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Minister

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(by email)

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RE: Invitation to Participate in SA-EU Policy Dialogue – Towards a Digital Twin Province: Building a Connected and Intelligent Asset Management Ecosystem

Hon Minister **Ms Liisa-Ly Pakosta**

1. INTRODUCTION: SA-EU DIALOGUE FACILITY AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The SA-EU Dialogue Facility has formed the backbone of structured partnership and policy exchange between the South African Government and European Union institutions since its inception in 2008. Operating within the framework of the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) and the Joint Action Plan of the SA-EU Strategic Partnership, the Facility strengthens bilateral cooperation through evidence-based policy dialogue, technical exchange, and collaborative knowledge development aligned with international best practice.

Through a consultative development process, the Western Cape Government – Department of Infrastructure has identified a strategically critical policy dialogue topic responding to urgent digital governance transformation needs while advancing mutual EU-South Africa digital rights, data interoperability, and transparent governance objectives. The dialogue "Towards a Digital Twin Province: Building a Connected and Intelligent Asset Management Ecosystem" has been developed as a priority initiative, reflecting South Africa's commitment to digital government, transparent data governance, and citizen-centric digital infrastructure management aligned with EU digital rights frameworks and South African governance modernisation priorities.

We are reaching out to the Estonian Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs (Justiits- ja Digiministeerium), as Estonia's strategic lead for digital government, data interoperability, digital rights protection, and transparent digital governance innovation,

to solicit your support and expertise in advancing this critical initiative. Estonia's pioneering role in developing comprehensive digital government frameworks, establishing citizen-centric digital governance systems, implementing transparent data management approaches, and demonstrating globally replicable digital state models makes Estonia an essential strategic partner for this dialogue. This initiative aligns directly with Estonia's mandate to support digital governance excellence and international digital cooperation.

2. PROPOSED DIALOGUE OVERVIEW

Dialogue Title: Towards a Digital Twin Province: Building a Connected and Intelligent Asset Management Ecosystem

Lead Applicant and Stakeholder Institution:

The Western Cape Government – Department of Infrastructure serves as the lead applicant and coordinating institution, with engagement from the Public Service Commission (PSC), which provides governance oversight and institutional accountability frameworks. The initiative specifically addresses digital governance, data interoperability, and transparent institutional frameworks for digital infrastructure management.

The Challenge:

South Africa's public sector faces critical challenges in digital governance coherence: multiple government agencies maintain separate digital systems with limited integration, data governance frameworks remain fragmented, and institutional accountability for digital infrastructure management is unclear. These governance deficits—combined with legitimate citizen concerns about data security, privacy, and transparency in government digital systems—limit the effectiveness and legitimacy of digital infrastructure initiatives.

Estonia has successfully developed comprehensive digital government frameworks emphasizing transparency, citizen trust, data security, interoperability, and accountable governance. Estonia's e-Governance principles and institutional approaches to digital state transformation provide proven models directly applicable to South African governance modernisation and digital infrastructure challenges.

Dialogue Objectives:

The dialogue seeks to facilitate knowledge exchange and technical cooperation between South African and Estonian stakeholders to co-develop digital governance frameworks emphasizing transparency, interoperability, data security, and citizen engagement. The initiative specifically aims to:

- Develop coherent digital governance frameworks: Create integrated policy and institutional approaches emphasizing transparent, accountable digital infrastructure management
- Advance data interoperability and security: Establish standards and governance protocols ensuring secure, transparent data exchange and system integration
- Ensure digital rights protection: Develop frameworks protecting citizen privacy, data security, and transparent use of digital infrastructure data
- Support institutional capacity: Build government capacity for effective digital governance implementation and maintenance

- Learn from Estonian digital governance: Benchmark Estonia's digital state model, e-Governance principles, and transparent governance frameworks
- Enable citizen engagement: Develop frameworks enabling citizen participation, transparency, and trust in digital infrastructure governance

Expected Outcomes:

- A comprehensive Digital Governance Framework emphasising transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement, incorporating data security protocols, interoperability standards, and institutional accountability models
- Data governance and security protocols aligned with Estonian digital governance standards and EU digital rights frameworks
- Institutional capacity-building frameworks for government digital governance implementation
- Implementation roadmap with actions for transparent digital governance establishment

Dialogue Activities:

The dialogue will be structured around policy research on digital governance models, co-design workshops developing governance frameworks emphasizing transparency and accountability, technical roundtables on data interoperability and security, a study tour to Estonia to observe e-Government systems and transparent governance implementation, and policy validation and dissemination workshops.

3. REQUESTED SUPPORT FROM ESTONIAN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND DIGITAL AFFAIRS

South Africa seeks the participation and expertise of the Estonian Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs to enrich this dialogue through non-financial support mechanisms. Your contribution would focus on sharing expertise and experience with South African partners and institutions through:

- Ministry expert participation in virtual digital governance discussions: Deploying Estonian Ministry experts in e-Governance, digital rights protection, data interoperability, and transparent government to participate in workshops, providing perspectives on Estonian digital state model, governance frameworks emphasizing transparency and citizen engagement, data security approaches, and institutional coordination models.
- Access to Estonian digital governance resources: Facilitating access to Estonia's digital governance frameworks, e-Government guidelines, data interoperability standards, digital rights protection protocols, case studies of e-Government implementation, and operational documentation from Estonia's transparent governance systems.
- Study tour hosting and facilitation: Welcoming South African delegations to Estonia to observe e-Government systems in operation, engage with Ministry officials and e-Government practitioners, understand institutional approaches to

transparent digital governance, and learn about citizen engagement in digital government. All costs will be covered by SA-EU Dialogue Facility.

- Ministry expert participation digital governance framework discussions: Supporting development of South African governance frameworks aligned with Estonian principles adapted to South African institutional and cultural contexts.
- Ministry expert participation institutional accountability discussions: Providing guidance on institutional arrangements ensuring transparent, accountable digital infrastructure governance.
- Ministry expert participation ongoing digital governance cooperation: Establishing mechanisms for sustained consultation on transparent digital governance, data interoperability, and citizen-centric digital infrastructure management.

This collaboration is envisioned as a partnership leveraging Estonia's digital governance leadership to support South Africa's transparent, accountable digital infrastructure development.

4. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This dialogue supports EU-South Africa strategic frameworks on digital governance, digital rights, transparency, and democratic accountability in digital infrastructure.

5. INVITATION TO DISCUSS AND CONFIRM PARTICIPATION

We would welcome the opportunity to engage in a virtual discussion with the Estonian Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs to explore its interest in this dialogue.

6. FORMAL LETTER OF SUPPORT (PENDING AGREEMENT)

Should the Ministry agree to participate, we would request a formal letter of support confirming its interest to engage with South African partners on this initiative by no later than 25 November 2025.

Yours sincerely,



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