

WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY, WHOSE INTEGRATION?

Construction of democracy and integration into the EU of Estonia

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INTRODUCTION¹

Integration into the European Union has for many years been one of the top priorities of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs)², playing a central role in both their foreign and domestic policies. Preparing for membership in the EU is in many ways connected to the development of democracy in these countries. The Union has declared support to democracy in the applicant countries to be one of the main priorities of eastern enlargement. In addition to concrete support, however, I argue that the relevance of the EU for democracy in the CEECs is even more due to indirect influence – integration is a dominant issue in the domestic politics of these countries and therefore an important part of continuous (re)production of democracy. This paper studies what kind of democracy has been constructed in one of the eastern applicant countries, Estonia, in the course of integration into the EU³. It analyses firstly the different conceptions of democracy that have been presented and put into practice as part of that process. Secondly, it places integration into the EU in the context of democratic politics of Estonia, asking whether preparations for EU membership have left room for more than a formal democracy to function.

Both democratisation and integration into the EU of the CEECs have been studied a lot during the 1990s, but their interconnectedness has seldom been analysed in more depth. Furthermore, the studies that do elaborate the democratic aspect of eastern enlargement of the EU or the impact of the Union on the democratisation of the applicant countries usually take the viewpoint of the EU. My approach, on the contrary, concentrates on the perspective of the applicant countries, including not only official policies (the state level) but also public discussions and views of different societal actors (the society level). Furthermore, it differs from most research made on this topic through applying discourse theory as main methodological basis and understanding democracy primarily as the process of democratic politics.

¹ I am grateful to Tuomas Forsberg, Harto Hakovirta, Christer Pursiainen and Henri Vogt for comments on the draft of this paper.

² By CEECs I mean the ten former eastern block countries that have applied for membership in the EU: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

³ The parts of the study that concern the domestic viewpoint of Estonia cannot be generalised to all applicant countries, but there are many similarities in the relations of these countries with the EU. The analysis of EU documents (chapter 2.2.) has more general relevance.

Thus the border between international relations (IR) and general political science becomes blurred, and the necessity and fruitfulness of combining these two traditions is one of the underlying ideas that this study seeks to bring forth. On the one hand, it studies relations between the EU and applicant countries, which would typically be a topic of IR. On the other hand, it approaches integration policy of the CEECs towards the EU not only as a foreign policy issue, but as a part of domestic democratic politics. My primary interest lies in the development of democracy, but I see it as a domestic matter only to a limited extent. Hence the usual approaches of IR and political science are in a way turned upside down and become thoroughly intermixed.

The paper consists of two parts. In the first part, I present a theoretical and methodological framework for studying the interconnectedness of democracy and integration into the EU of the CEECs. The main building stones of the framework are discourse theory, democracy/democratic politics and integration, each of them discussed shortly in chapter 1. In connection with theoretical and methodological questions, I seek to explicate their relevance for my study through drawing parallels to the empirical case.

The framework primarily concentrates on different forms of indirect, discursive power of the EU inherent in the process of preparing for membership, and less on the active measures (such as financial aid) through which the EU has promoted democracy in the CEECs. I distinguish three groups of actors that are relevant for my topic: official institutions of the EU, Estonian state, and societal actors of Estonia. In the course of integration, these actors engage in discursive struggles over the meaning of "democracy" and other issues related to integration – for example, the dominant, minimalist conception of democracy followed by the European Commission coexists and competes with wider conceptions in the Estonian public discussion. These discursive struggles form part of everyday (re)production of democracy, and thus various democratic practices and structures are created or supported through integration. From the viewpoint of democratic politics, the plurality, contingency and openness of the discursive struggles related to integration, as well as the question of who determines the agenda and decisions in that process, are of central importance.⁴

In the second part of the paper I apply the theoretical and methodological framework to the case of Estonia. The aim is to find out which discourses dominate the

⁴ I am not claiming, though, that integration policy in practice *fully* does or could function as a process of open public discussion and decision making.

process of integration, what are the counter discourses, and which actors exercise power in and over the shared systems of meaning or try to challenge them. The time period that I cover ranges from July 1997 until the beginning of year 2000, starting from the publication of *Agenda 2000* document where the European Commission suggested the Union to open accession negotiations with five CEECs, including Estonia. Since then the domestic politics of Estonia has been strongly and more concretely than earlier orientated towards future EU membership. The main sources of the study are documents of the EU and Estonia, speeches, discussions in the Estonian newspapers, and previous academic studies.

1. CONSTRUCTING DEMOCRACY THROUGH INTEGRATION: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Discourses, power and change

Social and political realities are inseparable from the meanings that we attach to them. As meaningful realities, they are discursively constructed – shared ideas about, for example, a democratic society both reflect and constitute that society as its members maintain the dominant ideas and act in accordance with them. Meanings are related to each other to form discourses, that is, *systems of meaning* that constitute and are reproduced through social and political practices, institutions and relations of power⁵. Our action is conditioned by pre-existing discourses, but on the other hand, the existence of discourses is dependent on actors who constantly reproduce discursive realities and are free to change them. Applied to democracy, this means that democracy, although having a relatively fixed minimal definition, is in practice constantly redefined and reproduced by societal actors within the framework of contingent discursive practices and structures.

An understanding of discourse as a system of meaning raises language to a central role in experiencing and analysing reality. However, it has to be underlined that "discourse" does not refer to language only. It does not rely on a conception of language as transparent and descriptive, but understands text and speech as important forms of social

⁵ See Howarth 1995.

action⁶. Systems of meaning are “not autonomous systems but operate in the context of the institutional supports and practices that they rely upon”⁷. Laclau defines discourse as “a meaningful totality which transcends the distinction between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic”⁸; both mental and material elements are necessary “building-stones” of a discourse. The material is constituted as an object of discourse from diverse subject positions, that is, positions that individuals hold in a discourse.⁹ One can distinguish three domains of social and political realities that are constituted by discourses: *representations* of the world that construct systems of knowledge and belief, *identities* and positions of actors, and *relations* between actors¹⁰.

Discourses are inseparable from power - power to constitute shared meanings, shape our understandings of the world around us, and thereby produce, maintain or change human realities. Power to determine shared meanings has aptly been called “the most subtle and most effective form of power”¹¹. Discursive power cannot be understood as a power that one can possess, transfer and exchange, but as a relation of force that only exists in action¹². Truth and objectivity are determined by discursive power; the production of “objective” knowledge reflects power relations on which the discourse that defines what counts as objective relies. Dominant discourses are usually institutionalised (e.g. law) and, through institutional practices, reproduced over and over again often in unconscious ways. Such relatively stable discourses usually determine what we consider to be normal, acceptable, self-evident, right or good. To quote Foucault, “In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power”¹³.

⁶ See e.g. Fairclough 1999, 204-205.

⁷ Mottier 1999, 4.

⁸ Laclau 1993, 435.

⁹ See Laclau & Mouffe 1985, 108-109. As an example of empirical research based on a very similar notion of discourse and concerning an issue area close to mine (the formation of a collective identity between the Baltic states and the EU), see Wennersten 1999.

¹⁰ Cf. Fairclough & Wodak 1997, 273.

¹¹ Adler 1997, 336. Although the constructivist approach as outlined by Adler shares many ideas with discourse theory, Adler does not use the notion of discourse in the sense it is used here and provides a different, somewhat vague understanding of the connections along and between the ideational - material and agents - structures - axes.

¹² See Foucault 1980 (1976), 87-92. Stressing Foucauldian conception of power as a relation does not exclude drawing also on an “economic” understanding of power as a property; the two notions can be combined. See Cameron et al 1999 (152).

¹³ Foucault 1980 (1976), 94.

An analytical distinction can be made between three forms of discursive power: power *of* discourse, power *in* discourse, and power *over* discourse¹⁴. Power *of* discourse refers to the power that pre-existing systems of meaning have over our ways to think and act, while we are usually unconscious of it. This kind of power accounts for a great deal of stability and predictability of our action, and as an analytical tool, it directs attention to reproduction rather than change. For example democracy is itself a powerful discourse at least in what might be called "the western world"; we do not usually bring into question its positive value and desirability, or its superiority compared to other systems. Power *of* discourse is related to power *in* discourse which determines the positions of actors in social relations. Systems of meaning authorise certain actors to speak and act on behalf of others, and to represent and determine common understandings, whereas others are left in a passive or subjugated position – in short, discourses constitute and reproduce power relations.

While the concepts of power *of* and *in* discourse see social actors as constituted by relatively stable systems of meaning, power *over* discourse directs attention to *agency* and *change*¹⁵. Discourses are contingent; the process of constructing and reproducing them is not automatic or inevitable, but involves *choice*. Those who are entitled to exercise power within a certain discourse may consciously contribute to the maintenance or reproduction of that discourse. On the other hand, those who are placed in a subordinated position often develop counter discourses as forms of resistance in order to bring the dominant system of meaning into question and change it. (Re)production of dominant meanings can be used as an instrument of power.

For example, the Commission of the EU has the authority (power *in* the discourse of enlargement) to present objective evaluations on the applicant countries. As an example of power *of* discourse, its reports constitute the political reality in the CEECs through identifying what counts as achievements and problems, and how to deal with these problems and set priorities for future action. At the same time, the reports exclude many factors that could, in principle, also be evaluated. In spite of their authority, the assessments of the Commission are not always accepted as true and objective; there are also counter discourses both in the EU and the applicant countries that try to challenge the Commission and exercise power over the discourse of enlargement or integration.

¹⁴ Cf. Fairclough & Wodak 1997.

¹⁵ According to Hajer (1995), interest in subject and change are the two major correctives to Foucault that the "social-interactive discourse theory" represented by him provides.

The different forms of discursive power are tied to how discourses are *used* and thereby become manifested in practice; it is through the use of discourses that we are able to trace the constant change of systems of meaning as well as the agency involved in that change¹⁶. Change is dependent on "active discursive reproduction or transformation"¹⁷, in the course of which actors use different discursive strategies. During major social changes or crises existing discourses are most likely to disintegrate, leading to a situation where the role of actors in reconstituting meanings and producing new discourses acquires great importance.

Competition between different forces in political processes can be analysed through the concept of "discursive struggle" in which rival groups seek to fix the meaning of contested concepts such as "democracy"¹⁸. Periods of change, such as democratisation, are characterised by fierce competition between alternative meanings of social practices and institutions. Old conceptions are re-evaluated and new discourses are formulated, which involves choices between different meanings represented by competing political forces. The "winners" of discursive struggle formulate new systems of meaning which become institutionalised and dominant. However, this does not eliminate struggle and contingency; on the contrary, struggle with opposed forces and the existence of contingent elements are necessary for hegemonic practices which attempt to suppress opponents and confer meaning on contingent elements¹⁹.

1.2. Democracy as the process of democratic politics

Democracy can be seen as a process; as a certain kind of system of society that is constantly reproduced and that changes during that process.²⁰ Such an approach does not lie emphasis on the relatively stable formal and institutional basis of democracy, but on the discourses and practices through which that basis is reproduced and "becomes alive". These discourses and practices constitute what I call "democratic politics", essential forms of which are public discussion and open decision making that entail continuous struggle over meanings attached

¹⁶ These ideas come close to late Wittgenstein; see Laclau & Mouffe 1985, 108.

¹⁷ Hajer 1995, 56.

¹⁸ See Laclau 1993, 435.

¹⁹ See Howarth 1995, 124.

²⁰ When it comes to my topic, analysing democracy as the process of democratic politics provides a particularly good approach because in the CEECs democracy is still in the consolidation phase, and thus its process nature is more marked than in "old", more stable democracies.

to social reality. In this struggle, political actors aim at making their views become widely shared "truths".

Procedural and institutional factors that form a minimalist conception of democracy²¹ provide a basis for democratic politics, but they are only one of the dimensions of democracy. Studying the (re)production of democracy, it is also important to look at *responsiveness* of decision making – the extent to which views of various members of the society are reflected in decision making, – *participation*, and *democratic political culture* that includes values such as freedom, tolerance and openness. Thus both representative and participatory aspect are included in the conception of democracy that I follow, while I see it as a central question for the study of democracy how much stress (if at all) do different theories and political actors lay on each of these dimensions. At the same time, the content of these dimensions is defined in various competing ways. Furthermore, democracy would not be possible without a political community that is also constantly reconstructed. Members of the political community hold various positions and identities in democratic politics, and they act in the framework of institutions and laws, as well as dominant values and norms (political culture).

Pluralism and contingency are the main principles that underlie democratic politics. These principles have to be applied to both the idea and practice of democracy. Theoretically, there is no one right definition or model of democracy, and it is not desirable to search for an ultimate solution. In practice societies are pluralist, and different dimensions of democracy have to contain that plurality. Decision making can only be responsive (although always to a limited extent) if it takes account of and reflects a plurality of views. Contingency supports responsiveness as it sees political decision making as a process of making choices and not following pre-determined paths²². Contingency of decision making also makes participation meaningful – it is worth to express one's views and be active in political and social life if participation can "make a difference". Political culture that respects freedom, tolerance and openness of political processes contributes to the contingency and pluralism of politics. Consensus is not an ideal of such politics, but instead, difference and conflictuality are seen as necessary conditions of democracy. Continuous competition between alternative

²¹ See the minimal conditions for a democracy in Dahl (1971, 2-3).

²² The idea is close to what Keane (1988, x) calls "democratic imagination", or "the habit of asking questions about established beliefs and procedures".

views keeps democracy alive, while a common framework of basic principles and minimal conditions of a democracy allows for conflicts to be expressed and handled peacefully.²³

1.3. How is democracy constructed through integration?

Integration can be defined as a process whereby a common political system and political community are constituted among previously independent systems. When speaking about integration of the CEECs into the EU, I obviously do not mean the same process of integration that has been going on *within* the EU for decades. Therefore classical integration theories do not have much relevance for my topic²⁴. However, I consider it justified to use the concept of "integration" for both theoretical and practical reasons. As to the theoretical concept, the aim of the process that I study is indeed to constitute a common political system and political community among previously independent systems. From a practical viewpoint it has to be pointed out that the concept of "integration" is widely used in the CEECs in the same sense as I use it, referring to the relations of these countries with the EU.

As the formulation "integration *into* the EU" indicates, relations between the Union and applicant countries are characterised by asymmetry; the latter have to adopt the existing laws and practices of the Union in order to become integrated into it. That integration is not a one-way process – it involves dialogue, interaction, negotiations and adaption of both parties²⁵, and the EU itself is compelled to implement major internal changes in order to be able to accept new members – but the EU is clearly the one defining the criteria and setting the pace of integration.

More concretely, my interest mainly lies in integration *policy* and its connections to democracy. Thus I view integration as the process of making and implementing the decisions through which an applicant country becomes integrated into the EU. An integration policy model presented by Lykke Friis²⁶ offers a useful categorisation between different levels of actors – the Union, the state, and domestic societal actors – that

²³ This conception of democracy is greatly inspired by works of Chantal Mouffe (see Mouffe 1992 & 1996).

²⁴ Friis and Murphy (1999, 212-213) point out that classical integration theories ignore the relations of the EU with non-members and are therefore useless for analysing how external relations affect the internal development of the Union. However, they argue that EU policies towards the CEECs have had considerable effects on what is going on within the EU, which raises the need to study "the significance of the 'outside' in shaping the 'inside'".

²⁵ See Friis & Murphy 1999.

²⁶ Friis 1997.

are involved in integration (and thus also in the construction of democracy). It directs attention to both external and internal pressures, subjected to which the state (that is not seen to be a unitary actor) makes integration policy decisions.

The EU is very often "present", through numerous criteria, recommendations and norms, in the domestic decision making of the CEECs. From the viewpoint of democracy, this creates a somewhat problematic situation: a powerful external actor *participates in democratic politics without being included in the formal democratic system* of the applicant countries, and without corresponding participation of the latter in the decision making of the Union. (This situation is of course temporary and only characteristic of the pre-accession period, but for the CEECs this period is going to last for over a decade.)

Placing the pre-accession period in the framework of democratic politics is comparable to the idea of "extended governance" presented by Friis & Murphy: the EU practices governance over the applicant countries through the perspective of membership. Drawing on Michael Smith, they argue that it is the blurring of boundaries in Europe that enables the EU to govern beyond its territory. At the same time, this has an unintended effect of putting pressure on the EU to deepen its relations with the CEECs.²⁷ The EU plays a central role in the broader "European Order", and importantly for the applicant countries, the relation of the Union to the European Order has moved from a "politics of exclusion" towards a "politics of inclusion". Smith presents the politics of exclusion and inclusion as two models of "boundary politics" of the EU, while the strengthening of the latter is related to the recent and ongoing redrawing of boundaries - geopolitical, institutional/legal, transactional and cultural - between the EU and its environment. The increasing fuzziness of these boundaries is reflected by a "complex set of external linkages", including a variety of new forms of contacts and cooperation.²⁸

Among other things, these linkages may promote the consolidation of democratic principles and practices in the CEECs, but at the same time, extended governance of the EU narrows the scope for democratic politics in these countries. As the CEECs work for securing their place within the "European Order", their relation with the EU is very much conditioned by the institutional/legal "core of the EU governance system" that is "non-negotiable with outsiders"²⁹. The institutional/legal core functions as a pre-existing discourse that to a great

²⁷ Friis & Murphy 1999.

²⁸ See Smith 1996.

²⁹ Friis & Murphy 1999.

extent determines the relations between the EU and the applicant countries; the latter have not played any role in producing that discourse, but they have to adopt it in order to become full-fledged members of the "European family". What makes the adoption more complicated is that the discourse is undergoing considerable changes, the outcome of which is difficult to predict and can be shaped by the applicant countries to a little extent.

In the light of Foucauldian thought, extended governance and participation of the EU in democratic politics of the applicant countries are forms of discursive, constitutive power exercised by the Union. They include making claims about what is good and right for the applicant countries, defining "objective" criteria for evaluating these countries, and presenting "true" descriptions of the state of democracy or any other sphere of life on the basis of these criteria. The CEECs should adapt the norms and practices that are dominant in the EU, but that is often done in a superficial manner without adjusting them to already existing structures and practices. The effects of discursive power are manifested in the extent to which integration shapes or changes dominant discourses in the applicant countries.

This power must not be viewed as positive or negative in itself. In the applicant countries many people do indeed share the views of the EU on many issues, and the power exercised by the EU, if realised at all by these people, may be considered to have a positive, constitutive role in building their societies and strengthening the institutions and practices that they accept and value. On the other hand, alternative views also exist, and from some aspects, the power of the EU is experienced as repressive and subordinative, imposing foreign demands on domestic development. In some issues, national discourses may adopt new meanings through integration into the EU little by little, leading over time to considerable changes in certain conceptions and practices. A good example of the latter is the minority policy of Estonia, in which the demands and recommendations presented by the EU have led to new laws, institutions and practices, as well as changes in the ways how politicians and the media speak and write (and think?) about the minority. Thus the discourse presented by the EU has become more and more general, but still competes with conflicting views.

The most important sources for studying these discursive struggles are official documents and the media. As a specific type of texts, documents construct their own kinds of documentary realities that cannot be viewed as mere descriptions of certain political or social realities. As Atkinson & Coffey point out, "Documentary realities, based on complex inter-linkages between documents, *create* their own versions of hierarchy and legitimate

authority”.³⁰ Documents reflect political and social realities, but they also shape these realities and construct the identities of and relations between actors. Fairclough emphasises the intertextuality of these processes and the need to analyse both content and form of texts in a way that shows how new texts draw upon earlier discourses³¹.

The opinions of Estonian people about the EU and integration are to a large extent formulated by the media. It functions as a public space where general, widely shared understandings or “truths” about integration are constructed and discursive struggles take place. The media has a dual role in the discursive production of social reality: it provides a channel for the state and other actors to express their views, but it also acts as an independent opinion builder. In the media the official discourse on integration has to compete with counter discourses.

2. POLITICS OF NO CHOICE? – DEMOCRACY AND INTEGRATION INTO THE EU OF ESTONIA

This chapter analyses the construction of democracy as a part of Estonia’s integration into the EU, starting from historical background, looking then at official discourses of the EU and Estonia, and finally giving a brief overview of Estonian public discussion on issues related to integration.

2.1. Return to the West

Democratisation started in Estonia in the latter half of the 1980s when the country was still a Soviet republic and grasped the opportunity for change afforded by Gorbachev’s reform politics. Demands for democracy and national sovereignty were joined together in the “singing revolution” of Estonia that led to the restoration of independence in August 1991. A new, democratic constitution was approved in a referendum in June 1992, and the first fully democratic elections (since the 1930s) were held in September of the same year. Radical

³⁰ Atkinson & Coffey 1997, (58).

³¹ Fairclough 1999. Fairclough makes a distinction between intertextual analysis as analysis of form and content analysis, but emphasises that “form is a part of content” (p. 184).

political and economic reforms were implemented during the years 1992-1994, which aroused a lot of positive attention in the West. According to minimal conditions, democracy started to function satisfactorily.

Since 1994, radical economic reforms have continued hand in hand with political instability (that has, however, decreased in some respects), an increasing gap between the people and the new elite, and growing social and regional cleavages. One of the main problems for democratisation that had raised criticism from both Russia and the West – the position of the large Russian-speaking minority – has stayed high on the agenda, but tensions around that question have calmed down somewhat.³²

Westernisation and integration with the western international structures of cooperation have been central aims of the new political leaders of Estonia throughout the transition. Consistency in foreign policy has produced successful results; Estonia has detached itself from the former Soviet Union and established tight relations, both politically and economically, with western countries and organisations. Membership in the EU and Nato have been the primary political goals of Estonia for several years, but only Nato membership is supported by a majority of the people. Many Estonians are uncertain about their stance on joining the Union – support to EU membership has remained below 40 or even 30 % for several years, while opposers constitute less than 20 % of the citizens³³. However, relations with the EU have proceeded rapidly due to efforts made by officials. The Free Trade Agreement with the EU came into force in the beginning of 1995; in June of the same year the Association Agreement was signed, and in November Estonia applied for membership. An important turning point in relations with the Union was the year 1997 when a decision was made by the EU to start membership negotiations with Estonia and four other CEECs. In the following year, the Association Agreement came into force and accession negotiations were started.³⁴ By the beginning of 2000, negotiations had been concluded on 8 chapters out of 31. The official aim of the government is to be ready to join the EU in 2003.

³² For an analysis of democratisation, see e.g. Lauristin & Vihalemm (1997) and Lagerspetz & Vogt (1998).

³³ Source: Saar Poll. According to the latest poll conducted in October 1999, 38 % of Estonian citizens would vote for EU membership in a referendum (see Kirch 1999).

³⁴ For a more detailed overview of Estonia's relations with the EU, see Palk 1999. Without providing any supporting evidence, and contrary to the largest opinion polls made on this question, Palk (1999, 74) claims that a majority of Estonians supports membership in the EU.

2.2. Fulfilling "historical task" – official discourse of the EU

What kind of democracy?

In official materials of the EU, the Copenhagen criteria usually function as the basis for defining the role of democracy in the eastern enlargement of the EU, and as the "objective criteria" for evaluating the progress of the applicant countries and their readiness to join the Union. Democracy is defined as the primary condition for membership in the EU, together with other political criteria. In order to fulfil the political criteria, the candidate country must have achieved "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".³⁵ As it can be concluded from the quotation, the Copenhagen criteria do not actually include any definition of democracy. It even remains unclear whether the rule of law and human and minority rights are included in the conception of democracy or not. When the Commission evaluates democracy in the applicant countries in the three reports it has presented so far³⁶, it does not refer to any other sources either. A more precise conception of democracy that underlies the reports can, however, be extracted from the assessments themselves.

In the evaluations on democracy, the Commission concentrates on *public authorities*: how these "are organised and operate, and the steps they have taken to protect fundamental rights". Interestingly for the above presented understanding of democracy as a process, the Commission states that its assessment "does not confine itself to a formal description but seeks to assess the extent to which democracy and the rule of law *actually operate*" (my italics). A "formal approach" is thus identified as insufficient and having to be accompanied by a more dynamic analysis. Nevertheless, under the heading "Democracy and the Rule of Law" the Commission examines the central institutions only, thus taking quite a narrow approach on how democracy operates. The reasons for making such a delimitation or excluding other factors from the analysis of democracy (e.g. civil society) are not deliberated

³⁵ The criteria were laid down by the European Council in Copenhagen, June 1993. In addition to the first, political criteria, membership requires secondly "the existence of a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union", and thirdly "the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union". (Copenhagen European Council 21-22 June 1993: Presidency Conclusions.)

³⁶ DOC/97/12; Regular Report... 1998&1999.

in the reports. The assessments emphasise stability of institutions and can be categorised as representing an institutional conception of democracy.

The only weaknesses of political conditions that the Commission Opinion of 1997 points out are that non-citizens cannot be members of political parties, there is a shortage of qualified personnel in public sector, "the police's effectiveness has sometimes been called into question" related to organised crime and corruption, and the functioning of the judiciary faces some difficulties. The assessment of human and minority rights brings in the perspective of citizens and also the non-citizen inhabitants, but the connection of these areas to democracy remains unclear. The problems that the Commission points out regarding the political criteria (the operation of the judicial system, corruption, integration of the Russian-speaking people into the Estonian society) are not presented as weaknesses of democracy, but the Commission makes several requirements that Estonia should follow in order to improve the situation in these fields. In spite of these problems with political conditions, the general conclusion is that "Estonia presents the characteristics of a democracy, with stable institutions guaranteeing the rule of law and human rights".

The reports that the Commission presented in November 1998 and October 1999 follow very much the same lines. According to the former, the main problems with political criteria are questions related to non-citizen Russian-speaking people, and weakness of public administration and judiciary. The latter report presents sharp criticism towards the new Language Law and points out the problem of corruption.

On the basis of all the three reports, the main political problem in Estonia is the position of the Russian-speaking minority, especially related to citizenship and language policies. The Commission takes quite a pragmatic and cautious stance in minority issues that are very sensitive for Estonians. It does not blame Estonia for violating minority rights – on the contrary, these are "observed and safeguarded" according to the Commission – but it sees the great number of foreign or stateless people as a political problem that needs to be addressed. No explicit connection to democracy is made.

An important implication of the Commission reports is that, as Estonia is defined to be a functioning democracy, democracy as an aspect of eastern enlargement becomes less relevant. The assessment of the Commission functions as a powerful speech act that constitutes the political reality of Estonia, both domestically and maybe even more in foreign relations, by making it an "objective truth" that Estonia is a democratic country.

While democracy is claimed to function already without major problems, attention is directed to other fields. The main concerns of the Commission (in addition to the Russian speaking minority) are Estonia's ability to apply and enforce the *acquis*, especially related to the internal market, and weakness of administrative and legal capacity. According to the Commission, progress is also necessary before Estonia is able to "cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the Union". In order to overcome these problems, Estonia should work according to the Accession Partnership that provides a "clearly defined programme" with a list of short and medium term priorities and a timetable for implementing these priorities³⁷. The Commission does not see implementation of the Accession Partnership as a part of domestic democratic processes – in the Progress Report of 1999 it criticises the Estonian government for, in principle, not determining the work of parliament:

"As regards the timetables set by the NPAA [National Programme for the Adoption of the *Acquis*], unfortunately not all areas contain the same level of detail. /.../ It is notable that the time targets stated in the NPAA refer to the dates at which the government plans to adopt legislative proposals and not the actual date of adoption by parliament. This of course, limits the value of the NPAA as a programming tool."

This criticism was sharply commented by the director of the Estonian Office for European Integration, Henrik Hololei, according to whom setting such time targets would mean "either an underevaluation of the Estonian legislator or false promises"³⁸.

To provide an example of an alternative conception of democracy from within the EU, the financial aid of the Union aimed at supporting democratisation in the CEECs is based on a considerably wider conception of democracy. The Phare Democracy Programme that was started in 1992 on the initiative of the European Parliament aims at supporting "all elements of a fully democratic and civil society". The areas that the Programme focuses on include transparency of public administration, development of NGOs and representative structures, and awareness building and civic education. Referring to the dimensions of democracy that I presented above – procedural factors, responsiveness, participation, and political culture – the Phare aid is based on criteria that include aspects from all these dimensions, whereas the Commission reports are restricted to the procedural and institutional

³⁷ The first versions of Accession Partnerships, designed individually for each applicant country, were presented by the Commission in March 1998.

³⁸ Hololei 1999.

dimension. While the Commission concentrates on public authorities, the Phare Democracy Programme lays more emphasis on the perspective of the society and the citizen, and relationship between the citizens and the state.³⁹

Altogether, EU documents present “democracy” as an objective, necessary condition for membership and a primary value for the EU. At the same time, there is no clear definition of democracy that could serve as a basis for promoting and evaluating it, but different documents emphasise different factors. The plurality of conceptions of democracy within the Union – among member states and also among EU institutions – obviously does not allow for democracy to have a fixed definition. Nevertheless, the Commission presents its evaluations as objective and does not reflect at all on the factors it has included in or excluded from the criteria of democracy, giving an impression that the meaning of democracy is self-evident. And yet, the concept of democracy does not define itself for us; different actors give different meanings to it.

It has to be pointed out that there are some important arguments for using the minimalist criteria. Firstly, a wide consensus exists on the content of these criteria; they serve as “the least common denominator” since nearly everybody agrees on the necessity of elections, democratic institutions, and basic political rights and freedoms for a democracy. Secondly, it is easy to evaluate democracies on the basis of these criteria, as they provide a concrete list of factors that have to be fulfilled in a democratic state. Furthermore, the present member states, and even more the Union itself, have problems with the functioning of their democracies if wider criteria (e.g. participatory aspect) are applied.

All these reasons justify the fulfillment of minimal criteria being sufficient for membership in the Union. This should not, however, create an impression that democracy in some objective or natural way only is about the minimal criteria, or that there is no need to pay attention to democracy in the applicant countries as soon as they have fulfilled these criteria. After all, it is one of the central questions in discussions on democracy whether the minimal criteria are sufficient or, if not, what should be added. Apparently a separation has to be made between the degree of democracy needed for becoming an EU member, and different views on a stronger or more advanced democracy. Leaving the concept of democracy open

³⁹ See Briefing No 33.

gives space for different interpretations on the strength and stability of democracy in the applicant countries, and on the appropriate instruments for supporting it⁴⁰.

Political challenges and objective expertise

On the basis of official materials, the position of the EU vis a vis the eastern applicant countries is to present a model and give guidance to the applicant countries that wish to achieve the same stage of development and become members in the “club”. In studies on enlargement, labels such as “ins” versus “pre-ins”, “insiders” versus “outsiders” and “core” versus “periphery” of Europe are used to illustrate the asymmetric relationship between the EU and applicant countries. Meanwhile, in accordance with the idea of a “new European order”, the Union is constituting a common identity with the applicant countries⁴¹. According to Wennersten, the foreign policy of the EU towards the Baltic countries has to some extent constructed a collective supra-state identity that includes the Baltic states in the European/Western “inside”. This supra-state identification has had effects on the reconstruction of sovereignty in the Baltic states, which has thus not been a purely national process.⁴² Democracy is one of the common values on which a common identity is being built – although often used as a vague concept, it seems to have a great symbolic significance.

EU documents and speeches often present eastern enlargement as a historical challenge. It is claimed to be the responsibility of the Union to work for the creation of an “extensive area of stability and prosperity” in Europe where the Cold War border between east and west loses its significance. Mutual benefits outweigh the costs of enlargement, even though the process demands “commitment”, “intensive work” and “major efforts”. It is important to “maintain the momentum for reform” and keep up the “dynamics” and “speed” of enlargement. “Historical responsibility” for creating a peaceful Europe drives all actors to do their duty; there is a strong message of inevitability of enlargement in many official texts. The political elite takes a position of enlightened leaders who have a mission to carry out even though they are worried about public disinterest and scepticism. On the other hand, it is difficult for the Union to work out concrete solutions on how to integrate new members. It has

⁴⁰ See European Dialogue 1998/2 on discussions within the Commission on whether to concentrate democracy aid to governments or NGOs.

⁴¹ See e.g. Enlargement: Introduction.

⁴² Wennersten 1999.

to balance between “fulfilling the responsibility” and at the same time dealing with internal reforms and keeping the costs of enlargement on a level acceptable to present member states.⁴³ The texts drawing on “historical challenge” and “responsibility” constitute a discursive strategy that should increase the political will of member states to promote enlargement.

The voice of the Commission has a central place in the enlargement process. In reports on the applicant countries, the Commission presents its work as objective, taking into account the voices of other actors, and carrying out as carefully as it can the “unprecedented”, “huge” task that the Council has commended to it. The Commission takes the position of an authority that tells the truth about the candidate countries’ present state on the basis of “objective measurement of progress”, and gives guidance about how to improve it in the future. It does “high-quality work” that is “expert, objective, impartial, and free of political prejudice”. It is “critical and fair” in pointing out both achievements and future challenges.⁴⁴

In addition to taking the position of a just expert, the Commission seeks to legitimate its work through stressing that it cooperates with the applicant countries. For example when preparing the Accession Partnerships the Commission claims to have “conducted intensive discussions with each country” and “aimed to build a broad consensus on the priorities”. Even though presenting long lists of requirements, the Commission does not want to give an impression that it dictates what has to be done in the candidate countries. It has also stressed the importance of public discussion, or “keeping the public fully involved in debates on enlargement”, but one has to pay attention to the form of handling these issues – they are included in speeches, but not in central documents.⁴⁵ The decisive difference between these types of texts is that the latter clearly evokes action on the side of applicant countries, whereas the former tends to be viewed as “mere rhetoric”.

By denying the political nature of many questions that the Commission deals with, it places itself above other actors and exercises discursive power in a way that is not easily brought into question. Because of being based on “objective” work, reports and recommendations of the Commission should not be subjected to political disputes. However, the criteria they draw on are vague and allow for different interpretations, and the strategy of enlargement proposed by the Commission is very much tied to the political views in the

⁴³ See van den Broek 1998; SPEECH/98/236; IP/98/964; IP/99/751; Enlargement: Introduction.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Van den Broek 1998.

Union on the appropriate speed and scope of the process. A significant indicator of the power of the Commission is that its recommendations are usually followed by other EU institutions in taking *political* decisions on enlargement.

2.3. Innovative "model pupil" – official discourse of Estonia

Interaction of documents

As central EU documents evaluate democracy relatively narrowly and identify Estonia as a functioning democracy, democratic aspect does not constitute a large part of Estonian official integration policy materials either. In the following, I combine an analysis of how democracy is examined in some central documents and speeches with studying these materials from the viewpoint of democratic politics of Estonia.

Estonian official materials on integration are best understood when studied in interaction with EU documents, taking into account the aspect of intertextuality (see 1.3. above). Commission reports play a central role in Estonian integration policy; they have been carefully analysed by the Estonian officials dealing with integration, and Estonian responses to the Commission seek to take account of all criticism, point out improvements and present plans for the future. The Commission again follows whether the applicant countries "respond constructively" to its reports⁴⁶. It includes the documents provided by the Estonian officials in new reports, gives recognition for progress, and reproaches if some of its earlier requirements have not lead to expected changes on the Estonian side. This discursive interaction reflects and guides the work of numbers of Estonian public officials who prepare Estonia for membership in the EU.

The Estonian government responded to the first wide evaluation of the Commission (the Opinion in Agenda 2000) by presenting a document *Road Map to Reform* in October 1997. In that document, intertextuality is particularly explicit: citations from the Opinion are accompanied by comments on the measures that have already been taken or are planned on the Estonian side in order to improve the situation. In some issues very concrete solutions are presented, including dates and other details, whereas in others "solutions are

⁴⁶ Ibid.

actively being sought” or more vague plans are referred to. In general, the document stresses active, hard work and commitment of Estonia in following the guidelines of the Opinion. However, one requirement of the Commission, demanding state funding to Russian-language upper-secondary schools to be continued without time limit, is clearly rejected. The plan to finish state funding by school year 2007/2008 (as it had been decided by the Parliament) is justified by arguments similar to those that the Commission itself uses: it will ”ensure competitiveness” of the Russian speaking youngsters and ”encourage integration”. Using the same discourse as the Commission can be identified as the general discursive strategy followed by the Estonian officials in documents addressed to the EU.

Road Map to Reform was followed by a similar, but more detailed and thorough document, *National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis* (NPAA) in 1998. It was presented in the framework of the new Accession Partnership that had been launched by the Commission (see above).⁴⁷ The structure of the NPAA again follows the reports of the Commission. None of these documents explicitly examines democracy, but they deal with the court system and human rights and the protection of minorities.

Although the Commission has determined much of the content of Estonian integration policy, Estonian officials have made one considerable addition to issues examined in the reports: the chapter on political criteria in the NPAA includes a separate subchapter named ”Public awareness”. Informing the public is defined as an ”important part of European integration” that should promote ”objective understanding” of the Estonians about the EU, Estonian integration policy and future membership. A detailed strategy for providing regular information is identified in a document called the ”Principles of Informing the Estonian General Public of the European Union” that was prepared by a working group of civil servants already in 1997. The low interest and undecided or sceptical attitude of the people towards the EU are identified as a problem, and the suggested solution is to establish information points and centres, and spread information that is ”understandable and familiar to the Estonian public”. In addition to state-led structures, different organisations and interest groups are also integrated in the ”information/dissemination system”.⁴⁸ Thus the aspect of

⁴⁷ A new, revised edition of the NPAA was adopted by the government in March 1999, and the following government that started its work soon after that presented a slightly revised version in May 1999.

⁴⁸ National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis; Eesti avalikkuse Euroopa Liidu alase teavitamise põhimõtted.

public opinion and discussion is included in the NPAA, deviating from the general line that strictly responds to Commission reports.

Commitment and efficiency

The “presence” of the EU in domestic politics was expressed very clearly by the Estonian prime minister and foreign minister in a recent parliamentary discussion on European integration. According to foreign minister Ilves, through preparations for EU membership “foreign policy has turned into domestic policy” and “decisions taken in the context of domestic development have to take account of the reality of enlargement negotiations and responsibility to adopt the *acquis* as quickly as possible”⁴⁹. Prime minister Laar underlined the importance of European integration programme of the government for year 2000:

”[the programme is] the first priority of the government. This time the programme is to be implemented unconditionally because it includes undertakings of urgent necessity for the Estonian state, the postponement of which is in no way possible any more. The work plan of the government will be a hundred percent consistent with the European integration programme. The programme clearly sets both the aims of the activities and responsibilities. And I dare to assure that control over the implementation of promises will be strict.”⁵⁰

Such a strong emphasis of the government on inevitability or even “urgent necessity” to proceed with integration “as quickly as possible” clearly corresponds to the Commission discourse. Speaking about enlargement or integration, Estonian officials follow EU rhetoric also by characterising the process as “historical”, increasing “stability, security and prosperity” and involving “strong commitment”, “intensive work” and “great effort”. Estonia’s future membership in the EU is seen as a self-evident goal and a question of *when*, not *if*; and it *will*, not *would*, lead to certain consequences.⁵¹ Unlike in the EU, in Estonia such a discursive strategy is not needed for enhancing the political will of the elite, but an effort is necessary to increase the support of the people for EU membership. In the aftermath of the Soviet regime and its strong rhetorical devices it is, nevertheless, not so surprising that this

⁴⁹ Ilves 2000.

⁵⁰ Laar 2000.

⁵¹ Ibid; Ilves (all references).

kind of rhetoric about the creation of an “ever larger Union” does not appeal well to the Estonians.

Official materials describe Estonia as a diligent model pupil “prepared to do everything necessary to be ready at the time of our accession to assume the obligations arising from membership”. Politicians and officials tend to speak on behalf of all Estonians, referring to “we” or “Estonian people”, which is questionable in the light of the low level of support to EU membership – the “Estonia” that is claimed to be eager to join the EU only includes a minority of citizens. The discourse of “model pupil” is not, however, only one of a passive adapter and recipient of orders coming from above. The claimed readiness to do hard work has been accompanied by demands for reciprocity and corresponding effort from the other side. The speech held by foreign minister Ilves at the opening of accession negotiations was an especially forceful example of such demands. It claimed that Estonia has to be taken as an equal partner that is not only expecting benefits from the EU, but is ready to give its own contribution and believes in its “ability to contribute to safeguarding stability in Europe”.⁵²

The success of Estonia in relations with the EU is often explained through efficient reform policy. It is interpreted as a “strong vote of confidence in Estonia’s much-praised economic reforms” that the Free Trade Agreement and Accession Agreement with Estonia unprecedentedly came into force without a transitional period⁵³. Furthermore, according to Foreign Minister Ilves, the decision to include Estonia in the first group of enlargement negotiations was “testimony to the success of radical reforms” undertaken in Estonia. It has even been argued that Estonia’s liberalness could serve as a model for the EU; for example Ilves has claimed to be “confident that Estonia’s rapidly developing economy and dynamic society will contribute positively towards increasing the Union’s global competitiveness”. Estonia’s dynamic, innovative and liberal atmosphere (that certainly has profited the “winners” of the transition, but not the relatively larger group of “losers”⁵⁴) is confronted with the bureaucratic, stagnant and over-regulated EU countries, and it is feared that accession to the EU might threaten Estonia’s rapid economic development.⁵⁵

So the ruling political elite has been very confident of the line it has followed, and success in relations with the EU has legitimated that line. However, the policy that was

⁵² See Ilves 1998a.

⁵³ Estonia Today 21 July 1998.

⁵⁴ See Estonian Human Development Reports.

⁵⁵ See Ilves 1998a.

successful in the early stages of pre-accession obviously has to be, and to some extent has been re-evaluated, as it is in many aspects incompatible with EU norms and policies. The idea of Estonia's liberalness being a model for the EU is certainly brave and original and shows, contrary to often presented accusations (see the overview of public discussion below), that Estonian leadership is not ready to adopt "blindly" everything from the EU. Since the same political leaders stress the importance of public opinion, a question that also has to be asked is how much this idea is responsive to the views of the people in Estonia and the EU.

In preparing Estonia for EU membership, the civil servants who work on integration are in a powerful position as they actually conduct accession negotiations, harmonise legislation, draft policy analyses and plans and coordinate integration policy. However, their work appears to be neutral, apolitical, technical, and hence not to be submitted to democratic responsibility. Integration policy is a matter of expertise, professionalism and efficiency, and not a subject of political disputes. Membership in the EU is politically accepted as a central goal for Estonia, and civil servants work for coming closer to that goal. They have an authorisation from political forces to run integration policy, and they do it as professionally and effectively as they can. One indication of the discursive power of civil servants is that they are supposed to provide both the public and politicians with "objective" information on EU related issues.

Political responsibility falls upon the government, particularly the prime minister who is ultimately responsible for integration into the EU, and the foreign minister who has an important role in relations with the EU. The prime minister heads the Commission of Ministers, one of the four main groups that form the structure of integration policy. The other three groups – the Council of the Civil Servants, expert groups in each ministry, and the Office of European Integration – are non-political. Official documents emphasise the existence of political control through the involvement of the Parliament: the Committee on European Affairs of the Parliament is said to monitor closely the activities of the government in integration issues. The Committee is held responsible for the involvement of the citizens in integration; for "listening to, representing and implementing" their will^{56,57}. At the same time, parliamentary processes pose a threat to the efficiency and speed of preparations for EU membership. The government has recently underlined the need to enhance the commitment

⁵⁶ Savi 1998.

⁵⁷ See Fact Sheets...

and efficiency of the Parliament in integration process. Parliamentary discussions have retarded harmonisation of legislation and continue to threaten the fulfilment of promises given by the government to the EU.⁵⁸ The tight integration programme of the government does not leave much room for political discussion.

2.4. Eager Europeans or eurosceptics?

The following short overview of Estonian public discussion on integration into the EU mostly draws on the largest national newspaper of Estonia, *Postimees*. As to the relevance of that source, for Estonians the national printed press is the most important source of information about the EU⁵⁹. Apart from *Postimees*, my analysis relies on academic publications, most of them written by Estonians. Conceptions of democracy are studied very briefly because they are seldom explicitly a subject of debates on integration. However, questions related to democracy or democratic politics are often touched upon in these discussions.

Different conceptions of democracy

While the EU presents Estonia as a stable, functioning democracy, and democracy is thus not an important issue in Estonian integration policy, both domestic and foreign social scientists have been much more critical about the functioning of democracy in Estonia. Although there are no considerable threats to minimal democracy, the difficulties that have occurred in the political transition cannot be analysed in terms of minimal criteria only, but demand a wider approach. In general, most problems and weaknesses pointed out by social scientists have to do with the role of citizens in a democracy and the relationship between the citizens and the state, or the people and the elite. The problems that are often emphasised include weakness of civil society and social dialogue, feelings of alienation and powerlessness of the people, low trust in the political elite⁶⁰, and lack of social control over politicians and government. Social cleavages that have increased enormously during the 1990s are also often seen to weaken

⁵⁸ Ilves 2000; Laar 2000.

⁵⁹ Central and Eastern Eurobarometer, March 1997.

⁶⁰ According to a poll carried out in January 2000, 38 % of Estonian population trust the Parliament, 43 % the government, and only 35 % the courts. See Pressiteated 2.3.2000.

democracy and be one important reason for the decreasing legitimacy of the state.⁶¹ One concrete indicator of such developments is voter turnout in parliamentary elections, which had dropped by more than 10 % in 1999 (to a level of 57 %) in comparison to the previous elections of 1995. In addition to academic publications, these problems have often been pointed out in the media by both social scientists and politicians, journalists and other societal actors.

Integration, independence, identity

In Estonian public discussion arguments for and against joining the EU primarily concentrate on independence, security, sovereignty, national self-determination, identity and culture. These arguments are related to democracy in at least two ways. Firstly, many Estonians still make a strong connection between democracy, national self-determination and independence, which easily leads to a suspicious attitude towards EU membership. On the other hand, if independence is considered to be impossible in the long run unless Estonia becomes integrated with the West, integration serves as a guarantee to democracy, too. Secondly, from the viewpoint of democratic politics it is important that the more strongly joining the EU is seen as inevitable because of these factors, the less there tends to be scope for discussions about not only whether to join or not, but even about *how* to move towards membership.

The official discourse according to which membership in the EU is inevitable for Estonia is often presented in the media as well. *Inevitability* of joining the EU is related to arguments of *independence* and *security*. Membership is seen as a guarantee to independence that would otherwise be in danger. The EU is not considered to be a sufficient security guarantee, but it is the best that Estonia has opportunities to achieve in the near future. In this context, threat of Russia is usually not mentioned, but when it is, it is presented as something very obvious. The official foreign policy discourse of “positive engagement” of Russia does not allow the eastern neighbour to be described as a threat⁶², but the main reason for striving after membership in western organisations seems to be so self-evident that it does not even have to be expressed – it is one of the common, deep-seated truths shared by Estonians. This is well illustrated by the following quotation: “It is obviously not a secret why Estonia so eagerly

⁶¹ See e.g. Estonian Human Development Reports of 1998 and 1999 (written by a number of Estonian social scientists); Lagerspetz & Vogt 1998; Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997; Kivirähk 1999.

⁶² See Ilves 1998b on the policy of positive engagement towards Russia.

strived after starting accession negotiations [with the EU] in the first group and why it is important for Latvia and Lithuania, too”⁶³. The author does not tell why, but the sentence is presented in the context of handling Russia.

According to a dominant (but not necessarily majority) belief, Estonia only has two alternatives: to integrate with the West or to become sooner or later violently annexed by the East again. If Estonia would stay in a ”grey zone”, that grey zone would ”inevitably become integrated somehow and somewhere”⁶⁴. A eurosceptic counter argument might be called the *sovereignty* argument. It draws on independence, too, but eurosceptics stress that EU membership would restrict sovereignty of Estonia (which is actually not denied by supporters of membership) or even mean the end of independence. They argue either for a third alternative – sovereign, independent Estonia – or for joining the EU under specific conditions concerning, for example, the position of Russian speaking minority and protection of Estonian language. Eurosceptic arguments are supported by a slogan “from one union to another” that draws a parallel between the EU and the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ Such reasoning occurs quite often in public discussions, although it has been strongly condemned as populist and undue by those who lead integration policy. Unwillingness to give up independence and sovereignty that were just achieved after long foreign rule is, in any case, one of the main reasons for the low support for EU membership among Estonians. Restoration of nation state – one’s “own”, independent state (*omariiklus* in Estonian) – in the beginning of the 1990s was a “dream-come-true” that had seemed most unlikely in the Soviet period, and even though many Estonians have later become disappointed at the new state, they are not easily ready to give it up. This question is closely related to maintaining the Estonian identity, language and culture; nation state is supposed to be the best guarantee for that, whereas EU membership is seen as a threat to national identity.⁶⁶

Apart from security and independence, integration is considered necessary because of wider international developments such as globalisation and regionalisation. As Jaanson points out, these developments have already considerably decreased sovereignty of states. He also argues that Estonia is affected by globalisation in any case, but integration

⁶³ Jaanson 1997b. Jaanson is professor of international relations at the University of Tartu.

⁶⁴ Raud 1998.

⁶⁵ See Eesti euroskepsise kodupesa; Leito 1999; Leito & Silberg 1998. These materials contain lists of factors according to which the EU seems to be an even worse alternative for Estonia than the Soviet Union was.

⁶⁶ See Estonian Human Development Report 1999.

would give to Estonians better capabilities to cope with it.⁶⁷ The latter part of the argument may be questioned by very different political forces, including neoliberal, conservative-national and leftist, but still, the trends of globalisation and general loss of sovereignty of states have received surprisingly little attention in Estonian discussions. Instead, many arguments rely on a traditional conception of sovereignty, without taking into consideration the changes in the meaning of that concept. According to Rein Raud, Estonians should first of all consider what independence actually means, and what kind of independence is possible for Estonia, but "any attempts to start such a discussion are stifled before they even get properly started"⁶⁸.

While EU membership is seen as *inevitable* for guaranteeing independence and security, it is also often presented as *natural* because of the supposedly "natural" western and european identity of Estonia⁶⁹. Estonia belongs to Europe and the West, and membership in the EU would strengthen that tie. Again, the threat and the "other" lies in the East, and the Huntingtonian idea of the clash of civilizations has been welcomed by Estonians as an explanation and support to Estonia's fears and aspirations⁷⁰.

Although the supporters of EU membership usually see identification with the West and detachment from the East as two sides of the coin, sometimes Russia and the West are grouped together as the "other" that threatens the Estonian identity and inhibits democratic decision making⁷¹. Most often such arguments are presented in relation to questions concerning the Russian speaking minority. For example concessions in language policy that have followed western demands have been condemned as "fawning Moscow through Brussels or Brussels through Moscow or both", but in any case "disasterous for Estonia"⁷². Similarly, western criticism towards Estonian and Latvian minority policy has been interpreted as "gestures of good will" of the West to Russia⁷³, as if the concern of the West for minority rights in the Baltics would be just a question of "realpolitik", and not of democracy and human rights as western values. Most of the annoyance of Estonians in issues related to the Russian speaking

⁶⁷ Jaanson 1997a.

⁶⁸ Raud 1998.

⁶⁹ Hvostov (1999) presents a thorough, deconstructivist historical analysis of Estonian identity, which brings into question the current presentation of Estonian identity as "naturally" western and exposes the historical process of political and social construction of identity as not based on natural characteristics.

⁷⁰ Especially after *The Clash of Civilizations* by Huntington was published in Estonian in 1999, it was cited so much and often so uncritically in public discussion that one critical commentator called it a "new bible" (Postimees 25.11.1999).

⁷¹ E.g. Made 1997b & 1999; Postimees 20.12.1997.

⁷² Eesti Päevaleht 6.12.1997.

⁷³ Made 1999.

minority has been directed at Max van der Stoep, the OSCE High Commissioner on Minorities, who has been labelled "the symbol of fawning Russia"⁷⁴. Meanwhile it has often been forgotten that for example the EU has always stood behind his demands.

Integration as justification to domestic politics

Not only in official materials, but also in the media the extremely liberal reforms implemented in Estonia have often been justified by Estonia's success in international relations, including integration with the EU. Because of radical reforms, Estonia is said to have acquired an image of a successful reform country, and many political leaders consider it necessary to maintain such an image and continue along the same line. Thanks to radical reforms, Estonia "has what to advertise" to the West and is distinguished from the rest of the CEECs.⁷⁵ However, the use of success in EU relations as a justification to reform policy is unlikely to function as a successful discursive strategy for increasing the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of many Estonians. Often the same people who have suffered from radical reforms are suspicious about EU membership, and in many cases because they think it demands "tough capitalism"⁷⁶. So the government tries to legitimate one unpopular policy through another, presenting both as inevitable.

This line of argumentation can easily be brought into question. As a counter discourse, it has been pointed out that the Estonian system is too liberal for the EU since it does not have any policy or regulation at all in many fields included, for example, in the single market legislation of the Union. The weakness of social policy and inability of the political elite to alleviate the increased social problems are also considered to be contradictory to European ideals. The Estonian political elite has been criticised for misrepresenting the views of European political leaders: contrary to the dominant discourse of Estonian leaders, extreme liberalism of Estonia has been criticised in Europe.⁷⁷ Proponents of extreme liberalism have indeed emphasised that following the European model is a threat to the

⁷⁴ Eesti Päevaleht 10.12.1997.

⁷⁵ Postimees 20.12.1999; Hänni 1999; Made 1997a.

⁷⁶ About the attitudes of different social groups towards EU membership, see Kirch et al, pp. 84-89.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Palmaru 1999. The question of customs duties is one concrete example of such problems.

economic success of Estonia⁷⁸, whereas trade unions and women's organisations have drawn on European norms in their demands for increasing social dialogue, equality etc.

Consequently, very different policies and demands are justified through relations with the EU or the West in general. Both proponents of neoliberalism and those demanding a more active role for the state may defend their arguments by integration into the EU and europeanisation or westernisation of Estonia. In any case, referring to the EU is used a lot as a discursive strategy; it seems to make one's arguments more convincing and give them more weight in political discussions. Yet, the goal of joining the EU does not provide one clear path to follow, and therefore discussion on which is the best way towards membership and what kind of alternatives it involves is necessary.

"European race"

The arguments of inevitability and naturalness of EU membership are accompanied by the discourse of "model pupil" and "competition": Estonia has to work hard, or "even harder than so far", and do its "homework" well in order to guarantee that the success that has been achieved in EU relations will continue. "Model pupil" has a number of competitors (e.g. Latvia) who must not be allowed to outstrip Estonia in the "European race".⁷⁹ Since enlargement is understood as competition, it is part of its logic that it must not slow down – that would retard internal reforms of candidate countries⁸⁰, and moreover, no country, or rather no government would like its relative position to weaken. The rapidness of reforms and enlargement is often presented as a self-evident value, but on the other hand, quite many politicians have expressed doubts that Estonia follows the demands of the EU sometimes too painstakingly⁸¹ and that it is not good to hurry with accession⁸². The evaluations and demands of the Commission are also not always considered to be objective or justified, especially in the question of the Russian speaking minority, although in general the Commission reports are not brought into question⁸³.

⁷⁸ See Kallas 1999; Pullerits 1999.

⁷⁹ See Postimees 11.12.1999; 17.7.1997.

⁸⁰ See Streimann 1998.

⁸¹ E.g. Postimees 4.12.1999.

⁸² E.g. Postimees 15.12.1997; Ojuland 1998.

⁸³ See e.g. Hololei 1999; Postimees 17.7.1997; 14.10.1999.

All major parties of Estonia support integration into the EU, but the leader of the Centre Party (the largest party of Estonia) Edgar Savisaar has expressed a clearly reserved stance on EU membership. His views have to be related to his position as an opposition leader. According to him, the Centre Party is "rather for than against" EU membership, but may also take a negative stance at a referendum "if the conditions of accession are not acceptable for us". He has criticised foreign policy leaders, especially foreign minister Ilves, for not identifying clearly enough the priorities and demands of Estonia in accession negotiations and for "rushing into the EU without conditions". At the same time, he also presents European integration as a natural choice for Estonia, based on history and geographical position.⁸⁴ Several other politicians have also emphasised that Estonia has to defend its national interests in accession negotiations and should not be just a passive adaptor, but also actively suggest its own solutions. Such demands should make integration look more acceptable to the people as they stress Estonia's independent role in the process, but they are seldom concretised.⁸⁵

Involvement of the people versus power of bureaucrats

The central role of civil servants in integration has been criticised a lot in Estonia. On the background of that criticism there is a general widespread distrust of civil servants. Many people tend to think that officials rather work for promoting their personal and group interests than "common good". It is often claimed that civil servants support Estonia's membership in the EU because they would profit from it – the Union is famous for huge bureaucracy, as well as good salaries and other privileges of civil servants. Brussels has been called "an ally of Estonian civil servants", and increase of bureaucracy is one of the reasons for "euroscepticism".⁸⁶ It is less often pointed out that the demands of the EU to strengthen administrative capacity might also have positive implications, such as an increasing capability of the state to implement whatever decisions and policies⁸⁷.

The Estonian government has been criticised for acting contrary to the interests and expectations of the people and neglecting other issues while concentrating on integration. Both the EU and the government have been accused of manipulating public opinion and trying

⁸⁴ Savisaar 1999a & b.

⁸⁵ See e.g. Postimees 16.2.1999; Made 1997a.

⁸⁶ Eesti euroskepsise kodupesa; Postimees 11.11.1998.

⁸⁷ See Hololei 1999.

to indoctrinate people instead of giving “objective” information⁸⁸. Milder critics point out that it has not been made clear why an ordinary Estonian should support EU membership. “Bureaucratic language” and “façade events” related to integration are accused of being too far from the people.⁸⁹ The EU gives “millions for propaganda”, and the government has given to that “propaganda” exemption from taxes, which was strongly criticised by Postimees⁹⁰. The label “europropaganda” is often used about official information on the EU, which has a connotation to Soviet propaganda.

An overall impression of public discussion on the EU is that during the recent years there has been plenty of discussion about the need to discuss and information about how to receive general information on the EU, but less discussion and information about, for example, the implications of joining the EU, or the interests that Estonia should defend in membership negotiations. A major problem behind the lack of such discussions has been, as Tallo has pointed out, that the task to formulate the concrete interests of Estonia has been mostly delegated to civil servants⁹¹. Their work, again, is supposed to be objective and neutral, beyond political disputes. As a whole, the process of integration appears to be a politics of no choice, inevitable, following its own logic and leading to EU membership in any case, which makes political discussion and involvement of the people meaningless. Such an impression of integration is well illustrated by the following citation:

“The lack of real alternatives creates resignation that will soon overwhelm the whole society. Membership is not our positive choice, but an inevitability. The EU rolls on us like low pressure from the Baltic Sea. And like low pressure, it does not evoke much enthusiasm in people. /.../ Taking care of the ‘eurothing’ (*euroasi*⁹²) and promoting wider optimism has so far largely been the task of civil servants. Civil servants who officially represent eurooptimism mostly give the impression of being resigned europessimists. The job has to be done, so why bother to discuss. There is no time anyway, work has grown over their heads a long time ago.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Postimees 1.9.1999.

⁸⁹ Postimees 10.4.1999.

⁹⁰ Postimees 4.12.1999.

⁹¹ Tallo 1997. His article dates from 1997, but that problem has not disappeared, although as I mention, efforts have been made in order to increase the involvement of other actors.

⁹² Like ‘europropaganda’, ‘eurothing’ is an example of new Estonian ‘euroslang’ – usually referring to the EU and not the euro-currency – that has quickly become widespread in the media and everyday language and is often used in a sarcastic tone.

⁹³ Simpson 2000.

However, even if integration is seen as inevitable, while preparing for EU membership these civil servants actually make many choices that could provoke meaningful public discussions, if these discussions were part of political decision making. In order to alleviate this problem, the involvement of the Parliament and different social groups and organisations in integration process has recently been increased. Politicians often stress also that EU membership will eventually be decided by a referendum, and so the people will have the final say.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study democracy has been viewed as a process and as a concept that acquires different, coexisting and conflicting meanings depending on actor and context. Democracy is thus constantly redefined and reproduced in the process of democratic politics where plurality and contingency are the leading principles. In the context of enlargement, democracy serves as a common value that joins European states together and is one of the guiding principles in the process of widening the Union. When used as a membership criterion, “democracy” usually refers to minimal conditions that are relatively easy to assess and sufficient for becoming an EU member. On the other hand, in both the EU and the applicant countries democracy is often understood in a considerably wider sense, entailing concepts such as civil society and democratic political culture. Therefore it is questionable that the evaluations of the Commission, which follow a very limited conception of democracy and present that conception as self-evident and objective, have acquired such a central position in enlargement. According to the criteria applied by the Commission, the candidate countries are functioning democracies, but that should not push the question of democracy to a minor position in enlargement nor create an impression that there are no problems with democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

The analysis of Estonia’s integration into the EU from the viewpoint of democratic politics showed that integration has often neglected or restricted pluralism, responsiveness, public discussion and scope for choice in domestic politics of Estonia. It has been dominated by officials who see their work as objective and apolitical, implementing aims that are identified by the political elite as inevitable. Nevertheless, there would be more scope for political discussion, taking into account of different views and choosing between alternative solutions in the process of integration. Attempts have been made to strengthen

these aspects, but they conflict with the emphasis laid on speed and efficiency of preparations for EU membership. In the following, I summarize the main findings of the study that support these arguments.

Eastern enlargement is legitimised in official texts by identifying it as a historical challenge and emphasising the contribution it makes to security, stability and prosperity of Europe. Official materials of both the EU and Estonia present enlargement as inevitable and stress the need for commitment, efforts and keeping up the momentum of the process. Estonian elite sees EU membership as the only alternative for their country because of security and geopolitical reasons, but also due to the “natural” European identity of Estonia. Estonian people are much more sceptical about joining the EU, primarily because they assume that it would restrict sovereignty and pose a threat to national identity, language and culture. Interestingly, supporters, sceptics and opposers of EU membership draw very much on the same factors – first of all independence and identity – but give different meanings to these concepts. Arguments of “inevitability” and “naturalness” of official line easily stifle further discussion and have obviously not convinced ordinary Estonians of the claimed necessity to join the EU.

The Commission on the EU side and integration policy officials on the Estonian side act as objective authorities and experts in the process of Estonia’s integration into the EU. Their authoritative position and power in the discourse of integration are supported by the seemingly neutral, apolitical character of their work. This leaves little room for public disputes and political choice that are necessary for democratic politics. The suspicious attitude of a majority of Estonians towards EU membership, combined with a relatively high degree of apathy towards politics and distrust of politicians and civil servants, underline this problem. The political elite has emphasised the need to improve the situation through informing the people, promoting public discussion and increasing the involvement of the Parliament and various societal groups in integration.

In Estonian documents and public discussions Estonia is often identified as a “model pupil” who makes great efforts for doing the “homework” given by the EU as well as possible. On the other hand, Estonia has also been presented as an independent, innovative and dynamic actor who makes a contribution to the development of the Union and demands mutual commitment and equal partnership. In domestic discussions it has been emphasised that Estonia has to defend its national interests in accession negotiations, but there has not been much political discussion about what these national interests are. In general, the need to

be successful in competition with other candidate countries, "maintain the momentum for reform" and not let the enlargement process slow down leads to quick, automatic adoption of EU norms and structures. An analysis of interaction between documents of the EU and Estonia shows, however, that although the EU determines Estonian integration policy to a large extent, there are some considerable counter examples to that pattern, most importantly minority policy and liberalness of the state and economy. At least in the latter question it is doubtful whether the views defended by officials contrary to EU norms respond to the expectations of a majority of Estonians.

Although integration now demands an increase of regulation and strengthening of the state, extremely liberal reforms have been considered one of the most important reasons behind Estonia's success in relations with the EU. Liberal economic policy is a good example of how political leaders of Estonia have used integration with the EU or generally the West as a legitimation to their choices. Success in EU relations is still used as an argument for legitimating liberal policy, but contrary demands concerning for example social policy have also been backed up with EU norms. As this example illustrates, even if EU membership is accepted as a central goal for Estonia, it does not provide one clear path to follow. From the viewpoint of democratic politics it is important to have the choices related to integration represented in political discussions and decision making. Meanwhile, the more often political processes are seen as inevitable or natural, and to be taken care of by objective authorities as quickly as possible, the less there is space and time for democratic politics where decisions are contingent and different meanings compete with each other, and where participations is meaningful because it can "make a difference".

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