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# Conflict Prevention in Estonia: The Role of the Electoral System

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Estonia's success in averting a potential conflict over its Russian-speaking minority is often attributed to the intervention of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. Indeed, the Estonian case is one of the most satisfactory encounters in the period of Max van der Stoep's impressive diplomatic engagement. However, deeper, structural factors were also important over the longer term. In particular, the voting system that Estonia adopted, based on the single transferable vote system of proportional representation, turned out to be important in encouraging political moderation. This article argues that a decisive factor in ethnic accommodation was the way the political system channelled the activities of the Russian-speaking groups into Estonian parties. Other contributory factors were the weakness of ethnic identity among the Russian-speakers and international constraints on Russian foreign policy. This analysis highlights the crucial role of domestic institutions in conflict prevention.

## Introduction

THE ESTONIAN CASE is often cited as a prime case of effective conflict prevention.<sup>1</sup> But there is disagreement about the significance of external and domestic factors in averting a potential conflict. Some authors stress the role of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) and the broader activities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other external authorities.<sup>2</sup> They can point to the HCNM's success in defusing the crisis in the northeast in 1993 and securing some amendments to Estonian legislation on citizenship and language.<sup>3</sup> However, given that a large proportion of the non-Estonian population remained stateless after 1993, it remains to be explained why the conflict never intensified.

Others stress the lack of a sense of group solidarity, which prevented consistent political mobilization of the Russian-speakers.<sup>4</sup> Although the heterogeneous

composition of the Russophone identity is an important part of the explanation, these studies overlook the important issue of why this identity failed to develop under the conditions of the group's social exclusion.

A third group of studies have concentrated on the political mechanisms of ethnic accommodation.<sup>5</sup> They indicate that the electoral system did moderate the political discourse in Estonia and helped to establish stable relations between the Estonian- and Russian-speaking elites. However, existing studies do not explain how the electoral system established channels for the political integration of the Russophones.

This article aims to fill this gap and to demonstrate the significance of the electoral system in the prevention of conflict between Estonians and Russophones in Estonia. We do not claim that the electoral system was the exclusive factor that averted sustainable ethnic unrest. Rather, it affected the formation of organized political competition, impeded the creation of strong ethnic parties and created space for inter-ethnic alliances. In the Estonian context, the electoral system facilitated accommodation of the Russophone elite and inhibited the mobilization of ethnically polarized parties.

## The Conflict Dynamics and the External Intervention

The Estonian government has been sensitive to descriptions of the foreign intervention as 'conflict prevention'. It is, of course, impossible to establish whether a violent conflict would have taken place in the absence of preventive measures. Nevertheless, a tense situation with a potential for conflict had clearly arisen in 1993. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the recognition of independence, Estonia faced a challenging task to establish a stable nation-state. Over one-third of the total population of 1.5 million were non-Estonians. The first non-Communist government, under Edgar Savisaar, took an accommodating view towards the non-Estonian minority, proposing to grant citizenship based on residence in Estonia in 1990, which would have allowed virtually all non-Estonians to gain citizenship. But, after the attempted coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991, the balance of power in Estonia shifted in favour of the Estonian nationalists, who were able to draft a more exclusive law restricting citizenship to those who had been citizens in 1940 and their descendants. The Estonian government was fearful that the state would not be stable with a minority population of more than 30%. There were particular fears about former KGB and Soviet military officers, who with their families numbered over 100,000 and were also excluded from citizenship.

The Citizenship Law, passed in February 1992, required a sufficient command of the Estonian language and two years' residence before non-citizens could be naturalized. This caused considerable resentment among non-Estonians,

who saw themselves becoming disenfranchised and stateless. It also drew international attention to the situation in the country (as well as to the similar situation in Latvia). The status of non-Estonians was a subject of negotiations with the Russian government, which linked the withdrawal of military bases to the granting of citizenship to all non-Estonians. International organizations (including the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the EU, the Council of Europe and Human Rights Watch) also expressed concern and urged the Estonian government to change its approach. However, the government remained defiant and agreed to undertake only some minor changes. For example, an amendment waived the language test for those who had registered their intentions to apply for citizenship with the Congress of Estonia before 1991. The government also granted 'citizenship for special services' to about 500 people (leading non-Estonian politicians, artists, academics and sportspeople).<sup>6</sup>

Remarkably, for more than a year, popular discontent was silent and no noticeable collective action took place. The overall feeling of insecurity was not converted into mass protest, perhaps because the non-Estonians hoped that the dispute would be resolved satisfactorily through pressure from external actors. People expected their status to be clarified and legalized. Few non-Estonians applied for citizenship during this period. (Only 7,571 people applied for citizenship through naturalization, and 5,417 of these were granted citizenship. At the same time only 30,000 non-Estonians applied for Russian citizenship, and 25,400 emigrated from Estonia, mostly to countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS].)

On 21 June 1993, the Estonian government passed the Law on Aliens. This was supposed to regulate the problems with the legal status of a large number of non-citizens (mainly non-Estonians). In reality, this law effectively triggered a political conflict. Its provisions, which were quite mundane in terms of immigration acts, proved to be very controversial in the Estonian context. The main contention was over the requirement that all non-citizens obtain a residence permit, which would initially be temporary and would only become permanent after three to five years. In the context of radical anti-Russian and anti-Soviet rhetoric, in which prominent politicians and leading parties did not hesitate to voice the desirability of expatriation of non-Estonians, the new requirements were interpreted as a first step towards legalized expulsion. Coming on top of other problems, the Law on Aliens finally made people act.

The local councils in Narva and Sillamäe called referenda on the status of northeastern Estonia, aiming to establish territorial autonomy in the area. In Kohtla-Järve, despite the presence of a large number of non-Estonians, the local administration declined to organize a similar referendum. At the same time, the Russian government put enormous pressure on Estonia, accusing the country of a gross violation of human rights and warning the international community of possible ethnic cleansing. The Russian parliament authorized

the government to carry out a range of political, economic and other measures against Estonia. In Narva, spokespersons for the Russian community warned that there would be mass unrest and armed opposition if the Law on Aliens was accepted without change.<sup>7</sup> President Boris Yeltsin warned that Estonia had forgotten about 'geopolitical and demographic realities'<sup>8</sup> and pointed out that 'Russia will take steps to defend its national interests in Estonia'.<sup>9</sup>

Faced with fierce criticism from outside, and a serious crisis inside the country, Estonian President Lennart Meri vetoed the controversial law and sent it for expert opinion to the OSCE and the Council of Europe. At the same time, Estonia accepted the mediation of the recently appointed High Commissioner on National Minorities.

The international organizations identified major shortcomings in the law and returned their conclusions to the Estonian authorities. Parliament was reconvened and the Law on Aliens was amended on 1 July. It should be noted that changes in the law were not particularly radical and applied mainly to the appeal procedure and the residence permit reapplication rules. Nevertheless, the Estonian parliament demonstrated its willingness to compromise. At the same time, President Meri established a Roundtable of National Minorities, which was supposed to address the problems of inter-ethnic relations and to advise on policies related to these issues. It was also made clear that all permanent residents (including non-citizens) would be allowed to vote in the forthcoming elections of local councils.

The plans for referenda in Narva and Sillamäe were pushed forward even after the Law on Aliens was changed. Nevertheless, High Commissioner van der Stoep managed to secure the agreement of the local authorities to abide by the ruling of Estonia's Supreme Court on the matter. Referenda were held on 16–17 July, and 97% in Narva and 98.6% in Sillamäe voted in favour of regional autonomy, albeit on a low turnout. The Supreme Court duly declared the referenda illegal, and the authorities in the northeast did not contest its decision. The crisis of 1993 was over.

The HCNM made two main contributions towards resolving the crisis. The first was his recommendations on the Law on Aliens, made a day after the OSCE authorized him to act on its behalf.<sup>10</sup> These referred primarily to ambiguities in the law and deficiencies in the appeal procedure. A number of his recommendations were taken into account, and the fact of international involvement itself served to ease the tension. The second was his mediation. Intensive shuttling between Tallinn and the towns of Ida-Virumaa, and consultations with the Estonian government, Prime Minister Mart Laar, President Meri, leaders of the Russian-speaking organizations (the Russian Community and the Representative Assembly) and local authorities in the northeast led to the key compromise. The Estonian authorities promised that all non-citizens would be eligible to apply for citizenship and that the language tests would not be over-complicated. The Russian-speaking authorities agreed to respect

the territorial integrity of Estonia and to abide by the ruling of the Estonian Supreme Court on the referenda. This was the decisive intervention.

Although the HCNM and other international actors deserve credit for their handling of the 1993 crisis, the outcome also demonstrated the limits of external intervention. While the HCNM and the OSCE were quite effective as mediators, they were unable to make the government change the underlying principles of the contested policies. They secured the agreement of the Estonian government to moderate its attitude in the future and to alter some vaguely defined articles of the legislation, but this fell well short of what the Russian-speaking community was aiming for. The majority of Russian-speakers had demanded citizenship for all permanent residents, and some Russophone political organizations (such as the Russian Community) also insisted on legal status for the Russian language. Neither of these demands was accepted by the Estonian community or endorsed by the OSCE.

After the crisis in 1993, the OSCE and other international organizations managed to influence Estonian legislation again, but only after protracted discussions and external pressure. For example, the High Commissioner had raised the question of citizenship for stateless children in his first letter to the Estonian authorities.<sup>11</sup> But it took more than five years, and the linkage of the issue to EU accession, before the government agreed to a watered-down version of what the HCNM had proposed.

Serious obstacles to the integration of non-Estonians into Estonian society remained. Citizenship was granted only to those who passed language tests and met residence requirements. This proved an insurmountable hurdle for most Russian-speakers. By 1 January 2001, only 113,764 had received citizenship by naturalization.<sup>12</sup> The Language Law made many jobs less accessible for people without a sufficient command of Estonian. In February 1998, it was toughened to require fluency of everyone working in the service industry or with customers.<sup>13</sup> Members of the Riigikogu (the Estonian parliament) and local councillors were also required to be fluent, a measure that clearly restricted the representation of non-Estonians in state structures. University education was switched to Estonian, resulting in a significant decline in the number of Russian-speakers entering higher education.<sup>14</sup> In 1998, Estonia also adopted a new education policy, which envisaged the closure of Russian upper-secondary schools in 2007.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Russian-speakers were economically disadvantaged. Erik Anderson argues that Estonian privatization legislation deliberately favoured Estonians and discriminated against Russian-speakers.<sup>16</sup> Estonian researchers dispute this and argue that non-Estonians simply suffered from living in areas badly affected by economic restructuring.<sup>17</sup> Whichever explanation is correct, there is little doubt that Russian-speakers were generally worse off, and this too was a potential source of political grievance.

Overall, the attention of international organizations at an early stage was conducive to the peaceful management of the citizenship conflict, and it made

the government more cautious and in some respects more moderate in its policymaking.<sup>18</sup> This bought time for the development of an internal solution, which in any case was required, as the government was likely to resist continual interventions by international organizations. The gradual accommodation of the Russian-speakers came about largely as an unplanned result both of bargaining between political parties in Estonia over the electoral system and of the way this electoral system worked in the new Estonian political context. However, for the electoral mechanisms to have any effect on the political integration of the Russophones, a facilitating environment had to be produced. One of the key elements of such an environment, international pressure, has been briefly outlined in this section. Two other factors also played a role: the weak identity of the Russian-speaking group and the inability of the Russian Federation to effectively support the Russian 'diaspora'.

## The Weak Identity of the Russian-Speakers

The failure of the Russian-speakers to mobilize as a coherent political force is evidently a further part of the explanation for the averted conflict. As Smith & Wilson have argued, 'diasporic identities may be multiple and fragmented and not necessarily coterminous with a community of either resistance or passivity'.<sup>19</sup> The non-Estonian community originated from widely dispersed parts of the Soviet Union, and there was little to unify its members in the context of the Soviet Union's demise.<sup>20</sup> Military personnel and industrial workers formed two distinct categories. Generation differences became another cleavage, with children of industrial workers moving into non-industrial occupations and taking on different attitudes as second-generation immigrants. This was, in short, a highly fragmented community.

A number of obstacles prevented a consolidation of a common Russophone identity prior to 1991. Institutions that could tie members of the group together and link them to a distinctive symbolic system were practically non-existent. There was no separate church and no common political or cultural organizations that could bring the majority of non-Estonians together. The institutions that did exist effectively inhibited an identity-building process. Local branches of the Communist Party, trade unions and similar organizations had all been integrated into USSR-wide structures, connecting local people with similar groups elsewhere, so that there was no basis for a non-Estonian identity before 1991. Nevertheless, the attributes that members of the community had in common, and in particular their loss of economic and political status, could have been the driving force for a mobilization of their identity by ethnic entrepreneurs. Had the group been threatened with expulsion, as feared at the time of the 1993 crisis, such a mobilization could well

have developed. However, after 1993, the political differences within the Russian-speaking community and the reduced incentive for ethnic parties under the single transferable vote (STV) system of proportional representation (PR) discouraged the development of a mobilized ethnic opposition.

In other circumstances, a kin state might have supplied the impetus and ideology around which a diaspora group could have mobilized. In the case of the Russian Federation, this did not develop, for both external and internal reasons.

## The Vagaries of Russian Pressure

The Russian Federation's failure to capitalize on the resentment of the Russian-speakers is a further part of the explanation for the averted conflict. Russian policy towards the Baltic states went through a number of changes, in keeping with the changes in domestic politics within Russia and the changing external situation.<sup>21</sup> Initially, Yeltsin supported the independence movement of the Baltic states as part of his opposition to President Mikhail Gorbachev. As president of the Russian Federation, he recognized the Baltic states. The Russian policy under Yegor Gaidar's government was to recognize the sovereignty of the newly independent states and to rely on appeals to international organizations to deal with the question of Russian minorities. From spring 1992, this position came under increasing attack from critics who argued that the Russian Foreign Ministry was ignoring the 'near abroad'. In September 1992, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement that 'Russia cannot indifferently observe and not react to the violations of the rights of ethnic Russians in Estonia'.<sup>22</sup> Not only nationalist politicians but also those who were generally regarded as reformers started to argue that Russia should represent the interests of the Russian communities in the Baltic states and use the presence of Russian troops as a bargaining lever. Yeltsin's adviser Sergey Stankevich, for example, expressed particular criticism of the 'discriminatory policies of the Baltic states' and called for a more active stance on the part of the Russian Federation.<sup>23</sup> Nationalist groups began actively organizing among the Russian communities, while the Defence Ministry expressed its commitment to the defence of the 'honour and dignity of the Russian population' living in the 'near abroad'. By the time of the citizenship crisis, therefore, the defence of Russians in the 'near abroad' had solidified into a Russian interest in the eyes of the political, foreign policy and defence elites. This explains why the Russian parliament was willing to advocate economic pressure against the Estonian government in July 1992, and why Yeltsin made threatening statements and linked troop withdrawals to a satisfactory resolution of the citizenship question. However, the Russian government was dependent on the West



for financial and economic support at this critical stage of Russia's transition, and there was no immediate likelihood of the Russian Federation carrying out its threats. No practical steps followed from these radical statements, and concrete assistance by the Russian government to the Russophone community was minimal. After 1993, the official Russian policy of protecting the rights of Russian-speakers in Estonia became sporadic and ineffective.

Several factors prevented the Russian Federation from acting as a powerful source of support to the Russian-speaking community. First of all, Western governments, especially the United States, strongly opposed any attempts by Russia to put pressure on the Baltic states and to link troop withdrawals with other issues. In July 1992, the US Senate passed a resolution that tied US aid to Russia to the withdrawal of troops.<sup>24</sup> Western European governments took a similar view.

The second reason was the political volatility within Russia itself. Internal struggle between the president and the parliament, culminating in the violent clashes of October 1993, distracted Russian attention from the problems of the 'near abroad'. The attempts of the 'red-brown' opposition to capitalize on the problems of the non-Estonians and other Russians in the 'near abroad' in fact prevented orchestrated support for Russian-speakers. The efforts of Communists, nationalists and the official government to assert themselves as the main protectors of the Russophone communities resulted in chaotic and disorganized interventions. Different groups within Estonia enjoyed support from particular segments of the Russian political spectrum. For example, nationalist groups linked to the mayor of Moscow, Yuriy Luzhkov, supported one 'Russian party', the Estonian United People's Party (EURP), while the Council of Compatriots in the Duma, led by Konstantin Zatulin, and the Congress of Russian Communities supported another, the Russian Party of Estonia. The lack of consistent and unified support for the Russophone community from the Russian Federation in turn hampered efforts to mobilize a coherent political organization for Russian-speakers and was less than helpful in overcoming the fragmentation of the non-Estonians.

Although Russian pressure on Estonia has so far been rather ineffective, it has not disappeared. Particular segments of Russian political elites continue to make radical statements regarding Estonia, and the Russian government regularly expresses concern about the status of the Russophone minority and its willingness to defend this minority. The fact that about 100,000 Russian citizens still reside in Estonia gives the Russian government some justification for maintaining its critical scrutiny. This underlines the significance of the domestic political institutions, and especially the electoral system, which have helped to moderate political discourse and integrate Russophone leaders into mainstream politics.

## The Estonian Political System

Considering that Estonia had been an integral part of the Soviet Union and lacked many features of an independent state, the speed with which a new constitution and state institutions were established was remarkable. However, the electoral system had been under discussion since 1989 (for the election of March 1990), when relatively free elections were first introduced in the Soviet Union. At that time, the only vocal political organizations that specifically claimed to represent the Russian-speaking minorities were the Communist Party and the Soviet loyalist organizations, OSTK and Intermovement. The OSTK favoured a Soviet-style majoritarian system with single-seat constituencies, as this increased their chances of gaining seats in the predominantly Russian-speaking northeast. The Communist Party of Estonia (CPE) also supported this proposal. The Popular Front of Estonia (PFE) strongly opposed a majoritarian system, as it lacked the organizational capacity to run an effective campaign in all constituencies, especially in rural areas. It favoured a list PR system, but also offered to consider a mixed model, which retained elements of the majoritarian system but with three seats per constituency and party lists. The Communist Party countered with a proposal for a single non-transferable vote system, with multiple-seat districts but individual candidates, rather than parties, standing. The PFE also refused to accept this option. As a compromise they proposed a single transferable vote system, a model similar to the one in use in the Republic of Ireland. After some discussions, this proposal was eventually accepted. The system has survived with minor changes since then, and the elections of 1992, 1995 and 1999 were held according to the rules agreed in 1989. The electoral system was devised as a result of bargaining influenced by short-term party advantage rather than with a view to long-term conflict management. Nevertheless, it turned out to have a strongly stabilizing effect on Estonian politics.

It is worth explaining how this system works in detail to understand its effects on inter-ethnic relations. The country is divided into a number of electoral districts (at the moment there are 11 districts, but before 1995 there were 12) with 7 to 12 seats allocated to each district. Political parties put forward lists of candidates. Candidates who wish to run independently submit a declaration to the Central Electoral Committee, and there is a deposit per candidate equal to twice the minimum salary (at the moment, about 2,200 Estonian kroons, about £120). The deposit is refundable if the candidate is elected or receives at least half of the simple quota in an electoral district. Parties rank candidates in order of their preferences, and there are two types of lists – national and local. The national list is in fact composed of the local lists, but the rankings may be different, so that candidates placed high up in a local list may be far down in the national lists.

There are three rounds of counting and seat distribution. In order to distribute seats, *the simple quota* (also known as a Hare quota) is calculated by dividing the total number of votes cast in the district by the number of seats. In the first round, candidates whose votes surpass the simple quota are declared elected. In the second round, only parties that received more than 5% of the national vote are allowed to participate. Local party lists are rearranged according to the number of votes each candidate receives. The number of votes cast for each party in the district is divided by the simple quota to calculate the number of seats each party is entitled to receive. Mandates are then given to the candidates from the top of the list, provided each of them managed to receive at least 10% of the simple quota.<sup>25</sup> In the final round, the remaining seats are distributed between the candidates on the national lists of each party. These seats (compensation or adjustment seats) are allocated to candidates not according to their individual performance but to their rankings in the party lists (those on the top receive mandates), although the 10% rule remains valid. In this round of seat allocation, a modified d'Hondt method is used until all 101 seats are filled.

STV encourages parties to compete for votes across different constituencies, and it also favours cross-party alliances and voting for individuals.<sup>26</sup> The most important consequence of the system was that it encouraged parties to represent different segments of each ethnic community and permitted the participation of non-Estonians in Estonian political parties. The minority's representatives could be included in majority party lists without the majority parties having to articulate ethnic interests at the national level, while these interests could be conveyed to the state level through latent communication within parties. The system also tended to discourage politicians from resorting to ethnic stereotyping and public denigration of other groups.

Prior to 1991, the Russian-speakers were split into several camps. More liberal-minded people supported the PFE, while those who remained pro-Soviet supported either the loyalist organizations (OSTK, Intermovement) or the Communist Party. When they found themselves on the verge of disenfranchisement after the independence of Estonia in August 1991, the Russian-speakers had no ready-made organizational structure to speak for their rights. The Soviet loyalist groups were banned by the Estonian authorities on 25 August 1991 for their support of the Moscow coup. The Communist Party of Estonia had split into a pro-independence Social Democratic Labour Party, which tried to appeal to all ethnic groups, and a pro-Soviet remnant, which was later dissolved. The PFE had always been an Estonian organization and could not afford to align itself explicitly with the Russian-speakers (although it remained the most 'pro-Russian' of the Estonian parties). The main representation of the Russian-speaking groups in the northeast therefore devolved to a new organization, the Trade Union Centre,<sup>27</sup> which was supported by the Russian-speaking managerial elite and the formerly Communist town admini-

strations in the northeast. This organization became almost the only forum in which the Russian-speaking towns could meet to decide their course of action. Moderate Russian-speaking politicians, who used to align with the PFE before 1991, formed an organization called the Russian Democratic Movement (RDM) in Tallinn. A radical group which opposed the pro-Estonian position of the moderate Russian-speakers also created a political organization (the Russian Community). On 30 January 1993, the RDM, together with the Trade Union Centre and some minor organizations, formed the Russian Representative Assembly, which, however, remained a fairly weak organization.

In the 1992 parliamentary elections, Russian-speakers could not play an important part because too few were eligible to vote. However, in the 1995 elections after various party realignments a joint Russian-speaking alliance (Our Home is Estonia) did quite well, gaining about 62% of the votes of the Russian-speakers and gaining six seats in the Riigikogu. However, personal conflicts between the Russian-speaking party leaders rendered the group ineffective for almost two years between 1996 and 1998. In the 1999 elections, although the number of eligible Russian-speaking voters grew by a third, support for 'Russian' parties actually dropped. In the absence of official data on voting by ethnic group, we have estimated the participation of non-Estonian voters and the proportion of votes they cast for Estonian and non-Estonian parties, assuming that a negligible number of ethnic Estonians voted for non-Estonian parties (the basis for these estimates is set out in notes to Table 1). We estimate that 78% of Russian-speakers voted for 'Russian' parties in the 1995 elections,<sup>28</sup> and only 55% supported electoral coalitions or parties claiming to represent Russian-speakers in the Riigikogu election of 1999 (see Table 1).

Analysis of the electoral data shows that Russian-speakers supported a range of Estonian parties, especially left-wing parties and the Centre Party, which showed willingness to cooperate with Russian-speakers. The Centre Party became particularly important as a political home for some Russian-speaking leaders and as a vehicle for representing Russian-speakers' interests (see Table 2). This is evident from an analysis of the election results in Tallinn and the towns of the northeast, which shows the strength of support for the Centre Party among Russian-speakers.<sup>29</sup> There is also evidence of cooperation between parties. Prior to the local elections of 1999, the Centre Party signed a cooperation agreement with the largest Russian party, the EURP (and did so again in 2002). In the local administrations, the ruling coalitions in Tallinn and many towns of Ida-Virumaa became coalitions of Russian-speaking political groups together with their Estonian counterparts.

It is clear from this analysis that the Russophone votes were not consolidated and that there were several parties for which the Russian-speakers voted. There was a clear preference for non-Estonians to cast their votes for candidates with Slavic names. But the parties they voted for were not always 'Russian' parties,

Table 1. Estimated decline in support for Russophone parties among non-Estonian voters

	Riigikogu election 1995	Riigikogu election 1999	Local elections 1999
Number of non-Estonian voters <sup>a</sup>	56,584	71,342	135,168
Votes for non-Estonian parties <sup>b</sup>	44,011 (78%)	39,507 (55%)	71,677 (53%)
Votes for Estonian parties <sup>c</sup>	12,573 (22%)	31,835 (45%)	63,491 (47%)

a The number of non-Estonians eligible to vote is estimated by adding the number of non-Estonians who received citizenship at birth (80,000) to the number of naturalized citizens (49,500 by 1995; 105,805 by 1999), subtracting the estimated number of Estonian-speaking non-Estonians (20,000 Finns, Swedes and Estonian-speaking Jews), and subtracting 25% of the remainder to allow for minors and others unable to vote. The number of non-Estonians who voted is then calculated by applying official turnout figures for the three elections (68.9%, 57.37%, 50.91%), assuming that the turnout among non-Estonians was consistent with the national average. For local elections, the figure includes 71,769 non-citizens who voted (out of an eligible total of 165,031 non-citizens). The data sources are as follows. For the number of non-Estonians who received citizenship by birth and the number of Estonian-speaking non-Estonians: Marju Lauristin, Peeter Vilhalemm, Karl Erik Rosengren & Lennart Weibull, eds, *Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1997), pp. 286, 305. For the number of naturalized citizens: Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board. For turnout: Official Data from the Estonian Central Electoral Commission. For non-citizens voting in local elections: Estonian Central Election Commission.

b These numbers are the official electoral results of the parties or blocs identified as 'non-Estonian'. For the Riigikogu election of 1995, these are 'Our Home is Estonia' and the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDTP). The SDTP, though not a 'Russian' party, joined the lists of the Estonian United People's Party (EURP) in 1999; for consistency, its results are added to the non-Estonian parties' tallies. For the Riigikogu election of 1999, the parties are the EURP and the Russian Party of Estonia. For the local elections of 1999, the parties or blocs included are the electoral coalitions 'People's Choice', 'People's Trust' and other blocs manifestly Russophone or formed by at least one major 'Russian' party.

c Derived by subtracting the officially recorded votes for non-Estonian parties from the estimated number of non-Estonian voters, on the assumption that a negligible number of Estonians supported these non-Estonian parties and blocs.

but included some mainstream Estonian political organizations. These developments indicate that national identity has become less important in determining political affiliations. This is because, on the one hand, access to decision-making and resource allocation was available through alternative channels to ethnic parties and, on the other, the process of building a coherent identity and group solidarity was never completed.

## Conclusion

Our analysis has highlighted the significance of voting across the ethnic divide and suggests that the electoral system provided incentives for parties which could appeal to both Estonian and non-Estonian communities. Even though a significant proportion of the non-Estonian population remained disenfranchised in the Riigikogu elections, the party system which emerged has tended to favour moderation and discourage ethnic extremism. Had the political system been a list PR system, which might well have led to ethnic parties and

Table 2. Non-Estonian participation in Estonian parties, 1999 election<sup>a</sup>

Political party	Number of non-Estonians in list	Total number of candidates in list
Centre Party (Keskerakond)	25	242
Moderates (Mõõdukad)	15	303
Blue Party (Sinine Erakond)	13	62
Reform Party (Reformierakond)	9	212
Coalition Party (Koonderakond)	9	216
Progressive Party (Arengupartei)	8	65
Rural Party (Eesti Maarahva Erakond)	7	166
Pro Patria Union (Isamaaliit)	2	178
Russian Party of Estonia (Vene Erakond Eestis)	126	148
EURP (Eestimaa Ühendatud Rahvapartei) <sup>b</sup>	125	172

a These are the authors' own calculations on the basis of the official data available from the Estonian Central Electoral Committee (<http://www.vvk.ee>). The method used to differentiate non-Estonians from Estonians needs explanation. Usually (as in Edward Allworth, ed., *Soviet Nationality Problems* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1971]), the surname of a person is used to identify his or her nationality, and the differences between Slavic and Estonian surnames are so profound that in most cases this method produces fairly accurate results. There are, however, some problems with this method. Owing to the high number of mixed marriages in the USSR and other factors, surnames are not necessarily indicative of ethnic origin. There are many people in Estonia who have seemingly Russian names while identifying themselves as ethnic Estonians, and vice versa. For example, well-known Estonian musician Ivar Must (the composer of the winning song in Eurovision 2001) is an ethnic Russian with a typical Estonian name. For this study, the non-Estonians were first separated on the basis of surname. Second, Estonian experts (including Rein Toomla, the leading Estonian analyst on the subject of political parties and electoral behaviour) and politicians (including Vladimir Velmann, a member of the Riigikogu from the Centre Party) were asked to confirm whether people included in the list were indeed non-Estonians. The second stage eliminated several individuals with clearly Slavic names who were in fact Estonians and added others with non-Slavic names. Even after these checks, there is a possibility of error; however, these deviations are likely to be insignificant. Another study by Toomla (*Political Parties in Estonia*, an unpublished manuscript presented at a workshop in Kaunas, Lithuania, 25–26 March 2000) produced a very similar result. It may be argued that, in many cases (especially when a relatively unknown person with a Slavic name was running for a parliamentary seat), it did not really matter whether a candidate was indeed an ethnic non-Estonian. The possession of a clearly identifiable non-Estonian name would probably suffice to influence the electoral choice of many Russophones. Thus, voters could be misled, and a number of votes would be shifted from the ethnic parties to mainstream political parties.

b The Russian Party of Estonia and the EURP were two explicitly ethnic parties.

encouraged politicians on each side to take harder positions and adopt more intemperate rhetoric in pursuit of votes within their own community, a mobilization of the Russian-speaking community around a defence of its status and a more intense and protracted conflict would have been entirely conceivable. Another outcome in the internal political struggle in Russia could then have led to a very different course of events. The 'structural' conflict prevention afforded by the electoral system thus played a crucial role in mitigating a potential conflict, although it was also crucial that the political and social environment made it possible for the Russophone elite to be integrated into the Estonian political system.

Our emphasis on the importance of the electoral system does not negate the significance of other factors. Without the intervention by the HCNM, the OSCE and other international bodies, the Law on Aliens could have provoked a more intense conflict than it did, and the Estonian- and Russian-speaking communities might have become more polarized. The intervention of international bodies was also helpful in that it created an environment which was seen to reward moderate policies. The relative restraint towards Estonia exercised by the Russian Federation after 1993 was a further significant factor.

Conditions for conflict prevention can rarely be more favourable than in the Estonian case. A highly trusted and skilful intermediary, with the delegated authority of the major regional security organization, was fully engaged with the conflict. International organizations were able to exert effective pressure on the Estonian government, backed up by the conditionality that EU accession implied. The kin state could not afford to challenge the Western states without incurring the risk of serious losses. The potential rebel group was too divided and fragmented, in these circumstances, to mount a challenge to the state. Such favourable conditions do not always obtain in similar conflicts elsewhere. It was particularly fortuitous that the parties in the Estonian Supreme Soviet on their own, without external pressure of any kind, arrived at an electoral system in 1989 that had the capacity to manage the future conflict. Domestic capacity to deal with conflict remains the key requirement for effective long-term conflict prevention, but it is largely a matter of the historical and domestic circumstances within each state, rather than external intervention, that determines whether this capacity is adequate.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- \* Sergey Khrychikov is completing a PhD dissertation at Lancaster University entitled 'Conflict Prevention in Estonia and Ukraine: An Institutionalist Approach'. Hugh Miall is a Reader in Peace and Conflict Research at Lancaster University and Director of the Richardson Institute for Peace and Conflict Research. The publication of the article was supported by the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Research, Berlin, as part of *Security Dialogue's* series on 'Resolving Modern Conflicts'.
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- 26 For a detailed account of how STV works, see Rein Taagepera & Matthew Shugart, *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). For an analysis of how the system works in Estonia, see *Republic of Estonia: Parliamentary Elections, 7 March 1999* (Warsaw: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 1999), available online at [http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election\\_reports/ee/est1-1.pdf](http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/reports/election_reports/ee/est1-1.pdf).
- 27 In the summer of 1992, the Trade Union Centre entered into an alliance with the Russian Democratic Movement to establish a Co-ordinating Committee to protect the Russian-speaking population of the northeast (the committee was later renamed the Committee for the Autonomy of Northeastern Estonia).
- 28 62% voted for the 'Our Home is Estonia' alliance, and others for parties that clearly aligned with the Russian cause, such as the Social Democratic Labour Party.
- 29 In the Riigikogu election of 1999, the Centre Party gained 19% of the vote in Tallinn, Russian parties just under 15%, and Estonian parties 66%. In the Russophone towns of the northeast, the Centre Party gained 34%, Russian parties 36%, and Estonian parties 30%.