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## **European Identity: A study using the method of Identity Structure Analysis in Estonia in 2003-2005**

ABSTRACT. A general approach to the problems of real social integration of Estonian society is presented, which focuses on the problem of identity before and after Estonia's integration in the European Union. We understand ethnic or national identity as a social construct – the shared sameness of people belonging to the same group, with a common narrative and broadly matching cultural attitudes, beliefs and values. We examined empirically changes in attitudes of the urban population of Estonia towards accession to the EU. Data were gathered some months before the EU referendum held on 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2003. New data were gathered during the Estonian-Russian Border Treaty discussion period in May and September 2005.

### ***Introduction: Societal integration as a tool for a new dimension in collective identity in Estonia***

The Estonian population can be described as relatively diverse by several indicators: by ethnic background (Estonians, Russians and other Slavs, Finns, etc), by language use (mainly Estonian or Russian) and by income differences. Starting from 2000 the *Gini coefficient* has increased somewhat, reaching the level of 37,4 in 2003 (in 2000-36,2), according to EU-SILC study in 2003 (Statistical Yearbook of Estonia. 2006, 131). The social, political, and cultural divergences have made the society more fragmented. As such this could be viewed as setting new circumstances for the development of democracy, contributing to new challenges for social integration of society requiring new orientations. The process of social integration can perhaps be analysed in terms of redefining a conception of a common national identity of Estonian people that includes Estonians and ethnic minorities.

However, the Estonian population cannot be assumed to be a carrier of a single new ethnic and national identity. Disparities might arise when those social factors and mechanisms that should assist the processes of cultural integration (in terms of the formation of a multi-cultural society) and national integration (in the terms of Estonian citizenship) towards overall societal integration are undermined by other factors.

In the sociological literature, societal integration is predominantly considered to be the best developmental model for the well-being of societies in central and eastern

European countries (and in Estonia) as suggested, for example, in the general conceptions by Münch (1998) and Beck/Grande (2004), and in the special analysis for Estonia by Löfgren and Herd (2000) and Lauristin and others (2004).

We conceive successful integration to be a process of societal co-operation aimed at forging a new community of people that shares a super-ordinate, qualitatively distinctive orientation. For Estonian society it is important in this context to distinguish integration from assimilation and segregation of ethnic minorities since, on the one hand, it is important for the Russian minority to maintain its original cultural heritage, and, on the other hand, it is important that minorities will be able to prosper in their double cultural circumstances. While it is one thing to express support for the idea of integration, it is quite another matter to ensure its realisation.

The differentiation between many levels and segments of integration means that the process of forming new well-functioning structures in the society is much more complicated than a restricted understanding of integration that focuses only on the two different language groups: Estonians and Russians. It is possible to define the current situation in Estonia as the realisation of the first stage of the societal integration process – namely, the acknowledgment of common social problems instead of specific inter-ethnic problems, and the enhancement of tolerance between the Estonians and Russian-speaking population. Estonia may be regarded as entering into the next stage of the societal integration process, which should entail the efficient cooperation between Estonians and non-Estonian ethnic groups in the context of the European Union. This study reports evidence of the European dimension of identity in the Estonian urban population and the extent to which this represents societal integration in Estonia.

### ***European identity in the EU referendum process***

Although it's doubtful whether there is an 'European' identity – there are many varieties of what people may think as being European across the nations of Europe and across the different ethnic minorities within European nations. For the researches it is necessary to know to what degree the Estonian people is going to identify itself with Europe and how important they deem Europe to be or Estonian people expect

greater variation in the expression of “Estonian identity” as we see from results of Estonia media-researchers (*Vihalemm, Masso, 2003*).

The European past contains complex paradigms, which complexity could itself be presented as a common European cultural background. Western ideas of personal values, liberalism, rule of (written) law, principles of human rights and equality are good examples. Having in mind these more or less largely shared ideas and paradigms, one can define the historical and cultural closeness to Europe as the affinities of people sharing common experiences of European history, even when this has involved antagonistic relationship and war. European integration is first and foremost the formation of political institutions with their normative and political identity, and the formation of a common market.

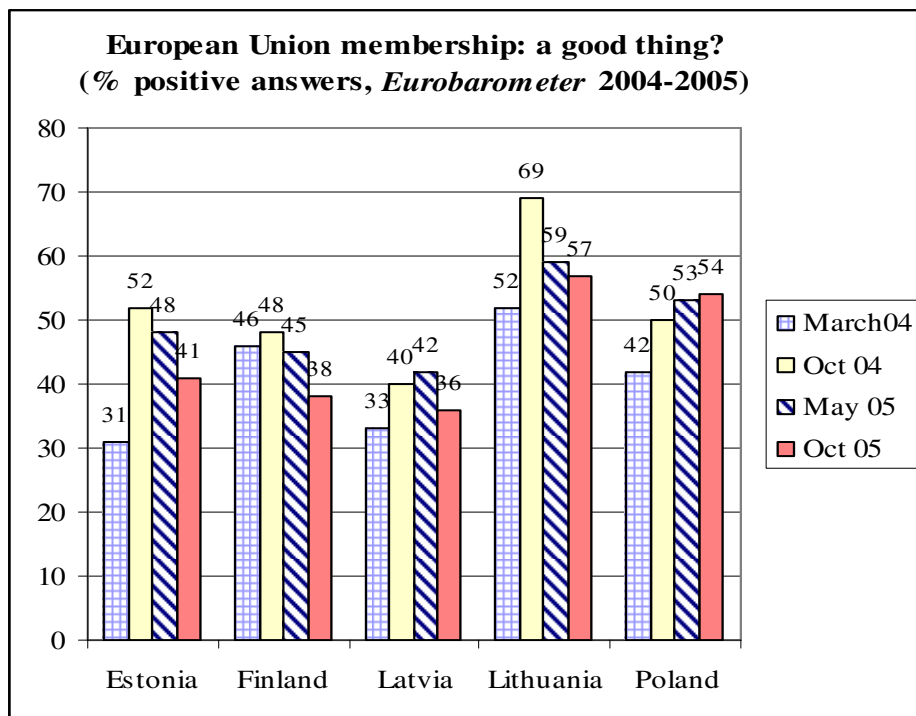
Cultural communication and education could in their turn promote identification with, and the unification of, European political space, as expressed by Michel Foucher (*Foucher, 1998/2000*). Communication can encourage the consolidation of the collective dimension, while leaving the national communication space at large untouched. National culture and history would provide the justification for a common sense of Europeness, while at the same time, leaving the question about political space open.

When Estonian society faced the EU-referendum in September 2003, the share of those who voted in favour of the European Union was 66.8 per cent, while the percentage of those who voted against membership was 33.2. The overall participation rate in Estonia was 64.1 % (*Estonian National Electoral Committee, 2003*). Public support for the European Union in Estonia increased from 48% in 2003 (people who answered “definitely support” and “rather support”) to 68% in September 2005. The proportion of opponents to the EU clearly diminished: from 44% in June 2003 to 26% in 2005 (*EMOR, EL Seire*).

During the debate that took place in the first year after Estonia joined the EU, the majority of citizens realised that EU membership provided new possibilities for defining the country’s position on Europe’s political and cultural map. *Eurobarometer* Studies data showed a clear willingness with regard to the EU in Estonia. *Eurobarometer* Studies 62 and 63 reported that the proportion of Estonian people who answered that “EU is a good thing” had grown, as it had in Estonia’s neighbour

countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In March 2004 this was 31%, in October-November 2004 it was 52%, but it decreased in October-November 2005 to 41% (according *Eurobarometer* Study 64; Figure 1). Ethnic or national identity is about the feeling of being a member of a political or cultural community as summarized by Martin Kohli in *Eurobarometer* (Kohli 2000: 122) and positive answers to question “EU is a good thing” were good indicator about feelings for the European Union.

**Fig. 1. EU Eurobarometer Study “EU is a good thing”**

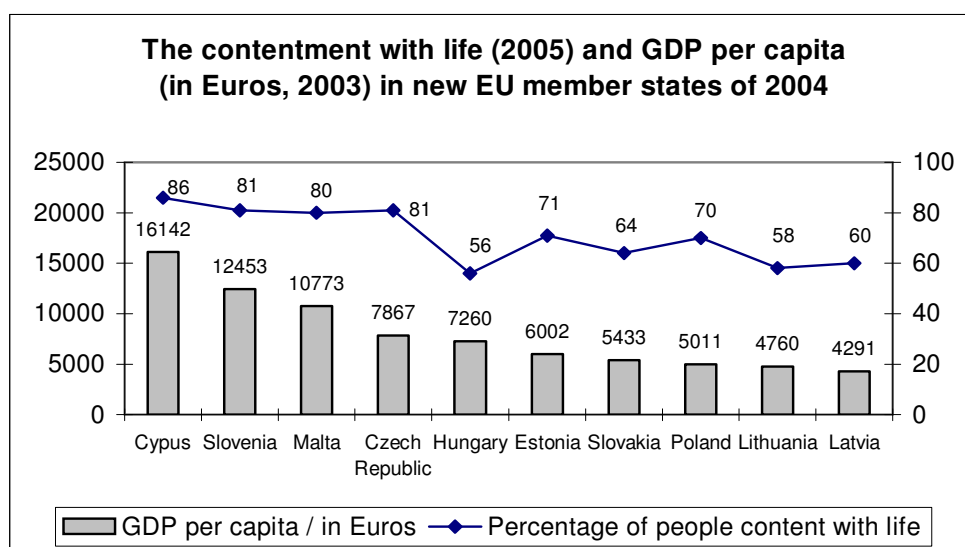


\* *Eurobarometer* Studies 61, 62, 63 and 64

Although geographically being indisputably a part of Europe, Estonia’s position there has not always been conclusively defined. Today, ideas about identifying with Estonian welfare neighbours (referring to similarities with Nordic countries) are spreading. One of these tendencies is that Estonian regional identity within the European Union could become similar to that of the Nordic countries (Finland and others). On the other hand, Estonian identity has some specific features, which allude to the possibility of belonging to the group of Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). Furthermore, according to some popular formulations of certain politicians, Estonia tends to be more similar to Ireland and United Kingdom.

But may we say that due to the Estonia's EU membership the European dimension is also forming a part of Estonians' self-perception? To illustrate Estonia's position in the EU we use here GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to measure economic activity in comparison with contentment with life among all new member states (see Figure 1a). Although the contentment with life is a subjective indicator about satisfaction of each person in the large process still both indicators display approximately the same tendency – achievement of societal wealth and welfare in the EU.

**Fig. 1a. Estonia's total GDP per capita (2003) and contentment with life in 2005 compared with the same indicators of other EU new member states\***



\*data from Eurostat news release: 63/2006-18 May 2006 and *Eurobarometer 64* (Oct. 2005)

Before the accession in 2003 Estonia's indicators were among the lowest compared to the other new accession countries. However, during the last couple of years Estonia's position has improved significantly and country's GDP per capita exceeds already Poland, Slovakia when measured in Euros. It will exceed Hungary as well (forecast data about 2007 by Eurostat, GDP measured per capita in PPS). During last three years the contentment with life in Estonia has also grown significantly: when in fall 2003 there were 53% of inhabitants content with their life (*Eurobarometer 60*), a follow-up survey (see Figure 1a) of autumn 2005 gave the result where the same indicator had grown already to 71%. (*Eurobarometer 64. Annex*).

### *Identity structure analysis as a tool to study European identity in Estonia*

We understand common European identity as a shared sameness of people belonging to the same group, with a common narrative and broadly matching attitudes, beliefs and values. The formation of a new European dimension of identity in Estonia – related to the process of accession to the European Union - as an incorporation of a new dimension in collective identity, started at the beginning of the 90-ies (*Kirch and Kirch 2001*).

European identity is a notion that is rooted in the EU applicant countries' social discourses. Facing the EU-accession according to a first study in 2000 (*Kirch, Rull, Tuisk, 2001: 328-330*) significant agents such as Euro-optimists and Euro-sceptics, rather than the Estonian Government, Estonian cultural elite or business circles, were predominant entities in the expression of identity in our target groups. The question was whether these entities remained “significant others” in 2003 and 2005.

The authors used the Identity Structure Analysis (ISA) conceptual framework to investigate these issues. The method was developed by Peter Weinreich in order to study the structure of personal and collective identity changes (Weinreich, 1989; Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). The data were gathered in the following Estonian cities: Tallinn, Tartu, Viljandi and Narva (N=174 persons) before the accession of Estonia to the European Union in April-June 2003. Further data were gathered during the referendums on European Union Constitutional Treaty in European states and the contract establishing the Estonian-Russian Border Treaty in May and September 2005. The data were gathered in two universities of Tallinn.

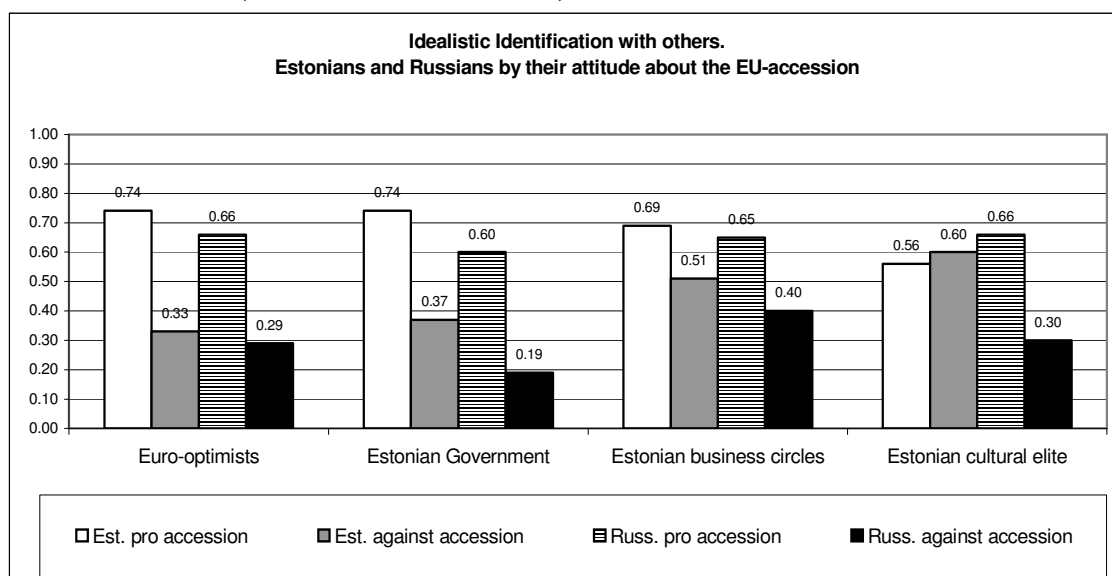
The 2003 study's identity instrument consisted of 10 bipolar constructs and 12 entities (in 2005 – 10 bipolar constructs, but one of constructs (about drugs) were eliminated and new construct about border issues were gathered during the Estonian-Russian Border Treaty discussion period – see Appendix 1) The constructs reflected personal attitudes towards different economic strategies, the free movement of people, the role of EU-legislation in comparison with national legislation, minority rights protection, etc. The individual psychological level of societal processes [?] reflects some of the social tensions and conflicts that sometimes get anchored to EU-

accession issues. Respondents were able to construe themselves (their self-images) in different contexts, and appraise significant others and groups in terms of the characteristics expressed by way of each particular bipolar construct, one at a time, on a 9-point scale. The eleven entities included “Me as I would like to be” (ideal self), “Me as I am now” (current self 1), “Me in 2003, Year of EU-referendum” (past self), “Person whom I honour and admire” (admired person), and “Person whom I don’t like at all” (disliked person) as mandatory entities required by the ISA method. “Me when representing Estonia at EU negotiations in Brussels” (current self 2), allowed respondents to appraise themselves in imagination as an agent directly involved EU matters. Further entities included - “Estonia’s business circles,” “Estonia’s cultural elite,” “Euro-optimists in Estonia,” “Estonian Government,” and “Euro-sceptics in Estonia”. These represented significant others and agents in Estonian society.

The indices *idealistic identification* and *ego-involvement* were computed using the Identity Exploration (IDEX) computer software. The definition of *idealistic identification* is as follows: degree of similarity between the qualities one attributes to the other and those one would like to possess as part of one’s ideal self-image. The *idealistic identification index* has a parameter range between 0 and 1. Magnitudes are considered high when above 0.70 and low when below 0.50.

In 2003 entities or significant others towards whom the Estonian “yes to EU” group (N = 73) aspire are: “Estonian Government” and “Estonian business circles” as well as “Euro-optimists” (Figure. 2). The Russian pro-accession group (N = 28) aspire towards the entities “Estonian business circles,” and “Estonian cultural elite” (having one of the highest values) and also “Euro-optimists”. These findings also show that the Estonian accession supporters seem to be hesitant to identify in aspirational manner with the cultural elite, as concern about preservation of Estonian culture and language after accession had been mostly expressed by intellectuals and people engaged in the sphere of culture. At the same time the Russian pro-accession respondents’ index magnitude is 0.66, showing that their identification with the Estonian cultural elite is stronger than that of Russians “against the EU”, and even higher than among Estonians themselves. The latter finding is probably based on these Russians’ broader perception that culture is not subject to change when a nation joins the EU.

**Fig. 2. Idealistic identification with *significant others* by Estonians and Russians in 2003 (before EU-referendum)**



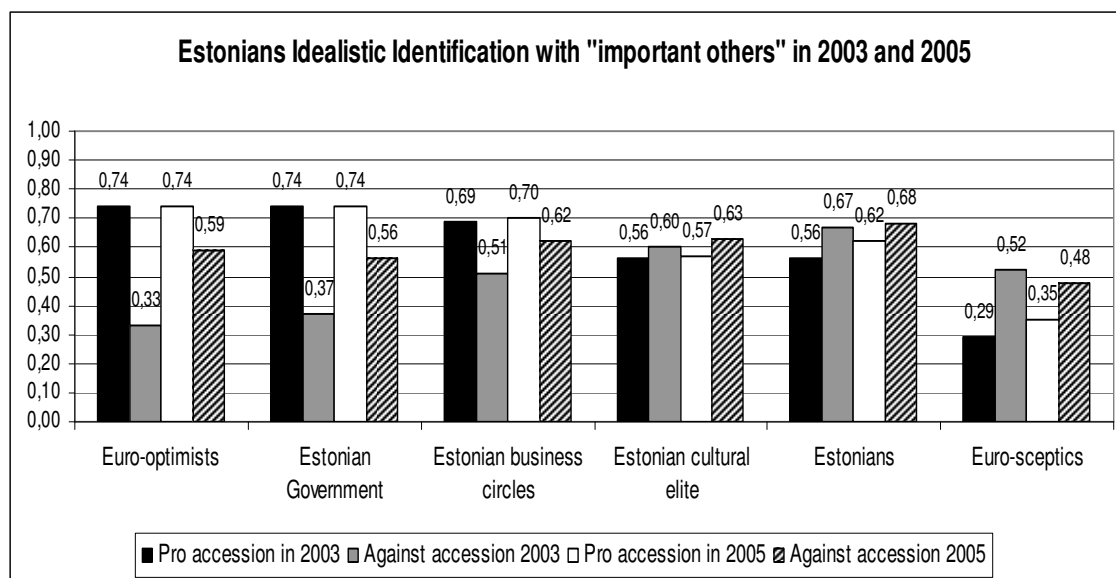
For Estonia’s anti-accession Russians (N= 14), therefore, the EU is more of a political project than it is for anti-accession Estonians (N= 44). It is interesting to notice those Russians who were against Estonia’s accession to the EU do not express their idealistic identification toward Estonian Government highly. It is amazing coincidence that the Government and its activities are idealised as lowly as with disliked person as respective index values are clearly low – only 0.19 and 0.21. Here we have underline that those of Estonians who were against the accession are to some degree patriots of Estonia as they idealise Estonian Government significantly higher (index value 0.37). Also disliked person has been “evaluated” higher (0.28) compared to Russian respondents (0.21).

The Russians’ lower idealistic identification with the Estonian government can be explained by the fact that it represents an authority associated with strict demands concerning the Estonian language, law and citizenship policy (although during the last decade several of these requirements in respective legal acts have been loosened).

Comparison of study results from years 2003 and 2005 broadly refer to the growing positive trend of identification with EU dimensions – people see among positive “important others” people and institutions related to EU (Figure 3).



**Fig. 3. Estonians idealistic identification with others in 2003 and 2005**

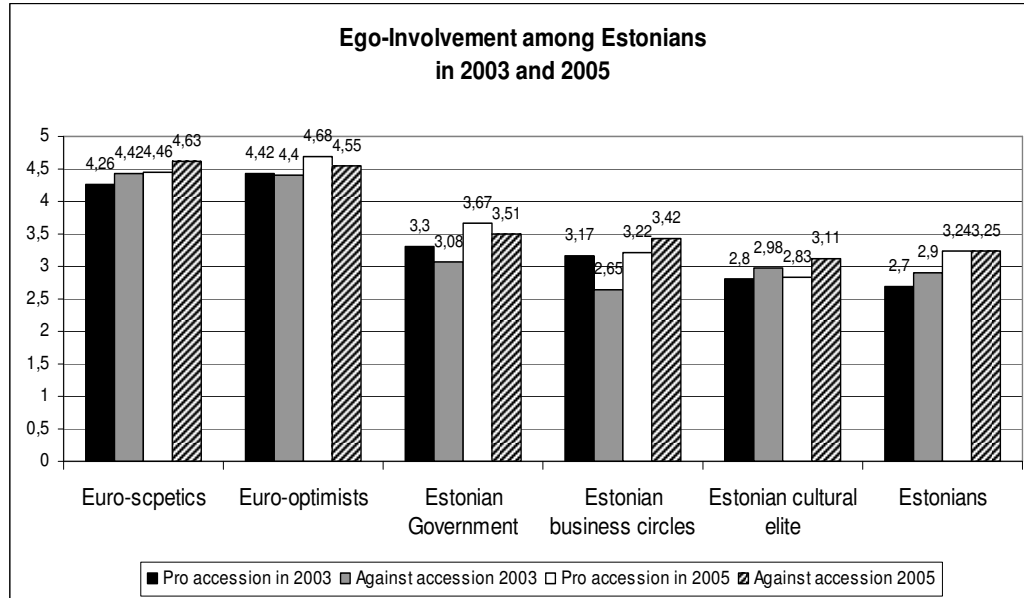


Concerning the results from the latest study we can say that people who in general support Estonia’s belonging to the EU identify themselves largely with the Estonian Government, more than with local business circles or with the cultural elite. All people, whatever their views on Estonia’s place in the EU integration process, were strongly identified with people ‘representing Estonia at EU negotiations in Brussels’. Even people against the accession identify now more with Estonian Government and cultural elite. These findings suggest that, instead of direct identification with European optimists or pessimists, respondents in their aspirations identify more with the state institutions and significant social groups (“the Government”, business circles, the cultural elite) that are real actors in EU integration process. Magnitudes of the index increased for both groups – those who are pro- and to a greater degree those who are against integration – indicating that acceptance of EU ideas increased during this short period between two studies, especially noticeable for those “against”.

*Ego-involvement* – shows how important is some entity to the respondent. *Ego-involvement* index (computed using the IDEX software) makes it possible to estimate the relative impact of others in the development of one’s own identity. The index has a parameter range between 0 and 5, and the magnitudes are considered high when above 4 and low when below 2. After the EU referendum (2005) a slight increase with Euro-sceptics was visible among young people and also with Euro-optimists,

which suggest a slightly greater involvement with Europe-based issues in general (Change is demonstrated in Fig 4).

**Fig. 4. Ego-Involvement among Estonians in 2003-2005**



According to assessments of *ego-involvement* in 2005, respondents' attitudes towards EU are most exercised by debate between European-sceptics and European-optimists. Respondents' high ego-involvement with Euro-optimists and Euro-sceptics demonstrates the significance of a democratic political environment and openness in Estonia as both of these entities represent alternative perspectives. This balanced situation should benefit the orientation of today's changing society.

ISA offers a means of quantitatively representing informal ideologies, in terms of the *structural pressure on constructs*. Structural pressure refers to the consistency with which a particular construct is used in the appraisal of self and others. This consistency derives from the compatibility of the construct's evaluative connotations with one's overall evaluation of the entities to which it is attributed (Weinreich, 1980/1986; Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003). High structural pressure on a construct means that, during appraisal of self and others, cognitions about, and evaluations of, them are compatible. That is, the construct is used consistently to evaluate self and others, thus representing a core value for the individual/group in question. Other

constructs may form secondary, inconsistent or unevaluative dimensions of identity, depending on the degree of structural pressure with which they are applied to self and others – inconsistent dimensions being centres of incompatible cognitions and evaluations. An examination of the core constructs for those who are for EU-Accession (Table 1) and those who are against/uncertain about the accession (Table 2) reveals salient differences in informal ideology between the two groups. As expected from their attitudes different values are considered as important for these two groups we have under investigation.

**Table 1. Pro-EU: Structural pressure on constructs by respondents' attitude about EU-Accession in May and Sept 2005**

In May 2005 , for EU-Accession, n=19			In Sept 2005, for EU-Accession n=21		
No	Construct	Structural Pressure	No	Construct	Structural Pressure
6	In the EU protection of human rights is guaranteed well enough	72.70***	6	In the EU protection of human rights is guaranteed well enough	60.73**
5	Free movement of employees between the member states gives better job opportunities for people	71.89***	5	Free movement of employees between the member states gives better job opportunities for people	52.54**
4	The EU is capable of guaranteeing, peace, stable development and security	69.35**	4	The EU is capable of guaranteeing, peace, stable development and security	58.59*
10	Border treaty with Russia should be signed, this grants sovereignty and security	68.98**	10	Border treaty with Russia should be signed, this grants sovereignty and security	43.08
3	The EU retains the capability to develop and reform	63.15**	3	The EU retains the capability to develop and reform	62.39**
7	EU membership promotes and encourages the development of Estonian language and culture	56.96*	7	EU membership promotes and encourages the development of Estonian language and culture	44.77

Note: Structural pressure is scaled from -100 to 100. 'Core' evaluative dimensions are \*\*\*70–79; \*\*60–69; \*50–59.

For EU optimists the constructs 3, 4, 5 and 6 play a large role by expressing their belief in "overall features" of the EU. At the same time construct 10 (Estonia's border treaty with Russia) seems to express a very important role for both groups (in May 2005), although we can easily see that for each group the border treaty with Russia has the opposite significance. For EU-optimists the treaty as such is seen to grant sovereignty (Table 1) while for EU-sceptics it is perceived to lead to Estonia's losing sovereignty (Table 2). But by September 2005 the Border Treaty has lost its importance, the value having dropped more dramatically among pro-accession group of the respondents (from 68.9 to 43.1).

For the optimists the anticipation of 'free movement of employees between the member states' (construct 5) can be taken as a 'core' construct, while for the sceptics

the opposed notion is anticipated, that is, ‘several problems arise in Estonia due to free movement of labour force’, for which structural pressure has increased from 50.5 to 75.4.

Those EU-sceptics who perceive difficulties with the labour market have become more convinced about this, and more of the opinion that international competition is not in their favour (SP: 50.51, 75.37). By contrast, those EU-optimists who support a free labour market, become less certain about its merits (SP: 71.89, 52.54). Changes of the structural pressure values also reflect that personal issues (concerning ‘self’, such as ‘me in the labour market’) emerge with greater importance, while larger political issues such as border agreements remain somewhere on the far horizon. Also the increase among EU-sceptics of structural pressure on the EU as supranational body retarding local decision-making (Table 2: construct 9, from 53.8 to 67.2) is a sign of disappointment about processes that have taken place from May to September in 2005.

**Table 2. Anti-EU: Structural pressure on constructs by respondents' attitude about EU-Accession in May and Sept 2005 (Against or Uncertain about EU-Accession)**

May 2005, n=16			Sept 2005, n=26		
No	Construct	Structural Pressure	No	Construct	Structural Pressure
3	The EU is under way to becoming a bureaucratic organization, unable to reform oneself	57.32*	3	The EU is under way to becoming a bureaucratic organization, unable to reform oneself	58.00*
10	The Estonia-Russia border treaty should not be undersigned, this is going weaken Estonia's sovereignty	56.81*	10	The Estonia-Russia border treaty should not be undersigned, this is going weaken Estonia's sovereignty	47.72
9	The EU is a supranational formation that to a certain degree restricts decision-making and independence of the states themselves	53.78*	9	The EU is a supranational formation that to a certain degree restricts decision-making and independence of the states themselves	67.20**
2	New member states cause extensive changes in EU policies (for example in agriculture)	51.91*	2	New member states cause extensive changes in EU policies (for example in agriculture)	45.86
5	Several problems arise in Estonia due to free movement of labour force	50.51*	5	Several problems arise in Estonia due to free movement of labour force	75.37***
6	Protection of minority rights in the EU becomes turned into an empty cliché	44.76	6	Protection of minority rights in the EU becomes turned into an empty cliché	55.61*
8	Most important are the aims of the EU as a supranational body	40.02	8	Most important are the aims of the EU as a supranational body	52.52*

Note: Structural pressure is scaled from -100 to 100. ‘Core’ evaluative dimensions are \*\*\*70–79; \*\*60–69; \*50–59.

The findings of the research over time indicate that the earlier centrality of the pro-EU participants' belief that 'free movement of employees between the member states gives better job opportunities for people' becomes less certain (SP: 71.89, 52.54), while the opposed belief of the anti-EU respondents, that 'several problems arise in Estonia due to free movement of labour force' becomes held with greater conviction (SP: 50.51, 75.37).

According to our analysis, high structural pressure on a construct of *free movement of employees between the member states* means that it is used consistently to evaluate self and others. In their everyday life people value more and more modern arrangements and post-industrial values, which has created certain contradiction between their identity structure archetypes and these new values. The new opportunities create the ground for the reception of the new set of European values. According to our analysis, we can conclude, that the Estonian society have reached the phase, where increasing international communication, economic and cultural ties have initiated the strong shift towards the creation of new "*borderless*" identity.

### ***Conclusion***

We understand European identity as a social construct – the shared characteristics of people belonging to the same group, with a common narrative and broadly matching cultural attitudes, beliefs and values. The formation of the new European identity in Estonia – related to the process of accession to the European Union - as an incorporation of a new dimension in a collective identity, started at the beginning of the 1990-ies.

European enlargement has influenced the self-definition of Estonian people. Transition will give the opportunity to re-define "Europeanness" from the viewpoint of new European identity components incorporated into Estonian identity. Although being indisputably a part of Europe, Estonia's position there has not been always conclusively defined. Today there are rather tendencies towards identification with Estonian well-fare neighbours, i.e., referring to similarities with Nordic countries.

Efficient cooperation between Estonians and other nations in the context of the European Union could be more productive in the framework of common scope of international institutions, in the broader European context. The status of European

citizenship should help form a valued national identity for Estonian and Russians and other ethnic minority groups, very likely influenced by European values.

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### **Appendix 1 Questionnaire of the study (2005)**

Each page of the questionnaire had one of the 10 bipolar constructs in the top. The entities on the left side expressed facets of respondent's world-picture. He/she had to cross one position for each entity of the scale (see the example below)

	1L		1R
Me as I am now	-	- - - - 0 - - X -	
Estonia's business circles	-	- - X - 0 - - - -	
Person who I honour and admire	-	- - - - 0 - X - -	
Me in 2003 (year of EU-referendum)	-	- - - - 0 X - - -	

Estonia's cultural elite	--X-- 0 -- -- --
Euro-optimists in Estonia	-- X - 0 -- -- --
Me as I would like to be	-- -- - 0 - - X -
Estonia's Government	-- -- - 0 - - X -
Me when representing the state in Brussels	-- -- X 0 - - - -
Euro-sceptics in Estonia	-- -- - 0 - - - X
Person who I don't like at all	-- -- X 0 - - - -

**The constructs.** The following constructs were used at the top of each page while list of the entities remained unchanged throughout the instrument.

1L EU laws are liberal enough in regulating market economy	1R EU laws are too tough for liberal economy
2L New member states cause extensive changes in EU policies (especially in agriculture)	2R New member states adapt existing system, and EU policies do not change very much as a consequence
3L The EU is under way to becoming a bureaucratic organization, unable to reform oneself	3R The EU remains ability to develop and reform
4L The EU is capable of guaranteeing peace, stable development, and security	4R The EU is not able to cope with conflicts and guarantee security in every member state
5L Free movement of employees between the member states gives better job opportunities for people	5R Several problems arise in Estonia due to free movement of labour force
6L In the EU protection of human rights is guaranteed well enough	6R Protection of minority rights in the EU becomes turned into an empty cliché
7L EU-accession endangers the development of Estonian language and culture	7R EU membership promotes and encourages the development of Estonian language and culture
8L Most important are the liberties and welfare of EU citizens	8R Most important are the aims of the EU as a supranational body
9L The EU is a supranational formation that in a certain degree restricts decision-making and independence of the states themselves	9R The EU is a supranational formation that to a certain degree restricts decision-making and independence of the states themselves
10L The Estonia-Russia border treaty should not be undersigned, this is going weaken Estonia's sovereignty	10 R Border treaty with Russia should be signed, this grants sovereignty and security