

Opposing the European Union or Looking for More Reforms: Different Facets of Euroscepticism in Estonia

Viljar Veebel¹

***Abstract:** Although public support for EU membership is strong in Estonia, some Eurosceptic views are also expressed. Most of the agents and groups with Eurosceptic views could be classified as soft Eurosceptics, including some politicians and public figures. However, from time to time Euro-populist ideas combined with hard Euroscepticism have emerged too, mostly among the politicians, but their overall influence in society is rather modest today. Nevertheless, as regards the economic perspective, the Eurosceptic views and arguments in Estonia are often based on pure economic rationality, which could in principle refer to the origins of “Euro-pragmatism” in Estonia. Thus, a “positive program” is needed where the focus is not on the statements like “we do not need Eurosceptics”, but on the question of how Eurosceptics could contribute to a more sustainable European Union.*

***Keywords:** Euroscepticism, Estonia, European Union, public opinion*

Introduction

Analysing the manifold facets of Euroscepticism in Estonia contributes to a better understanding of its role in the European Union (EU) as well as the country-specific interests at the European level. On the one hand, the influence of Eurosceptics in society affects a country's willingness to move forward with European integration. On the other hand, the EU-wide topics that face strong criticism at the national level often reflect country-specific vulnerabilities and challenges. For example, criticism towards the EU institutions could also speak about a country's own limited ability of promoting its interests at the EU level, or the opposition to cross-border projects could be related to a country's peripheral location or its low competitiveness in the international arena.

Estonia has experienced drastic changes not only during the transformation process from the planned economy to the market economy, but also during the recent global economic and financial crisis and *Brexit* debates. This has also shaped what the country expects from the European integration and how Estonia sees its role in the EU.

¹ **Viljar Veebel** is an Associate Professor at Baltic Defence College, Department of Strategic Studies, Tartu, Estonia. He is a researcher and consultant who has been researching at the University of Tartu, the Estonian School of Diplomacy and the Tallinn University of Technology. He defended his PhD in 2012 (University of Tartu), focusing on the European Union's pre-accession policy and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Since 2013, he is working in the Estonian National Defence Academy as Associate Professor of Social Sciences. The author is also actively participating as a consultant in EU-related projects in the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and the Balkan area in cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonian School of Diplomacy and Swedish International Development Agency. E-mail address: viljar.veebel@gmail.com.

Most of the agents and groups with economic Eurosceptic views in Estonia could be classified as soft Eurosceptics, combined with some Euro-populist views. However, as regards the economic perspective, the Eurosceptic views and arguments in Estonia are often based on pure economic rationality, which could in principle refer to the origins of “Euro-pragmatism” in Estonia. The current article focuses on the most prominent agents and groups holding Eurosceptic views in Estonia and an analysis of the origins – ideological and otherwise – of these attitudes.

The first section provides a background for the analysis by describing the latest trends in attitudes in Estonia towards European integration compared to the EU average and the other Baltic countries. This helps ascertain the extent of potential support for a strong Eurosceptical movement in Estonia. The second section focuses on the main themes in Eurosceptic debates in Estonia. A particular attention is dedicated to economic argumentation of the groups with Eurosceptical views and the background of these arguments. However, since the economic aspects are often intertwined with a critique towards the EU institutions and decision-making process, over-bureaucratization, lack of reforms, vague long-term visions and other issues, these topics will also be discussed. The third section analyses some interesting trends among the leading Eurosceptic parties in Estonia and compares some general patterns of public opinion with the other Baltic states. Overall, even if often in a reverse mode, the discussion could also give some hints on Estonia’s role and strategic interests in the European Union as far as the future of the EU is concerned. The paper concludes with the analytical part, debating the reasons and preferences of Estonia in the wider Central and Eastern European pattern of Euroscepticism.

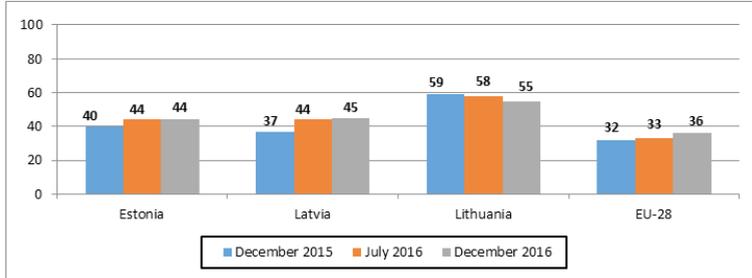
1. Latest trends in public opinion surveys: Are there reasonable grounds to expect the spread of Eurosceptical views in Estonia?

The latest developments in the European Union such as the recent European debt crisis, the refugee crisis in the EU, the conflict in Ukraine, uncertainty related to *Brexit* and constant disagreements between the EU Member States have seriously challenged the credibility of the Union. Whereas at the outset of the financial crisis in 2007-2008 about 45-50% of the respondents of the Eurobarometer survey tended to trust the EU, in 2016 the share of this category of the respondents reached only 32-36% (see Standard Eurobarometer 2007, 2008, 2015, 2016). Trust in the EU has declined to relatively low levels even in the EU Member States having traditionally boasted with strong pro-European views. This has also contributed to a recent rise in Eurosceptic movements across Europe.

Against this backdrop of the EU average, it is somewhat intriguing that in the Baltic countries the attitude towards European integration is rather positive. According to the recent Eurobarometer surveys from 2015–2016, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians tend to trust the EU more than the EU-28 average. The difference between the Baltic countries and the EU average is also visible when public opinion in the economic aspects is analysed. Public support for the European Economic and Monetary Union and the euro is particularly high in Estonia and Latvia compared to the most of the EU countries. The

Baltic countries are also in favour of the free movement of EU citizens in the European single market (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

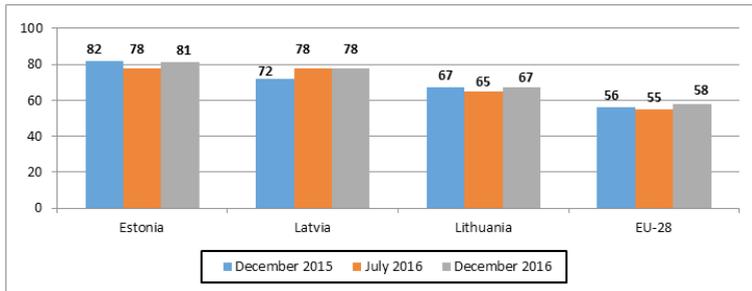
Figure 1: Trust in the European Union.



Source: Collection of Standard Eurobarometer Surveys, 2015-2017.

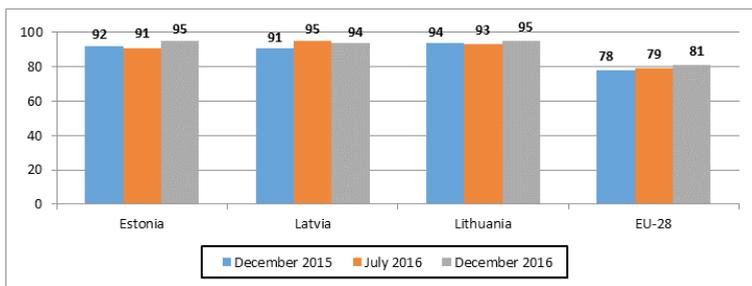
In Estonia, the long-term broad public support for the EU membership is also reflected in country-specific surveys. The Government Office of the Republic of Estonia has since 2011 ordered regular surveys to assess public support for the EU membership.² Until now, the results of the surveys have been notably positive.

Figure 2: Support to the Monetary and Economic Union and the euro.



Source: Collection of Standard Eurobarometer Surveys, 2015-2017.

Figure 3: Support for the free movement of citizens.



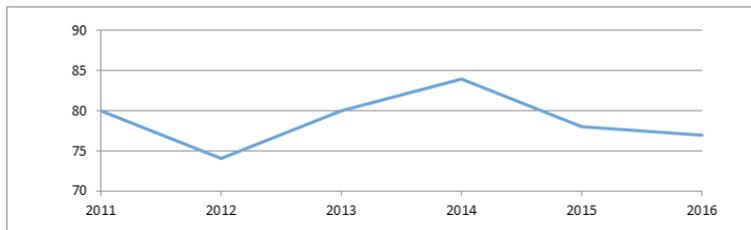
Source: Collection of Standard Eurobarometer Surveys, 2015-2017.

² Estonian State Chancellery (2011-2017). Researches (in Estonian). <https://riigikantselei.ee/et/uuringud>.

Since 2011, more than three quarters of the respondents have continually supported or rather supported the country's EU membership (Figure 4). The peak of the support was reached in 2014, when 84% of the respondents were in favour of Estonia's EU membership. In this light, it would be rather unreasonable to expect that a massive wave of Euroscepticism would sweep through Estonia in the coming years. If there exists visible active criticism, then it is connected with certain specific EU related projects (like Rail Baltica) or the ability of the Estonian government to represent societal interests at the EU level (refugee crisis).

From Estonia's perspective, the political climate in Europe has changed significantly since 2007-2008, when it was possible to witness Russia's attempts to create instability, first in Estonia in 2007 and then provoking the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008. The conflict in Ukraine and the outcomes of the *Brexit* referendum, as well as the latest US presidential elections have further raised the tensions for small Eastern Member States of the EU and NATO. Under these circumstances, it would be definitely reasonable for a small country neighbouring Russia to search for additional security guarantees and not to question the EU membership. However, during both the Greek debt crisis in 2012 and the recent European refugee crisis from 2015 on the public support for the EU membership in Estonia has nevertheless showed a slight downward trend.

Figure 4: Conditional or full support to the membership of Estonia in the EU 2011-2016.



Source: Collection of surveys ordered by the Government Office of Estonia, 2011-2016.

As indicated by the qualitative survey from 2013³, the decrease in support in 2012 can be explained by the fact that the respondents felt some of the EU Member States were not willing to take responsibility for their actions and problems, preferring to delegate the responsibility to the EU. This concerned primarily Greece. Another explanation is to be found from people's expectations that the living standards of the EU Member States converge faster in the EU. Consequently, especially for the low income earners, prices have risen faster than salaries in Estonia, contributing to emigration. At the same time, the fact that the country has lost a significant proportion of its labour force to the countries with higher standards of living has contributed to the rise of pay for high income earners. Thus, despite the salaries being significantly lower compared to old Member States, the drive for outward migration has put a pressure on local wages in higher segments, surpassing productivity.

³ Estonian State Chancellery (2013). Euroopa Liiduga seotud hoiakud kõhklejate hulgas (in Estonian) ("EU related attitudes among sceptics"). TNS, https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/uuringud/euroopa_liiduga_seotud_hoiakud_2013.pdf.

The survey from 2013 outlines also the factors influencing people's attitudes towards the EU. These are internal factors (i.e. what is happening in Estonia and in the EU in general, and how well Estonia's interests are represented in the latter) and external factors (i.e. what is happening in other EU countries and how the domestic media is presenting the topics related to the EU). In this light, both the role of the local political and economic situation and the tone of the public media should not be underestimated in shaping the public attitude towards the EU and thereby boosting or dissuading Eurosceptical views. The holders of Eurosceptical views⁴ are often described as "confused, narrow-minded or angry people" opposing the noble European values⁵ and are therefore automatically deemed to represent Russia's interests⁶, even when one of the main arguments to support the Rail Baltica project is related to growing transit profits from trade with Russia.

2. The main topics of the Eurosceptic debate in Estonia

Euroscepticism in Estonia is mostly associated with certain specific EU-related projects or the country's own ability to implement the projects or safeguard its interests at the EU level. The same applies also to the economic issues. Recent debates in Estonia have mostly concentrated on the role of the EU funding in supporting or harming country's development and the implementation of the infrastructure projects of the Trans-European Transport Network, including the EU North Sea-Baltic corridor and the trans-Baltic railway project Rail Baltica.

The current discussion on the role of the EU funding in supporting or harming Estonia's economic development is extremely intriguing. Estonia has received EU cohesion funding amounting to 2.2% of its GDP in 2004-2006 and to 3.0% of its GDP in 2007-2013. The funding was mainly used to build infrastructure projects and to support enterprises and human resource development.⁷ Although these are significant amounts of financial resources from Estonia's perspective, the question has been raised by several studies whether the funds have been allocated to projects that actually facilitate country's economic development or exhibit high socio-economic returns, and whether there exists a risk of aid dependence in Estonia. A review of the use of cohesion funds for 2007-2013 concluded that the main weakness in Estonia was a lack of strategic vision at the national level and of the explicitly defined regional and sectoral priorities (see, CDP and RAKE, 2011).⁸ A previously mentioned survey conducted by Kondor-Tabun and Staehr has found that EU funding via the Cohesion Policy has significantly contributed to public

⁴ Neivelt, Indrek (2014). Indrek Neivelt Rail Balticust: sõit rongiga Berliini on kulukas ja aeglane (in Estonian) ("Indrek Neivelt: The ride to Berlin with train will be expensive and slow". 25 January 2014. <http://arileht.delfi.ee/news/uudised/indrek-neivelt-rail-balticust-soit-rongiga-berliini-on-kulukas-ja-aeglane?id=67676957>.

⁵ Einmann, A and Loim T (2017) Neli parlamendierakonda on Rail Baltica poolt ja kaks vastu) (In Estonian) ("Two political parties in Estonian parliament support and two oppose Rail Baltica) <http://www.postimees.ee/4094001/neli-parlamendierakonda-on-rail-balticu-poolt-kaks-vastu>.

⁶ Raitar, I. (2017) Rail Balticu vastased on Moskva käsilased (In Estonian) („Enemies of Rail Baltica are the minions of Moscow"), Ohtuleht 18.06.2017 (Estonian Daily).

⁷ Kondor-Tabun, K., and Staehr, K. (2015). EU Cohesion Policy Funding in Estonia: Background, Developments and Challenges. TUTECON Working Paper, No 2/2015.

⁸ CDP and RAKE (2011). Hindamisaruanne riigihanke "Perioodi 2007-2013 struktuurivahendite vahehindamiseks" elluviimine (in Estonian) ("Assessing report to evaluate progress of state procurement Use of structural funds in period 2007-2013"). Available at: https://www.struktuurifondid.ee/sites/default/files/perioodi_2007-2013_struktuurivahendite_vahehindamine.pdf.

and private investment. However, this has also raised questions whether Estonia has been developing a degree of dependence on EU funding and whether EU funding is followed by reduced funding from national or local sources which might lead to problems in the future. The authors conclude that it remains a challenge for Estonia to limit the extent of substitution with the aim to ensure that substantial resources are directed in a way to enhance the country's economic growth in a medium and long term perspective (Ibid.). The same idea is expressed by Varblane, who argues that all three Baltic countries have benefitted from the EU structural funds.⁹ However, during the EU programming period 2014-2020 the exit strategies should be prepared by the governments to be able to finance the projects with significantly lower support from the EU cohesion funds in the future.¹⁰

Recent public debates on the implementation of the trans-Baltic railway project Rail Baltica have been extremely intense in Estonia and the project has received strong criticism from different sides.

The Rail Baltica is one of the priority projects of the EU in terms of peripheral infrastructure integrity. The project intends to link Finland, Baltic States and Poland with a standard EU gauge rail. Phase one (Poland-Lithuania) has been already completed and phase two is planned to be started in 2019. Standard gauge is seen important as it allows high speed trains to be integrated to the EU standardized infrastructure. At the European Union level, it is expected that the coordinated implementation of infrastructure projects in the framework of the Trans-European Transport Network contributes to the effectiveness of the overall EU transport system and enhances economic growth, competitiveness and employment in Europe. The North Sea-Baltica corridor is expected to be one of the nine EU's core network corridors. The project connects eight EU member countries – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Finland – and links regional roads and rail transport, airports, ports and inland waterways. The regional rail connection, the Rail Baltica project that connects the three Baltic countries, lies at the heart of this network corridor. In Poland, the North Sea-Baltic corridor intersects the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor which links Poland through the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria to Italy and Slovenia. In Finland, the North Sea-Baltic corridor is complemented by the Scandinavian-Mediterranean corridor which connects Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Italy and Malta. Potential difficulties in implementing the project have been highlighted at the regional level already in the report submitted by the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2005¹¹. The report pointed to low north-south traffic flows during that period, railways interoperability (the difference of gauge between the railway networks of the Baltic countries and those of Poland and Germany), and competing with the road and air transport.

The critics does not touch upon the immediate cost-benefit analysis of the project, but rather on the question of how realistic are the hopes that this project of solidarity will

⁹ Varblane, U. (2016). EU Structural Funds in the Baltic Countries-Useful or Harmful. *Estonian Discussions on Economic Policy*, Vol 24, No 2 (2016).

¹⁰ Varblane, U. (2014). Eesti peab vähendama sõltuvust Euroopa Liidu toetustest (in Estonian) ("Estonia needs to reduce dependence from EU subsidies"). Eesti Koostöö Kogu. Available at: <http://www.kogu.ee/urmas-varblane-est-est-peat-vahendama-soltuvust-euroopa-liidu-toetustest/>.

¹¹ Baltic Council of Ministers (2005) Report on the activities of the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2005, http://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/web-static/047/Report_on_the_activities_of_the_BCM_2005.pdf

actually be economically and socially viable or how the Europeanization argument together with internalization effect might be the game changer in terms of wider social gains. Critics is also related to the economic expectation that Rail Baltica is expected to boost both the cargo volumes in terms of local production and transit and passenger numbers, while the Baltic economies are growingly oriented to services; transit from Russia is having historical low points since 1991 and even local civil servants are not expected to use Rail Baltica for their visits to Berlin, Paris and Brussels.

Many opinion leaders, economic experts and prominent cultural actors in Estonia have publicly opposed the project. Their criticism is mainly directed towards the long-term economic viability of the project from Estonia's perspective, criticising the cost-benefit analyses of the project conducted in 2011 by AECOM Limited¹² and in 2017 by Ernst & Young¹³. Many local experts in Estonia have argued that the AECOM analysis is based on both unreasonable assumptions and unrealistic expectations as regards the volume of the passenger and goods transport¹⁴, questioned the reasonability behind the selection of the particular route of the railway connection¹⁵ and stressed that the results of the survey are definitely out-of-date¹⁶. They have also pointed out that the sources for covering the annual operating costs and capital costs of Rail Baltica are unclear and that also the already existing railway network in the Baltic countries should be maintained next to the construction of the Rail Baltica high-speed railway.¹⁷ Despite it, unfortunately the national government has responded to scepticism and criticism in Estonia towards the Rail Baltica project only in an elusive and sometimes even arrogant manner. The same applies to the local media which has responded rather aggressively to the critics of the local cultural actors.

As regards the Rail Baltica projects, it could be easily seen that instead of opting for a sensible analysis and adjusting the project to the needs of real life, the institutions involved in the process have simply opted for the plan they have initially preferred. However, if the Rail Baltica project is over-dimensioned and there will be no possibility for a down-scale, the project will not be viable (both in terms of immediate commercial basis and of wider societal scale) and needs maintenance-wise constant subsidies. Yet, while the

¹² Rail Baltica Final Report, 2011. AECOM, May 2011. Available at: http://www.tja.ee/public/Raudtee/Rail_Baltica_Final_Report_Volume_I_31_05_11_FINAL_v2.pdf.

¹³ Rail Baltica Global Project Cost-Benefit Analysis. Executive summary (2017). Available at: <http://railbaltica.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/RB-CBA-Final-Executive-summary.pdf>.

¹⁴ Tammistu, P. (2016). Analüütik: Ebamõistlikud unistused ehk Rail Baltic kui kaootiline improvisatsioon (in Estonian) ("Unreasonable dreams: Rail Baltica as chaotic improvisation, opinion of an analyst"). Ärileht (Business Daily), Publisher on 10 July 2016. Available at: <http://arileht.delfi.ee/news/uudised/analuitik-ebamoistlikud-unistused-ehk-rail-baltic-kui-kaootiline-improvisatsioon?id=75011599>; Neivelt, I. (2014). Indrek Neivelt Rail Balticust: sõit rongiga Berliini on kulukas ja aeglane (in Estonian). ("Indrek Neivelt: The ride to Berlin with train will be expensive and slow") 25.01.2014. Available at: <http://arileht.delfi.ee/news/uudised/indrek-neivelt-rail-balticust-soit-rongiga-berliini-on-kulukas-ja-aeglane?id=67676957>.

¹⁵ Humal, P. (2016). Rail Balticu praegune lahendus vääribki kriitikat (in Estonian) ("Current solutions with Rail Baltica deserve critics"). Postimees, Published on 26. 10 2016. Available at: <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/3887497/priit-humal-rail-balticu-praegune-lahendus-vaaribki-kriitikat>.

¹⁶ Lend, E. (2016). Logistikaprofessor: Rail Balticu puhul tuleks lähtuda mitte Buratinost vaid logistikast (in Estonian) ("Opinion of Professor of logistics: In case of Rail Baltica we should follow logistical logic not Buratino mentality"). Postimees, 30. 09. 2016. Available at: http://majandus24.postimees.ee/3856187/logistikaprofessor-rail-balticu-puhul-tuleks-lahtuda-mitte-buratinost-vaid-logistikast?_ga=1.43072803.703699133.1475121518.

¹⁷ Koppel, O. (2017). Some side notes about Rail Baltic. Baltic Rim Economies, Issue 1/ 2017. Available: http://www.utu.fi/en/units/tse/units/PEI/BRE/Documents/BRE_1_2017.pdf.

EU tends to leave these costs for the Member States themselves to bear from their public budgets, the investment is not so much adding to the available pool of resources, but rather rechannelling the peripheral resources.

In this light, the viability of the EU-financed regional large-scale projects is extremely important in avoiding EU-critical attitudes in the EU Member States. In the worst case, these critical attitudes could grow into “Euro-pragmatism” or even to “hard Euroscepticism” in Estonia.

3. Euroscepticism among the political elite, interest groups and experts

When analysing the arguments of agents and groups with Eurosceptic views in Estonia, a fundamental distinction must be made between what could be labelled as “hard Euroscepticism” or “anti-Europeanism” (i.e. the ones who are against European integration and demand for a prompt exit from the EU), “soft Euroscepticism” (i.e. the ones who do not fundamentally reject the idea of European integration, but are against integration in some policy areas which leads to an expression of opposition), “Euro-pragmatism” (i.e. the ones who are still interested in further European integration if it serves the acclaimed national interests) and “Euro-populism” (i.e. the ones who reject mainstream policies, based on the polarization between the national interests and the interests of the EU-elite¹⁸).

With regard to the Estonian political elite, since the restoration of the country’s independence in the early 1990s all the Estonian governments have made efforts to preserve the image of Estonia as an open, innovative and pro-European country. The biggest opposition party from November 2016 on, the Estonian Reform Party (RE), which was in power in Estonia over the last 17 years, and has been only recently replaced by the Estonian Centre Party (KE) in the government, has previously constantly stressed the gains and benefits of the EU membership and has supported most of the EU initiatives. The same applies to the conservative Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL) and the left-leaning Social Democrats (SDE) which have previously shared power with the Reform Party and are currently forming the government with the Estonian Centre Party. With regard to the somewhat pro-Russian background of the main coalition party, the Estonian Centre Party, some opposition to the EU policies and initiatives has been seen in the past and thus could theoretically be expected. However, this has not materialized in the present-day practice, as in the light of the broad public support for the EU membership also the Estonian Centre Party is interested in maintaining a pro-EU image, while simultaneously not driving its Russian-minded electorate away from the party. The new coalition agreement between KE, IRL and SDE includes only a few EU-related topics compared to the previous one between RE, IRL and SDE.

At the same time, in retrospect, despite an overall positive attitude towards the EU some individual members of the current or previous governmental parties have still expressed relatively radical Eurosceptic views. The most colourful of the sceptics is the member of the RE, Igor Gräzin, who has shared Eurosceptic views for decades already. He could be classified as one of the leading “Euro-populists” in Estonia, keeping in mind

¹⁸ Szczerbiak, A. and P. Taggart (eds) (2008). *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

the conventional meaning of Euro-populists tendency to oppose national interests to the interests of the EU-elite. Together with Ivar Raig and Mart Helme, he was also one of the main opponents of the EU membership in the early 2000s, when Estonia clearly oriented itself towards EU accession. In the early 2000s, they have formed a research centre called *Vaba Euroopa* (Free Europe) which has been allegedly partially financed by the British think tank Bruges Group.¹⁹ He was also the only member of Parliament voting against the ratification of Lisbon Treaty.²⁰ More recently, Gräzin has publicly raised some scenarios about what will happen after the EU collapses, suggesting that in the future the leading countries in Europe will be Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Finland, while also questioning the balance among the current EU Member States. He has also strongly criticized the economic behaviour and the financial systems of the Southern European countries and stressed that Estonia has to return to the traditions of the Nordic countries, as far as the economic culture is concerned. At the same time, he argued that a more loose public debt policy is needed in Estonia, as long as Estonia remains a member of the euro area²¹. The latter is particularly intriguing, as the rhetoric of the leaders of his “home party”, the Estonian Reform Party and its official ideology, have been strongly against making debts. He is also concerned that Estonia will remain at the economic periphery of the EU unless concrete measures will be taken to strengthen the country’s role in Europe while being at the same time openly critical towards the Rail Baltica project.²²

It is worth mentioning at this point that Gräzin has not been a lone wolf in the Reform Party in his critical stance towards the EU. Despite the RE having been in general a staunch supporter of Estonia’s membership in the EU, in the 1990s several prominent members had earned Eurosceptic titles, including the former Prime Minister and EU Commissioner Siim Kallas and the former Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojuland.²³ Hence, it is interesting to follow its trajectory. One can describe RE critique in the 1990s as a kind of “soft Euroscepticism” targeting EU over-bureaucratization and its support-schemes suffocating free enterprise and trade. This main line of critique of the RE party towards the EU has diminished in time. The probable reason is the rise in prominence of the neoliberal ideology in the EU. Historically, one can also notice a change in RE EU-attitudes from an orientation towards the UK to bandwagon with Germany. This change has been most clearly noticeable with the economic and debt crisis and its responses in the EU, but particularly in Germany. As this change characterises also the mainstream Estonian politics, the inner change in RE can thus be said to be parallel, if not having influenced, the attitudes of society. Former Foreign Minister Kristiina Ojuland, after having been expelled from RE in 2013, soon established her own Peoples Unity Party (RÜE) and has come the whole way from soft Euroscepticism

¹⁹ Postimees (2003). Eesti eurovastased saavad Briti mõttekaaslastelt raha (In Estonian) (“Estonian anti-European parties receive donations from British colleagues”). Article published on 15.04.2003. Available at: <http://www.postimees.ee/2013365/eesti-eurovastased-saavad-briti-m-otilde-ttekaaslastelt-raha>.

²⁰ Postimees (2008) Eesti ratifitseeris Lissaboni Lepingu (In Estonian) (“Estonia ratified the Lisbon Treaty”). Available at: <http://www.postimees.ee/1806453/eesti-ratifitseeris-lissaboni-lepingu>.

²¹ Gräzin I. (2014). Mis ühendab Euroopat ja Euroopa Liitu? (in Estonian) (“What unites Europe and the EU”). Published in 18.08.2014. Available at: <http://www.ohuleht.ee/591720/igor-grazin-mis-uhendab-euroopat-ja-euroopa-liitu>.

²² Gräzin I. (2016). Kuidas Euroopa Liit ära laguneb? (in Estonian) (“How the European Union will collapse?”). Published in 04.01.2016. Available at: <http://www.ohuleht.ee/711352/igor-grazin-kuidas-euroopa-liit-ara-laguneb>.

²³ Talts, M. (2008). Eurodebatist Eesti meedias: probleemid ja osalejad (in Estonian) (“European debate in Estonian media: actors and problems”). Riigikogu Toimetised (“Proceedings of Estonian Parliament”) 2000/2, 151–162.

to euro-optimism and then eventually to populist Euroscepticism, targeting mostly EU-s immigration policies.²⁴

But one can find in Estonia also leftist Euroscepticism that still stresses national sovereignty, an element it shares with the more or less radical right wing parties. Like with RE, one can see a few individual members of the currently leading coalition party, the Estonian Centre Party, having expressed some Euro-pessimistic views. For example, Jaanus Karilaid has argued that Estonia's exit from the EU could be seriously under discussion in 4-5 years, assuming that the country's financial balance in the EU will change soon and the refugee crisis in Europe will deepen (Pealinn 2016). Oudekki Loone²⁵ has stressed that the outcome of the *Brexit* referendum clearly shows that the EU has failed in uniting European countries and that the stickiness of the EU Commission to the financial regulations, refugee quotas and other issues could cause a domino effect in many EU member states after *Brexit*. At the same time, she has often publicly expressed pro-Russian opinions, which raises doubts about her motives when criticizing European integration.

However, in the Estonian political landscape, the most radical opinions towards European integration are expressed by the members of the Estonian Conservative People's Party (*Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, EKRE), which is one of the newest political parties represented in the Estonian parliament starting from March 2015. The leader of the party, Mart Helme, is known for his controversial statements where on the one hand, the importance of close economic and cultural ties and security cooperation in Europe is stressed, but on the other hand, a referendum on the Estonia's EU membership is demanded already for years.²⁶ This is based on the argument that the government needs a new mandate from the people, as the EU has changed radically from 2004 on (Delfi 2016). He has emphasized the problems related to the economic stagnation of the EU, which in his opinion has its roots in the current political structure of the EU, referring to the undemocratic behaviour of the European Commission. He also argues that issues related to fiscal policy and taxation should remain within the competence of the Member States and not of the European institutions (ERR (2017)). Hereby, the author of this article would like to highlight a paradoxical situation in Estonia where the Estonian pro-independence party, the EKRE, publicly criticises the country's EU membership, while the leaders of the government coalition parties tend to perceive future such debates as irresponsible or unnecessary. Since the pro-EU forces refuse to engage in further public debates, the public mindset is relatively strongly influenced by the pro-independence party leaders such as Mart and Martin Helme, father and son. Although the credibility of their statements is somewhat diminishing because the EKRE seems to fundamentally oppose any of the government's policies and initiatives without suggesting reasonable alternatives, their potential in creating widespread anti-EU sentiments in Estonia should not be underestimated in the future, should the circumstances in Europe change.

²⁴ Ojuland, K. (2014). Kristiina Ojuland: Kas Euroopal jätkub kindlat meelt? (In Estonian) (Kristiina Ojuland: "Will Europe stand strong?") Published on 20 October 2014. Available at: <http://www.ohtuleht.ee/600140/kristiina-ojuland-kas-euroopal-jatkub-kindlat-meelt>.

²⁵ Loone, O. (2016). Euroopa Ühendriikide loomise projekt on läbi kukkunud (In Estonian) ("The project of United States of Europe has failed"). Delfi on 24 June 2016. Available at: <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/eesti/oudekki-loone-euroopa-uhendriikide-loomise-projekt-on-labi-kukkunud?id=74894959>.

²⁶ Helme, M. (2016a). Tegusid, mitte narratiive (In Estonian) ("We need more action and less narratives"). Published on 19.01. 2016. Available at: <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/3474389/mart-helme-tegusid-mitte-narratiive>.

In the academic circles in Estonia the discussion on European integration has also remained rather neutral, focusing mostly on topics related to the division of power between small and large EU countries and their roles in the EU, the European neighbourhood policy combined with the role of the EU in guaranteeing security and stability in the region, and the risks related to the dependence on the EU structural funds. Some case studies also discuss the nuances of the EU competition policy and its implementation in Estonia. Most Eurosceptic position has in recent years been represented by Professor Eiki Berg from Tartu University, stressing that the diversity of economic and political interests of the EU member states and ambition simultaneously to enlarge and deepen the integration give no hope for stable and prosper EU in upcoming years²⁷ (Berg 2017).

The local trade and professional unions in Estonia have mostly remained neutral in the public debates on the pros and cons of European integration. Their issues of concern brought to public are mostly sector-specific. For example, the Estonian Trade Union Confederation has expressed its concerns over the ratification of the free trade agreement between the EU and Canada, referring to the potential lowering in social standards, environmental standards, consumer protection standards etc. The free trade agreement was nevertheless approved by the Estonian government later on in 2016. The Estonian Transport and Road Workers Trade Union has pointed out the phenomenon of social dumping in Estonia and in the framework of the “Fair Transport Europe” – initiative stressed the need to remove obstacles in the EU Member States when applying the EU – directive that regulates the movement of workers across the EU. Among professional unions, the most vocal groups in Estonia are the Central Union of Estonian Farmers and the Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, who have organized two massive public demonstrations in Estonia in 2015 and in 2016 to draw attention to the overproduction of agricultural products in the EU and the lack of local supportive measures and finances for the Estonian farmers to overcome the unfavourable market situation. They are foremost referring to the unfair practices of the EU of keeping direct agricultural support funds for Central and Eastern European Member States at significantly lower levels compared to the EU-15. However, their most vocal criticism has been targeted towards the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture and the Government of Estonia, arguing that they are not representing the interests of the Estonian farmers at the EU level in the way they should. Over the last year, the situation has somewhat relieved in the Estonian dairy sector, but remained still critical in the cereals sector. Thus, today the tensions and dissatisfaction both with the EU and with the Estonian government have not fully disappeared among Estonian farmers.

4. Analysing the trends of Euroscepticism in Estonia: importing the Visegrád model²⁸

Next to a state of natural scepticism and criticism, in the views and conduct of the Eurosceptic forerunners in Estonia there appears to exist a clear lesson drawing model.

²⁷ Berg, E (2017) Veelgi sidusama liidu hääbumine (In Estonian) (“The fall of ever closer union”), Postimees <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/4100189/eiki-berg-veelgi-sidusama-liidu-haabumine>.

²⁸ The Visegrád model can be defined as practical policy-making model where national interest dominate the EU joint interests, nationalism is accepted if preferred by majority of voters, less centralised Europe is preferred to “ever closer union” model and Euroscepticism is seen as normal component of national political debate (see Nič, M. 2016 The Visegrád Group in the EU: 2016 as a Turning Point?, European View vol. 15/2, 281-290).

Namely EKRE, the most outspoken radical opposition party in the parliament – and closely following its model, also a small non-parliamentary upstart RÜE –, seem to have followed the suit of some of the Visegrád countries. Not only have they publicly approved of the recent political developments in Hungary and Poland, it is noticeable how closely have they reapplied the agenda that has brought radicals and anti-democratic parties of the mentioned Visegrád countries in power. The examples are several where EKRE leaders Mart and Martin Helme^{29 30 31 32} or RÜE leader Kristiina Ojuland³³ have shown their sympathies towards the steps taken by Viktor Orbán and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, two European political leaders who take pride in their illiberal way of understanding democracy.

There is the usual EU bashing and anti-immigrant sentiments that are frequently voiced. But there is something of a paradox that the Estonian model exhibits. More precisely, the strange mix of Euroscepticism shows simultaneously two contradictory vectors. If Orbán has approved of the politics of Putin and cited him as an example³⁴ – perhaps due to the former Warsaw pact countries have generally managed to escape the direct pressure of Russia – Estonian Eurosceptics (like prominently Polish ones) have not been able to simply adopt that viewpoint. This is due to the dramatic past and present relationship of Estonia with Russia. This means that in terms of Russian high politics – such as Russian foreign and military policy – EKRE and RÜE are highly critical of Putin.³⁵ This is their foremost card to play which includes the critique of Russia's actions towards the countries formerly occupied by the Soviet Union, both economic and military. Yet, all this does not preclude some notable nods that especially RÜE has made towards Putin as far as the domestic policies of Russia and particularly its defence of what is deemed true Christian values are concerned.³⁶ Or, denying the obvious and self-acclaimed affinity between Orbán

²⁹ Helme, M. (2013). Eesti välispoliitika on oportunistlik, arg ja peavoolu sobitav (In Estonian) (“Estonian foreign policy is opportunistic, cowardless and following mainstream ideas”). Article published on 12 May 2013. Available at: <http://www.delfi.ee/archive/mart-helme-est-valsipoliitka-on-oportunistlik-arg-ja-peavoolu-sobitav?id=66112492>.

³⁰ Objektiviiv (2015) Poola valimistel võtsid võidu konservatiivid, vasakpoolsed parlamenti ei pääsenud (In Estonian) (“Conservatives were successful in Polish elections, left wing parties did not made it to the parliament”). Published on 26.10. 2015. Available at: <http://objektiviiv.ee/poola-valimistel-votsid-voidu-konservatiivid-vasakpoolsed-parlamenti-ei-paasenu/>.

³¹ Nagel, R. (2016). Martin Helme: ainus äärmuslik poliitiline jõud Eestis on Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond (In Estonian) (“Martin Helme: the only radical political party in Estonia is Social Democratic Party”). Article published on 02.06. 2016. Available at: <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/est/martin-helme-ainus-aarmuslik-poliitiline-joud-eestis-on-sotsiaaldemokraatlik-erakond?id=74710967>.

³² Helme, M. (2016b). Mart Helme: Kimäär on Kremli tornide alt välja roomanud (In Estonian) (“Mart Helme Snake has revealed himself from the towers of Kremlin”). Article published on 03.11.2016. Available at: <http://uueduudised.ee/poliitika/mart-helme-kimaar-on-kremli-tornide-alt-valja-roomanud/>.

³³ Sputnik News (2016). Estonia Should Follow Hungary in Holding Vote on EU Migrant Quotas. Available at: <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201605041039063097-quotas-estonia-migrants>.

³⁴ Mahony, H. (2014). Orbán wants to build ‘illiberal state’. Published on 28.06.2014. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/political/125128>.

³⁵ Helme, M. (2016b). Mart Helme: Kimäär on Kremli tornide alt välja roomanud (In Estonian) (“Mart Helme Snake has revealed himself from the towers of Kremlin”). Article published on 03.11.2016. Available at: <http://uueduudised.ee/poliitika/mart-helme-kimaar-on-kremli-tornide-alt-valja-roomanud/>; Ojuland, K. (2014). Kristiina Ojuland: Kas Euroopal jätkub kindlat meelt? (In Estonian) (Kristiina Ojuland: “Will Europe stand strong?”) Published on 20 October 2014. Available at: <http://www.ohuleht.ee/600140/kristiina-oujulang-kas-euroopal-jatkub-kindlat-meelt>.

³⁶ Stolitsa (2017). If growth of Islam in Europe continues, the citizens of NATO member states will look for Russia for solutions, Published on 22.02.2017. Available at: http://stolitsa.ee/oujulang_jesli_islamizaciya_jevropy_prodolzhitsya_vjeroyatno_i_grazhdanje_drugix_stran_nato_nachnut_smotrjet_v_storonu_rossii/162087.

and Putin, as the leader of EKRE has done.³⁷

It is important also to notice another relevant feature of Estonian Euroscepticism. Despite the basic similarities in their outlook and views, as well as the models they follow, EKRE and RÜE have not become fierce competitors. Namely, a closer look shows that the two parties try to target different segments among the population of Estonia. While EKRE is a pro-Estonian nationalist party claiming the ethnic Estonian primacy in Estonian politics and society, RÜE promotes a different species of nationalism, one that appears rather to mimic the French civic nationalism. While RÜE may also appeal to certain ethnic Estonian segments, its primary target seems to be the Estonian Russian-speaking population. This is a high-wire act by Kristiina Ojuland. Since her party cannot prosper on the Estonian votes only due to the high competition in this right-wing conservative segment, she applies the Orbán-model with a further modification, namely appealing towards the nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia. It is in this group that the anti-immigrant sentiments have been very strong, even stronger than among the Estonian-speaking population. It is in this sense that the peculiar modification of the Visegrád model by RÜE makes sense. The French-style non-ethnic concept of citizenship enables to extend the nationalist umbrella also to the Russian-speakers. In order to make this happen, Ojuland has bolstered this brand of nationalism with a sort of pan-Christian ideology which gives substance to the act of inclusion³⁸. As stated also in the party program, the Christian identity includes the Russian Orthodox, not so much the active members of the Church, but the cultural background.³⁹

In a curious way, Ojuland and RÜE help thereby to integrate the Estonian- and Russian-speaking communities, even if on an anti-immigration platform. At the same time, whereas EKRE has made its way to the major parties in Estonia both in terms of its support and parliamentary representation gaining rates as high as 10-15% in opinion polls, it must be mentioned that RÜE has not been overly successful as far as its popular support is concerned, polls by TNS Emor showing support rates between 0 and 1%.⁴⁰ If this may be in part due to the relatively young age of RÜE, also the high-wire act that demands balancing between criticising Putin – still a political hero for Estonian Russian-speakers – and pronouncing anti-immigrant sentiments in an inclusive form may be difficult to execute.

Altogether, this brief analysis demonstrates the appeal that the Visegrád model has for the radical parties in Central and Eastern Europe. This also explains why the two radical parties are not straightforward competitors. In terms of social and economic policies, both

³⁷ Helme, M. (2016c). Mart Helme | President Trump kui terve mõistuse võit (In Estonian) (“Electing Trump to President is a victory of healthy thinking”). Published on 16.11.2016. <http://www.ohtuleht.ee/771065/mart-helme-president-trump-kui-terve-moistuse-voit>.

³⁸ Ojuland, K. (2015). Kristiina Ojulandi avalik kiri siseminister Hanno Pevkurile: me peame seisma Lääne ja kristliku kultuuriruumi ohutu säilimise eest (in Estonian) (“Public letter to Minister of Interior Mr. Hanno Pevkur; we need to stand for secure Christian cultural space”). Published on 06.07.2015. Available at: <http://epl.delfi.ee/news/arvamus/kristiina-ojulandi-avalik-kiri-siseminister-hanno-pevkurile-me-peame-seisma-laane-ja-kristliku-kultuuriruumi-ohutu-sailimise-eest?id=71858347>.

³⁹ Rahva Ühtsuse Erakonna Programm (in Estonian), (“Program of the National Unity Party”). Last retrieved in 26.06.2017. Available at: <http://rue.ee/WP/erakond/programm/>.

⁴⁰ Erakonnad Info (2017). Toetused erakondadele (In Estonian) (“Support to political parties”). Page last retrieved on 26.06.2017. Available at: <http://www.erakonnad.info/reiting.html>.

EKRE⁴¹ and RÜE⁴² are staunch supporters of right-wing economic and social policies. At the same time, whereas anti-statist in terms of internal policy, both parties have supported rather non-liberal or radical conservative views of anti-free-trade nature.

As far as the attitude of Estonian Eurosceptics and the Euro-pessimistic parties towards the EU institutions is concerned, there is a tendency to see the latter as an obstacle to the national economies in general, and to the business people's ambitions in particular. With regard to the matters of economic policy, most of the Eurosceptics in Estonia have followed the British suit. This goes back to the late 1990s when the most outspoken Eurosceptics from that time like Gräzin and Raig put forward a critique that had been originally stamped by the British. What must have allured the two sceptics were the neo-liberal aspects of the critique. It must be admitted though that already in the 2000s before and after accession the British model was also generally appealing to the mainstream parties (like IRL and the Reform Party) and the Estonian population in general due to its right-wing character. It is important to stress here that this does not touch only the more radical criticism, but featured also in the moderate Euroscepticism similar to the positions of the UK towards the EU and was hailed and for several years served as the model for the Estonian EU policy.⁴³ Later, the more radical stand represented by the UKIP has been a model for EKRE's positions in the EU related economic questions.

Thus, the bulk of Estonian Euroscepticism has strong and wide right-wing connotations and this is most probably the reason why the UK has served as an example. Indeed, one can easily widen this comparison and argue that it was also historically Thatcherism that inspired mainstream political ideas in Estonia before and after regaining independence. According to this model, the role of the state needs to be minimal. While this has been the foundation of nearly all Estonian politics, it forms nowadays also the core of the arguments of the radical parties. EKRE is here the biggest and most prominent example. It plays also the card of nationalism, a surging trend in CEE countries. But this also means that the concept of sovereignty is restricted to the nation state and is interpreted in strictly nationalist terms. According to this viewpoint, the EU retains its value as far as it is kept to the very minimal role of safeguarding free trade and does not harass the sovereignty and independence of the Member States. Against this backdrop, it is understandable why for the Eurosceptics in general and the more radical ones the EU institutions are seen at best as the necessary evil, but since the recent crisis mostly as obstacles to more beneficial economic arrangements. All this issues in a relatively simple basic attitude: Estonia needs to keep the prerogatives of the nation states, but take advantage of the EU support schemes as much as possible.

Addressing finally also the popular sentiments, it is worth seeing Estonia against the backdrop of the other Baltic countries. There appears an interesting paradox. Whereas the general support for the EU has been much higher in Lithuania, their support for the euro

⁴¹ EKRE Konservatiivne Programm (in Estonian), ("Program of the National Conservative Party"). Last retrieved on 26. 06 2017. Available at: <https://ekre.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/EKRE-PROGRAMM-KONSERVATIIVNE-PROGRAMM.pdf>.

⁴² Rahva Ühtsuse Erakonna Programm (in Estonian), ("Program of the National Unity Party"). Last retrieved in 26.06. 2017. Available at: <http://rue.ee/WP/erakond/programm/>.

⁴³ Talts, M. (2008). Eurodebatist Eesti meedias: probleemid ja osalejad ["European debate in Estonian media: actors and problems"]. Riigikogu Toimetised [Proceedings of Estonian Parliament] 2000/2, 151–162.

is considerably lower compared to Latvia and Estonia.

The relatively stronger support for the euro in Estonia and Latvia can perhaps be explained by the way in which these two countries appreciate the role of the EMU and the European common currency. The euro is and has been related to a certain strand of monetary and fiscal policy that has formed the core economic policy for the two countries. With Estonia, one can see the prominence of this policy since regaining its independence. But it became also a sort of trophy or a prize for Estonia to glorify its staying true to its minimal state model throughout its years of independence, to its persistence in keeping extremely low levels of sovereign debt and, in particular, its bold execution of austerity policies since the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008. The latter made the Baltic states, even if somewhat controversially, success stories. Estonia was a clearer case⁴⁴. With Latvia, while it followed a more or less similar economic policy to Estonia, the crisis hit much harder and made the country ask for IMF-supervised loans and policies period. The austerity policies and the possibility to join the eurozone became therefore the symbol of Latvia being able to pull itself out of the debt crisis. Thus, albeit with a somewhat different background, the euro could be argued to have played a similar role in the two northernmost Baltic countries.

But there is more to it. Or the explanation might be even simpler than the one laid down above. As Lithuania stands out in this comparison with its lower support for the euro, the proximity of Lithuania to Poland may play a role. Poland has had a deliberate policy of postponing joining the euro zone, if not altogether avoiding it. And during the crisis it has managed significantly better than the euro zone countries on average. And is it not so that Estonia and Latvia have relatively close relations with Sweden, another prominent showcase of a non-euro country sailing through the stormy weather of the financial and debt crises with an ease and showing impressive numbers of GDP growth? While the argument treads speculative grounds, it is probable that what plays a crucial role here is the cultural and otherwise proximity of those sample countries. In spite of the often problematic relationship that Lithuania has had with Poland, their common history, shared religious background, cultural ties, and the socio-economic model make the example of Poland an immediate and useful one for Lithuania. This is not the case with Sweden for Latvia and Estonia. There have been historical relations and some common history especially with Estonia, and there are the economic ties represented foremost by Swedish investments to these neighbouring countries. But the ties – cultural and otherwise – are much more limited, and the socio-economic model of Sweden is perceived not only as opposite to the mainstream one in Latvia and Estonia, but literally incomprehensible in its social-democratic dimension.

Hence, if the above given explanation holds, Lithuania has managed to retain a much more neutral perspective on the euro compared to its Baltic neighbours. This has enabled the Lithuanians to weigh the benefits and downsides of the common currency more pragmatically. And the euro has remained a practical matter. Whereas for the Estonians and Latvians the euro has been a symbol, part of the almost religious adherence and pride to the austerity policies and low sovereign debt position.

⁴⁴ Staehr, K. (2015). Economic growth and convergence in the Baltic states: caught in a middle income trap? *Intereconomics*, 50(5), 274–280.

Eventually, a still more trivial explanation could be put forward. Compared to Estonia and Latvia, the Russian-speaking population in Lithuania is significantly smaller. After Putin's change of policy with the Georgian and Ukrainian affairs, the local Russian-speaking population has been more strongly influenced by the Kremlin propaganda. And one of the items it has brought up as a sign of the weaknesses of the EU is euro. Therefore, it may be worthwhile looking behind the general statistics to see if the Russian-speaking minorities could have played a role in this case.

Conclusions

In describing the Eurosceptic views among the Estonian policy-makers, entrepreneurs, trade and professional unions as well as in academic circles and public debates in Estonia, a fundamental distinction is made between hard Eurosceptics/anti-Europeans, soft Eurosceptics, Euro-pragmatists and Euro-populists.

Although public support for EU membership is strong in Estonia, some Eurosceptic views are also expressed. Most of the agents and groups with Eurosceptic views could be classified as soft Eurosceptics, including some politicians and public figures. However, from time to time Euro-populist ideas combined with hard Euroscepticism have emerged too, mostly among the politicians, but their overall influence in society is rather modest today. Nevertheless, as shown in the analysis above, the Orbán model has been popular among the Eurosceptic parties and could have a potential to attract followers. Local entrepreneurs, professional unions and trade unions in Estonia have remained neutral in the public debates on the EU membership, but focused mostly on sector-specific shortcomings. The academic community has also remained neutral, discussing mainly the topics related to the division of power between small and large EU countries and their roles in the EU, the risks related to the dependence on the EU structural funds and the European Neighbourhood Policy combined with the role of the EU in guaranteeing security and stability in the region. Some EU-related topics such as Greek bail-out packages and the recent refugee crisis were intensely discussed in Estonian society. However, the debates were mostly one-sided, as next to the government's official positions no room was left for Eurosceptic views and opinions. At the same time, recently a reverse situation has occurred in Estonia, where one of the opposition parties actively criticises the country's EU membership, but the leaders of the coalition parties tend to see further debates on this issue as irresponsible or unnecessary.

From the economic perspective, the Eurosceptic views and arguments in Estonia mostly concern specific EU-related projects (such as the trans-Baltic railway project Rail Baltica) or the country's own ability to implement the projects or safeguard its interests at the EU level (like the role of the EU funding in supporting or harming country's long-term economic development). The sceptics and critics are often very reasonable, based on pure economic rationality of the projects and initiatives (e.g. the Greek debt crisis or again the Rail Baltica project). However, despite the rational nature of the scepticism, the Estonian political elite has responded to scepticism only in an elusive and sometimes even ignorant or arrogant manner. Although the overall public support for the EU membership is strong

in Estonia, these attitudes could potentially transform to the increasing gap between the EU institutions, the national governments and the ordinary EU citizens, including Estonians. This is particularly pronounced for the Rail Baltica project, but also concerns the still lacking genuine debate in Estonia on the future of the European Union, including the economic cooperation.

Another source of criticism in Estonia towards the European Union stems from potential path dependence and “lock-in” situations. The clear gains and overall viability of the EU-financed regional large-scale projects is extremely important in avoiding EU-critical attitudes in the member states. In the worst case, these critical attitudes (for example, towards the Rail Baltica project) could grow into “Euro-pragmatism” or even to “hard Euroscepticism” in Estonia.

Refusing to recognize the role of Eurosceptics in European integration definitely increases the gap between the national/European elite and the hopes and opinions of ordinary Estonians. It is obvious that European integration would, sooner or later, fail if both the national parliaments and the European Parliament would consist only of Euro-optimists, whereas in real terms there are some ambivalent attitudes towards European integration among the pro-Europeans themselves. Thus, European integration should aspire to a process where a majority of the citizens of the EU (and also of Estonia) understand, recognize and support it on a voluntary and rational basis. To achieve this, even the most sceptical persons need to be engaged and heard. Thus, a “positive program” is needed where the focus is not on the statements like “we do not need Eurosceptics”, but on the question of how Eurosceptics could contribute to a more sustainable European Union.

REFERENCES:

- Baltic Council of Ministers (2005) Report on the activities of the Baltic Council of Ministers in 2005, http://vm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/web-static/047/Report_on_the_activities_of_the_BCM_2005.pdf.
- Berg, E (2017) Veelgi sidusama liidu hääbumine (In Estonian) („The fall of ever closer union“), Postimees <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/4100189/eiki-berg-veelgi-sidusama-liidu-haabumine>.
- CDP and RAKE (2011). Hindamisaruanne riigihanke “Perioodi 2007-2013 struktuurivahendite vahehindamiseks” elluviimine (in Estonian) (Assessing report to evaluate progress of state procurement “Use of structural funds in period 2007-2013”). Published on 15 December 2011. https://www.struktuurifondid.ee/sites/default/files/perioodi_2007-2013_struktuurivahendite_vahehindamine.pdf
- Erakonnad Info (2017). Toetused erakondadele (In Estonian) (“Support to political parties”). Page last retrieved on 26 June 2017. <http://www.erakonnad.info/reiting.html>.
- Einmann, A and Loim T (2017) Neli parlamendierakonda on Rail Baltica poolt ja kaks vastu) (In Estonian) (“Two political parties in Estonian parliament support and two oppose Rail Baltica”) <http://www.postimees.ee/4094001/neli-parlamendierakonda-on-rail-balticu-poolt-kaks-vastu>.
- EKRE Konservatiivne Programm (in Estonian), (“Program of the National Conservative Party”). Last retrieved on 26 June 2017. <https://ekre.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/EKRE-PROGRAMM-KONSERVATIIVNE-PROGRAMM.pdf>.
- Estonian State Chancellery (2013). Euroopa Liiduga seotud hoiakud kõhklejate hulgas (In Estonian) (“EU related attitudes among sceptics”). TNS, https://riigikantslei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/uuringud/euroopa_liiduga_seotud_hoiakud_2013.pdf.

- Estonian State Chancellery (2011-2017). Uuringud (in Estonian) (Researches). <https://riigikantslei.ee/et/uuringud>.
- Gräzin I. (2016). Kuidas Euroopa Liit ära laguneb? (in Estonian) (“How the European Union will collapse?”). Article published in local media portal on 4 January 2016. <http://www.oh tuleht.ee/711352/igor-grazin-kuidas-euroopa-liit-ara-laguneb>.
- Gräzin I. (2014). Mis ühendab Euroopat ja Euroopa Liitu? (in Estonian) (“What unites Europe and the EU”) . Article published in local media portal Ohtuleht on 18 August 2014. <http://www.oh tuleht.ee/591720/igor-grazin-mis-uhendab-euroopat-ja-euroopa-liitu>.
- Helme, M. (2013). Eesti välispoliitka on oportunistlik, arg ja peavoolu sobitav (In Estonian) (“Estonian foreign policy is opportunistic, cowardless and following mainstream ideas”). Article published on 12 May 2013. <http://www.delfi.ee/archive/mart-helme-est-i-valispoliitka-on-oportunistlik-arg-ja-peavoolu-sobitav?id=66112492>.
- Helme, M. (2016a). Tegusid, mitte narratiive (In Estonian) (“We need more action and less narratives”). Article published on 19 January 2016. <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/3474389/mart-helme-tegusid-mitte-narratiive>.
- Helme, M. (2016b). Mart Helme: Kimäär on Kremli tornide alt välja roomanud (In Estonian) (“Mart Helme: Snake has revealed himself from the towers of Kremlin”). Article published on 3 November 2016. <http://uueduudised.ee/politiitika/mart-helme-kimaar-on-kremli-tornide-alt-valja-roomanud/>.
- Helme, M. (2016c). Mart Helme | President Trump kui terve mõistuse võit (In Estonian) (“Electing Trump to President is a victory of healthy thinking”). Article published on 16 November 2016. <http://www.oh tuleht.ee/771065/mart-helme-president-trump-kui-terve-moistuse-voit>.
- Humal, P. (2016). Rail Balticu praegune lahendus väärribki kriitikat (in Estonian) (“Current solutions with Rail Baltica deserve critics”). Postimees, Published on 26. 10 2016. Available at: <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/3887497/priit-humal-rail-balticu-praegune-lahendus-vaaribki-kriitikat>.
- Kondor-Tabun, K., and Staehr, K. (2015). EU Cohesion Policy Funding in Estonia: Background, Developments and Challenges. TUTECON Working Paper, No 2/2015.
- Lend, E. (2016). Logistikaprofessor: Rail Balticu puhul tuleks lähtuda mitte Buratinost vaid logistikast (in Estonian) (“Opinion of Professor of logistics: In case of Rail Baltica we should follow logistical logic not Buratino mentality”). Postimees, 30. 09. 2016. Available at: http://majandus24.postimees.ee/3856187/logistikaprofessor-rail-balticu-puhul-tuleks-lahtuda-mitte-buratinost-vaid-logistikast?_ga=1.43072803.703699133.1475121518.
- Loone (2016). Euroopa Ühendriikide loomise projekt on läbi kukkunud (In Estonian) (“The project of United States of Europe has failed”). Article published in local media portal on 24 June 2016. <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/est-i-oudekki-loone-euroopa-uhendriikide-loomise-projekt-on-labi-kukkunud?id=74894959>.
- Mahony, H. (2014). *Orbán* wants to build ‘illiberal state’. Article published on 28 July 2014. <https://euobserver.com/political/125128>.
- Nagel, R. (2016). Martin Helme: ainus äärmuslik poliitiline jõud Eestis on Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond (In Estonian) (“Martin Helme: the only radical political party in Estonia is Social Democratic Party”). Article published on 2 June 2016. <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/est-i-martin-helme-ainus-aarmuslik-poliitiline-joud-eestis-on-sotsiaaldemokraatlik-erakond?id=74710967>.
- Neivelt, Indrek (2014). Indrek Neivelt Rail Balticust: sõit rongiga Berliini on kulukas ja aeglane (in Estonian) (Indrek Neivelt: “Travelling with trains of Rail Baltica will be slow and expensive”. 25 January 2014. <http://arileht.delfi.ee/news/uudised/indrek-neivelt-rail-balticust-soit-rongiga-berliini-on-kulukas-ja-aeglane?id=67676957>.
- Nič, M. 2016 The Visegrad Group in the EU: 2016 as a Turning Point?, European View vol. 15/2, 281-290).
- Objektiiv (2015) Poola valimistel võtsid võidu konservatiivid, vasakpoolsed parlamenti ei pääsenud (In Estonian) (“Conservatives were successful in Polish elections, left wing parties did not made it to the parliament”). Article published on 26 October 2015. <http://objektiiv.ee/poola-valimistel-votsid-voidu>

[konservatiivid-vasakpoolsed-parlamenti-ei-paasenu/](#).

- Ojuland, K. (2015). Kristiina Ojulandi avalik kiri siseminister Hanno Pevkurile: me peame seisma Lääne ja kristliku kultuuriruumi ohutu säilimise eest (in Estonian) (“Public letter to Minister of Interior Mr. Hanno Pevkur; we need to stand for a secured Christian cultural space”). Article published on 6 July 2015. <http://epl.delfi.ee/news/arvamus/kristiina-ojulandi-avalik-kiri-siseminister-hanno-pevkurile-me-peame-seisma-laane-ja-kristliku-kultuuriruumi-ohutu-sailimise-est?id=71858347>.
- Ojuland, K. (2014). Kristiina Ojuland: Kas Euroopal jätkub kindlat meelt (In Estonian) (Kristiina Ojuland: “Will Europe stand strong?”)? Article published on 20 October 2014. <http://www.ohtuleht.ee/600140/kristiina-ojuland-kas-euroopal-jatkub-kindlat-meelt>.
- Pealinn (2016). Jaanus Karilaid: Eesti lahkumine EL-ist võib teemaks tulla paari aasta pärast (in Estonian). Article published in local media portal on 30 June 2016. <http://www.pealinn.ee/newset/jaanus-karilaid-est-est-lahkumine-el-ist-voib-teemaks-tulla-paari-n171979> Postimees (2003). Eesti eurovastased saavad Briti mõttekaaslastelt raha (In Estonian) (“Estonian anti-European parties receive donations from British colleagues”). Article published on 15.04.2003. Available at: <http://www.postimees.ee/2013365/est-eurovastased-saavad-briti-m-otilde-ttekaaslastelt-raha>.
- Postimees (2008) Eesti ratifitseeris Lissaboni Lepingu (In Estonian) (“Estonia ratified the Lisbon Treaty”). Available at: <http://www.postimees.ee/1806453/est-eesti-ratifitseeris-lissaboni-lepingu>.
- Postimees (2003). Eesti eurovastased saavad Briti mõttekaaslastelt raha (in Estonian), (“Estonian anti-Europeans receive money from British colleagues”). Article published on 15 April 2003. <http://www.postimees.ee/2013365/est-eurovastased-saavad-briti-m-otilde-ttekaaslastelt-raha>.
- Rahva Ühtsuse Erakonna Programm (in Estonian), (“Program of the National Unity Party”). Last retrieved in 26 June 2017. <http://rue.ee/WP/erakond/programm/>.
- Raitar, I (2017) Rail Balticu vastased on Moskva käsilased (In Estonian) (“Enemies of Rail Baltica are the minions of Moscow“), Ohtuleht 18.06.2017 (Estonian Daily).Sputnik News (2016). Estonia Should Follow Hungary in Holding Vote on EU Migrant Quotas. <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201605041039063097-quotas-estonia-migrants/>.
- Staehr, K. (2015). Economic growth and convergence in the Baltic states: caught in a middle income trap? *Intereconomics*, 50(5), 274–280.
- Standard Eurobarometer Surveys (2007, 2008, 2015, 2016). Available: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index>.
- Stolitsa (2017). If growth of Islam in Europe continues, the citizens of NATO member states will look for Russia for solutions, Article published on 22 February 2017. http://stolitsa.ee/oyuland_jesli_islamizaciya_jevropy_prodolzhitsya_vjeroyatno_i_grazhdanje_drugix_stran_nato_nachnut_smotrjet_v_storonu_rossii/162087.
- Szczerbiak, A. and P. Taggart (eds) (2008). *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Talts, M. (2008). Eurodebatist Eesti meedias: probleemid ja osalejad (in Estonian) (“European debate in Estonian media: actors and problems”). Riigikogu Toimetised (“Proceedings of Estonian Parliament”) 2000/2, 151–162. <https://rito.riigikogu.ee/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Eurodebatist-Eesti-meedias-probleemid-ja-osalejad.pdf>.
- Tammistu, P. (2016). Analüütik: Ebamõistlikud unistused ehk Rail Baltic kui kaootiline improvisatsioon (in Estonian) (“Unreasonable dreams: Rail Baltica as chaotic improvisation, opinion of an analyst”). Ärileht (Business Daily), Publisher on 10 July 2016. Available at: <http://arileht.delfi.ee/news/uudised/analuitik-ebamoiistikud-unistused-ehk-rail-baltic-kui-kaootiline-improvisatsioon?id=75011599>.
- Varblane, U. (2014). Eesti peab vähendama sõltuvust Euroopa Liidu toetustest (in Estonian) (“Estonia needs to reduce dependence from EU subsidies”). Eesti Koostöö Kogu. Available at: <http://www.kogu.ee/urmas-varblane-est-est-peab-vahendama-soltuvust-euroopa-liidu-toetustest/>.