Chancellor’s Year in Review



Arne Maasik. Conundrum 3564. Sublimation print on polyester fabric. 2023 (fragment of the work)

Dear reader,

Every day, the concerns that reach the Chancellor of Justice offer a cross-section of the worries people in Estonia are facing. Parents write because their child has been left without a place at school or kindergarten, or because their child is unhappy and they do not know where to turn for help. Business owners contact the Chancellor because they feel weighed down by bureaucracy. Others feel that their city or rural municipality has let them down — by disregarding a spatial plan, delaying a building permit, or leaving someone in need without the care and support they require. The Chancellor also hears from people living in care homes, from conscripts and from prisoners. Defendants turn to the Chancellor of Justice because they feel that some criminal offences are defined too vaguely, and that public criminal proceedings can themselves become a form of punishment — one from which even a full acquittal cannot entirely protect them. People write because they have been left without medical care or without support intended for jobseekers; because they feel they have been

treated unfairly by the tax system; or because they suspect that patient confidentiality or bank secrecy has been breached, or that they have been subjected to unlawful covert surveillance.

People with disabilities turn to the Chancellor for help, as do Ukrainians who have found refuge in Estonia and people who feel they are being subjected to administrative harassment when seeking to renew a residence permit or ID card. Many city and rural municipal councils struggle to organise their work in a way that serves the interests of the local community and is seen as reasonable and fair by both the majority and the minority. When that happens, they look to the Chancellor to help find a way forward.

This list of matters that come before the Chancellor is far from exhaustive. Mistakes and friction are inevitable, both in our dealings with one another and in our dealings with the state. So, we should not be too quick to berate our own country. We quickly grow accustomed to what works well, while what goes wrong naturally attracts more attention.

Whenever possible, the Chancellor helps — always by taking the shortest lawful route. If the Constitution and the law do not allow the Chancellor to help, that is what people are told. Amid the noise of everyday life, the aim is to bring clarity and, when pointing out a flaw in a law or in the work of an official, to offer at least one solution that works and is lawful. How well the Chancellor and her staff have succeeded in this is, of course, for you to judge.

Many thanks to all the members of the Riigikogu, ministers, officials and staff of public authorities who have worked to find solutions. Everyone living in Estonia, as well as Estonian citizens abroad, must be carefully protected and looked after — this is what the Constitution requires.

From the Chancellor’s perspective, two trends stand out from the reporting year that has just ended. First, the general anxiety in society seems to have made its way forcefully into schools, hospitals, and state and local government authorities. We see frayed tempers and mistakes in the way people are treated. More often than before, people are angry with teachers, doctors and officials — who, unfortunately, sometimes respond in kind. The first casualty is the willingness to find an imaginative and considerate solution to a problem. Perhaps, in whichever of these roles we happen to find ourselves, we could show one another a little more understanding and humanity. Everyone would benefit, because a hostile and uncaring attitude ultimately affects even those who do not behave rudely themselves.

The second trend is an expectation of complete safety and convenience, coupled with a desire to reform (other) people. Perhaps this is also where we find the roots of bureaucracy that spreads like an invasive weed and chokes initiative, as well as the drift towards a surveillance society.

Excessive bureaucracy means requiring a farmer, builder, shopkeeper, technology company or any other business to do something whose purpose they cannot understand: to apply for permits and approvals, submit reports, and argue their case with supervisory officials. All of this gets in the way and costs time, money and nerves. And it is the taxpayer who ultimately picks up the bill for every additional requirement: someone has to check that the rules are being followed. Disputes arising from those checks bring further costs. Those costs and disputes often end up on the Chancellor’s desk or before the courts.

We all understand perfectly well why a doctor, or indeed a bus driver, must provide documentary evidence of their professional qualifications and work experience. The same applies, for example, to food safety. If a product cannot be trusted, it must not be sold. But every requirement should have a clear justification and should be developed in cooperation with doctors, transport companies and food producers. It is also entirely understandable that children, older people and people with disabilities should be effectively protected from harm. The same is true of safeguarding fair competition and protecting our living environment from pollution.

What tends to become stifling, however, are rules and requirements that do not in fact serve any clear and understandable purpose.

Politicians and officials have not usually invented excessive restrictions, or restrictions driven by ideological aims, themselves. They have often been demanded by a vocal interest group. If there is something to criticise, it is perhaps that neither in Estonia nor in the European Union as a whole have we been sufficiently willing or able to resist demands for excessive rules that hamper enterprise. And so, we use extra plastic to keep the cap attached to a milk carton, a new car is forever ‘assisting’ its driver, and a poultry farmer has to prove that a chicken’s welfare improves on grass but not on an artificial surface.

Phobocracy — the rule of fear — is gaining ground in Estonia. It feeds both overregulation and mass surveillance. Fear Estonian strawberries, drones and swimming in the sea or a lake. Fear wind turbines, oil shale, wolves, bears and prisoners. Fear roadside smoked fish and birch sauna whisks. Fear artificial intelligence, illness and war. Look everywhere for signs that

things are going badly and that there is no hope.

Fear is paralysing and makes us vulnerable. It breeds mistrust of others and a general sense of discontent. All of this works against efforts to reduce the burden of bureaucracy and prevents people from living their lives to the full.

Perhaps, then, we should think about how to address genuine concerns while also reducing fear. The future is not necessarily bleak. We should show why it is worth dreaming, turning those dreams into reality and building a life in Estonia. And we should do so without excessive restrictions that damage a free society, because a false sense of security ultimately comes at a price.

Ask whether there is too much bureaucracy and the answer is likely to be yes. But challenge any particular excessive rule and objections soon follow. Consider, for example, the rules governing how young people may lawfully do work that suits both their wishes and their abilities. It is difficult to accept that risks in human society can never be reduced to zero. Nor should they be, because trying to do so stifles initiative and the courage to act, while eroding common sense and practical judgement. The assumption that there should not even be a risk of an accident creates a risk of its own.

Public order, security and convenience are used to justify the collection and use of data, as well as ever more extensive surveillance. There is no question that criminals need to be pursued and planned criminal offences prevented. The Constitution allows this too — provided, of course, that acts which a free society ought not to prohibit are not themselves defined as criminal offences.

During the past reporting year, two opposing views came up against each other: on the one hand, a desire to give law enforcement and security agencies additional powers and, on the other, a belief that even their existing powers are being abused and that there is no effective oversight. Based on the Chancellor’s inspection visits, it can be said that there is no systemic abuse. As in any field of work, and in human life more generally, mistakes and disagreements can occur. A society in which no one ever gets anything wrong is simply unimaginable. The Chancellor commends the authorities inspected for their openness to cooperation and for the improvements they have made.

The growing dependence of people on technology — to the point where human responsibility and the ability to explain and correct decisions are lost — calls for very careful consideration and will probably also require scrutiny by the Supreme Court. People must remain in control of technology, not the other way round. Not everything that is technologically possible is necessary or right. Unfortunately, this is sometimes forgotten in practice.

At times, a technological solution has already been purchased before it becomes clear that there is no lawful way to use it. This is why it has repeatedly been necessary to explain that not a penny of taxpayers' money should be spent on restricting fundamental rights more extensively than before until a law authorising the restriction is in place.

Where justified, artificial intelligence should be used when decisions are made about people's rights and obligations. The Chancellor and her advisers have already carried out their first inspection visits to authorities using artificial intelligence. The approach is not to make an issue where none exists, but to assess risks sensibly and on their merits. The Constitution requires public authorities to use artificial intelligence only in ways that do not violate fundamental rights. The state remains responsible, and people must always have a genuine opportunity to challenge a decision made by a machine. And that challenge must be meaningful: the ability and capacity to review automated decisions must be preserved, as must the courage to correct them when necessary.

During the reporting year, it was also repeatedly necessary to recall that a law is, in essence, an agreement about what is permitted and what is prohibited, and about how rights and obligations are allocated. All major strands of opinion and interest are represented in the Riigikogu. In Estonia's consensus-based democracy, these views and interests must be weighed against one another and a solution sought that the majority considers best.

A good agreement is one that the people bound by it can understand. And those people are not only the members of the Riigikogu, but everyone who must comply with the law. Unfortunately, there are more and more laws which leave the reader unsure who is required to do what. The law and its explanatory memorandum are often treated as though they were one and the same. It is even said that this does not matter because the explanatory memorandum can simply be amended or supplemented. Or that, instead of being laid down by law, rights and obligations can be determined through development plans, guidelines, road maps or other documents.

Fundamental rights may be restricted only based on clear provisions of law. The law itself must make clear what is permitted and what is prohibited. Explanatory memoranda have often — presumably with the help of large language models — grown beyond reasonable bounds. Their purpose should be to help explain, through practical examples, what effect a law will have and what the new rules will change in people’s lives.

All public authorities are struggling with the proliferation of AI-generated text. Complaints have already been received about officials who ask for documents produced with the help of AI to be presented briefly and clearly. Estonia’s legal landscape has also been enriched by a court ruling that placed responsibility for AI-generated falsehoods on the complainant.

A person’s concern is easier to understand when they set it out briefly and simply, in their own words. Neither the courts, officials nor the Chancellor and her advisers need pages of AI-generated text in which relevant and irrelevant points, facts and inventions are mixed together — topped off by everything the AI thinks the official ought to say in response.

Everyone — including the Chancellor and her advisers — must quickly learn to use AI in ways that make our work faster and better. We need to learn how to build agents and how to give large language models well-designed tasks. Responsibility and creative thinking, however, must remain with people.

I hope you enjoy reading the report!

Ülle Madise

Chancellor of Justice

International Cooperation

The work of the Chancellor of Justice is not confined to matters within Estonia but is also closely linked to international cooperation. The protection of children’s rights, the prevention of ill-treatment, safeguarding the rights of people with disabilities and the promotion of human rights more broadly are all guided by shared values and international commitments that Estonia has undertaken. The Chancellor must therefore not only monitor compliance with these principles in Estonia but also report to international organisations on how Estonia is meeting its obligations.

Challenges relating to the protection of rights and human rights are not unique to any one country but affect societies more broadly — whether they concern children's mental health, the protection of personal data and privacy, the treatment of people in closed institutions, accessibility or the protection of vulnerable groups. Cooperation with other chancellors of justice, ombudsmen and human rights institutions helps to improve understanding of these issues, compare practices in different countries and strengthen the Chancellor's work. A strong and independent Chancellor of Justice helps uphold the rule of law, where power is balanced, and helps make Estonia a fairer, more caring and better country for its people.

Since 2001, the Chancellor has been a member of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI). The Institute brings together more than 200 national and regional ombudsmen from over a hundred countries worldwide. The Chancellor is also a member of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), the European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO), the International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF), the Independent Police Complaints Authorities' Network (IPCAN), the Council of Europe's network of National Preventive Mechanisms, and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) network of ombuds institutions and human rights bodies.

In the spring, Margit Sarv, Head of Human Rights, was appointed as the alternate member representing Estonia on the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Andres Aru, Head of the Children's and Youth Rights Department at the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, and Ksenia Žurakovskaja-Aru, Senior Adviser in the Inspection Visits Department, are members of Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE). Andres Aru also continued his second term as a member of the ENOC Bureau. Several of the Chancellor's advisers participate in thematic working groups of ENNHRI and other international organisations.

Tasks Related to European Union Law

European Union rules increasingly concern areas in which the protection of fundamental rights is particularly important, such as equal treatment, the use of artificial intelligence, migration and asylum procedures, and the use of European Union funds. This has brought additional work for the Chancellor in the areas of supervision, international cooperation and the promotion of fundamental rights.

It is important that ombuds institutions and national human rights institutions are consulted at an early stage and in a meaningful way when plans are made at European Union level to assign them new tasks or expect a greater contribution from them. When new obligations are being considered, account must be taken of the independence and existing functions of these institutions, so that additional responsibilities do not hinder them in carrying out their core role. Adequate resources must also be provided for any new tasks assigned to them.

Independent Monitoring of Screening and Asylum Procedures

The Riigikogu amended § 1 of the Chancellor of Justice Act by adding a provision under which, from 12 June 2026, the Chancellor performs the functions of the independent monitoring mechanism provided for in Article 10 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council (the Screening Regulation) and Article 43(4) of Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 (the Asylum Procedure Regulation). The amendment is linked to the implementation of the European Union's migration and asylum rules and is intended to ensure that people's fundamental rights are respected during screening and the asylum border procedure. Additional resources have also been allocated to the Chancellor for carrying out this new task.

The Chancellor will monitor how screening and asylum procedures are conducted at the border. This will involve regular on-site inspection visits, including unannounced visits, examination of documents and, where necessary, recommendations on how procedures can be improved.

The new task also entails increased international cooperation and reporting. The monitoring of fundamental rights in screening and asylum procedures is of interest to several European Union institutions and agencies, including the European Commission, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). It is also of interest to other international organisations, such as the United Nations and the OSCE, which monitor how issues relating to human rights, migration, asylum and the prevention of ill-treatment are addressed.

European Union Funds

In relation to European Union funds, the Chancellor helps to ensure that funding conditions and their application are lawful, clear and respect people's fundamental rights.

Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council requires Member States to respect fundamental rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union when implementing the Funds. Annex III to the same Regulation provides for monitoring committees to receive information about possible non-compliance of operations supported by the Funds with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as complaints concerning compliance with the Charter and the Convention. The Chancellor regularly provides the monitoring committees with overviews of violations identified and recommendations made on that basis. Where a complaint has been received, the relevant matter is added to the agenda of the monitoring committee meeting.

For example, at the end of 2025, the Chancellor received a petition concerning an application for a grant to renovate an apartment building and install a lift. The Estonian Business and Innovation Agency (EIS) had explained to the apartment association that the installation of a lift required the consent of all apartment owners.

The Chancellor noted that the legislation governing the grant does not specify whether the consent of all apartment owners is required or whether a majority vote is sufficient. This is a matter for the apartment association to resolve in accordance with the Apartment Ownership and Apartment Associations Act. At the same time, before awarding a grant, EIS must verify that the apartment association is entitled to apply for it, including whether a duly adopted decision of the association is in place. EIS must also make sure that there is no risk of subsequent disputes preventing the grant from being used for its intended purpose. If the decision does not meet the applicable requirements or is legally questionable, EIS may refuse to award the grant or recover a grant already awarded.

At the beginning of 2026, the Chancellor received a petition asking her to assess whether EIS had acted in accordance with the principles of good administration. EIS had retroactively amended the decision approving the petitioner’s grant application by adding an obligation to ensure that the assets needed to achieve the objective of the project were retained and used for their intended purpose for at least three years after the final payment for the project (the so-called durability requirement). As challenge proceedings were already pending in the matter, the Chancellor did not examine the petition, but explained to the petitioner the options for challenging EIS’s decision and the principles governing the application of the durability requirement.

The Chancellor was also asked whether it is lawful for apartment building reconstruction grants to be available only to apartment associations, meaning that apartment buildings where no association has been established cannot apply for a grant. The Chancellor found no violation in this case.

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is an important basis for the Chancellor's work in constitutional review proceedings, ombudsman proceedings and awareness-raising activities. Over the past twenty years, the Chancellor has referred to the Charter in 62 published opinions. Most often, the Charter has been relevant in ombudsman proceedings concerning the protection of fundamental rights, for example, in matters involving freedom of assembly, good administration and the prohibition of discrimination. The Chancellor has also relied on the Charter in constitutional review proceedings, including in opinions submitted to the Supreme Court concerning freedom of religion, the right to effective legal protection and elections to the European Parliament.

Raising awareness of the principles of the Charter is also important. The Office of the Chancellor of Justice has addressed issues relating to the Charter in academic publications, including the book *Human Rights*, prepared at the initiative of the Office, as well as in legal scholarship.

The Chancellor cooperates with the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, which serves as Estonia's contact point for the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, primarily through the exchange of information. As the courts have the primary role in overseeing compliance with the Charter when European Union law is applied, case-law is also an important consideration in the Chancellor's work. Civil society also contributes to raising public awareness, including the Estonian Human Rights Centre.

European Union Artificial Intelligence Act

In the field of artificial intelligence and digital public services, the Chancellor's role is to ensure that new technologies serve people and do not undermine their fundamental rights. The Chancellor assesses the activities of public authorities from the perspective of legality, fundamental rights and freedoms, and good administration. The Chancellor has therefore drawn attention to the transparency of machine-learning-based solutions and to the need to protect people's privacy both when cameras are used in public spaces and when very high-

resolution orthophotos are published.

The Chancellor has not been designated as an authority under Article 77 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the Artificial Intelligence Act. Such a function would not be compatible with the Chancellor's independent constitutional role and could create a conflict of roles in relation to the market surveillance authority, whose activities are themselves subject to scrutiny by the Chancellor. Moreover, the Chancellor's existing mandate allows her to assess digital solutions used by public authorities more broadly than Article 77 of the Artificial Intelligence Act provides for.

Equal Treatment Directives

The Chancellor helps to safeguard the principle of equal treatment in Estonia by ensuring that people are not treated differently without justification. The Chancellor's independent and impartial constitutional role enables her to assess equal treatment issues both in constitutional review proceedings and when resolving petitions. The Chancellor also conducts conciliation proceedings in discrimination disputes between persons in private law.

The Chancellor does not represent people before the courts or initiate strategic litigation, functions envisaged for equality bodies by Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499 and Directive (EU) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Within her existing mandate, however, the Chancellor can help to ensure that the principles of equal treatment are better upheld in the activities of both public authorities and persons in private law. It is planned to confer the powers to represent people before the courts and initiate strategic litigation on the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.

An overview of the Chancellor's activities in this field can be found in the chapter 'Equal Treatment'.

International Visitors

During the reporting year, the Chancellor hosted ombudsmen and commissioners from several countries, as well as judges, officials and representatives of international organisations.

In September, the Chancellor's advisers met online with advisers from the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud for Scrutiny of the Public Administration to discuss how to oversee public services that use artificial intelligence algorithms. In May, the Chancellor discussed the

same topic with advisers from the Finnish Parliamentary Ombudsman.

In January, the Chancellor welcomed Milan Antonijević, Serbia’s Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. They exchanged experiences on promoting equal treatment and preventing discrimination.

In April, the Chancellor and the Dutch National Ombudsman jointly organised a workshop in Tallinn focusing on the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. Advisers from the ombuds institutions of the Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Poland took part in the discussions. The meeting addressed the instrumentalisation of migration, the practical impact of the Pact, and issues related to establishing independent monitoring mechanisms.

In May, the Chancellor met Adam Bodnar, former Polish Ombudsman and current member of the Polish Senate.

In cooperation with the Supreme Court, the Chancellor hosted judges from several countries during the reporting year. The meetings provided an opportunity to introduce the Chancellor’s constitutional role and to discuss issues relating to the administration of justice, digital solutions and the protection of fundamental rights. In September, the Chancellor welcomed Dietmar Striegan, Director of the Weiden Labour Court in Germany. Also in September, the Chancellor hosted judges from France, Czechia, Italy, Romania and Germany as part of the Exchange Programme of the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN). In October, a delegation of Austrian judicial trainees visited the Chancellor. In May, the Chancellor met Renate Philipp of Germany’s Federal Administrative Court. Among the topics discussed were environmental law, freedom of expression and issues arising from the coronavirus crisis.

Meetings with representatives of international organisations and European institutions provided opportunities to exchange views on the rule of law, fundamental rights, migration, civic space and the prevention of ill-treatment.

In October, the Chancellor’s advisers met with the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). The main topics of the meeting were the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, and the protection of victims.

In November, the Chancellor met Christophe Kamp, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. The discussion focused on the protection of the rights of national minorities, integration and social cohesion.

In December, the Chancellor received Grigorios Tsioukas, Deputy Head of the Fundamental Rights Office of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and Małgorzata Siekierzyńska, Estonia Desk Officer. The meeting focused on the protection of fundamental rights in border and migration procedures and the role of Frontex in monitoring fundamental rights. Frontex officials also visited the Chancellor in July.

In March, the Chancellor held a virtual meeting with officials from the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers in connection with the preparation of the European Commission’s 2026 Rule of Law Report.

In May, the Chancellor’s advisers met online with Martin Zinkler, the Estonia rapporteur of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT). The annual informal meeting addressed the prevention of ill-treatment at national level and the monitoring of places of detention. Particular attention was given to the organisation and supervision of psychiatric care.

Also in May, the Chancellor welcomed Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, together with his delegation. The main topics of the visit were support for Ukraine, holding Russia to account, and democratic security.

In June, the Chancellor’s advisers took part in an OECD interview as part of its review of civic space. The discussion focused on equal treatment, the prohibition of discrimination and safeguards for people at risk.

At the end of August, the Chancellor met advisers to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

The Chancellor also received delegations of officials, experts and study groups from several countries. In September, Jacqueline Bernhardt, Minister for Justice, Equality and Consumer Protection of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Kathrin Wahlmann, Minister of Justice of Lower Saxony, visited the Chancellor with their respective delegations. Both visits focused on digital solutions and the use of artificial intelligence in the justice sector.

In December and May, the Chancellor met delegations from Ukraine to discuss issues relating to equality and the prevention of corruption.

In January, a delegation of Moldovan officials visited the Chancellor, with the visit focusing on data protection.

In June, Master’s students in public management from the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria in Linz visited the Chancellor. They were introduced to the Chancellor’s role in Estonian society, the protection of the rights of vulnerable people, and the impact of the digitalisation of public services on the Chancellor’s work.

In July, the Chancellor welcomed the French Ambassador, and in August representatives of the Norwegian Embassy.

Key Visits Abroad

During the reporting year, the Chancellor and her advisers took part in several international meetings, conferences and training events. Some of these related to the Chancellor’s participation in the work of international cooperation organisations and networks. At the same time, the Chancellor and her advisers are increasingly invited to contribute as experts and share Estonia’s experience in protecting fundamental rights, preventing ill-treatment, safeguarding children’s rights, developing the digital state and other areas related to the Chancellor’s work.

In October, the Chancellor and the Head of International Relations and Organisational Development attended a conference in Valletta marking the 30th anniversary of the institution of the Maltese Ombudsman. The conference focused on good administration and the role of the ombudsman in challenging times. The Chancellor gave a presentation on the role of the ombudsman in the digital and artificial intelligence age.

Also in October, the annual meeting of Nordic and Baltic ombudsmen and chancellors of justice was held, this time in Vilnius. Estonia was represented by the Chancellor, the Head of International Relations and Organisational Development, and advisers from the Inspection Visits Department. Discussions focused on how ombuds institutions can combine their different functions, problems in places of detention, and how conciliation and mediation could be used more extensively in ombudsman work.

In November, the Chancellor and the Head of International Relations and Organisational Development attended the annual conference of the European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO) in Brussels. Among the issues discussed was how simplifying regulation may weaken the

protection of people’s fundamental rights. The Chancellor also moderated a discussion on this topic. In January, the Head of International Relations and Organisational Development attended a cooperation meeting of ENO liaison officers in Málaga.

In March, the Chancellor and the Head of International Relations and Organisational Development attended a high-level conference of ombuds institutions and national human rights institutions organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The conference focused on safeguarding democracy; freedom of expression, opinion and assembly; and the role of ombuds institutions at a time when democratic processes are affected by foreign interference, the spread of disinformation, weakening checks and balances, and pressure on public debate. The discussions also addressed youth participation and the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

International cooperation placed considerable emphasis on migration, asylum and detention. In April, the Chancellor and the Head of the Inspection Visits Department attended a high-level meeting in Riga organised by the Latvian Ombudsman to discuss the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. In June, they attended a conference on the Pact in Rotterdam organised by the Dutch National Ombudsman. Among other topics, the conference examined how independent monitoring of migration and border procedures should operate. The Chancellor presented Estonia’s experience.

Advisers from the Inspection Visits Department took part in several training events and working meetings concerning conditions of detention and the prevention of ill-treatment. In December, an adviser from the Department attended Council of Europe training in Paris focusing on the procedural rights of suspects and accused persons held in pre-trial detention and on monitoring conditions of detention. In February, an adviser to the Chancellor attended a workshop in Oslo organised by the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), which examined the prevention of ill-treatment of people receiving psychiatric care. In May, a Senior Adviser from the Inspection Visits Department attended a meeting in Vienna on protecting the rights of persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities in the criminal justice system.

Close cooperation within the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) continued in the field of children’s and young people’s rights. In September, the Head of the Children’s and Youth Rights Department attended ENOC’s annual meeting and conference in Bucharest and also took part in a meeting of the ENOC Bureau. In February, he attended a meeting of the ENOC Bureau in Brussels, as well as meetings with a Vice-President of the

European Parliament and representatives of Eurochild. The discussions concerned the protection of children’s rights at European level and opportunities for cooperation between children’s ombuds institutions.

In October, the Head of the Children’s and Youth Rights Department attended a congress on children’s rights in Vilnius focusing on protecting children from violence. His presentation addressed violence against children in sport and other hobby activities. In January, he attended a seminar in Vienna organised by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, ENOC and Eurochild, which focused on child protection systems and child participation. In June, an adviser from the Children’s and Youth Rights Department attended the ENOC Spring Seminar in Oslo, where the topics included protecting children from violence, children’s rights in the digital environment and child-friendly justice.

At meetings related to the work of the national human rights institution, the Chancellor was represented by the Head of Human Rights. In September, she attended a meeting of heads of national human rights institutions organised by the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) in Brussels, where she spoke about the budgetary autonomy of human rights institutions. In November, she attended the ENNHRI General Assembly in Brussels and, in December, a European Commission conference marking the 25th anniversary of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

In February, the Head of Human Rights travelled to Geneva for the Pre-session of the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), where she spoke during the discussion on Estonia. In March, she attended the annual meeting of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and the ENNHRI General Assembly in Geneva. The meetings addressed the independence of national human rights institutions, their role in protecting human rights and their cooperation with international organisations.

In September, the Head of Human Rights, the Head of International Relations and Organisational Development, and advisers to the Chancellor met representatives of the Finnish Human Rights Centre and ombuds institutions, as well as researchers studying radicalisation, in Helsinki. They discussed how radicalised attitudes towards gender roles and equality can affect the protection of fundamental rights. The meetings were held as part of the ENNHRI Small Grants project ‘Addressing Radicalization of Gender Views’.

In October, the Senior Adviser on Social Rights attended Council of Europe meetings in Edinburgh marking the tenth anniversary of the Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights and discussing the protection of the socio-economic rights of people living in rural areas in Europe. In June, the Head of Disability Rights attended a training session of the Ombudsman Learning Academy in Athens, organised within the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), which explored how ombuds institutions can better reach vulnerable groups and help address their concerns.

The Chancellor's advisers also attended meetings on judicial cooperation, intelligence oversight and countering disinformation. In December, a Senior Adviser to the Chancellor attended a meeting of the European Judicial Network in civil and commercial matters in Brussels concerning the application of the Maintenance Regulation. In June, an adviser from the Law Enforcement Affairs Department attended a European conference on intelligence oversight organised by the German Bundestag in Berlin. In the same month, the Chancellor's Head of Communications attended the NHRI Academy in Zagreb, organised by ENNHRI and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which examined patterns in the spread of disinformation and ways of identifying and countering it.

International Reporting

During the reporting year, the Chancellor contributed to the preparation of several international reports. Among other things, she submitted her views to the European Commission for its annual Rule of Law Report on the situation in European Union Member States. The Chancellor also contributed to the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) report *State of the Rule of Law in Europe*, which complements the European Commission's report on the same subject. In addition, the Chancellor contributed to the European Commission's report on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

In the autumn, as part of the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Chancellor submitted a report on Estonia's fulfilment of its obligations under UN conventions. She also submitted a report on Estonia's implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention.

In the spring, the Chancellor contributed to a report by the UN Secretary-General on the role of ombudsman institutions in promoting and protecting human rights, good governance and the rule of law. The report is prepared pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 79/177 and considers, among other things, the contribution of ombudsman institutions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16.

The Chancellor also contributed to a number of thematic reports and surveys concerning, among other issues, the protection of national minorities; the situation of human rights institutions and human rights defenders; the application of European Union law in ombudsman proceedings; human rights oversight of counter-terrorism measures; efforts to combat racism and intolerance; climate justice; and the coordination of international reporting at national level.

The Chancellor also responded to several requests for information from international organisations, ombuds institutions in other countries and university students.

ENNHRI Regranting Programme

During the reporting year, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice participated in the regranting programme of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), which supports cooperation between national human rights institutions on important human rights issues.

A joint project by the Estonian, Latvian and Finnish national human rights institutions focused on the radicalisation of views on gender. As part of the project, a study visit was made to Finland, where participants met representatives of the Finnish Human Rights Centre and ombuds institutions, as well as researchers studying radicalisation. An international seminar was also held in Tallinn, and articles on the subject were published on the blog of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice's *Human Rights* book.

Office of the Chancellor of Justice

Under § 36 of the Chancellor of Justice Act, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice is the agency that serves the Chancellor of Justice as a constitutional institution. As head of the Office, the Chancellor determines its structure and list of service positions. The day-to-day administrative work of the Office is managed by the Director of the Office.

During the reporting year, the Office employed 44 full-time officials and employees. The number of officials and employees has remained stable over the past ten years, ranging between 39 and 45. New positions have been created as new duties have been assigned to the Chancellor. Around two-thirds of the Office’s staff are women; the youngest member of staff is 24 and the oldest 76. The gender pay gap is −1, meaning that a woman in a comparable position earns slightly more than a man.

The Office of the Chancellor of Justice is a sought-after internship for law students. Each year, 8–10 future lawyers undertake placements at the Office for shorter or longer periods.

The Office has seven subject-based departments. The Legal Service deals with letters and applications that fall outside the Chancellor’s mandate. Support services for the Office, such as accounting and document management, are provided by the General Department. In addition, several cross-office subject leads report directly to the Chancellor, including the Head of Disability Rights, the Adviser on Artificial Intelligence and the Head of Human Rights.

The Chancellor’s duties are exhaustively set out in § 1 of the Chancellor of Justice Act. Most recently, on 3 June 2026, the Riigikogu amended the list of the Chancellor’s duties by adding point 12:

‘The Chancellor of Justice performs the functions of the independent monitoring mechanism provided for in Article 10 of Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817 (OJ L, 2024/1356, 22.5.2024), and in Article 43(4) of Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common procedure for international protection in the Union and repealing Directive 2013/32/EU (OJ L, 2024/1348, 22.5.2024).’

Compared with institutions in other European countries, the Estonian Chancellor of Justice is unique. In other countries, constitutional review, ombudsman functions, the promotion of the rights of children and young people, and similar tasks are generally entrusted to separate institutions. In Estonia, all these roles are combined within a single institution. Finland, for example, has a separate Chancellor of Justice, Parliamentary Ombudsman together with a separate national human rights institution, Ombudsman for Children and Intelligence Ombudsman. The mandate of the Estonian Chancellor of Justice is among the strongest in Europe and internationally. Most institutions responsible for protecting and promoting human rights do not have the status of an independent constitutional institution.

During the reporting year, the Chancellor received a total of 6,313 written submissions for consideration. Based on the submissions received, the Chancellor opened 2,901 substantive cases. *(Editor's note: A single application may give rise to several cases if it concerns multiple issues.)* A total of 3,514 other types of applications and communications were received. These included requests concerning matters in which the Chancellor has no authority to intervene. In such cases, the applicant is normally sent a written reply and, where possible, guidance on what further steps they can take to protect their rights.

Compared with the previous reporting period (2024/2025), the number of applications, requests and complaints requiring substantive proceedings increased by 15 per cent. The workload has been growing at this pace since 2022 and has doubled over the past ten years. This reflects on the one hand the standing of the Chancellor and her Office as a credible avenue for resolving complaints, as well as the Chancellor's public profile and the trust placed in the institution, and, on the other, the continuing growth of legal awareness in society.

The Chancellor's budget in the 2026 State Budget, including the supplementary budget, is €3.82 million. In terms of both budget and staff numbers, the Office is one of Estonia's smallest state authorities.

The Office is in a historic building at Kohtu 8 on Toompea in Tallinn, managed by Riigi Kinnisvara AS. Renovation works carried out at the beginning of this century and again in 2019 sought to restore the building's original appearance and preserve the 1930s interior in some of its rooms. In recent years, the halls of the Office have regularly hosted solo exhibitions by contemporary Estonian artists. By prior arrangement, visitors interested in culture and history can also tour the building.

The Year in the Media

Speeches and Presentations

Speech by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise at the plenary session of judges, 28 May 2026

Presentation by Senior Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Atko-Madis Tammar, "Speech Therapist – Creating Equal Opportunities", at a webinar of the Estonian Association of Speech Therapists, 6 April 2026

Speech by the Chancellor of Justice at the General Assembly of the Estonian Bar Association, 31 March 2026

Address by the Chancellor of Justice at the 31st Anniversary Conference of the Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, “Care. All on Board?”, 23 January 2026

Address by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise at the Solidarity Concert “Ajakaja”, 4 December 2025

Welcome address by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise at the recognition event “Märkan Eeskuju 2025” at the Estonian Knighthood House, 11 November 2025

Presentation by Senior Adviser Atko-Madis Tammar at the Education Innovation Conference “A Supported Teacher Supports the Student”, 29 October 2025

Presentation by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise at the conference “Upholding Good Governance in Challenging Times. The Role of the Ombudsman”, Malta, 15–16 October 2025

Opening address by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise, “Preventive State and the Constitution”, at AML / FinCrime & Tech Conference 2025 at Swissôtel Tallinn, 1 October 2025

Presentation by the Chancellor of Justice at the Estonian Lawyers’ Association conference “The Future of Justice: Reforms, Risks, and Regional Balance” at the Estonian Knighthood House, 26 September 2025

Presentation by the Chancellor of Justice, “Safety, Laziness and Responsibility – Finding the Balance”, at the Development Day of the Ministry of the Interior’s Area of Government at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, 18 September 2025

Interviews

Interview with the Chancellor of Justice in *Maaleht*, 25 June 2026

Chancellor of Justice on “Otse Postimehest”, 17 June 2026

Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Andres Aru on “Terevisioon” about the survey on young people’s hobby education, 1 June 2026

Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise on “First Studio”, 21 May 2026

Chancellor of Justice on the programme “Otse uudistemajast”, 29 April 2026

Chancellor of Justice on “Uudis+” on Tõnis Mölder’s parliamentary immunity, 14 April 2026

Chancellor of Justice on Kuku Radio’s programme “Kahe vahel”, 23 January 2026

Chancellor of Justice on “First Studio”, 27 November 2025

Interview with the Chancellor of Justice on Kuku Radio, 19 September 2025

Interview with the Chancellor of Justice in *Postimees*, 17 September 2025

Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Atko-Madis Tammar on Vikerraadio on the formation of ability-based classes, 5 September 2025

Articles

“Ülle Madise: Not Everything Possible is Necessarily Wise or Right”, published in *Edasi*, 12 February 2026

Article by Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Ksenia Žurakovskaja-Aru and co-authors Anneli Soo and Kaie Proode, “The Significance of Detention Conditions in Extradition Proceedings”, *Juridica*, No. 5, 2026

Article by Senior Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Liiri Oja, “The State Must Protect Privacy Also in the Age of Artificial Intelligence”, on ERR’s science news portal *Novaator*, 15 October 2025

Article by Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Kristi Paron, “PATIENT SAFETY DAY: The Quality of Communication Between Healthcare Professionals and Patients as a Guarantee of Patient Safety”, 17 September 2025

Article by Senior Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Atko-Madis Tammar, “Paper Cannot Bear the Burden of Responsibility Towards the Youth”, on the ERR news portal, 7 September 2025

Article by Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Helen Ojamaa-Muru and co-authors Kadi Luht-Kallas and Tarvi Ojala, “Processing of Location Data in the Transmission of Area-Based Public Warning Alerts. What Are the Legal Frameworks?”, *Juridica*, No. 5, 2025

Article by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise and Adviser to the Chancellor of Justice Aigi Kivioja in the Estonian Human Development Report: “Pupils’ Needs Are a Reality Schools Must Address”