

Estonians hold 'funeral march' for science over govt funding

May 30 2019

Estonian scientists on Thursday held a funeral march for research after the tech-savvy Baltic state's government reneged on a promise to increase science funding in next year's budget.

Several hundred protesters carried funeral wreaths, flowers and candles to the seat of government in the capital Tallinn and the ministry of education and science in the second city of Tartu.

"Abandoning Estonian science and research is something that will affect the future of each and every one of us directly," read a statement on the Facebook page for the march, which was created by research scientist Mario Kadastik.

"If Prime Minister Juri Ratas and his cabinet don't honour the pledge, they should resign," said the page for the "funeral march for a research-led Estonia."

Academic unions have announced warning strikes in the two cities for June 5, while student unions urged graduation ceremony attendees to wear black ribbons as a symbol of mourning for Estonian science.

Since last month, Ratas has led a three-party [coalition government](#) consisting of his left-leaning Centre Party, the conservative Isamaa and the far-right EKRE.

In December, an agreement to raise [science funding](#) from 0.71 percent

of [gross domestic product](#) (GDP) to 1 percent was signed by scientists, businesses and most parties—with the exception of the EKRE, which claimed the goal was not ambitious enough.

According to data released this year by the EU's statistics office Eurostat, Estonia spends less than the bloc's average on research and development.

The three parties in power made the pledge again when they were forming their coalition government earlier this year.

But on Monday the [government](#) announced it would make cuts in the next budget, postponing a number of investments and maintaining the current level of science funding.

It decided at the same time to raise pensions and cut the excise tax on alcohol by 25 percent.

Education Minister Mailis Reps on Tuesday expressed disappointment regarding the decision and called on scientists to show disapproval.

President Kersti Kaljulaid warned against the decline of education, [science](#) and business and promised to hold a meeting between all the concerned parties.

Dubbed E-stonia, the small eurozone member of just 1.3 million people is known for being a trailblazer in technology, notably having pioneered e-voting in 2005 and playing host to NATO's cyber defence centre.

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