

## Political Insight: The Cabinet of the Republic of Estonia

The parliamentary elections took place on March 5th in 2023. The Reform Party, the winner of the elections, Estonia200, both centre-right liberal parties and the Social Democrats held coalition talks for over a month and came to an agreement.

The new government of Estonia has 12 ministers in addition to the Reform Party chairwoman as Prime Minister. Kaja Kallas will head her third government as a Prime Minister. The Reform Party gets 7 ministerial posts, Estonia200 and Social Democrats 3 each. Estonia200 also got the position of the speaker of Riigikogu, Lauri Hussar, chairman of Estonia200 has been sworn in already.

Seven ministers are returning from the previous administration, either to the same role or to a new one. By gender, five of the ministers are women and eight are men, compared with seven women out of 15 in the preceding coalition.

In the European Parliament the Reform Party belongs to the Renew Group, the European party affiliation being the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats of Europe (ALDE). Estonia200 currently does not have any European affiliation. the Social Democrats belong to The Party of European Socialists (PES) and their MEP is member of the S&D Group in the European Parliament.

### Estonian Reform Party

Prime Minister **KAJA KALLAS** (45)



Chairwoman of the Estonian Reform Party. Has a MA degree in law, EMBA degree in economics. Attorney-at-law until 2011. Elected to the Riigikogu in 2011 (Head of Economic Committee), elected to the European Parliament in 2014, and elected again to the Riigikogu in 2019 (highest number of votes in Estonia).

Kaja Kallas is a strong advocate for a pro-European and reform-minded path. Her main issues of concern in politics involve national security, support to Ukraine and digitalization, she's also known by her expertise in renewable energy. While she was an active Member of the European Parliament, she issued a report on the Digital Single Market and was ranked as 15th most influential MEP by Politico. Kallas draws attention to the process for total transition to Estonian-language education as soon as possible.

Estonia's security has always been high on the agenda for the Reform Party and Kaja Kallas has proved this in the light of security crises. Since the beginning of the Russian terrorist war against Ukraine, Kallas has risen to be one of the leading voices in support for Ukraine in Europe and globally, often referred to as the current iron lady of world politics. Kallas has underlined that the most important tasks faced by the new Government are ensuring security, green transition, especially in the field of energy and cutting costs to ensure fiscal stability and low national debt Estonia is known and praised for. In the election campaign, one of the core

messages was to prevent the Centre Party (left-liberal, ALDE), Isamaa (conservative, centre-right, EPP) and EKRE (far-right conservative, ID) coalition to happen again.

Minister of Climate **KRISTEN MICHAL** (48)



A heavy weight among the Reform Party ranks, having joined already in 1996, Kristen Michal is one of the key figures in the party. He has a degree in public management and in law. From 2003 to 2011 Kristen was the secretary general of the Reform Party, prior to that he held several advisory positions in the party.

Kristen Michal started his parliamentary career already in 2004, in the 10<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu. He has held the positions of chairman (2014-15; 2016-17) and deputy chairman (2018-19) of the faction. In the last parliamentary term, he served as deputy chairman (2019-2021) and chairman (2021-2023) of the Economic Affairs committee. He is also member of the Tallinn city council, serving as the chairman of the faction. Kristen Michal has held two ministerial posts, 2011-2012 minister of justice and 2015-2016 minister of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure.

In the position of the new climate minister, Kristen Michal will hold the central role in transitioning Estonian economy and society into a new sustainability and green economy paradigm.

Minister of Defence **HANNO PEVKUR** (46)



Board member of the Reform Party. Hanno Pevkur has a MA degree in law. Worked at-law until 2003, when he became a member of local municipal council. Became an alternate member of the Riigikogu in 2007. Held the position of the Minister of Social Affairs (2009-2012), the Minister of Justice (2021-2014) and the Minister of the Interior (2014-2016). Was the Vice-Chairman (2014-2017) and Chairman of the Reform Party (2017). Before becoming the Minister

of Defence worked as a Vice-President of the Riigikogu.

Hanno Pevkur is most interested in issues relating welfare, the security and safety policy of Estonia. Pevkur is well known for his long-term experience in Estonian political field. As a returning minister in the same office, Hanno Pevkur will contribute to the continuation of the Estonian defence policy. One of the main challenges for Pevkur and the entire government, will be coming to an agreement with local communities in Estonia (Nursipalu and Soodla) on the expansion of the Defence Forces exercise fields that have caused turbulence both in the mentioned areas and in the media. Finding a just solution for the people who have to give up their homes, will be a tough nut to crack.

## Minister of Finance **Mart Vörklaev** (39)



Chairman of the Reform Party political group in Riigikogu in the last parliamentary term. Mart Vörklaev graduated Estonian University of Life Sciences in 2008 with a degree in geodesy. Prior to Riigikogu, he held several positions in Rae municipality, 2012-2019 being the mayor of the municipality and since 2019 member of the municipality council, vice-chairman. He is also representative in the European Committee of Regions and member of the board in the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities.

Mart Vörklaev joined the Reform Party in 2010 and is one of the central figures on the Reform Party's political bench from the newer generation.

## Minister of Social Protection **SIGNE RIISALO** (55)



Member of the Estonian Reform Party. Degree in social work. Has worked in several positions in social welfare and child protection field since 1993. Riisalo had been a long-serving social affairs ministry official, before entering politics. She first took up the role as a member of the parliament in 2019 as a substitute member, in 2023 she got elected herself with a very good result. Riisalo's work is characterized by bringing out welfare politics and stressing the importance of social issues.

Within her mandate in Kaja Kallas' first government she has experienced difficulties in terms of dealing with COVID19 crisis and receiving Ukrainian war refugees, in the second mandate she consolidated her position as a strong minister and thus will continue.

## Minister of Culture **Heidy Purga** (48)



Well-known radio and TV presenter and DJ prior to entering politics in 2014. Purga has a degree in electronic media and has worked long years as editor-in-chief and presenter in Radio 2. She joined the Reform Party in 2014 and was elected to Riigikogu in 2015 where she has served as deputy chairperson of the cultural affairs committee and as deputy chairperson of the Reform Party faction since 2021. She is also member of the Tallinn city council and member of the advisory board of Tallinn University.

For her Estonia's most valuable resource are its people, and she wants everyone to have an opportunity to realise their potential.

Minister of Justice **KALLE LAANET** (57)



Member of the Reform Party, minister of defence in Kaja Kallas' first government from 2021 to 2022. Laanet started his political career in the Estonian Centre Party (2005-2012), serving also as a minister of Interior from 2005 to 2007. Prior to his political engagements, he worked in law enforcement, his last position before becoming a minister in 2005 was the position of West Police Prefect. He is a law degree. In 2014 he joined the Reform Party.

Kalle Laanet was first elected to Riigikogu in 2007 and has served since. In the last parliamentary term, he served as deputy chairman of the national defence committee and as a deputy chairman of the anti-corruption select committee.

Regional policy and security policy are his core issues. Put in his own words, for Kalle it is important to stand for the stability of both national and international security, as well as to create a supportive business environment in rural areas to stop depopulation.

## **Eesti200 (Estonia200)**

Minister of Education and Research **KRISTINA KALLAS** (47)



One of the founders of Eesti200 back in 2018, serving as the chairperson until 2022 and currently holding in the position of a vice-chairperson.

Kristina has an academic background, she obtained PhD in political sciences in 2016. Her dissertation focused on ethno-political interplays between Estonia, Russia, and Estonian Russians. She has been a research fellow since 2016 at Narva College of the University of Tartu.

Prior to that she has worked as an acting director of the Narva College and the Institute of Baltic Studies and researcher and research fellow since 2001. Since 2015 she has served as the head of the supervisory board of Integration Foundation.

Given her prominent career in academia and her thorough understanding of the ethno-political interplays in Estonia, Kristina was an obvious choice for the position of Education and Research given the difficult tasks ahead. From one hand her task will be ensuring the sustainability of Estonian school system and find solutions to the chronic problems of teacher and financial means shortage and from the other hand, to manage the transition of Russian-speaking schools to Estonian-speaking curricula.

Minister of Economics and Information Technology **Tiit Riisalo** (56)



Tiit Riisalo was chief of staff in the office of the of President Kersti Kaljulaid from 2016 to 2021. Thereafter he worked as Ambassador-at-Large for Connectivity and from January 2023 as Executive Director at the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV). He has a degree in social sciences from the University in Tartu and he has worked and held several advisory and marketing related positions throughout his career.

Tiit Riisalo is another Eesti200 member who has been previously closely affiliated with Isamaa, though never a member. Tiit belonged to the closer circle of former PM Mart Laar and worked for the Isamaa party as their Secretary General from 2012 to 2015.

He is actively engaged in Estonian Defence League. Since 2015 he is also member of the Search and Rescue sea rescue team that fits well with his passion to sail across the world.

Minister of Foreign Affairs **MARGUS TSAHKNA** (46)



Vice-chairman of Eesti200, but surely not a newcomer in Estonian politics, on the contrary he will be one of the more experienced politicians in the new government. Margus joined the Pro Patria (Isamaa) party already in 2000, serving as the Secretary General from 2007 to 2010 and chairman of the party 2015-2017. In 2017 he attempted to lead the Isamaa party towards an open and less socially conservative track in which he failed and that caused his

exit.

Margus became member of Riigikogu already in 2007. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Riigikogu, he held the position of chairman and vice-Chairman of the Social Affairs committee. Tsahkna is a returning minister, having served twice, 2015-2016 as a Minister of Social Protection and 2016-2017 as a Minister of Defence.

Margus is known for his social engagement. He actively supports the Tartu Christian Adolescent Home and children, youth in need. In the summertime he used to spend a lot of time on the Tartu local market, selling his mothers strawberries and engaging with local people. Most recently, he worked in Semetron, one of the main suppliers of field hospitals to Ukraine.



## Social Democratic Party

Minister of the Interior **LAURI LÄÄNEMETS** (40)



Chairman of the Social Democratic Party since February 2022, and served as minister of interior also in the last government. Elected to the Riigikogu in 2019. Has a BA degree in recreation management. He is a reserve officer of the Defence League. Läänemets has previously been the mayor of Väätsa rural municipality and a member of Tallinn city council. He's a Scout leader, a defence ally, and he's been an assistant police officer.

Läänemets had to deal with the removal of the Soviet tank issues in Narva last year, during which the Social Democrats lost one of their central figures, Katri Raik, in Ida-Virumaa. Läänemets has positioned himself closer to the rural voter, on the outskirts of the usual social democrat electorate. The worries for the 2023 election outcome did not materialize and the social democrats actually did better than expected, backing Läänemets in his position as the party chairman.

Minister for Health **RIINA SIKKUT** (40)



Riina Sikkut is a returning minister, having served as a Minister of Economics and Communications since 2022 and as a Minister of Health and Labour 2018-2019. Riina is also deputy chairman of the Social Democratic Party. Riina is a valued expert in social and health policy. She graduated from the University of Tartu with a degree in economics and in 2010 obtained a master's degree in health policy from the University of London. Riina has worked as a health policy analyst and

programme manager at the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies and worked as a social and health policy adviser at the Strategy Bureau of the Government Office.

Sikkut is an experienced politician, who has proved herself both in health policy and in economics. It was an obvious choice for her to continue and pick up the position of her main expertise.

Minister of Regional and Rural Affairs **MADIS KALLAS** (41)



Another returning minister, though in a different position, he held the position of Minister of Environment in the last government. Having run for the Social Democrats in the 2019 elections, he joined the party officially in 2022.

Has been the mayor and deputy mayor of Kuressaare. Graduated from Tallinn University with a degree in physical education. Kallas was an athlete until 2008. After top sports, he has been active in Saaremaa, working, among other things, as chairman of the supervisory board of Kuressaare Hospital and head of the Saaremaa crisis committee. He has also worked as a project manager for the Health Insurance Fund and the Ministry of Social Affairs (digital health and vaccination).

As a Minister of Environment, he demonstrated skill and expertise, earning the respect in the house and on wider scale. In his own words, he wishes to live in a clean and green Estonia where the society understands that nature conservation gives us more healthy years and good living conditions for the generations to come.