

The War of the Monuments in Estonia:
the Challenges of History
and the Minority Population

Vadim Poleshchuk





Vadim Poleshchuk, Mag. iur., Legal Advisor-Analyst, Legal Information Centre for Human Rights (LICHHR), Tallinn, Estonia. He is dealing predominantly with legal and political aspects of minority protection in Estonia and Latvia. Among his recent publications are: "Estonia – In Quest of Minority Protection", in S. Spiliopoulou Åkermark et al. (eds.) *International Obligations and National Debates: Minorities around the Baltic Sea*, The Åland Islands Peace Institute, 2006 (co-authored with J. Helemäe); "Estonia", in C. Mudde (ed.) *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe*, Routledge, 2005; "The Baltic States before European Union Accession: Recent Developments in Minority Protection", in A. Bloed et al. (eds.) *European Yearbook of Minority Issues*, vol. 2, 2002/2003, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004 (co-authored with B. Tsilevich).

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PB 85, AX-22101 Mariehamn, Åland, Finland
Phone +358 18 15570, fax +358 18 21026
peace@peace.ax www.peace.ax

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Preface

The Åland Islands Peace Institute has in recent years focused research and publications in three core areas: security in the Baltic Sea region; minorities; and comparative studies of self-government models with the Ålandic autonomy as a prime object of analysis and comparison. The present report covers the overlap between on the one hand minority issues and ethnic relations and on the other hand security concerns in the aftermath of the so called 'war of monuments' in Estonia. For most outsiders the importance of the issue became evident in the spring of 2007 when the controversy and the clashes around the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn shocked parts of Estonian society and wider Europe. Vadim Poleshchuk was therefore invited to give a presentation on this issue at the symposium *Minority Policies in Transition – Experiences and trends around the Baltic Sea*, organized by the Åland Islands Peace Institute in Uppsala (Sweden) in November 2007, in cooperation with several other institutions and with the support of the Nordic Culture Fund.

Vadim Poleshchuk gives a lucid analysis of the diametrically different interpretations given in Estonia with regard to the history of the country, in particular as regards the Second World War. He shows also how the controversy was used for political purposes by several actors. While there are many legal questions involved, some of them touched upon by the author, for instance as regards the question of occupation vs. annexation and the consequences of the one or the other position, Vadim Poleshchuk makes a forceful argument on the effects of choosing a model of an 'ethnic democracy' and the incompatibility of nationalist projects with modern notions of human rights and protection of minorities. His analysis gives new information and insight about current debates in Estonia and the Baltic States.

Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark
 Director, The Åland Islands Peace Institute

Förord

Under senare år har Ålands fredsinstituts forskning och publikationer fokuserat på frågor om säkerhet i Östersjöregionen, om minoriteter och om självstyrelseformer, ofta med Åland som ett väsentligt jämförelse- och analysobjekt.

Denna rapport rör både frågor om minoritetsskydd och etniska relationer i Estland och säkerhetsaspekter i Östersjöområdet till följd av incidenterna kring bronssoldaten i Tallinn. Vikten av dessa frågor blev tydlig efter de våldsamma kravallerna våren 2007 som överraskade delar av det estniska samhället och övriga Europa. Vadim Poleshchuk bjöds in att skildra och försöka tolka dessa händelser vid symposiet *Minority Policies in Transition – Experiences and trends around the Baltic Sea* som Ålands fredsinstitut anordnade i Uppsala i november 2007, i samarbete med flera svenska vetenskapliga institutioner och med stöd från Nordiska kulturfonden.

Vadim Poleshchuk ger här en rik, balanserad och klar analys av de motstridiga tolkningar som träder fram i Estland beträffande landets historia, i synnerhet gällande andra världskriget. Han visar hur motsättningarna har utnyttjats för politiska, opportunistiska syften som förvärrat dessa motsättningar. Utöver de folkrättsliga och juridiska frågor som uppstår kring diskussionen om ockupation eller annektering av Estland 1940-1944, diskuterar Vadim Poleshchuk de svårigheter som härrör från den modell av 'etnisk demokrati' som enligt författaren dominerar i Estland. Han argumenterar på ett övertygande sätt för att nationalistiska projekt står i konflikt med moderna uppfattningar om mänskliga rättigheter och minoritetsskydd. Hans analys ger oss ny information och värdefulla insikter i aktuella debatter i de baltiska länderna.

Sia Spiliopoulou Åkermark
 Direktör, Ålands fredsinstitut

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1. Introduction

The year of 2004 heralded the onset in Estonia of events promptly dubbed “the war of the monuments” – the spurious or well-staged harsh public criticism of the monuments established on graves from WWII to commemorate the Soviet soldiers. The events were triggered by the erection of a monument “to Estonian soldiers in the German uniform” in the locality of Lihula in September 2004, reaching their apogee in April 2007 with the removal and transfer of the so-called Bronze Soldier on Tõnismägi hill in Tallinn, which brought about an avalanche of mass disturbances in the capital city and some towns in northeast Estonia.

Estonia faces the collision of two community myths, both vying for supremacy, one concerned with “the great victory of the Soviet people in WWII”, the other – with “suppression and resistance in the years of WWII against the totalitarian Stalinist regime, by Estonians who aspired to lofty aims even when clad in German uniforms” (popular journalistic clichés). “The war of the monuments”, formally starting with the conflict of the central government with the authorities of the rural municipality of Lihula, significantly affected the mood in Estonia, making the schism between the two most prevalent ethnolinguistic communities even more evident.

This paper is not meant to make a pronouncement on the right or the wrong approaches to the events of WWII in Estonia. Just a cursory statement shall be made to this effect, not delving into the mutual accusations of Estonia and Russia in the matters of the conflict, spurred on by the transfer of the Bronze Soldier. The author will rather focus on differences in approach, which are endemic in representatives of the main population groups of this country. To understand “the war of the monuments” and “the April crisis” it is necessary to find out, how important the role of history is, more specifically the approach

to the Soviet past, in the life of modern Estonia. It is necessary to look at the specificities of the majority – minorities relations, in particular in the political sphere. This will give us the key for understanding the algorithm of “the war of the monuments” in its ethnic aspect.

2. “The war of the monuments”: 2004-2007

By way of introduction, the main events of “the war of the monuments” need to be presented.

In 2002 a monument honouring the Estonians, fighting on the side of Germany during WWII, stood in Pärnu, a resort town, for 9 days. The plate on the monument said that it was erected in memory of “all the Estonian soldiers fallen in the Second War for Liberation for their motherland and free Europe in 1940-1945”. The monument was removed in response to pressure by the central authorities, worried about the image of Estonia abroad. In 2004 the same monument was going to be erected in Lihula, a locality in West Estonia. After some alterations it took the form of a bas-relief of a machine gunner, wearing an SS uniform, a helmet and carrying a “Cross of Freedom” Order and a German “Iron Cross” decoration on his regimental uniform. The Lihula authorities initially planned to place the monument beside the secondary school, but later decided to put it up at the local cemetery - opposite the monument to Soviet soldiers, which was erected on their common grave. Prime Minister J. Parts, primarily for reasons of foreign policy, tried to put pressure to bear upon the Lihula authorities to stop unveiling of the monument, but without any success. T. Madisson, a district elder and ultra-right politician, was a central figure in this complex situation.

The Lihula monument stood only for two

weeks. It was removed on 2 September 2004 by order of the government. Formally the decision was based on the fact that the monument was erected on public lands without proper authorisation. The process of dismantling the monument struck the Estonian residents' imagination: it took place at dusk; moreover, the location was surrounded by police with dogs. The agitated crowd (mainly teenagers) started to throw stones at the crane, which resulted in the injury of the crane operator. The Lihula inhabitants' resistance to the police did not result in any severe penalties.

The specialists in semiotics, who were commissioned by the police to carry out research on the monument, arrived at the conclusion that it did not glorify Nazism. Nevertheless, "a deviation of what is considered good practise lead to an extremely controversial interpretation of the meaning of the monument and a conflict at its location" (not far from the common grave of Soviet soldiers) (*Information 2004b*). On the grounds of that expert report an investigation that had been started by the police on the suspicion of incitement of social hatred, was dropped due to the absence of criminal elements in the act. In October 2005, the Lihula bas-relief was erected on the territory of the private war museum in Lagedi, near Tallinn; T. Madisson was present at its opening as a guest of honour.

After the removal of the Lihula monument, the Estonian government made a decision about the necessity of public regulation of the "commemoration of Estonians having struggled for the freedom of their country in the German army". At the instigation of the Estonian government, a new monument appeared in Maarjamäe, Tallinn: three large crosses, with plates alongside bearing the names of German military units, including the Estonian Legion (20-th SS division).

After the Lihula crisis the nationalist parties and some public figures immediately came out

with fierce criticism of the cabinet. A telephone poll held by the company "Faktum" showed that the opinions of ethnic Estonians and Russians (Russian-speakers)¹ on that subject were totally different: 58% of Estonians called the actions of the government unjust and 25% of Russians. Similarly, 29% and 64% of respondents considered these actions just. In the Estonian ethnic group many of those opposed to the authorities were either young (15-29 years old) or only had primary education (*Information 2004a*).

The direct consequence of the events in Lihula was the mass desecration of monuments and obelisks to Soviet soldiers throughout Estonia. A number of similar incidents also took place in the spring of 2005. Since the Lihula monument was criticised by many for its German uniform and Iron cross, "symbols of a totalitarian regime", demands were heard for the removal of the Bronze Soldier (a monument in Tallinn) for the same reasons. However, in 2004-2005 protest actions against "alien monuments" were not numerous.

In the beginning of March 2005, it became known that the President of Estonia, A. Rüütel, declined an invitation to attend the festivities held in Moscow on 9 May, dedicated to commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII. In the address of the President of 7 March 2005, the motivation of that decision boiled down to the assertion that the victory of the USSR over Germany resulted in the strengthening of the Soviet Regime in Estonia, under which Estonia and Estonians suffered. Opinions concerning the decision of President Rüütel (the former secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia) to decline the invitation from Moscow again revealed the differences between ethnic Estonians and non-Estonians. As suggested by the data of the opinion survey company, "Saar Poll", support for the President was expressed by 61.0% of Estonians and only 6.2% of non-Estonians;

21.5% and 91.1% respectively, expressed discontent with the decision of the President (*Sildam* 2005).

In May 2006, “the war of the monuments” received a new impetus, stimulated by the events around the Bronze Soldier. The sensitivity of the situation concerning the transfer of this monument was increased due to its location, situated opposite the buildings of the Security Police (Estonian special service), the National Library and one of the main Lutheran churches of the country. Nationalist parties had repeatedly called for the removal or the destruction of the Bronze Soldier, in particular the “Pro Patria Union” (*Isamaaliit*). The monument was located in the centre of the capital city, on municipal land. However, the city authorities, despite numerous discussions, never adopted a decision on the removal or transfer of the monument. Nevertheless, the monument itself had assumed a different appearance over the past decade. First, the “eternal fire” burning before it, was put out. Thereafter, the plates inscribed with the names of the Soviet soldiers buried there were removed. At the end of 1990s, there appeared the plates in Estonian and Russian on the monument, transforming it into a common memorial to all fallen in WWII.

The monument on the Tõnismägi hill became the centrepiece of celebrations of the Russian community twice a year: on 9 May (Victory Day), and to a much lesser degree on 22 September (the day Red Army troops entered Tallinn). On Victory Day the monument was usually visited by several thousand people. Normally, in the morning veterans’ organisations carried out the festive laying of wreaths. Afterwards, during the day, which is a working day in Estonia, common citizens brought flowers to the Bronze Soldier, with up to several hundred of people at the monument at any one time.

On 9 May 2006 the Tallinn authorities sanctioned two public events beside the monument

on Tõnismägi: laying wreaths from the veterans’ organisations, and a picket by opponents of the monument. The picket consisted of only a few people, who were holding the national flag and a home-made poster in Estonian: “Estonian people, don’t forget: this soldier occupied our land and deported our people”. After standing by the edge of the crowded square for a few minutes, the picketing group was pushed out to the road, from where they were evacuated in a police van.

Earlier, the Estonian-language press did not pay any special attention to the celebration of the 9 May in Estonia. However, in 2006 the events at the Bronze Soldier were covered by the press in detail, and in a negative manner. For instance, allegations were made about the crowd of Russians desecrating the Estonian flag (it was not confirmed by police authorities). As early as the following day the well-known Estonian radicals T. Madisson and J. Liim, with a group of like-minded persons, threatened to remove the monument. Further, Liim threatened to place a bomb at the memorial.

On 20 May 2006 a few hundred people held a “patriotic action” beside the Bronze Soldier. Like the organisers of the 9 May picket and T. Madisson’s supporters, many ethnic Estonians of different ages with national flags came to the monument. A small group of young skinheads with German military symbols on their clothes was also present, as well as a small group of Russian-speaking people who were radically opposed to “the enemies of the monument”. In the evening of the same day, the Bronze Soldier was smeared with paint in the colours of the Estonian flag. During the following week, a so-called “Night Watch” began around the Bronze Soldier – young Russian-speaking volunteers came to protect the monument from vandals. This initiative later grew into an organisation.

Then the opponents of the monument announced their intention to have a picnic on 27 May 2006 beside the Bronze Soldier. In opposi-

tion, appeals spread among young people from the Russian community to come to the monument and fill the space in front of it, making the event of the opponents impossible. The Tallinn police acted very efficiently and prevented a clash of dozens of people, who came to the Bronze Soldier: the Estonian and Russian parts of the crowd were separated from each other, after which the Russians were pushed out to the side of one of the central city squares. There were many young people on both sides. The Russians came to the monument with little flags of the European Union, while Estonians were carrying national flags.

The Bronze Soldier's destiny was actively discussed in the Estonian and local Russian-language press. According to the authors of a special media monitoring report for May-July 2006, carried out at the request of the Integration Foundation, "among the statements in [the media] the prevailing ones were that ethnic Estonians' attitude to the transfer of the monument is opposite to that of ethnic Russians and that the Bronze Soldier as a monument of occupation should not be situated in the city centre. In addition, in the Russian-language media a prevalent opinion is that the wish of Estonians to transfer the monument is nationalistic (if not fascist) in its substance. Hence the conclusion follows that both in the Estonian and Russian-language media-space national consciousness plays a very important role in arguments for or against the transfer of the monument" (*Kõnno* 2006: 11).

After those events the authorities left a fence at the square beside the monument and set up a police patrol. On 21–22 September 2006, Tallinn witnessed both the sanctioned meeting of nationalists and the meeting of the socially active Russian youth with flowers and candles. On 9 October 2006 the police ribbons were removed: access to the monument was opened on the eve of the visit of the Queen of England. There were further incidents at the monument (e.g. on 25

March 2007 when a group of radicals solemnly placed at the Bronze Soldier a wreath made of barbed wire).

The key figure in the case of transfer of the monument was Prime Minister A. Ansip, who actively used the topic of "the symbol of the Soviet occupation" in the process of his pre-election campaign. This tactic yielded positive results at the elections held in March 2007, allowing the Reformist Party, headed by A. Ansip, to attract more of the votes of the nationalist electorate. According to the opinion survey company "Emor" at the beginning of April 2007, support for the new government (again headed by A. Ansip) among ethnic Estonians constituted 77% (among non-Estonians— only 21%). At the same time only 5% of Estonians and 13% of non-Estonians thought that the question of the monument on Tõnismägi was one of the two most urgent problems of the government (*Statement* 2007).

On the night of 26 April 2007, a police operation was carried out, in the process of which the people protecting the monument and on duty there were pushed out from Tõnismägi. A tent was erected over the memorial and the burial place of the Soviet soldiers. From a legal point of view, the exhumation of these remains took place under the War Graves Act, which was specially adopted in January 2007. The Act refers to art. 34 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, but takes a wider interpretation than many understand. The reburial of the remains allows, under Estonian law, to relocate the grave monument or another grave mark to the new burial site of the remains.

By the evening of 26 April 2007 a large group of people, most of them Russian-speaking, gathered at Tõnismägi and expressed their discontent with the governmental actions. The crowd chanted "Shame!" and "Fascists!" The police ordered them to leave the square but to no effect. Observers say that some protesters threw empty

bottles in the direction of the police. Then a moment came when the law enforcers began breaking up the rally using special equipment. Some participants of the meeting responded by throwing stones at the policemen. The protesters were pushed out of Tõnismägi to the neighbouring streets where vandalism and looting of stalls and shops soon began, while the law enforcers were surprisingly passive.

During the first night of disorder, the police staged mass arrests of people on the streets, including those who protested near the monument at Tõnismägi. The offenders involved in vandalism were also detained.

Small groups of Russian youths carried Russian flags during the street disorders and chanted "Russia!" There were also minor fights between Russian and Estonian young people. A few young Estonian nationalists were present, some of them carrying Estonian flags. Most clashes were between Russian youths and the police.

Early on the morning of 27 April 2007, by the decision of the Government of the Republic, the monument was removed from Tõnismägi and some days later it was installed at the city military cemetery. On the evening of 27 April, protesters returned to Tõnismägi. The police changed their tactics and immediately started mass arrests near Tõnismägi hill and within a large area around it. Disturbances again started in Tallinn and in some towns in the north-east of Estonia, mostly involving the Russian-speaking population. In the capital the police surrounded complete blocks of the city centre and detained those inside, in particular Russian-speaking people.

Meanwhile there were no official prohibitions against visiting the centre of Tallinn where entertainment facilities worked as usual. But on April 27 recommendations "to stay home" were published in the mass media, sent to e-mail addresses and cellular phones.

The arrests were carried out with use of special equipment: the police used batons, rubber bul-

lets and plastic handcuffs, people were put face down on the ground. The detainees were taken to "filtration points". It is clear that most of the detainees were released without any charges but also without apology. In total, according to the police, the lists of the detainees kept in the "filtration points" include more than a thousand names.

From 30 April till 11 May 2007 all street events in Tallinn were prohibited by order of the police prefect. This left no space for the open expression of discontent with the actions of the authorities. A section of the Russian-speaking population chose, at the end of April – beginning of May as a form of civil disobedience to drive slowly from 12.00 to 12.20 p.m. signalling with horns. The police imposed fines on those who breached the traffic laws and publicly thanked those who informed the police about the breaches.

The April mass disturbances were an unprecedented event in the modern history of Estonia.

In its 2006 report, the Estonian special service called the conflict round the Bronze Soldier spontaneous, pointing to its ethnic aspect and describing the interests of the local Russian political figures and the Russian authorities in the conflict. There has been an information war carried out against Estonia, as thought by the special service, while "the main goal of Russian extremists and supporting Russian media is to create an image of split Estonia with two hostile communities – noble Russians and "Estonian Fascists" (Yearbook 2007: 6). According to the Security Police the population of Estonia is not divided on the basis of ethnicity, but due to the existence of two completely antagonist information sources (namely: many Russians are not oriented to "the free press of Estonia and other European countries", they watch the Russian Federation television and therefore fall prey to "the imperialist ideology and chauvinistic propaganda") (*Ibid*).

The Estonian authorities denied that the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia could have any serious problems that could provide grounds for spontaneous actions of discontent, triggered by the police operation at Tõnismägi. The authorities tried to explain the April events by the Russian Federation's influence (or even by orders from Moscow). In June 2007 A. Laaneots, Estonian commander-in-chief, publicly declared that the April disorders in Estonia had been "a large-scale special operation of the Russian Federation against Estonia, approved at high political level, thoroughly considered and prepared" (Kook 2007). Interestingly, in their most recent report the Estonian special service argued that it had not been able to "ascertain directing the violent events [of April 2007] from the side of Russian special services" (Yearbook 2008: 5). However, the same report said that mass riots had been provoked by Russia (*Ibid* 2008: 1).

In 2008, court proceedings continued over the Russian social activists that were accused of organisation of mass riots. Three of them are members of the "Night Watch".

In its turn, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia made a statement as early as in January 2007 to the Ambassador of Estonia in Russia, that the steps to dismantle the Tõnismägi monument and relocate the remains of the Soviet soldiers cannot be qualified "otherwise as a sacrilegious undertaking and a crying fact of desecration of the memory of soldiers, having freed the world of the Fascism" (*Information* 2007a). On 26 April 2007, when the excavations were starting at the Tõnismägi hill, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation said: "We are indignant that Estonian authorities did not heed our appeals. This means but one thing: Estonia's leadership wants to rewrite the lessons of World War II [...] Naturally the events occurring in Tallinn will be considered by us in building relations with Estonia. Among other things, we will continue to use the resource of

international organisations, primarily European, of which Estonia is a member, to exert a sobering influence on the Estonian authorities" (*Information* 2007b).

The situation was also worsened by the protest actions of the pro Russian Government youth at the Estonian Embassy in Moscow in May 2007.

The diplomatic warfare between Estonia and Russia has not yet ended. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia does regularly raise the issue of investigation into the killing in the days of April events of Russian citizen D. Ganin.

3. Interpretation of the April crisis: Defining the task

As early as in June 2007 the company "Saar Poll" carried out a sociological survey of the population, dedicated to the events at the end of April 2007. The survey evidenced the differences in opinions of the Estonian and the non-Estonian sections of the population. While 51% of ethnic Estonians, participating in the poll, thought that the decision of the authorities was "absolutely right" and 28% – "fairly right", only 4 and 7% of non-Estonians gave those answers, respectively. Among those surveyed from the minorities, 40% of respondents evaluating the correctness of that decision chose the variant "no, another solution should have been found" and 36% – "absolutely not, I completely oppose it". Evaluations of government activity to resolve the April crisis were also completely opposed. Most ethnic Estonians qualified it as "very successful" (23%) or "fairly successful" (43%), while most minority members considered it "totally unsuccessful" (56%) and "fairly unsuccessful" (28%) (*Saar* 2007: 27-28).

Estonians and non-Estonians also have different opinions about the reasons for the riots

(*Ibid* 2007: 28-29). The following explanations, offered by the mass media, were the most popular (more than 70%) among the representatives of the ethnic majority: activity of “inciters of hatred” and provocateurs; Russia’s will to use the Bronze Soldier to destabilise the (political) situation in Estonia and demonstrate its influence; different sources of information (mass media) for ethnic Estonians and Russians. The majority of non-Estonians tended to think that the causes of the trouble were the decisions and acts of the Estonian Government and the police.

The following explanations attracted a comparatively larger level of support among both ethnic Estonians and non-Estonians (*Ibid*):

- Estonians and Russians interpret the notion of fascism differently (Estonians – 60%, non-Estonians – 50%);
- Estonians and Russians interpret the meetings of Russian-speaking people at the Bronze Soldier differently (44 and 38% respectively);
- Conflict of geopolitical interests of large international players (44 and 38% respectively).

There were also some answers that manifested a difference of up to six times between the opinions and perceptions of ethnic Estonians and non-Estonians. Thus 42% of Estonians agreed that the disorders were caused by “activities of Russian special services” (compare to 7% of non-Estonians); 13% of Estonians and 71% of non-Estonians disagreed with that statement (*Ibid* 2007: 30).

For our topic, it would be important to point out the differences in estimates of the ethnic Estonians and minorities regarding the events of 1940 (when Estonia was made part of the USSR) and estimate to the policy of modern Russia with regard to Estonia.

As revealed by data of the survey conducted in 2005 in Tallinn, the attitudes to the events that date back over 65 years are substantially differ-

ent among ethnic Estonians and non-Estonians. The respondents were asked to select one of three possible interpretations of the proclamation in 1940 of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, when the republic was incorporated in the composition of the USSR: 1. It was a military occupation that lasted until 1991; 2. Estonia was annexed to the USSR by using the threat of military intervention; 3. Estonia joined the USSR voluntarily. Among ethnic Estonians, the first variant was selected by 64% of respondents, and the second by 27%. The variant of voluntary joining was selected by less than 1% of Estonians. With non-Estonians, a different picture is revealed. The variant of military occupation was selected by as few as 7%. The second variant was opted by 31%, and the voluntary joining by 40%. True enough, with non-Estonians 1/5 of respondents found it difficult to answer (with Estonians – only 7%). Similar data was also obtained in the process of other sociological surveys (*Poleshchuk & Semjonov* 2006: 55-56). A considerable percentage of the polled non-Estonians were youths in their twenties, whose school years had passed at least partially in the period after 1991, when the content of history handbooks dramatically changed in independent Estonia. In other words, this view of the events cannot be reduced to lack of knowledge of certain facts, only.

Opinions of Estonians and non-Estonians about the friendliness of Russia with regard to Estonia are also diametrically opposite. It is to be noted that according to the data of the Estonian Open Society Institute, ethnic Estonians have become more entrenched in their negative opinion in the recent years and/or after April 2007, while for non-Estonians a reverse trend was noted (which can be accounted for as dissatisfaction from the semi-official version of the April events). In 2007 the majority of ethnic Estonians (53%) blamed the political figures from Russia for the tense Estonian-Russian re-

lations, however 59% of non-Estonians blamed the Estonian politicians for that. One third of both Estonians and non-Estonians opined that tense relations were as a result of faults by both parties (*Proos & Pettai* 2007: 48).

In other words, the representatives of the Estonian and the non-Estonian sections of the population evaluated the causes of the crisis situation differently in many respects, as well as the role of the government in its resolution. Most non-Estonians, unlike ethnic Estonians, do not share the official historical views (i.e. they distance themselves from the official state ideology). They also refuse to see in Russia a state unfriendly to Estonia. The data presented above shows the results of the poll on public opinion about the events of 1940, about the harsh acts of the government in Lihula, about the visit of President Rüütel to Moscow on 9 May and on the question of the removal/transfer of the Bronze Soldier. For all these issues, the representatives of the Estonian and Russian-speaking communities held different opinions.

How great was the influence of the elites in forming opinions in this case? What were the realistic possibilities of radicals from both communities? To what degree were the attitudes of the different groups of the population formed under the influence of mass media, including the foreign reports/media coverage? There are no unambiguous answers to these questions, although it is evident that explaining away all the woes by the perfidy of the elites, politician-radicals or mass media would be a gross simplification. It is as empty as simply saying that “the war of the monuments” is a manifestation of the “inter-community conflict”.

Whoever is sowing the seeds of discord, in order to breed strife they must fall in the fertile soil, get sufficient sun, warmth and moisture. In what follows it will be shown, that the crisis concerning us here would hardly have occurred, should there not have been the following specificities of

the political and social life of Estonia:

- Attitudes to the facts of recent history by and large determines the political discourse;
- Perceptions of Estonians about themselves (“cultural nation”) made it possible to form a special political regime of the “ethnic democracy”;
- Participation of minorities in political and social life of the country is neither significant nor comprehensive.

4. The year of 1940 and its importance in the Estonian political discourse

The issue of the official interpretation of the events of the beginning of the Soviet period is the keynote to Estonian ethno-policy. The mainstream strategy of the Estonian movement for independence was to prove the legal invalidity of incorporating Estonia in the composition of the USSR in 1940: those events are invariably named in national official documents as the “Soviet occupation”. This approach envisaged the necessity of restitution, and a return to the pre-war *status quo* in the country (*restitutio ad integrum*).² Practical application of that ideology (first of all, regarding citizenship) had far-reaching consequences for the non-Estonian population. As has been argued by the Estonian political scientist P. Järve (2000: 32), “[t]he Estonian Constitution and many laws were created as a part of the political agenda of restitution to help restore the pre-war republic and save the ethnic nation from becoming a minority on its own traditional territory. Therefore, the open agenda of these legal acts was to promote the ethno-nationalist aspirations of Estonians, the core group, whereas their hidden agenda was to encourage the re-emigration of Russians and other

non-titular groups from Estonia to their historical homelands.”

Reference to the continuity of the Republic of Estonia proclaimed on 24 February 1918, has been laid down in the Constitution of Estonia (preamble), in resolutions of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia of 20 August 1991 “On state independence of Estonia” and in the declaration of Parliament of 7 October 1992 “On restitution of the constitutional state power”. Estonia considers as still effective the Tartu Peace Treaty of 2 February 1920, in which Bolshevik Russia recognised the independence of Estonia.

The Russian Federation does not conceive the events of 1940 as occupation or annexation. It supports its case by claiming that that the decision to accede was formally adopted by Estonia’s Parliament elected under laws of Estonia. Russia does not accept the continuation of the validity of the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920 (e.g. *Information* 2000). Russian academics also usually proceed from the premise that “the post-Soviet Baltic States or the post-Soviet Central Asia are just post-Soviet states, not any “reborn formations” (*Poloskova* 1999: 129).

The representation of the Soviet period as occupation and the discourse of restitution became an important component of state building after 1991, and they also served as a justification and basis of the ethno-policy, which was conducted with regard to Russians and other ethnic groups of the population, which settled in Estonia predominantly after WWII. If the events of 1940 are regarded as occupation, persons having arrived after that time could be considered as illegal immigrants, a position that makes it hard for them to claim Estonian citizenship. Furthermore, their right to stay in the territory of the country rests entirely and completely on the discretion of the national government. From this perspective, it is easy to dismiss the accusation Russia has brought against the Estonian govern-

ment, that what is taking place in Estonia has to be considered as a mass violation of human rights on the grounds that hundreds of thousands of people were deprived of citizenship and consequently “the right to many other rights”. As expounded by an Estonian jurist, “the continuity of the Estonian state cannot be disputed. With regards to matters of nationality, the Baltic States based their nationality legislation to a large extent on legislation which had been in force in each of the countries before 1940” (*Kerikmäe* 1997: 28).

Estonian authorities have internationally shared concerns that “history has been instrumentalised in some occasions in order to question the right of Estonia to exist as a legitimate state” (*Report* 2008: 13-14). The problem of assessment of the events of 1940 and 1944, has recently been treated as a question of state security in Estonia. According to the opinion of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs (shared also by the Estonian special services), “the allegations about voluntary accession of Estonia into composition of the USSR, justifying the annexation or denying occupation shall be considered as attacks at the Constitution” (*Letter* 2006).

The mass pilgrimage to the Bronze Soldier on 9 May was carried out by representatives of widely different social and age groups of the non-Estonian population. There are valid grounds to believe, that victory in WWII is an important element of their identity. As a matter of fact, it was only on that day that the Russians and other groups of the non-titular population indulged in acts, which the Estonian section of society (at least its elite) perceived as an open manifestation of disloyalty.

Disputes were also based on the events of 22 September 1944 (the day troops of the Red Army entered Tallinn). What the Russian veterans of WWII name “liberation of Estonia from German Fascist invaders” is officially treated in Estonia as “beginning of the second Soviet oc-

cupation". In 2002 the current President of Estonia T.H. Ilves (2002: 323) argued: "One must have a rather restricted understanding of history and the host country to call the replacement of one set of thugs, rapists and murders by another "liberation"".

The question of interpretation of the events of 1940 cannot be considered in isolation from attitudes to WWII as a whole; one can see a fusion of contradictory views in this case. According to the official approach, Estonia did not participate in WWII. At the same time it is well known that Estonians did fight either in the Red Army (in the first place in Estonian Rifle Corps), or in the German army (including the voluntary military troops of SS – *Waffen SS*). If Estonia was occupied in 1941-1944 by Nazi Germany, according to formal logic the Estonians in German uniform can be regarded as traitors-collaborationists. However, Estonians, who in the form of the SS soldiers tried to stop the passing of Soviet troops into the territory of the country, are usually viewed as fighters for the freedom of Estonia, not willing to permit a repetition of the horrors of Stalinist repression. The Estonian soldiers of the *Waffen SS* are often identified as counterparts of the participants of the War for Liberation.³ As Prime Minister A. Ansip put it in his recent speech at the Gathering of Fighters for Freedom (mainly Estonians who fought in 1944 in the German Army and "forest brothers"⁴), "[y]our fight is a heroic deed that must be highly appreciated now and in the future. Although Estonia's independent statehood was not restored at the time, your fight played a large role in the ability of the Estonian nation to keep up their struggle for freedom throughout the Soviet occupation. As you used to say among yourselves - We lost the battle, but we won the war in the end" (*Press release 2006*).

Making heroes of the Estonians having fought in German uniforms has now been inserted in the school curriculum (common to Estonian

and Russian-language schools). As declared by the Estonian government after the incident in Lihula, it "esteems highly the valour of people, fighting at times of different occupations for independence and freedom of Estonia, and considers it important to immortalise and perpetuate their memory..." However it needs be done "in a dignified way, respecting the true goals and motives of those people, not the uniform imposed on them by the others" (*Press release 2004*).

Active participation of Estonians in the war on the side of the Germans is frequently accounted for by Stalinist repressions, which came down upon the country in 1940-1941. According to the research of the historical commission, set up by then President of Estonia, L. Meri, in 1940 the Soviet People's Commissariat of the Interior (NKVD) arrested in Estonia almost one thousand people, whereof at least 250 were executed, and 500 died in places of detention. In 1941 even 6 thousand people were arrested, of whom more than 1,600 were executed and almost 4 thousand people died in places of detention. Over 2 thousand people were killed in summer and autumn 1941 by operatives of NKVD, the extermination squads, withdrawing troops of the Red Army etc. In June 1941 over 10 thousand people deemed politically unreliable were deported from Estonia. Out of that number, about 3,000 men and 150 women were taken aside and put into camps, where the majority of them were executed or died (*Conclusions 2006: 12-14*).⁵

According to the data of the same historical commission, during the years of German occupation 950-1,000 Estonian Jews were killed, several thousand Jews from other countries and 400-1,000 Roma. At least 7 thousand people were executed for political motives (of whom 6 thousand ethnic Estonians and a thousand basically ethnic Russians). Besides that, approximately 15 thousand Soviet prisoners of war (out of a total of more than 30 thousand people) died on the territory of Estonia. The commission

makes a note of involvement of collaborationists from among local population in crimes against humanity (*Conclusions* 2006: 18-21).

The aspiration of Estonians to visualise positively the defence against the advance of the Red Army in 1944, organised by Germans is easy to explain: the German occupation is openly or covertly considered by many in Estonia as “less onerous” than the Soviet period. Because “the Soviet advance grew into the Soviet occupation before 1991”, the USSR represents in the minds of many Estonians the idea of absolute evil, while Nazi Germany is perceived as a relative evil. Furthermore, the Stalinist repressions continued also after WWII.⁶

Incorporation of Estonia into the USSR in 1940 took place without real large scale use of violence – there was no resistance. It is important, from a psychological perspective to underline the desperate resistance put up by Estonians, in the course of the battles of 1944 with the Red Army, although under a foreign flag. The serious trauma, inflicted by Soviet repressions and especially deportation, cannot be dismissed.

Furthermore the question of Stalinist repressions and the events of WWII impinge on modern political discourse in Estonia. Under the Public and National Holidays Act, 14 June – the anniversary of the June deportation of 1941 is annually a day of mourning, when Estonian flags are hung out with black ribbons, and all events incompatible with mourning are prohibited. According to an amendment to the Act, adopted in February 2007, September 22 became the Day of Resistance.

It must be acknowledged, that regardless of some official declarations, in Estonia the events of 1944 are not, commonly considered in the context of WWII. As a matter of fact, the controversial picket appeared in 2006 at the monument on 9 May, not 22 September. The fact that on 9 May at Tõnismägi the local Russian-speakers did not mark the conquest of Estonia, but the

end of WWII, was not believed by many politicians and ordinary people. It can be argued that the fight against fascism was considered by Estonians as a smokescreen, whereas Russians considered such behaviour justification of fascism (see e.g. the media monitoring report for May-July 2006 in *Kõnno* 2006).

As it was shown above, a majority of the Russian-speaking population of Estonia doubts that the events of 1940 can be regarded as occupation. Because the historical component plays an important role for the identity of both ethnolinguistic communities of Estonia, and many events are interpreted differently, the task of developing a common civil ideology, uniting all residents, appears exceedingly difficult.

As far as the international dimension is concerned, Estonian politicians and experts have not lost the hope of clarifying to their foreign colleagues (including Russians) the specificities of the local understanding of the history. For instance, the well known political scientist R. Vetik (2006) analysed in one of his speeches the circumstances, in case of which Russia would make apologies to Estonia for the events of 1940. The main thesis of his presentation was the assertion, that for making apologies, it is necessary to accept that the single and “right” history does not exist. Hence Russia must acknowledge that different peoples have their own perspectives and that “the Estonian view of history is not inherently erroneous”.

5. Estonian “cultural nation” and “ethnic democracy”

The restitution ideology in the sphere of ethnic relations gave rise to clear-cut demarcation lines between Estonians and non-Estonians, who found themselves on different sides of the “status” barricades. This accords with the sit-

uation where Estonians present themselves intrinsically as a “cultural nation”, having marked borderlines with the surrounding world and opposing outside groups, including local minorities. Below, are some explanations of the specificities of interrelations between the ethnic majority and the minorities, and also why that may be important in the context of “the war of the monuments”.

In the Estonian academic community, as among ordinary people, the existence of the problem of the divided society has gained recognition. When staying within the framework of the Estonian version of political correctness, the matter concerns (ethnic) “Estonians” and “non-Estonians”. There is a general understanding throughout the country that these two groups differ by ethnic characteristics, but not exclusively. The official integration programme of 2000 states that “as a result of the extensive migration that took place during the Soviet period, a community using Russian as its first language has developed in Estonia, and many of its members lack a sufficient outlet to the rest of society” (*State Programme 2000*: point 3.1).

The question of the nature of national/ethnic characteristics has been given little attention in Estonian academic circles. Even in post-Soviet Russia, there are heated debates concerning primordial and constructivist approaches to ethnic questions, but not in Estonia. However, there are no doubts that in Estonian academia, it is primordialism which prevails.⁷ The idea that nations “have existed through the mists of time, either oppressed or waiting to be “awakened” – so popular among nationalists” (*Melvin 1995*: 1).

For describing the perceptions of Estonians about themselves, a standard set of myths can be listed, which allowed certain western researchers to regard Estonians as a “cultural nation”. For instance, Estonians existed almost “always”⁸ (up to 4 thousand years), retaining their unity in the framework of a large multiplicity of linguistic

(“dialects”) or household (costumes, architecture of the dwellings) character. This “Estonianness” is based on a common culture, whose most important element is a common language. Estonians have specific connections with their native land, where they know the name of any meaningful geographical object. Moreover, Estonia is the only place where Estonians can develop their language and culture. In other words, Estonians visualise themselves as a group with clear (in the representation of someone even opaque) borders, separated from the whole external world, to which the minorities are referred, too. It is not a coincidence that in Estonia the Language Act (art. 2) names all languages, besides Estonian, foreign languages (including the languages of national minorities).

Estonia is little different from other former neighbours in the Soviet communal apartment. As pointed out by L. Barrington (1995: 134), “[t]o those who study central Europe and the former USSR, it is no surprise to hear that Estonians define their nation in ethnic terms. Some... saw the nation not as defined by blood but by culture. Yet, even this does not limit the ethnic character of the nation. One can become Estonian only by adopting the Estonian language and customs. There is no idea of merging cultural features of non-Estonians into this cultural nation or defining “Estonian” based on loyalty to the state”.

The Estonian version of nationalism is closely linked to the local representations of the Estonian nation. As the Estonian intellectual E. Soosaar said, “[f]or centuries, Balts had only two choices: to survive or to merge into larger nations. You could say that we decided, subconsciously but collectively, to survive. So for us, nationalism is a mode of existence” (*Lieven 1994*: 18). Understandably, against the background of such interpretations, there sprouted in Estonia not a civil, but specifically ethnic nationalism, which “views the nation as an ethno-cultur-

al category, as an entity, having deep historical roots, social-psychological or even genetic nature” (as defined by V. Tishkov (1997: 78)). The attempts to introduce into official discourse the deliberations about the civil nationalism, about the civil nation were made in the framework of the integration programme of 2000, however, it was emphasised there too that “[i]n social dialogue all cultures functioning in Estonia are equal. In relations with the State, however, the status of Estonian culture is different of that of the minority cultures, since one of the objectives of Estonian statehood is the preservation and development of the Estonian cultural domain” (*State Programme 2000*: point 3.4). This passage is based on the preamble of the Estonian Constitution.

Non-willingness to recognise the Russian-speakers as a legitimate part of the social and political system was formalised at the beginning of the 1990s even through the use of certain specific terminology. As noted by Estonian-Russian researcher A. Semjonov (2002: 113), “[t]he dominant concept has gone from descriptive neutral terms, such as “non-Estonians”, “migrants”, and “other-language population”, to words with negative connotations: “illegal immigrants”, “aliens”, “colonisers”, and “invaders”. In accordance with the principle of restitution, the problem itself has been transformed: from the need to regulate interethnic relations in a basically multi-ethnic society to the necessity of decolonisation, resocialisation or “voluntary remigration””. Social scientist M. Raudsepp argued that “formerly legitimate (although often disliked) and fully valued members of the society have been transformed in a social sense into illegitimate and inferior state subjects” (*Ibid*).

It needs to be understood, that for most ethnic Estonians, the essence of their nationalism lays in a profound perception of injustice over the loss of their interwar independence in 1940 through their incorporation into the Soviet Union (*Pet-*

tai & Hallik 2002: 508). The Soviet period and Soviet power (colloquially *vene aeg* – Russian time) were associated with ethnic Russians and the Russian language, and was normally stigmatised as being alien and inorganic for the country. Those attitudes were also based on real and perceived negative characteristics of the Soviet regime and particularly on demographic changes that occurred in the country after WWII. Thus, the declining percentage of ethnic Estonians was regarded as a threat to their survival, and was exacerbated by the fact that the level of Estonian language proficiency among minorities was extremely low. Additionally, the use of Russian in the country was widening and there were reasonable doubts that the Estonian language could successfully compete with it.

The Latvian researcher A. Pabriks (1998: 7) argued that the Baltic governments declined automatic granting of citizenship to all permanent residents (i.e. “zero variant”) “since the Baltic States cannot be considered to be the new states. In 1991 they restored their independence, therefore, they had to restore but not define the body of citizens. However, the correct legal approach created the space for inadequately restrictive and illiberal treatment of the Russian immigrants in Latvia and Estonia”. Indeed, the phenomenon of mass statelessness among ethnic non-Estonians was a fully expected outcome of application of the principles of restitution to the question of citizenship. That situation is one of the most spectacular examples of intrusion of historical interpretations into the area of ethno-policy.

Reinstitution in 1992 of the validity of Citizenship Act of 1938 marked the victory of radical political elements, the ideological defeat of the Supreme Soviet elected in 1990 in the struggle with the parallel body of power– the Estonian Congress. When adopting the decision on citizenship “[s]overeignty and independence in the interests of protecting the Estonian nation were still the name of the game. However, it was

now framed (at least rhetorically) in legalistic-juridical terms that seemed to remove the actual nationalist sting from the process. It was not an ethnic struggle for political dominance; it was the resolution of an international legal issue, in which one state had been illegally occupied by another in 1940, and that state now had a right to restore its sovereignty. What is more, for average Estonians the idea of recreating a citizenry had great appeal, since it was an opportunity to repudiate publicly the legitimacy of the Soviet Union as well as gain a psychological boost of confidence as a free nation” (*Pettai & Hallik* 2002: 510-511).

The radical nationalists having come to power also underlined the “educational effect” of their decisions regarding the citizenship. As declared already in 1990 by the future Minister of Foreign Affairs T. Velliste, “[t]he Russian colonist population here is effectively a military garrison in civilian clothes, and there can be no question of giving them citizenship until they have satisfied some important requirements... If you give these people, who by international law are illegal immigrants, false hopes, you will only create confusion in their minds. It is much better to tell the truth: Who annexed Estonia in 1940? Stalin and Zhdanov. You will have to understand the consequences of that! Having told them that, we can build an honest and legal relationship, and those who do not want to accept it, can leave” (*Lieven* 1994: 306). As estimated by the Citizenship and Migration Board in 1992 “persons with undefined citizenship”, (the local euphemism for stateless former Soviet citizens) constituted 32% of the whole population, i.e. the overwhelming majority of ethnic non-Estonians (*Yearbook* 2003: 8).

The new Constitution, adopted at referendum on 28 June 1992 without participation of the majority of ethnic non-Estonians (because they were not citizens of Estonia) laid the foundations of the ethnocentric approach to the Esto-

nian statehood. The central role is played by the preamble, with history figuring in several phrases. The political scientist P. Järve (2000: 7) noted that: “the logic of the Preamble, not very explicit though, is simple: the citizens (all ethnic groups together) establish a state and adopt a constitution to preserve one ethnic group— the Estonians— and its culture. Thus, one ethnic group has manifested its specific claims to the state in which it establishes itself constitutionally as a single core ethnic nation. This Preamble is the constitutional pillar and the legal point of departure of the Estonian ethnic democracy”.

Another political scientist – R. Vetik (2007) – stated that the point of departure of the Estonian legal framework is the politically defined subject of statehood, i.e. the citizen, as it must be in a democratic state. Nevertheless Vetik does see a controversy “in the social consciousness that is rather construed through ethnic characteristics, i.e. the Estonian state is considered as the property of Estonians only”. To cap it all, the political scientist R. Ruutsoo (1998: 176) was outspoken in an academic article published as early as in 1998: “the ethno-collectivist essence of the Estonian statehood is expressed through emphasising the collective goals of Estonians as representatives of a definite people and privileges of Estonians as persons, belonging to a definite ethnos”.

J.J. Linz and A. Stepan (1996: 428-429, 433) suggested that Estonia uses, with respect to minorities, a strategy of isolation from the political process through the failure to provide them with political rights. The authors place Estonia in the so-called third type of typology, which is characterised, on the one hand by recognition of the differences between nation and demos (in the framework of nation-building), but on the other hand, by exclusion of the minorities (in the framework of state-building).

In their turn, G. Smith and the already quoted P. Järve described Estonia as an “ethnic de-

mocracy". Smith's approach is based on the earlier version of the concept of ethnic democracy of S. Smooha, according to which it differs from other types of democracy by the circumstance that a definite part of the population has a structurally higher status. The non-dominant groups are not entitled to the right to present demands to the state, and they are not regarded as fully loyal. With regard to Estonia and Latvia, in Smith's opinion, that model must be modified. "Firstly, the hegemony of the core nation has been achieved primarily through delimiting the scope of political rights and through language laws. [...] Secondly, certain civil and political rights are enjoyed universally. [...] Finally, certain collective rights are supported..." (Smith 1996: 200-201).

P. Järve already based his concept on the S. Smooha's extended concept (Smooha 2001), which enumerated the following distinctive features of the "ethnic democracy": 1. Ethnic nationalism installs a single core ethnic nation in the state. 2. The state separates membership in the single core ethnic nation from citizenship. 3. The state is owned and ruled by the core ethnic nation. 4. The state mobilises the core ethnic nation. 5. Non-core groups are accorded incomplete individual and collective rights. 6. The state allows non-core groups to conduct parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggles for change. 7. The state perceives non-core groups as a threat. 8. The state imposes some control on non-core groups. P. Järve (2000: 31) found that all those features are at least partly relevant in Estonia with the only exception of the fourth one.

P. Järve (2000: 32-33) also considers it important to observe to what extent ethnic democracy is formally institutionalised with the help of legal devices and to what extent it is based on other manifestations of ethnic nationalism. The researcher comes to the conclusion that thanks to the principle of restitution and the specific so-

lution of the question of citizenship, there was no need to openly set down ethnic principles in Estonian legislation. The only exception is the preamble to the Constitution. The ethnic bias of officialdom consisting mainly of ethnic Estonians may bring about the ideologically motivated application of the laws, against the background of which the features of ethnic democracy may manifest themselves even against a background of the formal conformity of the laws with international standards of human rights.

In their turn, the Estonian scholars V. Pettai and K. Hallik (2002: 506-507) tried to use the model of I. Lustick, describing the "operationalisation" of the control over minorities through mechanisms of segmentation, dependence and cooptation. The authors argued the following propositions: 1. The decision on citizenship was an important step on the path to the segmentation of the non-Estonian minority; 2. The market reforms, as they were carried out, changed the economical basis of the Estonian and non-Estonian communities, predetermining the dependence of the latter community on the first; 3. The Estonian elite made recourse to co-optation among key non-Estonian leaders, among others also in the framework of official integration strategy.

Thus, in the past 15 years, a number of works appeared, arguing that the articulated or concealed goals of the Estonian ethno-policy are intended to create a certain (vertical) system of relations between the majority and the minority. The policy in the area of citizenship, language and even integration policy may put into operation mechanisms for providing control, domination or exclusion by the ethnic majority.

"The war of the monuments" and "the April crisis" showed that in Estonia attitudes to historical events (1940 and especially 1944) may serve as another demarcation line. Knowledge of Estonian and holding Estonian citizenship cannot be monopolised by ethnic Estonians, be-

cause theoretically the major part of non-Estonians may learn the language and become naturalised. However, if we aspire to the system of leadership, which puts the main “ethnic” group in the privileged position, historical perceptions will be for the minority a much more complicated hurdle in accessing political power and other benefits.

6. Political participation of minorities and equal opportunities

At the beginning of the 1990s, when Estonians were actively involved in state building, Russians found themselves edged out of that process, primarily because of the lack of citizenship and a weak mastery of Estonian. R. Rutsoo (1993) linked the complexities, which the Russian community experienced in the creation of the institutions of civil society, with the domination of the idea of restitution. Even now the voluntary associations of Russian-speakers have very few opportunities to influence Estonian society as a whole (*Lagerspetz et al.* 2002: 82).

Some researchers attempted to explain the established routine of interrelations between Estonians and non-Estonians in the political sphere, among others by reference to a simplified Socialist concept of democracy as a power of the majority. As stated by P. Järve (1995: 25), “[a] popular understanding was created that minorities have virtually no rights if they try to have their own way in areas where the majority does not allegedly approve it, especially in political matters. According to this ... repression could be used against minorities if they refuse to agree with the majority and stubbornly follow their own course of action. Some problems with minorities in Estonia may have their roots in this understanding of majority rule”. P. Kolstoe (1995: 138) pointed out that one Latvian intellectual directly referred

to the influence of the Bolshevik political culture on the Baltic policy, in order to account for the complications of the local ethnic relations. In principle, this should not cause surprise, in view of the Soviet/Communist Party-past of many key political figures of the state (including Prime Minister A. Ansip).

There were no representatives of minorities in the first Parliament of the newly independent Estonia (1992-1995). In the process of the Parliamentary elections of 1995, two specially created “Russian” parties obtained six seats (out of 101). In 1999 the same number of seats was won by one of the “Russian” parties. In 2003 and 2007 no “Russian” party won seats in Parliament. However, on both occasions six ethnic Russians gained seats after they ran for “Estonian” parties (in 1999 – only two). In reality, the Russian members of Parliament always had extremely insignificant influence on the process of decision-making, which brought about frustration in the Russian-speaking population. Deputies from the minorities were forced to act in conditions of a political vacuum, having no significant support within the country.

In Estonia, in the context of the political participation of minorities, the local level is very important, because non-citizens have access to elections in local government councils. At the last municipal elections in 2002 and 2005 in the places of dense residence of non-Estonians, a convincing victory was achieved not by the “Russian” parties, but by the mainstream Centre Party. In the run-up to the elections of the past decade, the Centre Party was one of the first to actively orient itself to non-Estonian voters. To achieve this, a special image of the Centre Party as a powerful actor, opposing the “ethno-radicals” was fostered among the Russian-speaking population. The situation was made easier because the Party had in the past decade often been in opposition, meaning that it did not bear formal responsibility for the legislation, which

encroached upon the interests of the Russian-speaking population. Moreover, the Centre Party is headed by the charismatic leader, E. Savisaar, who already at the beginning of the 1990s stood up, from time to time, with some declarations in the defence of minorities. Ethnic non-Estonians know him much better than they know other Estonian political figures. However, even in the Centre Party the influence of non-Estonians is insignificant.

The situation with the Bronze Soldier turned out to be a topic beneficial for Estonian politicians before the Parliamentary elections in March 2007. There is no doubt that the Reformist Party, whose leadership (in particular Prime Minister A. Ansip) assumed an intransigent position as opponents of the monument ("symbol of the Soviet occupation"), attempted to attract a section of the nationalistically minded Estonians, who voted at previous elections for "Pro Patria Union" and the party "Res Publica". In any case, in March 2007 these latter two parties, by now amalgamated, lost 16 seats in the Parliament, the majority of which went presumably to the Reformists.

Regarding the ethnic Russians with Estonian citizenship, the Centre Party was most energetically tackling them during the election process. In Russian-language pre-electoral advertisements, the Centrists, both explicitly and implicitly, positioned themselves as opponents to the removal of the Bronze Soldier. The adherence to their principles by the Russian deputies from the Centre Party were contrasted with the vacillation of two Russians in the Reformist Party, who either did not vote or did not make their appearance in Parliament during the discussion of the laws, allowing for the demolition/transfer of the monument.

In the final analysis, the Centrists managed to attract to their side a majority of the "Russian" electorate, which earlier had voted for the "Russian" parties. The success of the latter was less

than modest. In 2007, the Constitutional Party (former United People's Party of Estonia) obtained only 1% of votes (in 2003 – 2%). On both occasions the marginal slate of the Russian Party of Estonia fetched 0.2% of votes.

The recent Parliamentary elections showed that in the Estonian context, the large political parties may find it more profitable to sacrifice support from the local "Russian" electorate for the sake of widening support among the ethnic majority, including those nationalistically minded. However, the cause is the undeniably small share of non-Estonians among the citizens of the country. By supporting the Centre Party, the minorities, who had few other viable options, placed all their eggs in one basket. When E. Savisaar was not invited to form the new Government, the majority of those in the minorities did not see anyone in the highest leadership of the country who could voice their concerns.

Moreover, already after the April events, the Centre Party, which controls the municipalities in the capital city and "Russian-speaking" towns in northeast ended up in a complicated plight. The authorities of Tallinn attempted to stall the process of transfer of the Bronze Soldier – a topic of interest to their Russian-speaking voters. It is especially for the purpose of overcoming the non-consent of the local authorities that the Military Burials Act was adopted, which allowed the dismissal of the opinion of the municipality of the capital city. Appeal of the authorities of Tallinn to the court was without avail. On the "Bronze night", the leader of the Party and the Mayor of the capital, E. Savisaar, failed to stand out with any appeals to "his voters", as the right-wing parties demanded.

In the conditions of the nationalist hysteria in the aftermath of the April events, such a position provoked indignation in the Estonian section of population. According to a phone survey of "TNS Emor", carried out at the beginning of May 2007, the actions of the Prime Minister of

the country, A. Ansip, starting with the removal of the Bronze Soldier were approved by 82% of ethnic Estonians, whereas 84% of non-Estonians evaluated the actions of Ansip negatively. According to the same data, the personal rating of E. Savisaar among non-Estonians constituted 56%, and “anti-rating” among Estonians – 81% (*Statement* 2007).

In the process of a poll in June 2007, half of the Russian-speaking respondents subscribed to the opinion that one of the causes of the April riots was “a protest against the policy of the Estonian Government with regard to non-Estonians”. Among Estonians only one quarter shared this view (*Saar* 2007: 29). What can be the cause of such an interpretation of the events?

Prevailing currently in Estonian public discourse is the conviction that Russians feel dissatisfied because they have been stripped of their former privileges. At one time there were even attempts made to scientifically substantiate this conjecture. For instance, A. Kirch pointed out, as an economical privilege, that Russian-speakers could quickly get an apartment in the Soviet time (he does not present any other examples) (*Kirch et al.* 1992: 5).⁹ The Norwegian researcher P. Kolstoe (1995: 102) however, maintained that in the 1970s and 1980s the ethnic Russians “were still handicapped in most places as regards access to political power, and in some places even in their educational opportunities. In brief, during the post-Stalinist period, the Russian diasporas, were culturally and linguistically privileged in relation to other non-titular groups in the [Union] republics, but were usually not so privileged in relation to the titular groups”. It would be interesting to compare those views with the data of sociological research.

In the framework of a survey held in 2005 in Tallinn, a third of Estonians and non-Estonians held that the relations between the groups had not changed, as compared to the Soviet period. While 31% of ethnic Estonians believed that

they had improved (8% of non-Estonians), 44% of representatives of minorities held that they had deteriorated (13% of Estonians) (*Poleshchuk & Semjonov* 2006: 35). Notably both Estonians and non-Estonians thought that, in a number of areas, in the Soviet time the representatives of the other group were in a more privileged position. The survey also reflected the strong belief of the native population that the migrant non-Estonians had it easier to obtain a dwelling from the state (*Ibid* 2006: 51). When moving to the period of independence, the estimates change: Estonians are convinced of equal opportunities for representatives of both communities (except in the political sphere); non-Estonians do not believe in having equal opportunities (with the exception of participation in clerical and religious life). Whereas “for untainted experiment”, the respondents compared Estonians with representatives of minorities, holding the Estonian citizenship and having proficiency in the official language (*Ibid* 2006: 48).

The national poll of 2007 also corroborated the surmise that ethnic non-Estonians do not hold that they have equal opportunities with Estonians in many spheres of life. 30% of those polled non-Estonians had repeatedly, and 25% in isolated cases, faced a situation when “someone was provided an advantage, due to his ethnicity or language when taking on a job, given a certain position, or distributing benefits”. Among ethnic Estonians such people numbered only 4 and 11% respectively. The quarter of polled Estonians and non-Estonians declared, that they had not themselves faced such a situation, however they had heard rumours to the effect (*Saar* 2007: 12).

Thus the mood of non-Estonians may be affected also by the factor that many of them do not believe that they have equal opportunities with ethnic Estonians in many areas of life. It makes sense to check how much the perceptions of the minorities are related to the ob-

jective situation in such key areas as the labour market. As recently summarised by K. Kasesaru and A. Trumm (2008: 53-54), “[i]t is true that both the employment structure and income level of non-Estonians differ to a significant degree from those of ethnic Estonians. This is characterised by a higher unemployment rate and job insecurity, a tendency to belong to the ranks of blue collar, rather than white collar workers, and a larger discrepancy between their level of education and the requirements of their position. Regardless of the general increase in incomes, the differences between the socio-economic situation of non-Estonians and ethnic Estonians have not decreased, but rather grown in recent years. A feature characteristic of this tendency is that the differences become deeper not for people with less education and lower incomes, but instead for persons with higher education and potentially higher aspirations for self-realisation. [...] Discontentment among middle-aged non-Estonians with higher education related to their prospects (and those of their children) in the Estonian labour market and the resulting increase in their lack of trust towards Estonian state institutions are also important factors in understanding the social background of the events of April 2007”.

7. Conclusion

The war of the monuments” represents a complicated conglomerate of discordant efforts by all the parties involved in the conflict. However, the author holds the opinion that the April crisis would not have been possible if there had not existed in Estonia a certain (vertical) model of interrelations between representatives of the ethnic majority (controlling the policy of the country) and minorities. The interests of the latter were sacrificed to the benefit of interests of the majority, and also to achieve quite concrete

goals in the political sphere.

In Estonia, immense popularity is enjoyed by the approach, formulated in the polemical article by the American-Estonian political scientist R. Taagepera (1998): “The honest view on history suggests that the former members of the civil garrison cannot demand the given entitlements as their democratic human rights. They can only appeal to the practical attitude and generosity of Estonians”. A similar approach, in particular brought about by the insensitivity of the Estonian Government to the problems, may have an inordinate importance to members of minority groups. For ethnic Russians, the victory in WWII, which they won at a high cost against an adversary, who aspired to their complete physical extermination, is a miracle-deliverance, the key moment in modern history. Confronted with sacrosanct historical representations of Estonians on questions of controversial history of the country, the Russian minority found itself exposed and vulnerable to the ethnic majority, supported by the entire state machinery of Estonia. Such consequences of conflicting historical interpretations became possible, largely due to the fact that many of the ethnic majority did not consider making concessions to the minorities: in general, on the question of interpretation of history; in particular, on the question of location of a monument crucially important for the minorities (however, it was an accident that the monument became the centre of the conflict situation).

By reference to voluminous empirical material, the Serbian scientist V. Dimitrijevic (1995: 13) maintained that “[m]ost post-communist states in Eastern and Central Europe are based on strict adherence to the ethno-nationalist concept of the “nation state” as a state primarily belonging to the dominant, most numerous, “historic”, “constituent”, “state building” etc nation. Members of other ethnic groups are in most cases formally recognised, declared equal and pro-

tected, but essentially treated as an anomaly, or as tolerated historical “guests”³. The case of Estonia is interesting because it differs from other post-Soviet countries: initially most members of Estonian ethnic minorities were denied formal equality, while they were deprived of or limited in their access to the process of adopting political decisions.

Researchers have suggested various models, explaining the specificities of the Estonian political regime. By explicating the goals for setting up the system of control, domination or exclusion of minorities by ethnic majority (“ethnic democracy”), many of them have directly pointed out the importance in the Estonian context of factors such as limiting political rights (through the specific decision on citizenship). That was not complicated while Estonians perceived themselves as the “cultural nation”, having clear cut borders with the surrounding world and counterpoising outside groups, including the minorities. The ideology of restitution in itself did not predetermine the rigidity of the ethno-policy however, it made that rigidity possible in the conditions when the “democratic ideal of proportional representation of minority groups was perceived as a direct menace to national and cultural independence” (as worded by A. Steen (1997: 92)). Notably, the absence of equality in the political sphere is now also putting into relief the social, economical complications, presently experienced by Estonian minorities. Their discontentment related to the position in the labour market and mistrust towards state institutions are important to highlight the social background of the April crisis.

Confrontation in the context of “the war of the monuments” turned out to be useful for those who created in Estonian society salient demarcation lines between Estonians and non-Estonians by use of restitution ideology in the sphere of ethnic relations. Historical perceptions may become a new demarcation line.

As was written by a well-known expert on the rights of minorities J. Packer (1999: 271), “the nationalist project of the “nation-state” is incompatible with respect for human rights since it favours one cultural association (one nation) over all others: a regime of human rights virtually presumes one pluralist state”. It was specifically the absence in Estonia of “one pluralist state” which made possible “the war of the monuments” with all its grave consequences to the social and political stability in the country.

Notes

¹ In Estonia the terms “an Estonian” and “a Russian” are the indication of a person’s ethnic origin. In this paper these terms will be used in the same meaning. The term “non-Estonians” will refer to both citizens and non-citizens of minority ethnic origin. Non-Estonians make a little less than 1/3 of all population. Most of them speak Russian as their first language and that justifies the use of the parallel term “Russian-speakers”. “Non-citizens” will refer to all Estonian residents without domestic citizenship (a little less than 1/5 of all population). Almost all of non-citizens (or their descendants) resided on the territory of Estonia before 1991 when the country restored independence.

² See for instance the resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic of 30 March 1990, which proclaimed the principle *restitutio ad integrum* “in Estonia occupied until this day”.

³ “War for Liberation” refers to military activities on the territory of Estonia, which ended with the recognition of the independence of Estonia in February 1920 by the Bolshevik government of Russia.

⁴ “Forest brothers” are people who opposed the Soviet administration and hid in the woods (mostly in 1940s-1950s). Some of them were engaged in armed actions against the Soviet administration and Soviet-minded Estonians.

⁵ Russian historians, referring to the documents from Russian archives, defy the results of that commission, holding that the number of victims must be corrected to a smaller number (Dyukov 2007).

⁶ For instance, during the second major deportation on 25 March 1949, 20,702 people were deported to distant regions of the USSR, mainly from rural locations (Deportation 1990).

⁷ Russian scholar S. Sokolovski (2004: 21) pointed out that for primordialists the „wellsprings of origin of the ethnic communities are hidden in the bygone ages and are con-

nected with long evolution and the establishment of peculiar characteristics of the language and culture, making the community being considered as standing out among the others. The circumstance that for primordialists the ethnoses must obligatorily be „the communities of many generations, hereditary” reveals such characteristics of that approach like substantialism and essentialism in the treatment of ethnical phenomena”.

⁸ In the colourful information brochure for tourists, the Estonian Institute (2003), performing enlightening functions, embarks on a short synopsis of the Estonian history with the following sentence: “2000 years before the birth of Christ, Estonians (!) who had until then been busy with hunting and fishing gradually began raising cattle and cultivating the land”.

⁹ A. Semjonov (2002: 142) remarked regarding those arguments of A. Kirch, that the problem of obtaining an apartment was really typical in the Soviet Union. “But then, how could an enterprise invite migrant workers to Estonia without offering them places to live? Moreover, “good housing” usually meant a small flat in a so-called panel building in some newly developed neighbourhood, hardly a “real economic privilege””.

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Vadim Poleshchuk

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