



Resolution of the Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL) and the European Students' Union (ESU)

*On ensuring sustainable, legally protected, and politically independent funding
for higher education in Estonia*

Recognising that higher education is a cornerstone of a knowledge-based society, innovation, social mobility and inclusive growth, the Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL) and the European Students' Union (ESU) express serious concern over the persistent underfunding of Estonia's higher education sector, with its share of the GDP having fallen to around 1.1%.

While a 2022 strategy, in cooperation with the Council of Rectors of Estonian Universities, committed to increasing operational support for higher education by 15% for the years 2024–2026, but with this growth not being maintained beyond 2026. Moreover, recent discussions suggesting that up to 50% of operational funding could be allocated at the discretion of the minister raise serious concerns about the independence of higher education institutions. Such a structure would make core funding vulnerable to political considerations and undermine institutional autonomy; one of the key principles of democratic and high-quality education.

We share the view that to sustain quality, access and international attractiveness of Estonian higher education institutions, a more stable and predictable funding model is required.

We therefore call on the Government of the Republic of Estonia to adopt the following measures:

1. Legal framework for funding

- Amending existing legislation that anchors the state's minimum annual funding commitment to public higher education at a level aligned with sustainable practices (for example, a baseline of at

least 1.5 % of GDP, or a mechanism to adjust funding annually in relation to GDP, inflation and enrollment trends).

- Ensure the framework protects higher education funding from arbitrary cuts tied solely to electoral cycles or shifting short-term priorities, thereby enhancing institutional stability and long-term planning capacity.

2. Safeguard academic autonomy and institutional integrity

- Respect the autonomy of universities as enshrined in Estonian and European higher education principles, ensuring that decisions about teaching, research and institutional development remain in academic hands.
- Prevent concentration of financial control that could compromise academic freedom or create incentives for political loyalty instead of academic excellence.

3. Accessible, inclusive and high-quality higher education

- Prevent the introduction of tuition fees for full-time students studying in programmes in Estonian as a substitute for state funding shortfalls, as this risks reducing access and disproportionately affects students from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.
- Guarantee adequate scholarship and support resources for both Estonian and international students (including language courses, career services, and integration assistance) such that Estonia remains an attractive destination for global talent and supports retention of domestic graduates.

4. Stable institutional environment

- Enable higher education institutions to engage in strategic planning (for teaching, research, innovation, and internationalisation) based on predictable funding streams rather than ad hoc annual decisions.
- Involve students, academic staff, higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the formulation, monitoring and review of the funding framework to ensure it meets evolving educational and societal needs.

5. Commitment to international competitiveness and social cohesion

- By guaranteeing stable funding, Estonia positions itself to retain skilled graduates, attract international students, and contribute to innovation-led growth.
- A strong, publicly-funded higher education system supports equitable access, regional inclusion and social mobility, avoiding the risk that higher education becomes a privilege rather than a public common good.

The Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL), with the support of the European Students' Union (ESU), urges the Estonian government and parliament to adopt this resolution and translate the policy intent of secure funding into binding legal and financial commitments. Without such action, the higher education sector remains vulnerable to fluctuations in political will, undermining access, quality and international reputation. We stand ready to engage constructively in the implementation and monitoring of this framework.

Kinnitatud:

Eesti Üliõpilaskondade Liidu üldkoosolekul 22.11.2025

Euroopa Üliõpilasliidu üldkoosolekul 11.12.2025