Summaries

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S COLUMN

Your Well-Being Has Been Processed: How Much Well-Being Did We Get for the Money?

MARJU HIMMA
Editor-in-Chief, Riigikogu Toimetised

Public spending can be measured precisely, but its contribution to well-being is harder to assess. This editorial argues that Estonia's sector-based policies often overlook how health, employment, income and relationships interact across people's lives. It calls for life-course impact assessments, better coordination between institutions and evaluation based on actual outcomes rather than administrative efficiency. The central question is not how much the state spends, but whose well-being it improves and how.

CONVERSATION CIRCLE

The Welfare State's Fiscal Capacity: Stimulating Growth, Targeting Support and Reducing Bureaucratic Barriers

RIIGIKOGU TOIMETISED PANEL DISCUSSION

Estonia's parliamentary parties agree that a strong economy is essential to sustaining the welfare state, but disagree on how to pay for it. The roundtable examines which services the state must guarantee, how to balance individual and collective responsibility, and whether new resources should come from growth, tax reform or better-targeted support. Participants also question whether administrative rules and bureaucracy prevent help from reaching those who need it.

FOCUS

Does the Welfare State Really Help? Benefit Application Processes and Support Services in Ensuring Well-Being

KATRE PALL
Analyst, Praxis Think Tank
MERILEN LAURIMÄE
Analyst, Praxis Think Tank

The effectiveness of welfare benefits depends not only on the amount paid but also on how people apply for them and whether essential services are accessible. Drawing on research into benefit recipients' experiences and vulnerable groups, the authors show how administrative burdens and disrespectful treatment can undermine dignity, autonomy and trust. They argue for simpler procedures, meaningful user involvement and support that improves people's actual ability to cope.

What Should a Future-Proof Tax System Be Built On?

UKU VARBLANE
Head of Research, Estonian Foresight Centre
TEA DANILOV
Director, Estonian Foresight Centre

Estonia's tax system is internationally competitive, yet population ageing, higher defence spending and growing demand for public services challenge its long-term sustainability. The authors examine the overall tax burden and the balance between consumption, labour and capital taxes. Changing forms of employment and technological development add further pressure. Future reform must reconcile economic incentives with adequate revenue and fair distribution of the tax burden.

The Future of Estonia's Tax System

KARSTEN STAEHR
Professor of Macroeconomics, Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech)

Estonia's tax system is relatively simple and efficient, but rising expenditure and fiscal pressures call for reform. Staehr argues that spending cuts alone are unlikely to suffice. He proposes reassessing the taxation of distributed corporate profits and pension savings, and considering property, wealth and inheritance taxes. The challenge is to raise sufficient revenue without undermining economic efficiency, fairness or social cohesion.

Well-Being Across the Life Course and Its Implications for Policymaking in Estonia

DAGMAR KUTSAR
Associate Professor of Social Policy, University of Tartu

People's well-being depends on the interaction of health, education, employment, relationships and security over life. Estonia's life-course well-being model shows why policies assessed within separate sectors may miss their wider and longer-term effects. The article distinguishes objective living conditions from subjective experiences and highlights transitions between life stages. It proposes more integrated policy assessment while noting that the model does not establish cost-effectiveness.

Social Media Use and Well-Being

KATRIN TIIDENBERG
Professor of Participatory Culture, Tallinn University
TRIIN LAURI
Professor of Comparative Public Policy, Tallinn University

Using data from a representative Estonian adult survey, the authors examine how social media habits, attitudes and problematic use relate to well-being and depression risk. Their findings challenge the idea that social media is uniformly harmful or beneficial: effects differ across users and usage patterns. Associations with poor mental health do not prove causation. The authors caution against blanket restrictions and advocate responses that recognise vulnerable groups and different needs.

Well-Being in Estonia Is Generally Good — But Not for Everyone

MARE AINSAAR
Associate Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Tartu
AVE KOVALJOV
Lecturer in Sociology, University of Tartu
KADRI SOO
Lecturer in Social Well-Being, University of Tartu
LIISA TALVING
Associate Professor of Comparative Politics, University of Tartu

The Hea Eesti well-being study finds that 76% of Estonian adults are satisfied with life, but this positive average hides substantial inequalities. Economic security strongly shapes well-being, while young adults, some men approaching retirement and ethnic Russian residents face particular vulnerabilities. Mental health, trust, relationships and opportunities for participation also matter. The authors call for policies that respond to different needs rather than relying on averages alone.

Cash Benefits or Public Services: Where Should the Next Million Go?

MARJU HIMMA
Editor-in-Chief, Riigikogu Toimetised

Should Estonia spend its next million euros on cash benefits or public services? Comparing choices across childcare, unemployment, disability and elder care, the article shows that neither approach is universally superior. Cash offers flexibility but cannot replace unavailable services; services address needs directly but require staff and infrastructure. Evidence cannot rank every alternative by impact. The key is to measure what additional spending actually changes in people's lives.

STUDIES

From Deliberation to Decision-Making: Lessons from Estonia's Climate Policy

MAIU LAURING
Citizens' Assembly Organiser and Lead Analyst for Estonia, ReTool Project
KADRI KANGRO
PhD student, University of Tartu

Estonia's citizens' assemblies and climate-policy deliberations show how public discussion can illuminate difficult trade-offs involving fairness, costs and competing interests. Yet well-organised participation does not automatically influence policy. Examining experiences in Tartu, Tallinn and the Arvamusrännak

process, the authors argue that recommendations need clear routes into decision-making, responsibility and feedback. Deliberation should become part of routine policymaking.

The Green Transition, Geopolitics and Strategic Indispensability

MAREK TIITS
Director, Institute of Baltic Studies
TARMO KALVET
Research Director, Institute of Baltic Studies
JOHANNA MAARJA TIIK
Analyst, Institute of Baltic Studies

The green transition has become a contest over industrial capacity, energy security and geopolitical influence. Drawing on research into alternative global futures, the authors argue that Estonia should not bet on a single winning technology. Instead, it should strengthen specialised skills, innovation partnerships and positions in international value chains. The strategic goal is to make Estonian companies valuable and difficult to replace, even as markets and geopolitical conditions change.

What Does Fairness Mean in a Datafied Welfare State?

MARIS MÄNNISTE
Lecturer in Critical Data Studies, University of Tartu
LEE RAUDSEPP
Junior Research Fellow in Information Law, University of Tartu

Algorithmic tools can help welfare institutions allocate limited resources, but their predictions may hide contested assumptions about who deserves support. Using the example of employment-service decision support and a participatory exercise, the authors ask whose understanding of fairness is embedded in data and models. Predicting someone's employment prospects is not the same as identifying their needs. Fairness requires transparency, participation and accountable human judgement.

From Productivity to Well-Being: Making Evidence-Based Industrial Development Decisions

AARNE TOOMSALU
Industrial Analyst, Executive Director of the Estonian Inventors' Association
REIN MURAKAS
Sociologist and Consultant

Industrial investment should begin with a customer need and a clearly defined development task, not an equipment purchase. The authors outline a process for gathering market evidence, comparing technical solutions and testing assumptions before major commitments. Success must be assessed through productivity, business results, retained skills and benefits to people. They propose a 24–36-month learning-factory pilot to test this approach and guide both firms and public funders.

QUO VADIS, RIIGIKOGU?

The Legacy of the Fifteenth Riigikogu: Majority Power, Opposition Rights and Constitutional Review

AARO MÕTTUS
Visiting Lecturer in Constitutional Law, University of Tartu

Disputes during the fifteenth Riigikogu have clarified the constitutional limits of parliamentary obstruction, opposition rights and majority powers. Supreme Court rulings have also defined MPs' access to judicial protection and the conditions for linking bills to votes of confidence. Mõttus argues that these developments expose unresolved issues in parliamentary procedure and raise the question of whether the Riigikogu should revise its rules of procedure.

Political Debate or Personal Attack? The Boundaries of Communication in the Riigikogu

RAILI PÜTSEPP
Master's Graduate in Public Sector Management and Innovation, Tallinn University of Technology; August Rei Parliamentary Research Scholarship Laureate

The Riigikogu's public debates often feature sharp political confrontation, while committee work and informal exchanges can be considerably more cooperative. Based on interviews with parliamentarians, the article explores where legitimate criticism becomes a personal attack. Such attacks may damage trust and make cooperation harder, even when forceful disagreement is necessary. Better parliamentary communication requires shared norms and responsibility beyond formal rules.

Budgetary Autonomy of Constitutional Institutions: What Did the Fifteenth Riigikogu Change?

KADRI MIGUR
Head of the Finance Department, Chancellery of the Riigikogu

A 2024 amendment to Estonia's State Budget Act gave the Riigikogu Finance Committee a stronger role in considering additional funding requests from constitutional institutions. Drawing on document analysis and eleven interviews, the author finds that the reform increased substantive budgetary autonomy only partly in its first year. Formal decision-making rights do not necessarily ensure sufficient or stable resources. Clearer criteria and transparent decisions remain essential.

How Political Trust Develops Among Young Estonians and What They Expect from the Riigikogu

LIISBET HELLENURME
Sociologist; August Rei Scholarship Laureate

Interviews with twelve young Estonians show that political trust depends on whether politicians' actions match their promises, as well as on honest communication and a sense of being represented. Young people also want meaningful opportunities to influence decisions, not merely the formal right to vote. The findings are not statistically representative, but they suggest that the Riigikogu and political parties could strengthen trust through genuine dialogue and visible responsiveness.