

Conflict Transformation the Estonian Way: The Estonian-Russian Border Conflict, European Integration and Shifts in Discursive Representation of the “Other”

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Abstract: This article explores the scope and character of the transformation of conflictive relations between Estonia and Russia that has taken place over the past decade in the context of the EU’s latest round of enlargement. Examining the allegation regarding the pacifying nature of European integration, I assess the contribution of various “pathways of EU influence” (Diez et al., 2004, 2006) to the shifts in the construction of identity and otherness in Estonian-Russian relations, based on the analysis of (de-) securitising moves as well as references to the EU as a legitimising factor of attitudinal change in elite and public discourses. Focusing primarily on Estonia as one of the new EU member states, I demonstrate that despite some evidence of de-securitisation of the Russian “other” in Estonian elite and public discourses, this transformation has remained limited and uneven and cannot be unequivocally attributed to the effects of European integration. While the construction of Estonia’s political identity is still heavily dependent upon a conflictive image of Russia, a large portion of public discourses advocating a more tolerant and secure identity construction vis-à-vis Russia “compensate” for this by a latent antagonism towards Estonian politics with an admixture of Euroscepticism.

Keywords: conflict transformation, security, (de-) securitisation, Estonian-Russian relations, Estonian-Russian border conflict, elite and societal discourses

INTRODUCTION

In this article,¹ I explore the scope and character of the transformation of conflictive relations between Estonia and Russia that has taken place over the past decade (1994–2005), and the extent to which it can be related to the influence of European integration.

Objectively, the relations between Estonia and Russia were seldom considered conflictive since they rarely threatened violent escalation (e.g. Maurer, 2005). However, if a discursive definition of conflict – as an articulation of incompatibility between subject positions – is adopted (see Diez et al., 2006), one’s attention is drawn away from the “objective”

indicators of a conflict to instances of discursive representation of the “other” as threatening. From this perspective, the conflict in Estonian-Russian relations is expressed through the advancement of antagonistic images of the respective “other”, widespread in both Estonian and Russian elite and public discourses (Shlosberg, 2001; Kuus, 2002a; Makarychev, 2004; Tüür, 2005a; Aalto, 2003: 587–588). This article is concerned with changes – both positive and negative – in the discursive securitisation of the ‘other’ as well as in the levels of societal acceptance of such securitisation (Diez et al., 2006; Wæver, 1995). Such changes are referred to as conflict transformation (Diez et al., 2006).

Given that the period under scrutiny coincides with the gradual realisation of Estonia’s aspirations for EU membership it is tempting to analyse this transformation in the context of EU enlargement, by engaging with arguments concerning the pacifying nature of European integration (ibid.; Cole, 2001; Wallensteen, 2002: 33; Higashino, 2004). By analysing discursive references to the EU as the legitimisation of change in the representation of the “other” (as compared to other factors), as well as the character of change (i.e. towards greater or lesser securitisation), it is possible to determine the extent and nature of the influence of European integration on the conflict in question (Diez et al., 2006).

The discursive dimension of conflict transformation was reconstructed on the basis of interviews conducted with societal actors in the Estonian-Russian border region in October 2005, and through the analyses of school textbooks, parliamentary debates, government documents, print media, and other relevant cultural material. Since Estonia, both as an aspiring candidate and as a member state, was more susceptible to the influence of European integration than Russia, this article focuses primarily on the Estonian side of the conflict. In addition, the construction of Estonian politics demonstrates a greater degree of dependence on the conflictive image of Russia than vice versa (among other reasons, because of the sheer scope of other problematic issues on Russia’s political agenda); and consequently, conflict transformation, where it occurred, is much more noticeable in Estonia.²

The first section of the article outlines various dimensions of the Estonian-Russian border conflict and the dynamics of its formation following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. The second section presents an analysis of various instances of conflict transformation that has taken place over the past decade and discusses the overall impact of European integration on this process. The following sections look more closely at particular types, or “pathways” of EU influence on conflict depending on whether the target of impact is policy sphere or the society at large, and whether the impact resulted from concrete measures taken by EU actors or, more indirectly, the integration process itself (Diez et al., 2006).

Based on this analysis, I demonstrate that although there have been important changes in the mutual construction of the “other” that can be described in terms of “indirect” effects of European integration, conflict transformation has had a very limited effect on the construction of Estonia’s political identity, since more tolerant discourses appear “invisible” from the position of power because of their largely a(anti)-political character.

THE BORDER CONFLICT

The most visible point of contention in Estonian-Russian relations is the border, as manifested in Estonia's long-standing territorial claims to Russia (which, although dropped from the official rhetoric, are still voiced by some political actors and population groups). The territorial claims are based on the discrepancy between the administrative boundary of the Soviet Republic of Estonia redrawn in the course of Stalin's 1944/45 reforms following Estonia's incorporation into the Soviet Union, which served as the basis for the current *de facto* control line, on the one hand, and the interwar state border located further east, on the other. The claims are legitimised by a restoration approach to Estonian statehood (i.e. the continuity of the present state from the interwar Republic of Estonia). However, it is the understanding of borders as social processes (Paasi 1999) rather than as political and territorial phenomena that offers a better insight into the conflict, especially since irreconcilable meanings invested in the border as well as controversial identity-building practices, are at the core of constructing Estonia's and Russia's subject positions as incompatible.

The enthusiasm and solidarity across ethnic and administrative divides that marked the break-up of the Soviet Union (Simonian, 2003; Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 276–279) proved to be short-lived. By 1992–1993, it gave way to more exclusive and antagonistic state- and identity-building both in Estonia and Russia. As the newly independent Estonia struggled to prove its economic and political viability in the face of Russia's attempts to secure influence over a former sister-republic (Laar, 2002), Estonia's interpretation of its relations with Russia acquired existential overtones. These objective pressures exacerbated the underlying historical construction of Russia as Estonia's "pre-eminent Other" (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006), and of Estonian state- and nationhood as being maintained despite, and in opposition to, Russia's centuries-long imperial ambitions. The Soviet era was viewed as an unlawful occupation (e.g. Laar, 2002; Berg and Ehin, 2004) that denied Estonia the legitimate right to exercise its statehood for over half-a-century (Kononenko, 2006: 72). With the years of independence between 1920 and 1940 recast in a mythical light as an ultimate expression of Estonia's political and national identity, the period of Estonia's history under the Soviet rule was downplayed or presented as an existential threat to the survival of the Estonian nation (Laar, 2002). Accordingly, the struggle for decentralisation and reform in the Soviet Union during the late 1980s – early 1990s was reinterpreted as a struggle for Estonia's independence (Simonian, 2003: 48–66). The responsibility for the consequences of the Soviet rule (such as the drastically increased share of Russophone population – from 8% in 1939 to 31% in 1991 (ibid.: 95) was ascribed to Russia (Ilves, 1998a). The external opposition to Russia was thus replicated in an internal division of Estonia's politics and society. The external opposition to Russia was thus replicated in an internal division of Estonia's politics and society, whereby non-ethnic Estonians, of whom many welcomed (and in many instances helped achieve) Estonia's independence (Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 276–279), were pushed to the margins of

the political arena (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585), and inter-ethnic relations became securitised.

With half-a-century of Estonia's history denied legitimacy, the restoration of Estonia's independence was viewed as a return to the *status quo*, including the borders of inter-war Estonia as defined by the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia. Being the first international treaty negotiated by the newly independent state, the Tartu Treaty is often regarded as Estonia's "birth certificate" (Aalto, 2001: 48) and considered indispensable for Estonia's political and national identity (Lukas, 2005; Vahtre, 2005). But far more important to Estonia's identity than the territorial issue is the recognition of its political continuity from the interwar state embodied in the Tartu Treaty and the acknowledgement of the historical injustice that Estonia suffered at the hands of the Soviet Union.

Russia, on its part, views Estonia's portrayal of the Soviet era in indiscriminate black and the ensuing suspicions towards Russia's present-day foreign policy as deeply offending. Russia does not regard the incorporation of Estonia into the USSR as an "occupation" but rather as, a legitimate expansion to the former domain of the Russian empire necessitated by geopolitical and security considerations (Danilov et al., 2005). Both political and popular Russian discourses emphasise Estonia's gains from being part of the Soviet Union, such as infrastructure and industry development as well as greater, compared to other Union republics, economic wealth and ideological freedoms (Simonian, 2003). The discursive image of Estonia as an enemy turned upon its benefactor (Shlosberg, 2001) goes hand-in-hand with the perception (however inaccurate) that Estonia, together with other Baltic republics, is to blame for the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Simonian, 2003; Tüür, 2005a) that many Russians still recall with a degree of nostalgia as times of stability and peace. Reform-minded Russians, on the other hand, perceive Estonia's continued suspicions as unjustified, undifferentiating between the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia that, like Estonia, prides itself on parting with its Soviet past (Makarychev, 2004: 26). Estonia's grievances over another historical injustice, Stalin's deportations of the 1940s, are often countered by the argument that Russia's own losses and hardships in the "common tragedy" of Stalinism were significantly greater (Makarychev, 2004: 26; Simonian, 2003: 47).

For Russia, the full extent of Estonia's political insecurity is difficult to fathom (Zakharov, 2005), and yet Russia itself was drawn into the logic of "identity conflict" (Diez et al., 2006). Whereas the objective importance of the "Estonian issue" for Russia is relatively low, Estonia's nationalist rhetoric and behaviour often receives disproportionate attention in the Russian media, fuelling the feelings of offence among the population and sustaining the perception of inexplicable hostility that Estonia nurtures towards Russia (Zakharov, 2005; cf. Kononenko, 2006: 75). The closing of the border in 1994, despite being Russia's own President Yeltsin's initiative (Berg and Oras, 2003), caused immense irritation among the inhabitants of Russian regions adjacent to Estonia, which was actively stimulated by Russian federal and regional-level politicians (Shlosberg, 2001). Most

crucially, both public and political discourses in Russia indicate certain difficulties in accepting that a country of such insignificant size as Estonia can even begin to formulate a foreign policy divergent from Russia's interests (Tüür, 2005a). Although there are objective reasons for Russia's intransigence with regard to the issue of 1920 borders (such as setting a dangerous precedent for Russia's other unresolved border disputes, e. g. with Japan), they often become overshadowed by identity-driven reasoning.

Such reasoning underpins, for example, the framing of territorial claims in ethnic and historical terms. The southern stretch of the present border runs across an area populated by the Seto, a distinct Finno-Ugric ethnic group Estonia considers part of its nation (Nikiforova and Viktorova, 2001). Among Seto political activists, the Tartu Treaty border is narrated as the eastern border of Setomaa (Seto-land) (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006) – a representation which contests the Estonian government's official policy regarding the border but resonates with the national sentiment underpinning the restoration approach to Estonian statehood. Countering this representation, Russia has claimed the Seto as part of its own cultural heritage and highlighted “the Russian-ness of the contested borderlands” by narrating Pskov region and the contested Pechory district as sites of crucial importance in Russian history (ibid.; Makarychev, 2004). However, the Seto “political narrative and enactment of Seto identity” align far better “with Estonian geopolitical interests” (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006), and Estonia remains an uncontested gateway for Seto political activism, despite the critical attitude of its leaders towards the Estonian government's border policy (Vaidla, 2002). Instances of “re-nationalising” the contested territories through historical narratives also occurred at the northern part of the border, through representing Ivangorod (Narva's cross-border counterpart which also resides in the contested territories) as Russia's historical interface with the “outside world”.³

As Estonia, in the climate of increasing antagonism with Russia, sought to re-orientate its identification from East to West, the Estonian-Russian border issue became drawn into a wider identity “contest”. Estonian elites viewed restoration of Estonia's independence as coterminous with a “Return to the Western World” (Lauristin et al., 1997; Ilves, 1998b; Laar, 2002), and the closing of the eastern border was not, at the political level, perceived as a problem, since it was compensated by a simultaneous opening of the western one. Accession to the EU and NATO was also conceptualised as reaffirmation of Estonia's European/ Western identity and a guarantee of its security and sovereignty in the face of the tacit Russian “threat” (Berg, 2004). Although interpretations of the border as “a protective mechanism” both for Estonia and the EU at large (Boman and Berg, 2005) shifted from military to “soft” security terms (Estonian MFA, 2001; cf. Kuus, 2002a), “hard” security concerns were featured prominently in the debates surrounding the EU and NATO accession (e.g. *Postimees* 2. 02. 2001, 15. 05. 2001) and continued in the media (e.g. *Postimees* 25. 10. 2005).

Estonia's eagerness to redefine itself as belonging to the West elicited contradictory responses from Russia, exposing Russia's own identity

dilemmas. Perceiving itself as belonging in Europe and as the embodiment of “true” Europe yet not party to European institutional design and political culture (Neumann, 1996; Makarychev, 2004: 30–31; Prozorov, 2005), Russia found itself both longing for the “West” and determined to resist its enticement (Shlosberg, 2001). During the Soviet era, Estonia (alongside other Baltic republics) was perceived as different and almost “Western” (Zakharov, 2005, Anonymous university lecturer, 2005); yet, Estonia’s post-Soviet conscious “Europeanisation” was deemed superficial by the inhabitants of neighbouring Russia’s Pskov region (Boman and Berg, 2005). Russia’s perception of Estonia as different yet in many respects profoundly similar (Tüür, 2005a) generates a fear in Estonia that Russia does not view the Estonian-Russian border as reflecting a true difference and may one day decide to do away with this artificial divide (Tüür, 2005c). Fuelling this fear are Russia’s anxieties over the turning of the border into an exclusionary line. Having failed to use the unresolved border dispute as leverage against NATO enlargement, Russia resorted to rhetorical offensives (Laar, 2002; Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 285–286) aimed at exposing Estonia’s “false” European-ness and unworthiness to join the West on normative grounds (Makarychev, 2004: 12, 22–23).

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Following the mutual securitisation of Estonian-Russian relations around 1992–1993, the first significant instance of conflict transformation occurred in 1994, when Estonia announced a policy of “positive engagement” towards Russia (Luik, 1994) and began to air the possibility of dropping territorial claims in exchange for Russia’s recognition of the Tartu Treaty (Berg and Oras, 2003: 51–52). Although sometimes attributed to the EU’s pressure (e.g. Makarychev, 2004), the withdrawal of Estonia’s territorial claims was rather prompted by the general lack of support in the West as well as a stalemate in border negotiations with Russia that became apparent by 1994 (Berg and Oras, 2003: 51). Although the proposed trade-off had not met with Russia’s approval, Estonian Foreign Ministry continued to pursue a pragmatic foreign policy towards Russia and subsequently withdrew not only the territorial claims but also the demand that the Tartu Treaty be mentioned in the negotiated border agreement. Partly, this was due to the realisation that Estonia needed a border treaty with Russia more than the recognition of the Treaty, especially in light of EU accession which by then became a driving goal for Estonian foreign policy. In addition, it was discovered that from a legal perspective, whether it contained a reference to the Tartu Treaty or not, the new border treaty would not undermine the validity of the Tartu Treaty or the legal continuity of the Estonian state (*ibid.*: 53; Ilves, 1998a). Thus, Estonian policy-makers viewed the negotiated border agreement as purely technical in character, which allowed the negotiating team to concentrate on practical matters relevant for Estonia’s prospective EU membership (Kallas, 1996). By and large, this contributed to significant progress regarding the border

agreement, and by 1998 the treaty was essentially ready to be signed (Berg and Oras, 2003: 54–55).

In line with the argument regarding the pacifying nature of European integration, I suggest that Estonia's de-securitising stance was informed by the construction of its interests as a prospective member state. The EU thus served as a powerful legitimisation that "enabled" the Estonian elite into the described policy change (Diez et al., 2006). Estonia's integration into the EU helped alleviate one important aspect of the "identity conflict" by securing Estonia's belonging in Europe and the West (Mihkelson, 2003; Berg and Ehin, 2004; Kononenko, 2004: 23). It did not, however, address the second aspect of Estonia's identity quest, based on exclusively ethnic identification and often perceived as being at odds with the European/Western identity component (Kuus, 2002b: 92). This, perhaps, may explain why the "pragmatic" turn in Estonian foreign policy mostly remained limited to "European" issues and did little to de-legitimise the perpetuation of the identity conflict at the level of domestic politics, which is still largely preoccupied with securing Estonia's ethnic and political identity in exclusive terms.

Furthermore, these two conflicting aspects of identity appear to generate discursive "currents" that are thematically distinct, yet may overlap through common political agency. It appears that border negotiations for Estonia became largely dissociated from the underlying quest for identity recognition. Thus, talk of good relations with Russia, of progress with regard to the border treaty and optimism concerning the foreseeable conclusion of a trade agreement – that would abolish the double taxation of Estonian exports to Russia – seems to coexist comfortably with the language of identity conflict, often within the same speeches (Ilves, 1998a; cf. Ojuland, 2003). In parliamentary debates, accusations regarding Russia's unreliability and its domineering negotiating style alternate with reiterations of the importance of gaining recognition from Russia and the rest of the world about the historical injustice of the occupation (e.g. Ilves, 1998a; Ojuland, 2003; Privalova, 2004; Tulviste, 2004; Lukas, 2005; cf. Helme, 2005; Kononenko, 2006: 76–77). The majority of Estonian media analyses of Estonian-Russian relations or Russian foreign policy are preoccupied with drawing historical parallels, which, given the predisposition for a selective reading of mutual history provide a very mono-dimensional context for interpreting Russia's present intentions (Tüür, 2005b, 2005c; cf. Herd and Löfgren, 2001: 292). Some political parties and associations (such as the Seto Congress) adopted a position critical of the government's conciliatory approach to border negotiations, accusing it of treason with regard to Estonia's national interests. Although admittedly intended for domestic consumption and as a tool for inter-party rivalry (Muuli, 2005; Matsulevitch, 2000; Viktorova, 2001), pronouncements of this sort occasionally found their way into international and Russian media, fuelling Russia's perceptions of Estonia's inherent hostility (cf. Makarychev, 2004: 26). One of the most damaging repercussions of such inter-party squabbles was the withdrawal of Russia's signature from the

2005 border treaty after the Estonian Parliament adopted, as part of its ratification decision, a corollary statement reiterating a commitment to Estonia's independence through indirect references to the Tartu Treaty (Muuli, 2005; Ojuland, 2005; Kononenko, 2006: 79). Thus, although the prospect of EU accession contributed to the enhancement of practical cooperation between the two states, it did not dissipate the climate of emotional insecurity surrounding Estonia's relations with Russia.

Yet, despite the seeming ubiquity of securitising rhetoric, towards the beginning of the 2000s one can observe another curious divergence in the perception of the conflict and the "other" in Estonia. While the political elite are still preoccupied with the identity conflict (cf. *Postimees*, 24. 10. 2005), articulations of the conflict at the societal level appear to be on the decline (Melnikova, 2005; Melnikov, 2005; Zakharov, 2005; Tuubel, 2005). The growing alienation of parts of the electorate from politics⁴ and a degree of disillusionment with the state and its government (Aalto, 2003: 585) contributed to the perception that politicians were playing "games" of little relevance to their people (Melnikova, 2005, Kosk, 2005, Zakharov, 2005, Tuubel, 2005, Anonymous university lecturer, 2005) – a perception that extends to the elite articulations of the identity conflict. While some people maintain strong views about the conflict and Estonian-Russian relations,⁵ others express frustration with national politics and would like the government to exercise greater maturity in its dealings with Russia (Melnikova, 2005, Melnikov, 2005, Tuubel, 2005). Occasionally, similar arguments and calls for greater "general societal engagement" with Russia appear in the Estonian media (Bronstein, 2002; cf. Kuus, 2003). Thus, the present situation pertaining to the border conflict is characterised by ambiguity and diversity, with different accounts portraying contradicting realities of the Russian-Estonian relations (cf. Aalto, 2003).

Outwardly, the outlined conflict dynamic does not seem to correlate with the following turning points in Estonia's integration into the EU: The signing of the Europe Agreement and submission of a membership application in 1995; the start of accession negotiations in 1998 (based on the 1997 Luxembourg Summit decision); and finally its accession into the EU in May 2004. Still, the firm political course towards EU membership adopted by Estonia in the mid-1990s opened several avenues for a more or less direct influence of European integration on Estonia's policies, in general and on its relations with Russia, in particular. Yet, as will be shown in the following discussion, its effect on the conflict was not always positive, whereas de-securitisation of Estonian-Russian relations cannot always be associated with effects of European integration.

PATHWAYS OF EU INFLUENCE ON ESTONIAN–RUSSIAN CONFLICT

In the theoretical framework developed for the EUBorderConf project,⁶ Diez, Albert and Stetter (2004, 2006), they distinguish between four different types of influence that the EU can generate vis-à-vis parties in border conflicts. This distinction rests on two dimensions: Firstly, whether the impact is a result of "concrete measures" undertaken by EU actors or an indirect "effect of integration processes" at large, and secondly, "whether the

impact is on concrete policies or has wider social implications” (Diez et al., 2006). A combination of these dimensions produces four types of impact or “pathways of influence”:

Figure 1. Pathways of impact of European integration on border conflicts
(source: Diez et al., 2006: 572).

EU approach:

		Actor-driven	Integration process
Target of impact:	Policy	(1) compulsory impact	(2) enabling impact
	Society	(3) connective impact	(4) constructive impact

In the resulting framework, *compulsory impact* refers to instances where the EU, through “carrots” and “sticks” associated with integration,⁷ tries to compel the parties to change their policies vis-à-vis each other “towards conciliatory moves, rather than deepening securitization” (Diez et al., 2006). *Enabling impact* relies on the ability of “specific actors within conflict parties to link their political agendas with the EU and, through reference to integration, justify desecuritizing moves that may otherwise have not been considered legitimate” (ibid.). *Connective impact* operates through encouraging contact between conflicting parties, often via direct financial support of joint projects, which are supportive of the formation of societal networks across the borders (ibid.). And finally, *constructive impact* relies on “the assumption that EU impact can put in place completely new discursive frameworks for creating novel ways of constructing and expressing identities within conflict regions”, thus changing the underlying identity scripts and supporting a (re-)construction of identities that “sustains peaceful relations between conflict parties” (ibid.). The following four sections of this article analyse the impact of European integration on the Estonian-Russian conflict in terms of the outlined “pathways of influence”.

COMPULSORY INFLUENCE

Although, in the latest enlargement, the EU has played a significant role “in terms of steering the course of economic and political reforms in the applicant countries” and “setting the criteria for accession” (Kononenko 2004: 18), it is somewhat problematic to attribute the transformation of the Estonian-Russian border conflict unambiguously to the EU’s compulsory influence. Russia, a non-applicant and not even a prospective candidate, is not susceptible to the EU’s compulsory impact altogether; and when the EU did attempt to influence Russia (e.g. through such avenues as conditionality of WTO accession), it was concerning broader issues, such as democracy, human rights or the rule of law. Estonia, on the other hand, although subject to the compulsory adoption of the *acquis*, often behaved as a “model pupil”

of Europeanisation (Raik, 2003: 34) in its eagerness to fulfil EU membership criteria ahead of the set deadlines and so prove its belonging in Europe. Because of the largely voluntary character of policy change, it is difficult to view it strictly in terms of “compulsory” influence. However, the logic of “carrots” and “sticks” was more pronounced in the justifications of the government’s actions offered to the domestic audience, where the greater good of EU membership was often emphasised over temporary losses encountered on route to the EU (e.g. Ilves 1998a).

The removal of the greatest stumbling-block in the Estonian-Russian border negotiations, Estonia’s territorial claims, is sometimes attributed to the EU’s direct pressure (Makarychev, 2004), although this is doubtful given that the change came about before the lodging of membership application in 1995. Neither can “pragmatisation” of Estonia’s foreign policy towards Russia be viewed in the context of compulsory influence, since it was rather a result of the EU’s enabling impact, with the practical approach to border negotiations informed by the construction of Estonia’s interests as a prospective member state. The continuation of border negotiations beyond the point when the EU (as well as NATO) assured Estonia that the lack of a border treaty would not be viewed as an impediment to its accession also suggests that the compulsory impact was not the key factor in pushing Estonia towards a more forthcoming stance towards Russia.

Far more controversial with regard to compulsory influence was the issue of the Russophone minority. Because this issue lies at the heart of the identity conflict, the EU’s attempts to influence Estonian citizenship and language legislation (through avenues such as OSCE (Herd and Löfgren, 2001: 286)) were discursively presented in terms of a “double-edged threat” from both Russia and Europe (Kuus, 2002a). The EU, in this discourse, becomes an agent of Russia’s interests in destabilising the Estonian state and identity (ibid.; Aalto, 2003: 582–583). The perception of Estonian language and culture as being under threat, and statehood as the only means to protect them (Kuus, 2002a), necessitated restricted access of the Russophone minority with its “undetermined geopolitical orientations” (Aalto, 2003: 583) to political decision-making. Proponents of this discourse tend to regard the EU as an unfulfilled promise of salvation from Russia: Instead of escaping from Russia into the EU, Estonia found Russia already encroached in it (Tüür, 2005c; Kuus, 2002a).

In this instance, the EU’s impact – however insignificant in practice – invited conflict-enhancing interpretations, resulting in further securitisation of inter-ethnic relations and of the EU itself (cf. Herd and Löfgren, 2001: 288, 276). This had led some political actors in Estonia to question the rationale of EU membership, especially in the light of firmer prospects of NATO’s eastern enlargement that started to materialise in the early 2000s. The preference for the NATO component of the “dual enlargement” was emphasised on the traditional grounds of “hard” security, but also framed in terms of cultural and civilisational affinity (Williams and Neumann, 2000; Kuus, 2002a: 306). Unlike European integration with its emphasis on “soft” security (Herd and Löfgren 2001: 282), NATO was free from controversies associated with the EU’s supranationalism and its perceived negative

consequences for Estonian sovereignty (Kuus, 2002a). The development of ESDP – a “harder” security element on the Union – was also treated with reservation due to a perception that it weakened the transatlantic security provisions (Kasekamp et al., 2003). Even the economic benefits of EU accession, which Estonian politicians widely marketed to the domestic public (e.g. Ilves, 1998b; Herd and Löfgren, 2001), were sometimes questioned as undermining the advantage of Estonia’s ultra-liberal economy (Gräzin, 2002a, 2000b).

ENABLING IMPACT

As discussed above, the prospect of EU membership “enabled” the Estonian political elite shift from the restoration-informed foreign policy to a more pragmatic approach towards Russia in the mid-1990s, which led to a partial de-securitisation of high-level relations. However, the prospect of EU membership did little to de-legitimise the perpetuation of the conflict at the level of domestic politics, where articulations of insecurity with regard to the location of the border, inter-ethnic issues, and Russia’s attempts to influence minority-related decision-making continued to flourish.

The mechanism behind the enabling impact can be illuminated by Mikkel and Kasekamp’s findings: Mobility of Estonia’s political parties from the periphery to the political mainstream and from the opposition to a role in the government tends to correspond with the increase in Euro-optimism (2005). They suggest that as parties and politicians are socialised into the responsibilities of daily conduct of “European affairs”, based on previous governments’ commitments, they find themselves in a position of advocates of EU membership and integration (ibid.). From this perspective, Euro-sceptical sentiments, closely linked to the perception of endangered character of Estonia’s nation and state and incompatible with a conciliatory stance on Russia, are a “natural” province of government opposition. This, however, does not seem to cover the entire spectrum of conflict-perpetuating rhetoric, which is also abundant in speeches by members of the governing elite (e.g. Ilves, 1998a; Ojuland, 2003). It is possible to speculate that the position of responsibility for the state’s affairs also brings about socialisation of another kind, commanding an acute awareness of Estonia’s historical insecurities and the political aspirations they dictate.

In some instances, EU accession was used to legitimise policies and decisions with dis-connective effects. An example of this can be seen in the abolition of simplified border-crossing provisions for local inhabitants of the border areas in 2000, four years before the required deadline. Whereas the imposition of the Schengen border regime is often criticised in the context of EU-Russian relations at large, Estonia’s eagerness towards eliminating the ambiguity in, and enhancing control over, the border crossing procedures on its Eastern border (cf. Berg and Oras, 2003: 56) can be viewed in light of its identity quest: A desire simultaneously to affirm its status as a future EU member state and to distance itself from Russia. Apart from being detrimental to the interests of Estonia’s own borderland inhabitants (Nikiforova and Viktorova, 2001) and damaging to bilateral cooperation

projects (Vassilenko, 2005, Anonymous NGO director, 2005), this move was taken by the Russian side as yet another expression of Estonia's hostility, and Russian media lost no time in accusing Estonia of skilfully manipulating the EU to alienate Russia (Alekseeva, 2000).

Predictably, the influence of European integration on the Russian political elite has remained negligible. From Russia's perspective, whatever unresolved issues exist in its relations with Estonia are fairly marginal compared to the problems Russia faces on its other borders (cf. Tüür, 2005c). They are also marginal in the overall context of EU-Russian relations (Zakharov, 2005), despite Estonia's aspirations of becoming a "gateway" and a "bridge" in relations between Russia and the EU (Tüür, 2005c). Moreover, Russia generally prefers to address the countries it perceives to be the chief players in the Union – Germany, France, and the UK – directly rather than through the common EU facade (Zakharov, 2005; Kononenko, 2006: 73). This, quite apart from the modernist neglect for "post-sovereign" political configurations (Wæver, 2000), can be explained by the reluctance to become subject to common EU policies formulated with Estonia's input (Tüür, 2005a). Thus, the mutual jealousy that marks Estonia's and Russia's relations with the EU (Tüür, 2005c) limits the extent of the EU's enabling impact on the border conflict.

CONNECTIVE IMPACT

The impact of EU policies on societal actors in the Estonian-Russian border conflict is perhaps the most straightforward when compared to other pathways of EU influence, owing to an explicit cross-border orientation of many EU funding programmes. The EU has played an important role in intensifying and diversifying Estonian-Russian bilateral dialogue by involving different authority levels and non-governmental organisations in cross-border cooperation (Viktorova, 2001). Throughout the 1990s, many of the developing civil society actors, both in Estonia and Russia (such as Pskov-based NGO *Vozrozhdenie*, or the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation/*Chudskoi Proyekt* with offices in both Tartu and Pskov) adopted the values promoted by the EU and other donors' funding programmes as their motivation and rationale for action (Anonymous NGO director, 2005, Zakharov, 2005). Although it is debatable whether this was initially the result of a genuine convergence of interests or a degree of financial opportunism, after a decade of socialisation in "EU speak" it is possible to note not only connective, but also some constructive impact of the EU on the civil society actors' perceptions of the Estonian-Russian relations. Most importantly, the experience of cross-border cooperation has contributed to a diversification of the image of the "other" (Viktorova 2001), and the Estonian-Russian border has become associated with opportunities rather than obstacles towards cooperation (Boman and Berg, 2005).

However, not all instances of the constructive impact served to diminish conflict. In Estonia, the EU cooperation programmes at times exacerbated the identity conflict by pitting NGOs against the government, whose policy line was already under attack from the more radical nationalist voices. The EU also failed to create a viable counterpart for the Estonian NGOs in

Russia, where the funding programmes (such as TACIS) mainly focused on supporting government institutions (Shlosberg 2001). During the 1990s, many Estonian non-governmental actors saw the EU funding as an opportunity to bypass the state level in their cooperation with Russia. While they were often successful, the lack of state support (if not outright opposition) curtailed the initiatives; this damaged the sustainability as well, as the general credibility of the NGOs' efforts. Almost complete dependence, of the bulk of joint activities in the Estonian-Russian border area, on the availability of EU funds further endangers the sustainability of cooperation (Boman and Berg, 2005).

Since Estonia became an EU member state, the need to bypass the state level started to lose its relevance. Priority areas for EU funding have become increasingly formulated at the national level in consultation with civil society actors (Anonymous NGO director, 2005). Many cooperative projects (such as joint water management of the lake Peipsi on the Estonian-Russian border) run by NGOs also involve local authorities, government experts, and professionals. However, despite the considerable progress made by various bilateral commissions on issues of mutual concern, the real output of these cooperation projects seldom goes beyond communication and "networking". At the political level, each side still tends to block crucial decisions to demonstrate its power over the fortunes of the "other" (Kosk, 2005; cf. Shlosberg, 2001). In Russia, the authorities are often suspicious of NGOs, viewing them as the fifth column promoting Western interests (Vassilenko, 2005; cf. Makarychev, 2005), and the initiative of local authorities is often crippled due to insufficient legal competence for the conduct of foreign relations and lack of political will at the federal level (Shlosberg, 2001; Melnikov, 2005, Zakharov, 2005). Although in Estonia, the government became more relaxed in its attitudes towards civil society actors, NGOs' initiatives are still mostly viewed as "private" and somewhat lacking in relevance for the state as a whole, and certainly subordinate to the government's policies (e.g. Ojuland, 2003). Thus in general, although the EU's influence on the societal actors has been considerable, it remained limited by the framework of inter-governmental Estonian-Russian relations.

As for the incentives behind inter-governmental cooperation, the dealings of Estonia's national-level authorities with Russia were often motivated by the identity conflict rather than the desire to overcome it. Although this can be attributed to the downside of the EU's enabling impact on Estonia's government policy towards Russia rather than to its connective influence, the strife between various government agencies over the discursive delineation of the Estonian-Russian border inevitably affects the political environment in which societal actors operate. To give an example of contested motivation behind cooperation, the Petserimaa Department of Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board that managed the "simplified" border crossing regime⁸ between 1994 and 1999, was sometimes criticised by the Foreign Ministry for unauthorised conduct of foreign policy. An employee of the Board and a prominent Seto activist, Jüri Vaidla, claimed that the Department was preoccupied with an aspect of Estonia's internal affairs ignored by the government, i.e. maintaining relations with Estonia's own territories and

population beyond the present “control line” (Vaidla, 1999, 2002). The Foreign Ministry’s decision to abolish simplified border-crossing in 2000 can be explained by the desire not only to gain better control over actual border-crossing, but also to counter the interpretations of the current border as temporary and subject to future redrawing. This attempt to reduce the fuzziness of the border, however, was undermined by the Citizenship and Migration Board’s policy of issuing Estonian passports to those inhabitants of adjacent areas of Russia, whose ancestors were citizens of the interwar republic, with the effect of supporting the practice of double citizenship officially prohibited by Estonian laws (Nikiforova and Viktorova, 2001). Many of the Estonian government’s cooperative programmes with Russia, e.g. the support of the Estonian school in Pechory, also have an underlying motif of supporting Estonia’s ethnic claims to the lost territories. It is fitting that such government programmes are managed not by the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs but by the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Education (Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006).

More recent Estonian government’s cooperative initiatives are, however, less evidently self-interested. For instance, in 2003–2004 the Foreign Ministry funded a joint training programme for Southeast Estonian and Pskov region tourism entrepreneurs in order to work out a common strategy for developing tourism in an integrated border area (Made 2004). The fact that the funds came from the Estonian Development Aid Fund and in light of recent comparisons with other Fund’s activities in countries such as the Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, a new speculation can be made: The government’s rationale for supporting cooperation with Russia is increasingly shaped by the liberal ideology characteristic of the EU’s own neighbourhood and development aid policies (Smith, 2003; cf. Kasekamp and Pääbo, 2006). As areas of policy influenced by the EU-style approaches and rationale grow, the space for conflict articulation gradually diminishes and conflictive discourses become pushed out of the political mainstream. Not only societal or private sector actors but also state-funded institutions, such as the Estonian National Museum, are becoming more relaxed about their relations with Russia and are beginning to re-establish contacts with their Russian counterparts (Tuubel, 2005).

CONSTRUCTIVE IMPACT

This section of the article focuses on changes in identity scripts visible in the Estonian (and, to a lesser extent, Russian) society at large, based on insights gained from interviews, school textbooks, media, parliamentary debates, and other cultural and educational material. Since constructive change is, by definition, the slowest to take shape (Diez et al., 2006), the findings presented here do not aspire to be conclusive, but rather aim to draw attention to some emergent trends in the discourses of identification.

Previous sections already noted a divergence between the discourses preoccupied with two aspects of the Estonian identity puzzle as outlined by Kuus (2002b) – identification based on broader European/Western commonalities and identity-construction in exclusively ethnic terms. This section focuses on another divergence rooted in the dissociation of Estonia’s

ethnic and political identity in some strands of societal discourse (see Aalto, 2003) that are largely invisible in official political rhetoric (Herd and Löfgren, 2001; cf. Kuus, 2002a). I argue, moreover, that this instance of discursive change does not stem from the conflict-diminishing impact of the EU-inspired “pragmatic” approach, since the latter was seldom conceptualised as genuine “politics”. Rather, by its many proponents and opponents alike, the pragmatic stance in relations with Russia – and, to a great extent, with the EU itself (Ilves, 1998a) – was perceived as purely instrumental: A temporary step back from Estonia’s genuine political interests with the aim of gaining a better ground for pursuing them in the future (cf. Ágh, 2004: 5–6). The essence of Estonia’s “political” interests and identity is still greatly represented by the conflict-generating discourses of historical injustice and confrontational identity-building despite of the Russian “other”. An important consequence of this association of politics with the conflictive construction of Estonia’s identity is that people interested in Estonian politics and especially in Estonian-Russian relations become inevitably affected by it, if not through partaking in the logic of identity conflict then through an acute awareness of the way in which identity issues are framed in the domestic discourse (Tüür, 2005c). Since academic, political and public debates on Estonia’s statehood and security are to a large extent conflated (see Kuus, 2002b: 95), the more liberal sentiments of the domestic public (see Aalto, 2003: 584–586) remain effectively invisible.

Yet, there is some evidence of popular de-securitisation of the Russian “other”, both in the context of Estonian-Russian relations and with regard to Estonia’s Russophone population. On both sides of the border, people note positive changes in mutual attitudes and perceptions and a growing interest towards the “other”, manifested in increasingly frequent contacts and communication, including mutual business interests (Melnikova, 2005; Melnikov, 2005; Zakharov, 2005; Vassilenko, 2005; Tuubel, 2005; Anonymous university lecturer, 2005; cf. Kuus, 2003). This tallies well with Aalto’s (2003) observation that securitisation of identity in Estonia is losing its ubiquity. For many “ordinary” Estonians, the precondition for friendly relations is not so much Russia’s recognition of the 1920 border but the acknowledgement of Estonia’s distinct culture and identity, which the majority of Russians are quite willing to accept (Tüür, 2005c, Zakharov, 2005, Tuubel, 2005, Anonymous university lecturer, 2005). Once this fundamental difference is acknowledged, commonalities between Estonians and Russians become more obvious and the differences appear less threatening as they become a source of mutual enrichment rather than estrangement (Tuubel, 2005). This is true of both interpersonal communication and collective perceptions (Valk and Realo, 2004).

De-securitisation of ethnic identity is also evidenced by the growing interest of Estonians and Russians towards each other’s language and culture since the early 2000s. Examples range from increased interest in language training (e.g. children’s integration camps in Estonia, Russian language courses at Estonian enterprises and Estonian classes at Russia’s Pskov Free University) to cultural festivals (such as “Pskov Days in Tartu”) and

television projects (e.g. Pskov television's series "Estonia That We Do Not Know") to culinary experiences: An Estonian restaurant "Vana Tallinn" was opened in Pskov in 2005 as a counterpart to a Russian restaurant "Rasputin" in Tartu (Anonymous university lecturer, 2005; Melnikov, 2005; Melnikova, 2005; Vassilenko, 2005; Tuubel, 2002, 2005; Zakharov, 2005).⁹

Although Huntington's civilisations theory is traditionally popular in Estonia (Makarychev, 2004; *Eesti Päevaleht*, 27. 11. 1999), since it substantiates Estonia's desire to differentiate itself from Russia, its political resonance (Kuus, 2002b: 97) does not seem to be matched in the educational sphere. For instance, a human geography textbook (Raagmaa, 2003) that uses the theory to describe idiosyncrasies of different parts of the world also highlights the changeable character of civilisations and permeability of their borders. It argues that Orthodox and Western civilisations are similar in their main characteristics. Geographical representations of the Estonian-Russian border have also undergone a transformation: While the 1996 Estonian Atlas depicts both the 1920 border with Russia and the present "control line" (*Eesti Atlas*, 1996; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2006), the 2005 World Atlas shows the border as was agreed in the new border treaty that the Estonian Parliament ratified in 2005 (*Suur Maaailma Atlas*, 2005).

Estonian history textbooks, while preserving references to Soviet occupation, tone down the issue of the Russian "threat" in the post-Soviet era, providing only brief schematic accounts of events following the break-up of the Soviet Union and little opinion or interpretation (e.g. Vahtré, 2004; Adamson and Valdmaa, 2001; Adamson et al., 2003). Adamson and Karjahärm (2004: 180) further note that history as a complex matter does not easily lend itself to simplistic nationalist interpretations. They remark that, although the historical importance of the Tartu Treaty is indisputable, it is not the only legitimisation of the Estonian state: True foundation lies in the right of self-determination of its people (ibid.: 197–198). In this respect, the textbook goes beyond the customary rhetoric of the majority of Estonian politicians who still brood over Estonia's insecurities (e.g. Lukas, 2005). In Russian history textbooks (e.g. Levandovsky and Shchetinov, 2005; Danilov et al., 2005), the mentions of Estonia are scant but not antagonistic. Furthermore, when describing the ethnic tensions and problems in political representation, that the national awakening of the early years of the Soviet regime brought about, the textbooks indirectly acknowledge that Estonia's post-independence exclusionary policies had a precedent in Russia's own twentieth-century history.

All these examples, to varying extent, indicate a change in the articulation of identities – from essentialist and mutually exclusive to relative and more tolerant – among parts of both Estonian and Russian societies. However, it is questionable to what extent the EU can be credited for this transformation. Although EU support was mentioned in connection with some of the described cooperative initiatives, interviewees explained their conflict-mitigating stance with negative, rather than positive, factors. Thus, respondents noted an increasing divergence between state-level policies and attitudes on the one hand, and the concerns and interests of "ordinary people", on the other (Melnikova, 2005; Melnikov, 2005; Kosk, 2005;

Zakharov, 2005; Tuubel, 2005; Anonymous university lecturer, 2005). While Estonian Foreign Ministry claims exclusive discursive competence over Estonian-Russian relations, denying the role of “popular diplomacy” (Ojuland, 2003), the interviewees criticised the government’s representation of Estonian-Russian relations as grounded in narrow political interests divorced from the that were actual situation. They also characterised Estonian politics as immature, referring to it as “sandbox games” for politicians (Melnikova, 2005, Melnikov, 2005, Kosk, 2005, Tuubel, 2005) or “children’s politics” (Zakharov, 2005, Anonymous university lecturer, 2005) because an uncompromising stance towards Russia is viewed as a manifestation of power (Kosk, 2005). The people’s criticism of the attempts of Estonian politicians to make political capital through constant discursive perusal of the Russian “threat” thus seems to be part of their general disillusionment with Estonian politics, which was unable to fulfil its promise of “politics for the people” (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585).

The EU rarely features people’s accounts as an inspiration for societal change, which is consistent with Vetik’s observation that Euroscepticism among Estonians is commensurate with general mistrust towards domestic political institutions and actors (2003; Ehin, 2001; Sikk and Ehin, 2005: 30–31; Mikkel and Kasekamp, 2005: 104). When pried about the role of the EU one of the respondents, being aware that this study was conducted with EU funds, asked, “How do *you* need to put it?” (Melnikova, 2005). Mostly, people explained the change in their perceptions of the “other” with the internal logic of societal development in Estonia. At the beginning of 1990s, people in Estonia savoured the newly gained independence and opportunities of political participation in what the majority perceived as their own state. By the 2000s, as that initial thirst was quelled (partly because of the disillusionment with the state that did a poor job representing the interests of its populace) and affairs were set in order. The attention started to turn outward, to the more and less proximate neighbours, including the eastern one (i.e. Russia) (e.g. Tuubel, 2005; Melnikova, 2005). Indirectly, however, the mentioned “setting of affairs in order” can be associated with the EU’s stabilising influence on Estonia’s economy and society. While individual assessments of this influence range from positive to strongly negative (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585), it is doubtless that Estonia’s EU accession eased people’s fixation on the woes of their own state due to the opening of horizons for education and employment.

While it is difficult to estimate the reach of this de-securitising trend because of its largely anti-political character,¹⁰ it seems clear that the two described trends of de-securitisation – EU-inspired and society-based – are separate and almost mutually exclusive. From the perspective of the latter, the EU’s enabling impact on the Estonian elite is easily subsumed by the “conflictive” image of politics, while European ideals of political participation are at odds with the stance of passive apolitical opposition apparently endorsed by Estonia’s de-securitising societal actors. It seems that the association of Estonian politics to the discourse of identity conflict not only discourages political avenues for alternative representations of

Estonian-Russian relations, but also limits the effects of other de-securitizing influences on the Estonian society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article offers an analysis of the dynamics of Estonian-Russian border conflict in the context of European integration and focuses on both state and societal-level perceptions of the “other” and of the conflict itself. Since the bulk of both empirical and secondary material appeared to advance contradictory arguments regarding the (de-)securitization of the conflict, Diez, Albert and Stetter’s (2004, 2006) theoretical framework provided a helpful tool for separating various “currents” of positive and negative transformation, whether effected by the EU’s impact or not.

While the impact of European integration remained marginal in some instances of Estonian-Russian relations and in the articulation of the conflict, in others it helped trigger important dynamics that subsequently affected other pathways of the EU’s influence. Thus, the process of *compulsory* harmonisation of Estonia’s legislation with the *acquis* doubtlessly contributed to a reformulation of Estonia’s foreign policy interests, especially in the context of its future EU membership. Thus a policy change in Estonia’s border negotiations was enabled with Russia. At the same time, the EU’s attempts at *compulsory* influence with regard to Russophone minority-related legislation had *disabling* consequences, since the EU itself was occasionally re-constructed as a threat to Estonia’s security and identity (Kuus, 2002a, 2003: 15; Herd and Löfgren, 2001: 288). The *enabling* effect of Estonia’s foreign policy change also had a *disabling* counterpart in empowering conflictive domestic political rhetoric and substantiating the hard-liners’ claims that the government’s accommodating stance to Russia betrayed Estonia’s national interests. Whereas the EU had a significant *connective* impact in promoting societal-level cooperation between Estonia and Russia, the *disconnective* effect of the EU’s own external border policy with Russia was amplified by Estonia’s somewhat premature endorsement of the Schengen regime, which had a *disabling* influence on Russia’s political elite and local actors. In addition, the development of civil society encouraged by the EU and other Western donors did not always imply increased levels of cooperation. As with the spread of pragmatic EU-inspired policies among the political elite, some societal actors have taken over the representation of hard-line positions on the Estonian-Russian border conflict. Yet, improved high-level relations and increasing levels of communication between Estonian and Russian societal and private actors, on the one hand, and decreasing societal reach of securitisation of the border conflict, on the other, have produced some change in the identity scripts of the Estonian society in support of a *constructive* aspect of conflict transformation. However, despite its support of many societal-level conciliatory initiatives, the EU as a source of *constructive* impact is not widely acknowledged. Instead, the reduction in societal-level tensions is mostly attributed to the popular distrust towards Estonia’s domestic politics and increasing dissociation with its conflict-perpetuating domestic discourses.

In light of this analysis, it is likely that in the future, the scope of EU-inspired pragmatic policy-making will continue to expand, especially as the Estonian political elite undergoes a further socialisation into the EU's political and decision-making culture. However, the disappearance of the domestic association of "politics" with the conflict-generating identity discourses is conditional upon a different construction of pragmatic issues by the Estonian political elite. Instead of being presented as purely instrumental and temporary, this sphere of mere "policy" needs to be reconceptualised as politics, open to debate and public consultation. It is obvious, however, that whether as a result of the long-term impact of European integration, or as an effect of maturing political culture, such a *constructive* change will need a long time to take root. Regarding Estonia's approach to its relations with Russia, as it becomes increasingly influenced by the EU's liberal policies, it will inevitably partake not only of their strengths but also of their weaknesses. There are a number of analyses concerned with the reasons behind the low efficiency of the EU's cooperative initiatives with Russia and their poor reception by the Russian public, such as excessively bureaucratic orientation of cooperation projects and their limited tangible output (e.g. Kononenko, 2004, 2006; Makarychev, 2004; Zakharov, 2005). In this respect, Estonia could anticipate the risks of expanding its development aid policy by analysing the EU's successes and failures in its dealings with Russia. This may have a dual effect: To gain a better understanding of Russia as a cooperation partner on a variety of different levels and to potentially contribute to a more informed EU-wide approach especially in the area of neighbourhood policies.

ENDNOTES

¹ Empirical research for this study was supported by the European Commission through the EUBorderConf project (SERD-2002-00144), whose team served as a continual source of inspiration. Thanks to the participants of CEEISA 4th Annual Convention in Tartu, 2006, as well as to the three anonymous referees for their valuable comments on an earlier draft. Any errors or omissions remain my own.

² Space limitations of this article preclude a full analysis of the transformation of Russia's subject-position in this conflict, especially considering a significant discrepancy between regional- and federal-level constructions of Russia's relations with Estonia. See Makarychev (2004) for an analysis of Russian-side discourses on the border conflict.

³ See www.ivangorod.narod.ru, accessed in June 2002.

⁴ While it is difficult to outline this trend numerically, one of the leading pollsters in Estonia notes that the levels of trust in state institutions that are not associated with politics are consistently higher than trust ratings of political institutions (Saar Poll, 2003). A useful indicator in this regard is the consistently low (20 to 30 per cent) trust rating of political parties in the recent years (EMOR/Riigikantselei s.a.; Saar Poll, 2003; cf. Raik, 2005: 125), which in Estonia's electoral system are the chief gateway for democratic participation. The issue of apparent faultiness of this mechanism of representation generates surprisingly little debate in Estonia, partly because low voters' turnout at elections seems consistent with trends elsewhere in Europe. One debate that captures a growing gap between the dominant political discourse and attitudes of those who feel excluded from it refers to the emergence of a "second Estonia" (Vetik, 2002) which is mostly conceptualised as the Estonia of the poor and the "ordinary" as opposed to the financially and politically influential people (Saarts, 2002).

⁵ This is evident in the heated debates that surrounded the fate of the "Bronze Soldier" monument in Tallinn in the summer and fall of 2006. The monument, a legacy of the Soviet era, commemorates

Soviet soldiers who perished in WWII and as such invokes the opposing interpretations in terms of occupation vs. liberation associated with the outcome of the war and implications for Estonia's statehood.

⁶ See: www.euborderconf.bham.ac.uk; last accessed in November 2006.

⁷ The most significant “carrot” the EU wields vis-à-vis conflict parties is EU membership (as opposed to the “stick” of its denial/withholding), which largely limits the EU’s compulsory impact to prospective member-states. Association agreements, as opposed to the prospect of EU accession, lack a comparable leverage (e.g. in the case of Israel-Palestine); the actual accession into the EU also diminishes the EU impact (e.g. Greece in the case of Turkish-Greek border conflict) (Diez et al., 2006).

⁸ The “simplified” border crossing regime extended to local inhabitants of the border areas on special occasions (such as state and religious holidays, which the locals often referred to as “simplified days”) and operated on the basis of lists rather than visas.

⁹ Although most examples of positive change refer to the southern stretch of the Estonian-Russian border, the northern Narva-Ivangorod area never experienced a comparable cultural separation along the border, with the division running rather between the Russophone Northeast of Estonia and the rest of the country.

¹⁰ See note 4 above.

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CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THE ESTONIAN WAY

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CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THE ESTONIAN WAY

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