied by the Soviet Union. Another – **the UN-based** – international system was established in 1945, and, out of all titular republics of the former USSR, the rights to be among the members of the newly-born organisation were granted to Belarus and Ukraine only. It was not until 17 September 1991<sup>1</sup> when Estonia, figuratively standing on the ‘rumbles’ of the collapsing Soviet Union, became an integral part of the world’s international system, having joined the UN.

Thus far, to a surprise of many, the Estonian Republic is still among those 69 modern nations (out of the total number of 193 members of the UN), which have never been elected as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. In 2017-2018, Estonia was trying to make it clear that, as stated, it “should have the opportunity to participate in creating stability and security through [UN] Security Council membership [...] [and] shar[e] its experience and best practices in efficient governance and creative e-solutions”<sup>2</sup>. Officially, the campaign was launched on **13 July 2017**<sup>3</sup>, but 2018 was absolutely instrumental for the process to see a

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Estonia in the United Nations’. *Välisministeerium*. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/estonia-united-nations>].

<sup>2</sup> ‘Estonia to the UN Security Council 2020-2021’. *Välisministeerium*. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/estonia-un-security-council-2020-2021>].

<sup>3</sup> ‘Estonia’s UN Security Council membership campaign kicks off’. *Välisministeerium*. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/news/estonias-un-security-council-membership-campaign-kicks-0>].

perspective. During the year, the efforts of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (especially, the country's Foreign Minister Sven Mikser) in campaigning for Estonia's place in the UN's main executive organ were supported by other Estonian ministries and different political bodies, whose high-profile representatives visited as many countries as it was possible. For example, Marianne Mikko (MP, the *Social Democratic Party*) had high-level meetings in **Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago** (in January)<sup>4</sup>, Marko Mihkelson (MP, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, then from *Isamaa*) visited **Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain** (March)<sup>5</sup>, and Hannes Hanso (MP, Chairman of the National Defence Committee, the *Social Democratic Party*) had an extensive trip to Latin America, visiting **Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Panama** (May)<sup>6</sup>. The given examples – separately and together – represent only a fraction of what has been achieved in terms of delivering the 'Estonian message' globally – some of those destinations were visited by an Estonian delegation for the first time ever. When analysing these developments, one should keep in mind that the Republic of Estonia is a country of about 1.3 million people, and what would be an 'international' daily routine for the United States, China or even France is an incredible 'feat' for a much smaller nation.

In the context of the aforementioned campaign that is still on, the positively effective role of the Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid needs to be underscored. In 2018, it became clear that the **President Kaljulaid's vision on her country's foreign policy-bound directions is much broader**, if compared to any of her predecessors. As it was outlined in details in the October briefing on external relations, in the second half of the year, almost one after another, Kersti Kaljulaid visited **Georgia, Ukraine, China, Armenia, the Republic of Korea, Australia, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Zealand, and the United States**. More recently, closer to the end of the year, the President went to **Benin** (her first ever trip to Africa) and **Senegal**<sup>7</sup>. By far,

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<sup>4</sup> 'President's advisory council member Marianne Mikko meets Foreign Minister of Guyana Carl B. Greenidge in the framework of Estonia's UN Security Council membership campaign visit to Caribbean countries' and 'Estonian President's advisory council member Marianne Mikko's high-level meetings in Trinidad and Tobago'. *Välisministeerium*. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/news/presidents-advisory-council-member-marianne-mikko-meets-foreign-minister-guyana-carl-b>] and [<https://vm.ee/en/news/estonian-presidents-advisory-council-member-marianne-mikkos-high-level-meetings-trinidad-and>].

<sup>5</sup> 'Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament Mr. Marko Mihkelson's working visit to Oman', 'Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament Mr. Marko Mihkelson's working visit to the United Arab Emirates', and 'Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament Mr. Marko Mihkelson's working visit to Bahrain'. *Välisministeerium*. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/news/chairman-foreign-affairs-committee-estonian-parliament-mr-marko-mihkelsons-working-visit-oman>], [<https://vm.ee/en/news/chairman-foreign-affairs-committee-estonian-parliament-mr-marko-mihkelsons-working-visit-united>], and [<https://vm.ee/en/news/chairman-foreign-affairs-committee-estonian-parliament-mr-marko-mihkelsons-working-visit>].

<sup>6</sup> 'High-level meetings in Chile of Member of Estonian Parliament and Member of the President's Advisory Council Mr. Hannes Hanso'. *Välisministeerium*. Available from [<https://vm.ee/en/news/high-level-meetings-chile-member-estonian-parliament-and-member-presidents-advisory-council-mr>].

<sup>7</sup> 'President Kaljulaid discussed cooperation between the two states with her Benin colleague' and 'President Kaljulaid discussed opportunities for co-operation with the President of Senegal'. *The President of the Republic of Estonia*. Available from [<https://president.ee/en/meedia/press-releases/14745-president-kaljulaid-discussed>].

it was **the most diverse geo-strategic approach in discovering the globe ever taken by Estonia**. In September 2018, giving her address at the 73<sup>rd</sup> UN General Assembly, President Kaljulaid explained her country's vision in details:

Small countries have no time for small objectives – our aim is, among other issues, to bring all things digital to Security Council – cyber risks are something Estonians as citizens of a fully digitized state understand better than most. We want to offer our perspective to make sure that human beings remain safe in this new world were cyber related threats compound with conventional ones. The vision that we have for the candidacy and for the UN as a whole is based on three keywords – empathy, equality and efficiency.<sup>8</sup>

Considering the above, the Estonian case in the context of becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2020-2021 looks very solid. Certainly, in 2019, it will be up to the international community of nations to decide on what countries are to be chosen for the next intake, but the likelihood that it is going to be Estonia that will be picked out from the Eastern European Group is very high.

### **Russia as a 'theme' in 2018: an Estonian context**

The Estonia-Russia border – 294 kilometres in length – represents the border segment where Russia becomes an immediate neighbour of both the EU and NATO. Since 2014, considering the factor that Russia had illegally annexed a significant part of Ukraine (the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol) and been maintaining its illegal military presence in other parts of the Ukrainian sovereign territory (some areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions), Estonia fully supported a broad range of international sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation. In this respect, there was no significant change in the Estonian official position to be noticed in 2018. At the same time, there is something that still needs to be underlined – from 2018, Estonian top-politicians, while addressing on their country's view in regards of Russia and its aggressive stance at present, more often started offering a much broader as well as holistic perspective. The practical point is obvious – when the international community of nations tries to find a positive solution to stop any type of Russian aggression in

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cooperation-between-the-two-states-with-her-benin-colleague/index.html] and  
[https://president.ee/en/meedia/press-releases/14747-president-kaljulaid-discussed-opportunities-for-co-operation-with-the-president-of-senegal/index.html].

<sup>8</sup> Kersti Kaljulaid in 'Address by the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly'. 26 September 2018. *The President of the Republic of Estonia*. Available from [https://www.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/14577-address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-estonia-kersti-kaljulaid-at-the-73rd-united-nations-general-assembly/index.html].

Ukraine, the world should not be forgetting about the other conflicts, which may but may not necessarily involve the same aggressor. Those conflictual situations can be detected in Europe (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova), in the Middle East (Syria) or elsewhere (Africa). It could be argued that, with this approach, it will be much easier for the international community to detect in a more precise manner the range of actual challenges the world is facing. As Kersti Kaljulaid noted:

Ongoing military aggression in Eastern Ukraine continues in the very heart of Europe. Crimean Peninsula remains occupied, as do parts of Georgia, and there is no resolution of the protracted conflicts in Africa. It is hard to tolerate these sad issues. Yet it is no solution to mince words to make ourselves feel better. For those in distress, recognition of their true situation, together with the humble recognition that we cannot do much more than commiserate, is offering at least some hope.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of Estonia-Russia relations *per se*, there is a significant issue that has not been solved for years – the border treaty signed by the two countries has not been ratified as yet. In its contemporary version, the story goes back to May 2005, when Estonia and Russia signed a number of documents on the land and maritime borders between the two neighbours. The *Riigikogu*, the Estonian Parliament, proceeded with passing the treaties in June 2005, adding a small preamble where there was an explanation that “in ratifying the border treaties, the *Riigikogu* had in mind that, in accordance with Article 122 of the [Estonian] Constitution, the border treaty would partly change the line of the state border as defined in the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920 but would not affect the rest of the treaty and would not define the treatment of any bilateral issues not connected with the border treaties”<sup>10</sup>. The Russian side withdrew its signature, noting, as reported, that the aforementioned preamble could open up “the way to future territorial claims”<sup>11</sup>, even though Estonia denied having any territorial claims to Russia. The apparent ‘stalemate’ was moderated by the resumed negotiations in 2013, which followed by the signing ceremony on 18 February 2014<sup>12</sup>. Since then, the *Riigikogu* got the agreements passing the first parliamentary reading in November 2015, but the *State Duma*, the Russian Parliament, has yet to commence the process<sup>13</sup>. According to the *Riigikogu*’s procedural rules,

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<sup>9</sup> Kaljulaid in ‘Address by the President of the Republic of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly’.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Moscow: Border treaty won’t be ratified if Estonia doesn’t change conduct’. 23 May 2018. *ERR*. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/833760/moscow-border-treaty-won-t-be-ratified-if-estonia-doesn-t-change-conduct>].

<sup>11</sup> ‘Moscow: Border treaty won’t be ratified if Estonia doesn’t change conduct’.

<sup>12</sup> ‘After 20 years, Russia and Estonia sign border treaty’. 18 February 2014. *Reuters*. Available from [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-estonia-idUSBREA1H0QN20140218>].

<sup>13</sup> ‘Moscow: Border treaty won’t be ratified if Estonia doesn’t change conduct’.

“upon the expiry of the mandate of the *Riigikogu*, all bills and draft resolutions the proceedings of which were not completed within the mandate of that *Riigikogu* are dropped from proceedings”<sup>14</sup> – with necessity, it can only mean that, in order to not be nullified, the process must be finalised by the beginning of March 2019 when the current composition of the *Riigikogu* will be having its last session.

Thus far, the positions of the two sides have not changed much. In December 2018, Alexander Petrov, the Russian Ambassador to Estonia, underscored that

Russian-Estonian relations are not currently in the best state. [...] Time is passing, and there is essentially none left until 3 March. [...] While I wouldn't like to make predictions that might be misconstrued, resolving this issue that is important to both of us, which would allow us to move forward to concluding other accords, is obviously no longer possible, and will have to be dealt with by the next Estonian parliament.<sup>15</sup>

As for the Estonian side, in May 2018, President Kaljulaid stated that she would be ready to visit Moscow and meet with the Russian President, provided that Russia would have the border treaties ratified prior to her prospective the visit<sup>16</sup>. In the comprehensive framework of 2018, having had a busy as well as eventful year, the Republic of Estonia will be looking forward to 2019. The next briefing will be dedicated to what the country should expect from ‘tomorrow’.

**Prepared by:** E-MAP Foundation MTÜ, Tallinn, Estonia

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Russian ambassador: Estonian-Russian relations not currently at their best’. 17 December 2018. *ERR*. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/885533/russian-ambassador-estonian-russian-relations-not-currently-at-their-best>].

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Petrov in ‘Russian ambassador: Estonian-Russian relations not currently at their best’.

<sup>16</sup> Kersti Kaljulaid in ‘Кальюлайд: я готова поехать в Москву, когда Россия ратифицирует пограничный договор’. 22 May 2018. *Delfi*. Available from [<http://rus.delfi.ee/daily/estonia/kalyulajd-ya-gotova-pohat-v-moskvu-kogda-rossiya-ratificiruet-pogranichnyj-dogovor?id=82186669>].