Transformation or Escalation? 
The Estonian-Russian Border Conflict and European Integration

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Introduction

This working paper focuses on one of the sub-areas in Europe’s North-Russia case study, the Estonian-Russian border, exploring the impact of EU integration on the transformation of the border conflict between Estonia and Russia. Although not treated as a conflict by most EU policy-makers since there was never a threat of overt violence (e.g. Maurer, 2005; cf. Pace, 2005), the Estonian-Russian border dispute displays many features of an identity conflict as defined in the theoretical framework of the EUBorderConf project (see Diez et al, 2004).

During the decade-and-a-half-long history of their relations as independent states, both Estonia and Russia had on multiple occasions articulated perceptions of each other as a threat to their fundamental sense of the self, and Estonia in particular often constructed its statehood and identity as endangered by Russia’s past and present policies. Despite the mitigating influence of the EU’s enlargement and integration that contributed to normalisation of the state-level relations between Estonia and Russia, Estonia’s domestic political discourse on Russia is still largely dominated by a conflictive logic. The reaction that occasional spill-overs of Estonia’s domestic rhetoric elicit from Russian media and politicians, on the other hand, seems quite out of proportion with the low profile that relations with Estonia occupy on the Russian government’s political agenda. Accusations regarding Estonia’s hostility and self-righteous rhetoric on Russia’s part only substantiate Estonia’s insecurities and serve to perpetuate the conflict. Yet, despite the persistence of this conflictive logic, the border conflict has also undergone considerable de-securitisation among the Estonian and Russian societies at large, and societal-level discourses present a very different reality of the Estonian-Russian relations based on more secure and mutually compatible identification. At the societal level, Estonian-Russian relations are also depoliticised, since politics, especially in Estonia, has become associated with conflict-perpetuating discourses that do not, in the view of many ‘ordinary’ Russians and Estonians, reflect the actual political needs of the day.

The paper thus attempts to elucidate separate ‘currents’ of de-securitisation and escalation of the conflict at various levels of the Estonian-Russian relations, and the impact that European integration has had on the transformation of this border conflict. Using the theoretical framework developed by Diez, Albert and Stetter (2004), it outlines various pathways of the EU’s influence, and their positive and negative effects on the parties’ perceptions of each other, reconstructed on the basis of interviews conducted with societal actors in the Estonian-Russian border region in October 2005, analyses of media and school textbooks, parliamentary debates, and other relevant cultural material. For a number of reasons, the main emphasis in this study of the border conflict is on the Estonian-side discourses. Firstly, the construction of Estonian politics demonstrates a greater degree of dependence on the conflictive image of Russia than vice versa, and consequently, the transformation of the conflict in Estonia, where it occurred, is much more noticeable than in Russia. Secondly, both as an EU applicant and as a member state, Estonia has been far more susceptible to the impact of European integration than Russia. Finally, Russian-side discourses on the border conflict have been examined in some detail elsewhere (Makarychev, 2004), and there is also a great discrepancy between the regional- and the federal-level constructions of Russia’s relations with Estonia, which would necessitate a separate study beyond the modest scope of the present paper.

The paper starts with an outline of various dimensions of the Estonian-Russian border conflict, focusing on unresolved issues and mutual perceptions that contributed to its perpetuation
throughout the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s. It then proceeds to analyse the dynamic of conflict transformation in the light of the EU’s enlargement to the area, and finally examines in greater detail the four pathways of the EU’s influence, bringing out positive and negative aspects of the EU’s impact. Concluding remarks summarise the findings of the study, presenting the relative weight and success of the transformation of Estonian-Russian border conflict along the four outlined pathways of influence, and offer some deliberations regarding the future transformative potential of the European integration of this border conflict.

The Border Conflict

Figure 1. Estonian-Russian contested borderlands
The red line indicates the border of Soviet Estonia and the current ‘control line’, while the green line shows the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty border (source: http://www.ii.uib.no/~eero/matk/Epilt/eesti.jpg, November 2005)
Although, after yet another abortive attempt at signing a border treaty in 2005, the border conflict between Estonia and Russia preserves the traditional territorial dimension (see Figure 1), it is rather its aspects associated with borders as social processes (Paasi, 1999), such as controversial identity-building practices, that have been responsible for the construction of Estonia’s and Russia’s subject positions as incompatible. The enthusiasm and solidarity across ethnic and administrative divides that marked the break-up of the Soviet Union (Simonian, 2003; Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 276-79) proved to be short-lived and, by 1992/1993, gave way to more exclusive and antagonistic state- and identity-building.

As the newly independent Estonia struggled to prove its economic and political viability in the face of Russia’s attempts to secure influence over a former sister-republic through economic and, to a lesser extent, political pressure (Laar, 2002), Estonia’s interpretation of its relations with Russia acquired existential overtones. These objective pressures exacerbated the underlying construction of Russia as Estonia’s ‘pre-eminent Other’ (Kaiser and Nikiforova, forthcoming), and of Estonian statehood and nationhood as being maintained despite, and in opposition to, Russia’s centuries-long imperial ambitions. The Soviet era was presented as unlawful occupation (e.g. Laar, 2002) (a term that caused a lot of controversy in bilateral relations, with Russia viewing itself as Estonia’s liberator from the Nazi Germany) that prevented Estonia from the legitimate right of exercising its statehood for almost half-a-century. With the years of independence between 1920 and 1940 (despite all the political imbalances of the ‘first republic’) recast in a mythical light as an ultimate expression of Estonia’s political and national identity, the period of Estonia’s history under the Soviet rule was downplayed and/or presented as an existential threat to the survival of the Estonian nation (e.g. Laar, 2002). Accordingly, the struggle for decentralisation and reform of the Soviet Union in late 1980s - early 1990s was reinterpreted in terms of a struggle for Estonia’s independence¹. Furthermore, the responsibility for the consequences of the Soviet rule (such as the drastically increased share of the Russophone population²) was ascribed to Russia (cf. Ilves, 1998). The external opposition to Russia was thus replicated in an internal division of Estonia’s politics and society, whereby non-ethnic Estonians, of whom many welcomed (and in many instances helped achieve) Estonia’s independence (Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 276-79), were pushed to the margins of the political arena (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585), and inter-ethnic relations became securitised.

With half-a-century of Estonia’s history denied legitimacy, the restoration of Estonia’s independence was viewed as a return to the \textit{status quo ante}, including the borders of the inter-war Estonia defined by the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty with the Soviet Russia. Being the first international treaty concluded by the newly independent state, the Tartu Peace Treaty is often regarded as Estonia’s ‘birth certificate’ (Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 197-8; Aalto, 2001: 48) and is considered indispensable for Estonia’s political and national identity, and not just in historical terms: one Estonian MP referred to the Tartu Treaty as regulating Estonian-Russian relations in the present tense as recently as January 2005 (Lukas, 2005). The current \textit{de facto} border (or, as the Estonian state border law defines it, ‘control line’) between Estonia and Russia, however, runs well west of the 1920 borders, following the boundary drawn in the course of

¹ In the debates surrounding the reform of the Soviet Union at the times of Perestroika, the possibility of Estonia’s independence was almost never aired, with concerns of the Baltic republics centred on re-negotiating their relationship with the Soviet Union under the new Union treaty (which would have implied \textit{de jure} recognition of their incorporation in the USSR) – not severing it (Simonian, 2003: 48-66; cf. Laar, 2002).

² The share of Estonia’s Russophone population has increased from 8% in 1939 to 31% in 1991 (Simonian, 2003: 95).
Stalin’s 1944/1945 administrative reform after Estonia’s incorporation in the Soviet Union (see Figure 1). Thus, the problematic nature of the Tartu Peace Treaty as an important identity marker becomes evident given that it entails Estonia’s territorial claims to Russia. But far more important than the territorial issue (which was dropped from border negotiations in 1995 (Ilves, 1998)) for Estonia’s identity is the recognition of its political continuity from the interwar state embodied in the Tartu Treaty and of the historical injustice that it suffered at the hands of the Soviet Union.

Russia, on its part, views Estonia’s portrayal of the Soviet era in indiscriminate black and its ensuing suspicions towards Russia’s present-day foreign policy as deeply offending on many accounts. Russia does not regard the incorporation of Estonia into the USSR as ‘occupation’, but rather as a legitimate expansion to the former (pre-First World War) domain of the Russian empire necessitated by geopolitical and security considerations (Danilov et al., 2005). Both political and popular Russian discourses emphasise Estonia’s gains from being part of the Soviet Union (such as infrastructure and industry development), as well as the fact that Estonia and other Baltic republics were considerably better off compared to other Union republics, enjoying relative economic wealth (owing largely to federal subsidies) and ideological freedoms (Simonian, 2003). The discursive image of Estonia as an enemy that has turned upon its benefactor (Shlosberg, 2001) goes hand-in-hand with the perception (however inaccurate) that Estonia, together with other Baltic republics, is to blame for the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Simonian, 2003: 51-75; cf. Interview 6) that many Russians recall with a degree of nostalgia as times of economic stability, orderliness and peace. The reform-minded Russians, on the other hand, perceive Estonia’s continued suspicions as unjustified, undifferentiating between the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet Russia that, like Estonia, prides itself on having done away with its Soviet past (Makarychev, 2004: 26). Estonia’s grievances over another historical injustice, Stalin’s deportations and repressions of the 1940s, are often countered by a somewhat lame argument that Russia’s own losses and hardships in that ‘common tragedy’ were significantly greater (Makarychev, 2004: 26; Simonian, 2003: 47).

For Russia, the full extent of Estonia’s political insecurity is difficult to fathom (Interview 7), and yet Russia itself has been drawn into the logic of identity conflict. Whereas the objective importance of the entire set of issues in its relations with Estonia is relatively insignificant on the scale of problems Russia faces at other borders, Estonia’s provocative rhetoric and behaviour often receive disproportionate attention in the media, fuelling the feelings of offence among the population and sustaining the perception of inexplicable hostility that Estonia nurtures towards Russia (Interview 7). The closing of the border in 1994, despite the fact that it was done on Russia’s own President Yeltsin’s initiative (Berg and Oras, 2003), caused immense irritation among the inhabitants of Russian regions adjacent to Estonia, which was actively stimulated by Russian federal and regional-level politicians (Shlosberg, 2001). Most crucially, however, both public and political discourses in Russia indicate immense difficulties in coming to terms with the fact that a country of such insignificant size and standing as Estonia can even begin to formulate an independent foreign policy of its own that is divergent from, and sometimes in direct opposition to, Russia’s interests (cf. Tüür, 2005a). Although there are objective reasons for Russia’s intransigence with regard to the issue of 1920 borders, they often become overshadowed by identity-driven reasoning.

Thus, not only did Russia refuse to recognise the 1920 border with Estonia, as a further impingement on its shrinking territory, and question the Tartu Peace Treaty as a basis for the present-day bilateral agreement, given that many other historical treaties would favour Russia.
considerably more; it also persistently resisted any mention of the Treaty in the new border agreement, fearing that an indirect recognition of one historical injustice will set a dangerous precedent for border negotiations with Russia’s other neighbours (Interview 7). Russia has also resisted Estonia’s claims to its former territory on ethnic grounds. The present border runs across the area populated by the Seto, a distinct Finno-Ugric ethnic group Estonia considers part of its nation (Nikiforova and Viktorova, 2001), whereas the Tartu Peace Treaty border is narrated as the eastern border of Setomaa (Seto-land) (Kaiser and Nikiforova, forthcoming). Countering this claim, Russia has attempted to ‘appropriate’ the Seto as part of its own cultural heritage by playing a better ‘ethnic patron’ to them, and to ‘highlight the Russian-ness of the contested borderlands’ by narrating Pskov region and the contested Petseri/Pechory district as sites of crucial events in Russian history (Kaiser and Nikiforova, forthcoming; Makarychev, 2004). However, the Seto ‘political narrative and enactment of Seto identity aligns’ far better ‘with Estonian geopolitical interests’ (Kaiser and Nikiforova, forthcoming), and Estonia remains an uncontested gateway for Seto political activism.

As Estonia, in the climate of increasing mutual antagonism with Russia, sought to re-orientate its identification from East to West, the Estonian-Russian border issue became drawn into a wider identity ‘contest’. The restoration of Estonia’s independence was seen as coterminous with the ‘Return to the Western World’ (Lauristin et al, 1997) where, according to an almost unanimous conviction of the Estonian political elite, Estonia justly belonged (Laar, 2002). In Estonia, the gradual closing of the eastern border was not, on the political level, perceived as much of a problem, as this was compensated by a simultaneous opening up of the western one. Accession to the EU and NATO can also be conceptualised as reaffirmation of Estonia’s European/Western identity, and a guarantee of its security and sovereignty in the face of the tacit Russian ‘threat’ (e.g. Berg, 2004). At the same time, the border between Estonia and Russia became increasingly securitised, first in terms of military threats and later – with the disappearance of references to Russia as a potential military threat from the Estonian national security and defence documents towards the late 1990s – in political and cultural (or even civilisational) terms (Kuus, 2002). The border with Russia is often viewed as ‘a protective mechanism’, both for Estonia itself and the EU at large (Boman and Berg, 2005). The fact that Estonia’s eastern border is also the eastern border of the EU (and NATO) is often emphasised in domestic political rhetoric. Although the perception of military threat posed by Russia has largely eroded, Russia is still associated with many of the more pertinent ‘soft security’ risks of the twenty-first century (arms and drugs trafficking, illegal migration etc.) stemming from its porous southern borders and political and economic instability. And yet, despite the general ‘softening’ of regional security agenda and a shift from military to cultural framing of security in Estonia (Kuus, 2002), ‘hard’ security concerns keep resurfacing in the media (Postimees, 25.10.2005), and they have also been prominent in the political debates surrounding EU and NATO accession (Postimees, 2.02.2001)

Estonia’s eagerness to become reconceptualised as belonging to the West elicited somewhat contradictory responses from Russia, uncovering Russia’s own identity dilemmas. Perceiving itself as belonging in Europe and, indeed, as the embodiment of the ‘true’ Europe and yet not party to European institutional design and political culture (Neumann, 1996; Makarychev, 2004: 30-1; Prozorov, 2005), Russia found itself both longing for the ‘West’ and determined to resist its enticement, viewing it both as an opportunity and as a challenge and a threat (Shlosberg, 2001). In the Soviet times, Estonia (as well as other Baltic republics) was always perceived as different

3 For example, the development of ESDP has caused a lot of controversy in Estonia due to the perception that it weakened the transatlantic security provisions (Kasekamp et al., 2003).
and almost ‘Western’ (Interviews 7, 9); yet, the conscious post-Soviet ‘Europeanisation’ of the Estonians is deemed superficial by the neighbouring Russia’s Pskov region inhabitants (Boman and Berg, 2005). This tension between the perception of Estonia as different and yet in many respects profoundly similar to Russia (Tüür, 2005a) generates the fear in Estonia that Russia does not view the Estonian-Russian border as reflecting a true difference, and may one day decide to do away with this artificial divide (Interview 6). Fuelling this fear are Russia’s anxieties over the turning of the Estonian-Russian border into an exclusionary line and the loss of Russia’s influence over Estonia. Having failed to use the unresolved border dispute as leverage against NATO enlargement (as both the EU and NATO accepted the existing border control arrangements as satisfactory), Russia once more concentrated on rhetorical offensives (e.g. Laar, 2002; Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 285-86) aimed at exposing Estonia’s ‘false’ Europeanness and its unworthiness to join the West on normative grounds (cf. Makarychev, 2004: 12, 22-3), e.g. over the issue of political rights of Russian-speakers. This, however, not only contributed to further substantiation of Estonia’s fears and its attempts to distance itself from Russia through membership in the EU and NATO, but also antagonised Estonian political elite and the titular populace towards the Russophone minority (Simonian, 2003: 132).

**Conflict Transformation and European Integration**

Unlike in some other areas, the break-up of the Soviet Union on its northwest periphery was not characterised by extensive violence (notwithstanding the attempted demonstrations of force by the Soviet military in Lithuania in January 1991 and in all Baltic republics during the August 1991 coup). Yet, the radical measures that the weakening Central Committee tried to exercise in order to ensure the compliance of the Baltic republics with its increasingly inefficient policy line (Simonian, 2003) allow for a speculation that before its break-up, the Soviet Union was undergoing an internal conflict of subordination. With the Baltic republics’ declaration of independence in August 1991 and its recognition by Russia, the conflict rapidly de-escalated, although after a brief period of euphoria in Estonian-Russian relations it started gathering momentum once more as it became clear that the parties’ interests were mutually exclusive, with Estonia following a restorationist policy with regard to its statehood and borders and Russia departing from the political realities of the day and imperatives of a ‘great power’. Around 1992-1993, the logic of an identity conflict took shape. Although the withdrawal of Russian troops had quelled the fears that the identity conflict could potentially escalate into a conflict of subordination, Estonia’s intransigence with regard to the 1920 border and Russia’s unilateral demarcation of the Soviet times’ boundary in 1994 firmly cemented the perception that mutual accommodation was impossible, and brought bilateral negotiations to a deadlock (cf. Berg and Oras, 2003: 51).

This, as well as the lack of understanding that Estonia’s territorial claims elicited in the West, led to a new turn in Estonian foreign policy. In 1994, a policy of ‘positive engagement’ towards Russia was announced, and Estonian politicians started to air the possibility that Estonia might drop its territorial claims if Russia recognised the Tartu Treaty (Berg and Oras, 2003: 51-2). Although this proposition had not met Russia’s approval, Estonian Foreign Ministry continued to pursue a ‘rational’ foreign policy towards Russia, and agreed to withdraw the demand that the Tartu Peace treaty should be mentioned in the negotiated border agreement. Partly, this was due to the realisation that Estonia needed a border treaty with Russia more than the recognition of the Tartu Treaty, especially in view of EU accession which by then became a driving goal of
Estonia’s foreign policy; and partly because it was discovered that from a legal perspective, the new border treaty would not undermine the validity of the Tartu Treaty or the legal continuity of the Estonian state, whether it contained a reference to the Tartu Treaty or not (Ilves, 1998; Berg and Oras, 2003: 53). Thus, from the viewpoint of the Estonian policy-makers, the negotiated border treaty was purely technical in character, which allowed the negotiating team to concentrate on practical matters relevant for the prospective EU membership (Kallas, 1996). By and large, this contributed to a significant progress with the border agreement, and by 1998, after meticulous negotiations on all manner of practical details and procedures that Russia had insisted upon, the treaty was essentially ready for signing (Berg and Oras, 2003: 54-55).

Ironically, this technical and rational approach to border negotiations and its ensuing success has not had much effect on the identity conflict between Estonia and Russia. While Russia continued attempts to trade its signature on the border treaty for Estonia’s concessions on ‘compatriot’ issues (Berg and Oras, 2003: 55), for Estonia, border negotiations as such became dissociated from the underlying quest for identity recognition. Despite the talk of good and stable relations with Russia, of progress with regard to the border treaty and the foreseeable conclusion of a trade agreement that would abolish the double taxation of Estonian exports to Russia (Ilves, 1998; cf. Matsulevitch, 2000; Ojuland, 2003), the domestic political debates more often than not lapsed into the familiar language of identity conflict. Accusations regarding Russia’s unreliability and its domineering negotiating style alternated with reiterations of the importance of gaining the recognition of the historical injustice of the occupation and popularising it to Russia and to the ‘outside world’ (e.g. Privalova, 2004; Tulviste, 2004; Ilves, 1998; Ojuland, 2003; Lukas, 2005). Some political parties and associations (such as the Seto Congress) adopted a position critical of the government’s conciliatory approach to border negotiations, accusing it of treason and selling out the interests of their own people ‘to the communists’ (Vaidla, 2005). Although admittedly intended for domestic consumption and as a tool in inter-party rivalry (Muuli, 2005; Matsulevitch, 2000; Viktorova, 2001), pronouncements of this sort occasionally found their way into international (and Russian) media, fuelling Russia’s perceptions of Estonia’s inherent hostility and exacerbating the identity conflict (cf. Makarychev, 2004: 26). One of the most damaging repercussions of such domestic inter-party squabbles was the withdrawal of Russia’s signature from the border treaty in 2005, after the Estonian Parliament unilaterally decided to supply it with a preamble mentioning the Tartu Peace Treaty (Muuli, 2005).

Although the prospect of EU accession contributed to the enhancement of practical cooperation between the two states, it did not dissipate the climate of emotional insecurity surrounding Estonia’s relations with Russia. In effect, Estonia became locked up in an identity conflict that does not require any effort on Russia’s part to perpetuate it: whatever Russia says or does is interpreted in an unequivocal way as harmful and hostile to Estonia (e.g. Tüür, 2005b; Interview 6). The image of Russia that Estonia has created precludes any constructive dialogue with it: Russia is seen as undifferentiated, inherently malevolent, treacherous and internally unstable, with instability threatening to affect Russia’s immediate neighbours (Interview 6; Mihkelson, 10th Estonian Parliament’s 3rd session, 10.3.2004). Most Estonian media analyses of Estonian-Russian relations or Russian foreign policy are preoccupied with drawing historical parallels, which, given the predisposition for a selective reading of mutual history, provide a very monodimensional context for interpreting Russia’s present intentions (Interview 6; Tüür, 2005b). Needless to say, Russia righteous stance on the historical events as well as underlying disparaging attitude towards Estonia’s viability as a sovereign state do not serve to improve matters.
Yet, despite the self-perpetuating logic of the identity conflict, towards the beginning of the 2000s one can observe another curious divergence in the perception of the conflict and the ‘other’ in Estonia. While the majority of the political elite still seems to be caught up in the identity conflict (cf. Postimees, 24.10.2005), articulations of the conflict as such (let alone identity conflict) at the societal level are becoming increasingly rare (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 7). Alienation of ‘ordinary people’ from politics and a degree of disillusionment with the state and its government (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585) contribute to the perception that politicians are playing ‘games’ of little relevance for their people (Interviews 1, 4, 5, 7, 9). While some people continue to hold strong views on the conflict and on the relations with Russia (Interview 6), the majority are tired of the continual pining of the politicians and would simply like the government to exercise greater maturity in dealings with Russia and to be given better opportunities for practical cooperation with their Russian partners (Interviews 1, 2, 5). This attitude reflects a widespread public sentiment in Russia, where the majority perceive Estonians as sensible and attractive people whose government, however, refuses to understand the basics of good neighbourliness (Interviews 7, 9). Thus, the present situation with regard to the border conflict is characterised by ambiguity and diversity, with different accounts presenting contradictory realities of the Russian-Estonian relations (cf. Aalto, 2003). Although, of course, it would be wrong to assume that previous periods were not characterised by multiple and diverse realities (which are simply more difficult to trace amidst the ‘censorship’ of the dominant discourses of the time), the respondents consistently pointed to 2001-2002 as the time of change in the perceptions and attitudes at the societal level (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 7, 8).

Outwardly, the outlined conflict dynamic does not seem to correlate with the turning points in Estonia’s integration into the EU: the signing of the Europe Agreement and submission of a membership application in 1995; the start of accession negotiations in 1998 based on the 1997 Luxembourg Summit decision; and accession to the EU in May 2004. Although the Union’s involvement in Estonian-Russian relations was mainly viewed in the context of enlargement and related discussions with Russia on issues of mutual concern (cf. Kononenko, 2004), Estonia mostly prepared for the accession without taking a particularly active stand in its relations with Russia, despite frequent rhetorical references to Estonia’s pivotal role in EU-Russian relations that would enhance its own relative position vis-à-vis Russia. However, the firm political course towards EU membership adopted by Estonia towards the mid-1990s has opened several avenues for more and less direct European Union’s influence on Estonia’s policies in general, and on its relations with Russia, in particular. As will be shown in the following discussion of the various pathways of EU influence, their effect on the conflict was not always positive, whereas de-securitisation of Estonian-Russian relations cannot always be associated with the effects of European integration.

Compulsory Influence

Although in the latest enlargement, the EU has played a significant role ‘in terms of steering the course of economic and political reforms in the applicant countries’ and ‘setting the criteria for accession’ (Kononenko, 2004: 18), it is difficult to attribute the transformation of the Estonian-Russian border conflict unambiguously to EU’s compulsory influence. Russia, as a non-applicant or not even a prospective candidate, is not susceptible to the EU’s compulsory impact altogether; and when the EU did attempt to influence Russia (e.g. through such avenues as conditionality of
WTO accession), it concerned far broader issues such as democracy, human rights or the rule of law in Russia. Estonia, on the other hand, although subject to the compulsory adoption of the *acquis*, often behaved as a ‘model pupil’ of Europeanisation (Raik, 2003: 34) in its eagerness to fulfil EU membership criteria even ahead of the set deadlines and so prove its belonging in Europe. Because of the largely voluntary character of policy change, it is difficult to view it strictly in terms of ‘compulsory’ influence. In the justifications of government’s actions offered to the domestic audience, however, the logic of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’ was more pronounced, and the greater good of EU membership was often emphasised over the temporary losses encountered en route to the EU (e.g. Ilves, 1998).

It is sometimes argued that the removal of the greatest stumbling-block in the Estonian-Russian border negotiations, Estonia’s territorial claims, was a result of the EU’s pressure (Makarychev, 2004). However, as described above, the reasons behind this move were wider and more complex and included both an external aspect (lack of support of all Western democracies, not just the EU) and an internal one (stalemate in the negotiations with Russia) (cf. Berg and Oras, 2003). Rationalisation of Estonia’s foreign policy towards Russia was rather a result of EU’s enabling impact, as the practical approach to the border negotiations was informed by the construction of Estonia’s interests as a prospective member state. The fact that border treaty negotiations continued beyond the point when the EU (as well as NATO) made it clear that it would not see the lack of a border treaty as an impediment to Estonia’s accession, also suggests that the compulsory impact was not the key factor in pushing Estonia towards a more forthcoming stance towards Russia.

A far more controversial issue with regard to compulsory influence is the one of the Russophone minority. Because it is at the heart of the identity conflict, the EU’s attempts to influence Estonian citizenship and language legislation were discursively presented in terms of a ‘double-edged threat’ from both Russia and Europe (Kuus, 2002). The EU, in this discourse, becomes an agent of Russia’s interests at destabilising the Estonian state and identity (Kuus, 2002; Aalto, 2003: 582-3). The perception of Estonian language and culture as being under threat, and statehood as the only means to protect them (Kuus, 2002), necessitated restricted access of the Russophone minority with its ‘undetermined geopolitical orientations’ (Aalto, 2003: 583) to political decision-making. The proponents of this discourse (which, according to Aalto (2003), was shared by about 50% of ethnic Estonians in the 1990s), tend to regard the EU as an unfulfilled promise of salvation from Russia: instead of escaping from Russia into the EU, Estonia found Russia already encroached in it (Interview 6). In this instance, the EU’s impact invited conflict-enhancing interpretations, resulting in further securitisation of inter-ethnic relations and of the EU itself. This had led some political actors in Estonia to question of the rationale of EU membership, especially in the light of firmer prospects of NATO’s eastern enlargement that started to materialise at the beginning of the 2000s. In the heated debates whether such interests as the protection of Estonia’s identity and sovereignty would be best served by the EU or NATO membership (e.g. *Postimees*, 2.02.2001; cf. Toots, 2003), the EU’s supranationalism was often presented as a threat to Estonian sovereignty. However, this vociferous (albeit mainly internal) reaction to the EU’s pressure was highly disproportionate to the extent of changes Estonia needed to introduce into its legislation to satisfy both the OSCE and the Council of Europe monitoring missions that left Estonia by the end of 1997, which was taken as an indication that ‘Estonia does not have problems with human rights’ (Tamm, 1998).
Enabling Impact

As discussed above, the Estonian political elite was ‘enabled’ into the change from the restorationist to a more rational policy towards Russia in mid-1990s by the prospect of EU membership. On the one hand, Estonia’s integration in the EU helped alleviate one aspect of the identity conflict by securing Estonia’s belonging in Europe and the West; on the other, future EU membership contributed to a (re-)formulation of Estonia’s foreign policy interests in a more pragmatic way, which led to eventual normalisation of relations with Russia. Estonia’s membership in the EU (and NATO) helped lower the emotional tensions in Estonian-Russian relations by eliminating one of the main sources of Estonia’s insecurity – the geopolitical indeterminacy of its situation (Mihkelson, 2003; Berg and Ehin, 2004; Kononenko, 2004: 23).

However, the prospect of EU membership did little to de-legitimise the perpetuation of the conflict at the level of domestic politics, where articulations of insecurity with regard to the location of the border, inter-ethnic issues and Russia’s attempts to influence minority-related decision-making continued to flourish. In some instances, EU accession was used to legitimise policies and decisions with dis-connective effects, such as the abolition of simplified border-crossing provisions for local inhabitants of the border areas in 2000, four years before the required deadline. Whereas the imposition of Schengen border regime is often criticised in the context of EU-Russian relations at large, Estonia’s eagerness in eliminating the ambiguity in, and enhancing control over, the border crossing procedures on its Eastern border (cf. Berg and Oras, 2003: 56) can be viewed in the light of its identity quest: a desire simultaneously to affirm its status as a future EU member state and to distance itself from Russia. Apart from being detrimental to the interests of Estonia’s own borderland inhabitants (Nikiforova and Viktorova, 2001) and damaging to bilateral cooperation projects (Interviews 3, 8), this move was taken by the Russian side as yet another expression of Estonia’s hostility, and Russian media lost no time in accusing Estonia of skilfully manipulating the EU to alienate Russia (Alekseeva, 2000).

Predictably, the influence of European integration on the Russian political elite has remained negligible. From Russia’s perspective, whatever unresolved issues exist in its relations with Estonia are fairly marginal compared to the problems Russia faces on its other borders. They are also marginal in the overall context of EU-Russian relations (Interview 7), despite Estonia’s aspirations of becoming a ‘gateway’ and a ‘bridge’ for EU-Russian relations that were often aired by Estonian politicians (Interview 6). Moreover, Russia generally prefers to address the countries it perceives to be the chief players in the Union – Germany, France, the UK, and to a lesser extent Italy – directly rather than through the common EU facade (Interview 7). This, quite apart from the modernist neglect for ‘post-sovereign’ political configurations (Wæver, 2000), can be explained by the reluctance to become subject to common EU policies formulated with Estonia’s input (Tüür, 2005a). The mutual jealousy that marks Estonia’s and Russia’s relations with the EU (Interview 6) thus limits the extent of EU’s enabling impact on the border conflict.

Yet, there has been some evidence of EU’s input into ‘enabling’ a part of the Russian elite into a more compromising approach towards Estonia, albeit not through the indirect channel of European integration, but rather through an instance of direct engagement of high EU officials with the Russian leadership over the issue of signing the Estonian-Russian border treaty. Reportedly, president Putin’s negative stance on the border treaty improved after a prolonged talk with Javier Solana, which also gave a boost to the conciliation-oriented part of the Russian political elite, thus leading to Russia’s signing of the treaty. However, the Estonian parliament’s
démarche to introduce a mention of the Tartu Treaty into a preamble to the border agreement put the pro-conciliation political forces in Russia into an internally precarious situation, thus eliminating the possibility of further support for Estonia from within the Russian elite and also cancelling the favourable to Estonia’s interests influence of the European Union on Russia.\footnote{I am indebted for this remark to Dr Konstantin Khudoley of St Petersburg State University, made in response to a presentation of an earlier version of this paper at CEEISA 4\textsuperscript{th} Annual Convention, Tartu, Estonia, 25-27 June 2006.}

**Connective Impact**

The impact of EU policies on societal actors in the Estonian-Russian border conflict is perhaps most straightforward compared to other pathways of EU influence, due to an explicit cross-border orientation of many EU funding programmes. The EU has played an important role in intensifying and diversifying Estonian-Russian bilateral dialogue by involving different authority levels and non-governmental organisations in cross-border cooperation (Viktorova, 2001). Throughout the 1990s, many of the developing civil society actors both in Estonia and Russia (such as Pskov-based NGO Vozrozhdenie, or the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation /Chudskoi Proyekt with offices in both Tartu and Pskov) adopted the values promoted by the EU’s and other donors’ funding programmes as their motivation and rationale for action (Interviews 3, 7). Although it is debatable whether this was initially down to a genuine convergence of interests or a degree of financial opportunism, after a decade-long socialisation into the EU ‘speak’ it is possible to note not only connective, but also some constructive impact of the EU on the civil society actors’ perceptions of the Estonian-Russian relations. Most importantly, the experience of cross-border cooperation has contributed to a diversification of the image of the ‘other’ (Viktorova, 2001), and the Estonian-Russian border became associated with opportunities rather than obstacles to cooperation (Boman and Berg, 2005).

However, not all instances of the constructive impact were conflict-diminishing. While in Estonia, the EU cooperation programmes at times exacerbated the identity conflict by pitting the NGOs against the government, whose policy line was already under attack from the more radical nationalist voices, in Russia, the EU failed to create a viable counterpart for the Estonian NGOs, because the funding programmes (such as TACIS) mainly focused on supporting government institutions (Shlosberg, 2001). During the 1990s, many Estonian non-governmental actors saw the EU funding as an opportunity to bypass the state level in their cooperation with Russia. Although other donors, such as individual EU member states and the US, also played a role in this, the EU’s programmes integrated Estonian (and, to a much lesser extent, Russian) NGOs into the EU-wide framework of regional-level cooperation, which set a powerful example for the Estonian-Russian border area. However, the lack of state support (if not outright opposition) often curtailed the initiatives, damaging the sustainability of cooperative projects as well as the general credibility of NGOs’ efforts. Almost complete dependence of the bulk of joint activities in the Estonian-Russian border area on the availability of EU funds further endangers the sustainability of cooperation (Boman and Berg, 2005). In addition, not all societal actors contribute to de-securitisation of the conflict: as the expansion of the area of ‘rationalist’ politics pushed conflictive discourses to the margins of Estonian domestic politics, they increasingly became represented by hard-line societal organisations (e.g. the Seto Congress). Although such organisations do not seem to rally widespread public support, the pragmatic character of the government’s policies in many instances seems to strengthen and validate the logic of the identity conflict (e.g. selling out the state and national interests to Russia, betraying own people etc. (e.g.
Luup, 17.02.1997), which sometimes affects people’s thinking by way of mere awareness of it (cf. Interview 6).

Since Estonia became an EU member state, the necessity of bypassing the state level started to lose its relevance, as priority areas for EU funding are increasingly formulated at the national level in consultation with the civil society actors (Interview 3), and many cooperative projects (such as joint water management of the lake Peipsi on the Estonian-Russian border) run by NGOs also involve local authorities, government experts and professionals. However, despite the considerable progress made by various bilateral commissions in the issues of mutual concern, the real output of these cooperation projects does not go beyond communication and ‘networking’, because at the political level each side tends to block crucial decisions to demonstrate its power over the fortunes of the ‘other’ (Interview 4; cf. Shlosberg, 2001). In Russia, the authorities are often suspicious of NGOs, viewing them as the fifth column promoting Western interests (Interview 8; cf. Makarychev, 2005), and the initiative of local authorities is often crippled due to insufficient legal competence for the conduct of foreign relations, the lack of the political will at the federal level and unclear division of competences between federal and regional agencies (Shlosberg, 2001; Interviews 2, 7). Although in Estonia, the government became more relaxed in its attitudes towards civil society actors, NGOs’ initiatives are still mostly viewed as ‘private’ and somewhat lacking in relevance for the state as a whole, and certainly subordinate to the government’s policies (e.g. Ojuland, 2003). Thus in general, although the EU’s influence on the societal actors has been considerable, it remained limited by the framework of inter-governmental Estonian-Russian relations.

As to the incentives behind inter-governmental cooperation, Estonian national-level authorities were often motivated by the identity conflict – rather than the desire to overcome it – in their dealings with Russia. Although this can attributed to the downside of the EU’s enabling impact on Estonia’s government policy towards Russia rather than to its connective influence, the strife between various government agencies over the discursive delineation of the Estonian-Russian border inevitably affects the political environment in which societal actors operate. To give an example of contested motivation behind cooperation, the activities of the Petserimaa Department of Estonian Citizenship and Migration Board that managed the simplified border crossing between 1994 and 1999 were sometimes criticised by the Foreign Ministry as unauthorised conduct of foreign policy. An employee of the Board and a prominent Seto activist Jüri Vaidla, on his part, claimed that the Department was preoccupied with an aspect of Estonia’s internal affairs ignored by the government, i.e. maintaining relations with Estonia’s own territories and population beyond the present ‘control line’ (Vaidla, 1999). The Foreign Ministry’s decision to abolish simplified border-crossing in 2000 can be explained by the desire not only to gain better control over actual border-crossing, but also counter the interpretations of the current border as temporary and subject to future redrawing. This attempt to reduce the fuzziness of the border, however, was undermined by the Citizenship and Migration Board’s policy of issuing Estonian passports to those inhabitants of adjacent areas of Russia whose ancestors were citizens of the interwar republic, with the effect of supporting the practice of double citizenship officially prohibited by Estonian laws, in full cognizance of local authorities and the border guard (Nikiforova and Viktorova, 2001; Interview 9). Many of the Estonian government’s own cooperative programmes with Russia have the underlying motif of supporting Estonia’s ethnic claims to the lost territories, e.g. the support of the Estonian school in Pechory. It is fitting that such government programmes are managed not by the Estonian Foreign Ministry, but by the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Education (Kaiser and Nikiforova, forthcoming).
More recent Estonian government’s cooperative initiatives are, however, less evidently self-interested. For instance, in 2003-2004 the Foreign Ministry funded a joint training programme for Southeast Estonian and Pskov region tourism entrepreneurs in order to work out a common strategy for tourism development in an integrated border area (Made, 2004). The fact that the funds were allocated in the framework of Estonian Development Aid Fund, and a comparison with other Fund’s activities aimed at countries such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, allow for a speculation that the government’s rationales in supporting cooperation with Russia are increasingly shaped by the liberal ideology characteristic of the EU’s own neighbourhood and development aid policies (e.g. Smith, 2003). As areas of policy influenced by the EU-style approaches and rationale grow, the space for conflict articulation gradually diminishes and conflictive discourses become pushed out of the political mainstream. Not only societal or private sector actors, but also state-funded institutions, such as the Estonian National Museum, are becoming more relaxed about the relations with Russia and begin to re-establish contacts with their Russian counterparts (Interview 5).

For private sector actors, it is largely pragmatic considerations that define the scope of Estonian-Russian cooperation (Interviews 2, 7). For Russian businessmen, the prospect of EU enlargement to Estonia has provided an incentive to establish themselves on the Estonian market with a view to a subsequent expansion to the rest of the Union, although the Estonian authorities and public are still wary of Russian capital, viewing Russian investments as an attempt at economic domination via the back door (Interviews 2, 6). However, Estonian businesses and joint Estonian-Russian ventures are increasingly expanding to Pskov and Novgorod regions of Russia (Interviews 2, 7), especially since Russia’s business environment improved drastically around 2002. If previously, it was customary for the Russian partners to run off with the pre-payments made by Estonian buyers, since 2002 dishonest businessmen became increasingly ostracised by other Russian entrepreneurs wishing to protect their reputation, and more and more firms started to operate through regional chambers of commerce and industry (Interview 2). Yet, it is difficult to relate this improvement unequivocally to the EU; in many ways, the change was conditioned by the internal logic of business development and the general desire to meet ‘Western’ standards of business culture and ethics on the part of Russia’s entrepreneurs. Furthermore, like in the case of societal actors, cooperation between Estonian and Russian businesses is constrained by the state-level relations and bilateral legal provisions – or the lack thereof (Interview 2).

**Constructive Impact**

Previous sections of this paper have already touched upon the issue of gradual marginalisation of conflictive discourses in the face of the strengthening pragmatic and liberal attitudes to the Estonian-Russian relations in Estonia’s political circles. This section of the paper will address the repercussions of this in the society at large, and focus on changes in identity scripts effected with – or outside – the EU’s influence. Major discursive changes in the Estonian society can be summarised in the three related points: firstly, the dissociation of the pragmatic policy-line adopted by the Estonian government in the relations with Russia from the discursive realm of ‘politics’ as such, with the latter remaining an abode of conflictive logic both among the political elite and some population groups; secondly, exposure to this logic of people with interest in politics which results if not in approval, then in awareness of this perspective on relations with Russia; and thirdly, broader societal de-securitisation owed to an increasingly anti-political stand
of the large share of Estonia’s population critical not only of the elite’s anti-Russian pronouncements but of the general policy output of the government. Out of these developments, the EU’s role has been the strongest in legitimising the pragmatic interest-driven approach to dialogue with Russia; in other instances of change, the EU’s impact has been more indirect and less evident.

As discussed above, the expansion of the sphere of ‘rational’ policy-making with regard to Russia, inspired by Estonia’s EU accession, restricted conflictive discourses to the realm of domestic politics in Estonia. Where this pragmatic approach failed, however, was in becoming a viable alternative to the conflict-generating political discourses because it was seldom conceptualised as genuine ‘politics’: rather, by its many proponents and opponents alike, the rational stance in relations with Russia (and, to a great extent, with the EU itself – see Ilves, 1998) was perceived as purely instrumental – a temporary step back from Estonia’s genuine political interests with the aim of gaining a better ground for pursuing them in the future (cf. Ágh, 2004: 5-6). The essence of Estonia’s ‘political’ interests, however, was still to a great extent represented by the conflict-generating discourses of historical injustice and confrontational identity-building in spite of the Russian ‘other’.

One striking consequence of this is the disproportionate visibility of the discourse linking the securitisation of Estonian identity and statehood as outlined by Kuus (2002) – far beyond the 50 per cent of ethnic Estonians (i.e. just below one third of the entire Estonia’s population) that espouse it according to Aalto (2003: 587-8). Another consequence of this association of politics with the conflictive construction of Estonia’s identity is that people interested in Estonian politics and especially in Estonian-Russian relations become inevitably affected by it, if not through partaking in the logic of identity conflict then through an acute awareness of Estonia’s insecurities and political aspirations they dictate (cf. Interview 6). Heightened awareness of the Estonian elite and academia of the way these political issues are framed in the domestic discourse leads them to underestimate the more liberal sentiments of the domestic public (see Aalto, 2003: 584-6), which, in turn, perpetuates the conflictive political discourses in Estonia.

The mentioned liberal sentiments that are largely invisible from the perspective of the dominant discursive reality refer to the widespread popular de-securitisation of the Russian ‘other’, both in the context of Estonian-Russian relations and with regard to Estonia’s Russophone population. On both sides of the border, people note positive changes in mutual attitudes and perceptions and a growing interest towards the ‘other’, manifested in increasingly frequent contacts and communication (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9). This tallies well with Aalto’s observation that securitisation of identity in Estonia is losing in ubiquity (Aalto, 2003). For most ‘ordinary’ Estonians, the precondition for friendly relations is not so much Russia’s recognition of the 1920 border as its acknowledgement of the distinctiveness of Estonia’s culture and identity, which the majority of Russians are quite willing to accept (Interviews 5, 6, 7, 9). Once this fundamental difference is acknowledged, commonalities between Estonians and Russians become more obvious and differences appear less threatening as they become a source of mutual enrichment rather than estrangement (Interview 5), which is true of both interpersonal communication and collective perceptions.

Thus, one of the respondents mentioned plans by a joint Estonian-Russian film crew to make a documentary featuring two similarly remote and isolated villages on the Estonian and Russian shores of the lake Peipsi, to emphasise the commonality of rural lifestyles and problems faced by
their small communities (Interview 2). Another film project advocating mutual interest and understanding consisted of a series of programmes made by Pskov television with the support of the Estonian consul in Pskov, featuring ‘Estonia That We Do Not Know’ and acquainting the people of Pskov region with the developments in the neighbouring country they have had very limited opportunities to witness themselves (Interview 9). Cultural festivals, such as ‘Pskov Days in Tartu’, attract great mutual interest, and a cooperation agreement has been signed between the administrations of the two cities, representing the only twinning agreement between an Estonian and a Russian city (Interviews 8, 1). A Russian restaurant ‘Rasputin’ opened in Tartu and an Estonian restaurant ‘Vana Tallinn’ recently opened in Pskov (again, with the support of the Estonian consul Urve Nõu) offer perhaps more tangible experiences of each other’s culture and seem very popular with the locals (Interview 8). Yet another project, this time in the form of a book sponsored by the EU’s Phare programme, is an edited collection of essays by students of inter-cultural communication courses at Tartu University and Estonian Music Academy, exploring how representatives of various nations living in Estonia (mainly Russophones of various origin) perceive Estonians and vice-versa (Valk and Realo, 2004). The essay authors often emphasise the differences of character and personality that become evident in contacts between Russians and Estonians, but do so without implying its conflictive nature.

In the projects directly aimed at overcoming communication barriers between Estonians and Estonia’s Russophones, such as children’s integration camps organised since the late 1990s, in addition to the main task of integrating Russian-speakers into the Estonian society there is a distinct objective to interest Estonian children in the Russian language and culture (Interview 1). Among adult Estonians, the interest towards Russian has been on the rise since the beginning of 2005 at least, when Estonian businesses began to organise Russian language courses for their employees (Interview 1). Among Pskov region’s Russians, interest towards the Estonian language has also been notable: a free Estonian language class that started in 2001 in the framework of a Nordic Council of Ministers’ project was subsequently institutionalised as a course offered by Pskov Free University (Interview 9). Estonian National Museum also has a number of educational programmes that are oriented at integration (some of them supported by the EU’s Phare programme), popularising Estonian culture and history among both among Estonian and Russophone children (Tuubel, 2002; Interview 5). Throughout the 1990s, many Estonian museums have undergone an identity crisis, having lost many visitors, especially excursions from Russia, due to an opposition to ‘everything Russian’ that ruled Estonians’ attitudes at the time (Interview 5). That situation started to change around 2002-2003, when interest towards Russian culture and history, both local and Russian proper, started reawakening: museums once more started employing Russian-speaking guides and developed special programmes for Russophone children (Interview 5). As museums were rediscovering their purpose, they encouraged visitors to think about their own identities, and emphasised historical links between Estonia and Russia (e.g. through exhibitions devoted to Finno-Ugric peoples historically living in the Russian Federation) (Interview 5). Another important innovation is related to recent attempts at re-evaluating Estonia’s twentieth-century history, which in many museums’ expositions with their emphasis on mediaeval or 19th century history, was so far silenced altogether (Interview 5). Although this effort is still only nascent, the very appearance of this issue on museums’ agendas is telling of changes in people’s attitudes, with earlier denial contrasted to the emerging desire to accept and re-evaluate their recent past in a broader, European or even global, context (Interview 5).
Although, as Makarychev (2004) notes, Huntington’s civilisations theory is traditionally popular in Estonia since it substantiates Estonia’s desire to differentiate itself from Russia, a human geography textbook (Raagmaa, 2003) that uses the theory to describe idiosyncrasies of different parts of the world also highlights the changeable character of civilisations and permeability of their boundaries, arguing that in its main characteristics, the Orthodox civilisation is not particularly different from the Western one. Geographical representations of the Estonian-Russian border have also undergone a transformation: if in the Estonian Atlas issued in 1996, both the 1920 border with Russia and the present ‘control line’ were marked (Eesti Atlas, 1996; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 1995), the 2005 World Atlas shows the border as it was agreed in the new border treaty that Estonian Parliament ratified in 2005 (Suur Maailma Atlas, 2005). Estonian history textbooks also chose to tone down the issue of Russian ‘threat’, providing only brief schematic accounts of events following the break-up of the Soviet Union without offering much opinion or interpretation (e.g. Vahtre, 2004; Adamson and Valdmaa, 2001; Adamson et al., 2003). Adamson and Karjahärm’s Estonian History for high Schools (2004) offers a more profound analysis of many controversial points in Estonia’s history, balancing the opposing interpretations and perspectives. Although criticising, for example, the eagerness of many Soviet era immigrants to build a post-national ‘Soviet’ republic in Estonia to the detriment of its national culture, they also note the input of the Russophones in the restoration of Estonia’s independence that is often forgotten or ignored in political discourses (Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 247, 276-9).

In an account of Estonia’s history in the twentieth century, Adamson and Karjahärm further note that history as a complex matter does not easily lend itself to simplistic interpretations that would perhaps flatter nationalist political interests, and mention, for example, pro-Russian attitudes of one of the architects of Estonia’s independence of 1910s-1920s, Jaan Poska (Adamson and Karjahärm, 2004: 180). Perhaps most importantly, however, Adamson and Karjahärm remark that although historical importance of the Tartu Peace Treaty is indubitable, it is by far not the only legitimisation of the Estonian state, whose true foundation lies in the right of self-determination of its people (2004: 197-8). In this respect, the textbook goes far beyond the customary rhetoric of the majority of Estonian politicians still brooding on Estonia’s insecurities (e.g. Lukas, 2005). Russian history textbooks (e.g. Levandovsky and Shchetinov, 2005; Danilov et al., 2005), on the other hand, demonstrate a greater coherence with the Russian government’s policy line in that their scant mention of Estonia and Estonian-Russian relations seems to correspond to the low profile Estonia occupies on the Federal government’s agenda (Interview 7). However, where Estonia is mentioned, no antagonism is spelled out; and in describing the ethnic tensions and problems with political representation that the national awakening of the early years of the Soviet regime brought about, the textbooks indirectly acknowledge that Estonia’s post-independence policies had a precedent in Russia’s own twentieth century history (Danilov et al., 2005; Levandovsky and Shchetinov, 2005).

All these examples, to varying extent, indicate a change in articulation of identities, from essentialist and mutually-exclusive to relative and more tolerant, on the part of a significant proportion of both Estonian and Russian societies. However, it is questionable to what extent the EU can be credited for this transformation. Although EU support was mentioned in connection with some of the described cooperative initiatives, most people explained their conflict-mitigating stance by negative, rather than positive, factors. Thus, respondents noted an increasing divergence between state-level policies and attitudes on the one hand, and the concerns and interests of ‘ordinary people’, on the other (which is especially notable in Estonia) (Interviews 1,
While Estonian Foreign Ministry claims exclusive discursive competence over Estonian-Russian relations, denying the role of ‘popular diplomacy’ (Ojuland, 2003), many people view the government’s representation of Estonia’s interests and positions as grounded in politicians’ private political interests that have little to do with the requirements of the actual situation. Many respondents characterised Estonian politics (both in general, and with regard to Russia) as immature, referring to it as ‘sandbox games’ of politicians (Interviews 1, 2, 4, 5) or ‘children’s politics’ (Interview 7, 9), where an uncompromising stance towards Russia is viewed as a manifestation of power. People’s criticism of the attempts of Estonian politicians to make political capital through constant discursive perusal of the Russian ‘threat’ thus seems to be part of their general disillusionment with politics in Estonia that did not fulfil its promise of ‘politics for the people’ (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585; Saar, 2001; Vetik, 2002).

The example of the European Union rarely features in people’s accounts as an inspiration of societal change. When pried about the role of the EU, one of the respondents, being aware of the fact that this study was conducted with EU funds, asked, ‘How do you need to put it?’ (Interview 1). For most people, the EU is associated with a promise of freer travel once Estonia enters Schengen (Interview 9) and, on the less positive side, with the increase of prices surrounding Estonia’s EU accession in May 2004 and disappearance from the Estonian market of certain products that were deemed to be below the EU’s standards (such as Russian- and Ukrainian-produced salt) (Interviews 1, 2). Mostly, the change in people’s perceptions of the ‘other’ was put down to an internal logic of societal development in Estonia. If at the beginning of 1990s, people in Estonia savoured the newly gained independence and the opened opportunities of political participation in what the majority perceived as their own state, by the beginning of 2000s, that initial thirst was quelled (among other factors, because a great number of people started to feel alienated from the state which did a poor good job representing the interests of its populace), own affairs were set in order and the attention started to turn outward, to the more and less proximate ‘neighbours’, including the eastern one (i.e. Russia). Indirectly, however, the mentioned ‘setting of affairs in order’ can be associated with the EU’s stabilising influence on Estonia’s economy and society. While individual assessments of this influence range from positive to strongly negative (cf. Aalto, 2003: 585), it is doubtless that Estonia’s EU accession eased people’s fixation on the woes of their own state due to the opening of horizons for education and employment.

**Concluding Remarks**

This paper presented an attempt at analysing the dynamics of Estonian-Russian border conflict in the context of European integration, focusing on both the state- and societal-level perceptions of the ‘other’ and of the conflict itself. Since the bulk of both empirical and secondary material appeared to point in different directions displaying contradictory tendencies with regard to escalation and de-securitisation of the conflict, the EUBorderConf’s framework of pathways of influence provided a helpful tool for separating various ‘currents’ of positive and negative transformation, whether it was clearly effected with the EU’s impact or not.

While in some instances of change in the Estonian-Russian relations and in the articulation of the conflict the EU’s impact remained marginal, in others it helped trigger important dynamics that subsequently affected other pathways of the EU’s influence. Thus, the process of *compulsory* harmonisation of Estonia’s legislation with the *acquis* doubtlessly contributed to a reformulation
of Estonia’s foreign policy interests on the basis of pragmatic considerations stemming from its future EU membership, and thus enabled a policy change in Estonia’s border negotiations with Russia. At the same time, however, the EU’s attempts at a compulsory influence with regard to the Russophone minority-related legislation had disabling consequences, as the EU itself was reconstructed as a threat to Estonia’s security and identity. The enabling effect of Estonia’s foreign policy change also had a disabling counterpart in empowering the conflictive domestic political rhetoric and substantiating the hard-liners’ claims that the government’s accommodating stance to Russia betrayed Estonia’s national interests (embodied in the insistence on recognition of the Tartu Peace Treaty and its border as a basis of relations with Russia). Whereas the EU had a significant connective impact in promoting societal-level cooperation between Estonia and Russia, the disconnective effect of EU’s own external border policy on its cooperation with Russia was amplified by Estonia’s somewhat premature endorsement of the Schengen regime on its eastern border, which had a disabling influence on Russia’s political elite and local actors. In addition, the development of civil society encouraged by the EU and other Western donors did not always imply increased levels of cooperation, as with the spread of pragmatic EU-inspired policies among the political elite some societal actors have taken over the representation of hard-line positions on the Estonian-Russian border conflict. Yet, improved relations and increasing levels of communication between Estonian and Russian societal and private actors, on the one hand, and decreasing societal reach of securitisation of the border conflict, on the other, have produced a change in identity scripts in both Estonian and Russian societies at large, manifesting evidence of a constructive aspect of conflict transformation. However, despite its support of many societal-level conciliatory initiatives, the EU as a source of a constructive impact was acknowledged only by a minority of respondents (Interview 3), with the rest explaining the reduction of societal-level tensions by people’s disillusionment in Estonia’s domestic politics and increasing dissociation with its conflict-perpetuating domestic discourses.

Based on these conclusions, it can be suggested that in the future, the scope of EU-inspired rational policy-making will continue to expand, especially as Estonian political elite undergoes further socialisation into the EU’s political and decision-making culture. However, the disappearance of the association of ‘politics’ with the conflict-generating domestic discourses is conditional upon a different construction of pragmatic issues by the Estonian political elite: instead of being presented as purely instrumental and temporary and thus not subject to political debate, this sphere of mere ‘policy’ needs to be reconceptualised as politics, open to debate and public consultation. This also appears to be the only way to overcome the alienation from politics of the more cooperation-minded and ‘mature’ Estonian electorate, whose views are currently under-represented. It is obvious, however, that whether as a result of the longer-term impact of European integration, or as an effect of maturing political culture, such a constructive change will take a long time to take root. Regarding Estonia’s approach to its relations with Russia, what needs to be pointed out is that as it becomes increasingly influenced by the EU’s liberal policies, it will inevitably partake not only of their strengths but also of their weaknesses. There are a number of analyses concerned with the reasons behind the low efficiency of the EU’s cooperative initiatives in Russia and their poor reception by the Russian public, such as excessively bureaucratic orientation of cooperation projects and their limited tangible output (e.g. Kononenko, 2004; Makarychev, 2004; cf. Interview 7). In this respect, Estonia could anticipate the risks of its expanding development aid policy by analysing the EU’s own successes and failures in its dealings with Russia, which may have a double effect of gaining a better understanding of Russia as a cooperation partner on a variety of different levels, and potentially contributing to a more informed EU-wide approach to the formulation of neighbourhood policies.
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Interviews

Interview 1: NGO project manager, Tartu, Estonia, 25 October 2005, interviewed by the author
Interview 3: NGO director, Tartu, Estonia, 25 October 2005, interviewed by the author
Interview 4: NGO project manager, Tartu, Estonia, 25 October 2005, interviewed by the author
Interview 5: Museum employee, Tartu, Estonia, 26 October 2005, interviewed by the author