

The Estonian Non-Profit Nimistu Enables Cross-Border Traceability of Foreign Owners of Estonian Companies

The free public-interest registry now identifies cross-border company ownership that national registers cannot, using open data from OpenCorporates.

TALLINN, ESTONIA, July 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Nimistu MTÜ, the Estonian non-profit operating the free public company registry nimistu, has introduced a feature that addresses a major gap in public company data: Tracking the ownership of Estonian companies across national borders. Using data from OpenCorporates, the world's largest open company database, nimistu now links foreign owners and parent companies of Estonian businesses to their official records abroad, including jurisdiction, registration number, and a direct link to the source.

Previously, efforts to identify the ultimate owners of Estonian companies often stalled at the border. The Estonian Business Register typically lists only a foreign owner's name and country, without an identifier or link. This left journalists, compliance professionals, researchers, and citizens unable to determine which specific company abroad was referenced, whether it still exists, or its current name. In many cases, this missing information was the most critical link in the ownership chain.

This issue is especially significant in Estonia, which has positioned itself as a digital gateway to Europe and, through initiatives like e-Residency, hosts a high proportion of companies with foreign owners. Foreign ownership is a defining characteristic of the Estonian register. Therefore, any tool that aims to make Estonian company data useful must extend beyond national borders to capture the full scope of activity.

Nimistu's new resolution feature addresses this gap. For any foreign-owned Estonian company or branch, the foreign owner is now matched to a verifiable entity in its home jurisdiction, complete with its official registration number and a direct link to its record. In countries with open registers, such as the Nordic and Baltic states and the United Kingdom, matches are

precise, based on registration numbers rather than name similarity. In these jurisdictions, approximately nine out of ten foreign owners are now matched automatically, most with exact accuracy.

“Estonian companies are very often owned somewhere else, and until now, that ownership effectively disappeared at the edge of our own register,” said a spokesperson for Nimistu MTÜ. “A name and a country are not enough to hold anyone accountable. By resolving those owners to their real records abroad, we turn a dead end into a thread that people can actually follow. That is exactly what a public-interest registry should do.”

The system is transparent about its limitations, which can be informative. If an owner resolves to a company with a different name due to a renaming or discrepancies between national registers, nimistu flags this for verification rather than concealing it. When an owner cannot be resolved, often because it is based in a secrecy jurisdiction, this absence is clearly indicated, signaling that the ownership is intentionally obscured. Clearly showing these barriers is more useful than implying unrestricted access.

This capability is based on a shared principle. OpenCorporates granted nimistu open-data access because both organizations publish under the same share-alike open license and aim to make corporate information accessible. Nimistu credits OpenCorporates as the source for each resolved owner and provides a link to the original record, supporting the reciprocity essential to the open-data movement. This collaboration also advances transparency. Some national registers, such as the United Kingdom’s, publish beneficial ownership information, identifying the individuals who ultimately control a company. Resolving an Estonian company’s foreign owner to its canonical record is the first step toward tracing ownership to these individuals.

The organization views this new feature as a foundation, not a finished product. Establishing a canonical, linked identity for foreign owners enables further developments, such as mapping ownership chains across countries, identifying networks of companies with common parents, and connecting Estonian businesses to sanctioned or politically exposed entities abroad. These capabilities are essential for investigative journalism and due diligence, and are only possible once a foreign owner is linked to a specific, identifiable company.

“This is the part of the mission that is hardest, and that matters most,” the spokesperson added. “Making public data genuinely usable is not about publishing more pages. It is about connecting the information that already exists into something a person can actually reason about. Cross-border ownership was the thread that always broke off in your hand. Now it holds, and everything we want to build next depends on it holding.”

This launch comes at a time when corporate transparency is a prominent public issue across Europe, from beneficial ownership registers to sanctions enforcement and scrutiny of cross-border corporate structures. Nimistu’s contribution is intentionally focused and practical: It does not editorialize or make accusations, but instead makes the public record easier to follow, with every fact traceable to its source register. In a landscape where much company information is paywalled or fragmented across national systems, an open, non-commercial tool that connects these systems represents a meaningful addition to public infrastructure.

nimistu aggregates data from more than sixty official Estonian and international public sources, including the commercial register, the tax authority, sanctions lists, procurement records, court rulings, and beneficial ownership data, and presents it in one place, with each fact accompanied by its source and the date it was last updated. The service carries no advertising, sells nothing, and requires no account or login. It is operated by Nimistu MTÜ, a registered Estonian non-profit association, and its running costs are covered through donations and grants rather than the sale of the data it publishes.

About Nimistu MTÜ

Nimistu MTÜ is a registered Estonian non-profit association whose purpose is to make the data held in Estonia’s public registers genuinely accessible to journalists, researchers, civil society organizations, and the general public. Its platform, nimistu.ee (<https://nimistu.ee>), is free, ad-free, and open, and it publishes its aggregated data under a Creative Commons share-alike licence for reuse across the journalism, research, and civic-technology communities.

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