

**DRIVING FORCES OF THE EMERGENCE AND MAINTENANCE
OF ESTONIAN – RUSSIAN BILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL
COOPERATION REGIME IN THE 1990S**

Andres Kratovits

Tallinn Pedagogical University

Abstract. The present article argues that despite the generally strenuous relations between Estonia and the Russian Federation, which affected also relations between environmental authorities, the need to collectively manage problems associated with the shared natural resource – Lake Peipsi has outweighed “hard politics” considerations and a successful bilateral environmental cooperation regime was created in mid-1990s. The existence of a large and ecologically valuable shared natural resource of broader international importance, together with an active knowledge-oriented group, which is ready to engage in policy mission for the sake of this natural resource (the epistemic community), have played a vital role in the emergence and maintenance of cooperation between the state actors.

Introduction

According to Samuel P. Huntington “the great historical line that has existed for centuries separating Western Christian peoples from Muslim and Orthodox peoples [...] runs along what are now borders between [...] the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and Russia [...]” (Huntington 1998: 158). Estonia’s geopolitical location on the border of two civilizations and its recent history, i.e. its turning from a “small brother in the Soviet family” into a sovereign subject of international law, or in other words, into an equal neighbour of the Russian Federation, make it an interesting subject for studying the driving forces and mechanisms of the emergence and maintenance of cooperation between the two countries differing substantially by size, importance on the international arena and cultural background. 10 years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and peaceful restoration of Estonia’s independence in 1991, relations between the two neighbours – Russian Federation with its population of approximately 150 million and Estonia with its population of only 1.4 million – still have considerable room for improvement. It has often been pointed out that cooperation between the two

states has not been developing so well and quickly as desirable. In spite of declarations that dynamic and friendly relations with Russia are among Estonia's security policy priorities (Klaar 1997:18), the list of unresolved political, economic and social issues, hampering normal development of two neighbours, has not significantly shortened over the last decade. Despite long-lasting negotiations and assurances from both sides that technical questions have been solved, the two countries still have not succeeded in signing an official agreement on borders. Economic relations between the two states are often overshadowed by political considerations, e.g. the unfavourable taxation regime, imposed by Russian authorities on many of Estonian products. The legacy left by the Soviet military presence can also be considered as a source of tension – there were 1565 military objects of the former Soviet Union in Estonia with the total area in their possession of about 87.000 hectares, i.e. 1.9% of Estonia's territory. Damage to the environment was estimated at about 4 billion USD (Raukas 1999:119). Although not directly threatened by its eastern neighbour today, Russia is still often implicitly considered as one of the main outside threats to Estonian security (Vares 1999, Kivi 1999, Luha 1999). Hostility and threats from the Russian side have also several times been openly demonstrated (Kadak 1999:70). The Russian Federation, on the other hand, has been continuously expressing its discontent with several political priorities and developments in Estonia during the 1990s. A difficult and interrelated set of bilateral issues, and especially the inter-ethnic relations between Russian minority and Estonian majority has been the most outstanding bilateral problem from the Russian point of view (Russia and... 1998). One of Estonian political priorities – accession to NATO, has continuously been causing mistrust and misunderstanding between two neighbours (Loshchinin 1997: 13–14, Shustov 1998:18, Suslov 1999).

In the frame of these unfavourable conditions, however, regular environmental cooperation between Estonia and the Russian Federation has emerged and is still being successfully maintained. Several intergovernmental agreements on fisheries and environmental protection have been negotiated and signed, regular meetings of intergovernmental bodies held, and relations in the field of environmental protection, both on governmental and on non-governmental levels, built and strengthened. International regimes – defined as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor's expectations converge in a given issue-area of international relations” (Krasner 1983:2) – have been in the centre of scientific efforts to explain the emergence and maintenance of cooperative behaviour of state actors in the field of environmental protection (Zürn 1998). Issue-areas are most often seen as “sets of issues that are in fact dealt with in common negotiations” (Keohane 1984:61). The issue-area in the field of environmental protection can be identified as negotiated on the basis of notions like commodity or geographical location, i.e. international regimes are constructed by interested state actors around a set of problems of mutual interest. Their common interest usually converges around shared natural resources i.e. biological systems that extend into the territories of two countries, as well as on

transboundary externalities, that are “issues arising when activities within the jurisdiction of one state produce consequences that affect the welfare of those located in other jurisdiction” (Young 1997:8).

The role of civil society in the emergence and maintenance of international environmental regimes, especially in the area of transboundary waters’ protection and management, has been appreciated in several studies on international cooperation (Bernauer 1997:194, Breitmeier 2000, Rittberger 2000:84, Valiante 1997:198, Wapner 2000). It has been suggested that in parallel with the state-centric international society, another social system is emerging alongside the society of states – the global civil society. According to Wapner (1997:281) “this system is made up of a variety of non-state actors – including interest groups, professional associations, and corporations – that operate above the level of the individual but below or apart from the level of the state”. As far as transboundary waters’ management is concerned, it has been noted that “increasing social, economic and political integration, which is based on decentralized actions, is likely to increase the performance of transboundary waters management because it increases flexibility and leaves more room for the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders” (Bernauer 1997:194). The importance of the development of influential multinational communities that are external to the formal regimes has been acknowledged as one of the crucial elements allowing transboundary waters’ governance regimes to make progress in improving the environmental quality of concerned international waterbodies. These communities usually consist of scientists, environmental non-governmental organisations, and to a lesser extent of other interest groups in civil society. Their role in supporting the formal regime consists mainly of monitoring and making public the Parties’ success or failure in implementing the regimes’ principles and formal obligations (Valiante 1997:219). A particular segment of civil society – epistemic communities – has attracted attention of researchers, interested in interrelations of knowledge and policy coordination (Adler and Haas 1992, Haas 1992, Haas 1995, Peterson 1992, Adler 1997). Epistemic (related to knowledge) communities can be defined as “groups of experts who generate policy-oriented knowledge relevant to a given issue-area” (Wilkening et al 2000:193). They are collectives or networks of “professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area”, who share a common set of principled and causal beliefs and notions of validity and engage in a policy mission (Haas 1992:3). Ecological epistemic communities are seen as entities generating and providing information and new ideas for policy-makers, minimising uncertainties before entering into new international policy deals, setting standards and assisting policy-makers in identifying state interests (Adler and Haas 1992). It has been noted that epistemic policy coordination is likely to occur if there is a high degree of uncertainty among policy-makers and high degree of institutionalisation and consensus among scientists. Epistemic communities can be influential in four phases of the policy process during the formation and maintenance of international regimes. These are

(1) policy innovation, e.g. minimisation of uncertainties and framing issues for decision-makers; (2) policy diffusion, e.g. communication of new ideas and information to their colleagues in other countries, who can thereafter influence their governments; (3) policy persistence, e.g. advocating the established regimes as best-suited means to attain common goals; and (4) to a lesser extent also policy selection (Hasenclever et al 1997: 150–152).

Academic research on Estonian – Russian relations has mainly been concentrating on the issues of “hard politics” – bilateral and regional security (Grönick et al 1997, Arteus et al 1997, Kruzich et al 1998, Peterson et al 2000). The study of the so-called “soft politics” issues, including the development of cooperation on environmental protection between the two countries has been much more limited. During the last 5 years some studies on the issue of Lake Peipsi have been published. They have, however, mainly been concentrating on description of ecological situation and problems of the lake and its catchment area. The issue of transboundary cooperation has been briefly touched upon in many of these publications (Roll and Sults 1998, Roll and Romano 1999, Stålnacke and Roll 2002), but deeper analysis of the formation and maintenance of bilateral environmental cooperation regime still needs to be elaborated. In the present article I shall argue that despite the generally strenuous relations between Estonia and the Russian Federation, which affected also relations between environmental authorities, the need to collectively manage problems associated with the shared natural resource – Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe – has overweighed “hard politics” considerations. The efforts of epistemic community, which has arisen around the concern about the worsening ecological conditions of the lake, have played a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of the cooperative regime on the protection and sustainable use of transboundary waters between Estonia and the Russian Federation.

Evolution of environmental cooperation between Estonia and the Russian Federation

The Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) regained their independence almost simultaneously in 1991 and have built up their environmental policies according to similar internationally recognised principles and their own priorities (Kratovits and Punning 2001). They started a quick and successful process of joining international environmental conventions, as well as building up their trilateral cooperative arrangements in accordance with the norms and rules of relevant international environmental regimes (Kratovits 2001). Their “eastward” environmental policy goals were also similar. Both Estonia and Latvia share significant transboundary watercourses with the Russian Federation and, therefore, both Baltic countries have recognised cooperation with their eastern neighbour as an inevitable tool to secure protection, sustainable use and management of shared water resources. The goal of signing bilateral agreement with Belarus or a trilateral

agreement with Russia and Belarus on Daugava River as well as bilateral agreements with Estonia and Russia on small rivers is explicitly mentioned in the National Environmental Policy Plan for Latvia (NEPP 1995:32). However, up to the year 2000, Latvia has not succeeded in signing any environmental inter-governmental agreement with Russia.

Estonia, on the contrary, has successfully signed several bilateral environmental or natural resources related agreements with its eastern neighbour. In the field of fisheries, negotiations to conclude intergovernmental agreements lead relatively quickly to expected results – during the meeting of experts in Tallinn on 15–18 June 1993, experts agreed in principle on the texts of two treaties, establishing principles and general rules of procedures concerning cooperation in the field of fisheries (Protocol... 1993). The Treaty between the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Conservation and Use of Fishing Stocks in Lake Peipsi, Lake Lämmi and Lake Pihkva, as well as the Treaty between the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Russian Federation in the Field of Fisheries, was signed on 4 May 1994 in Moscow (MoE 2001). The joint commissions, established in accordance with these agreements, meet regularly and negotiate successfully the issues of sharing the fish quota as well as the use and protection of fish resources. The thirteenth session of the Joint Commission on Conservation and Use of Fishing Stocks in Lake Peipsi, Lake Lämmi and Lake Pihkva, which met in Tallinn from 11 to 14 May 2001, has, for example, exchanged information about the implementation and enforcement of recommendations taken at earlier sessions, actual catch in 2000, the state of fish resources, plans for the future catch, joint scientific research and other issues (Protocol I... 2001). A similar agenda concerning fish stocks in the Gulf of Finland of the Baltic Sea, has been negotiated at the meeting of the Joint Commission on Fisheries, held also in Tallinn from 7 to 10 May 2001 (Protocol II... 2001).

The Agreement between the Republic of Estonia and RSFSR on the Use and Protection of Natural Resources of Lake Peipsi from 1991 to 1995 was signed as early as on 1 August 1991 in Moscow. However, it was prepared before Estonia officially regained her independence and, therefore, its implementation never started due to changed political circumstances (MoE 2001). Negotiations to conclude a new agreement between two “fresh” sovereign subjects of international law started almost immediately after the previous agreement had been signed. Although the text of the agreement had in principle been agreed upon by April 1993 and both Parties have expressed their readiness to sign it as soon as possible (Danilov-Danilyan 1993, Tarand 1993), the process of the negotiations lasted as long as five years, due to disagreement on some technical questions and principles. After long and difficult negotiations, the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Environment was finally concluded and signed on 11 January 1996 in Pskov. Since 1995, an idea to sign two agreements instead of one – a general framework agreement and an agreement on the protection and

sustainable use of Lake Peipsi – has been expressed and supported by environmental authorities of both countries (Danilov-Danilyan 1995, Reiljan 1995, Miheyev 1995). On 9–10 November 1995, Estonian and Russian experts met in Tallinn and agreed on the technical details of the texts of both agreements as well as expressed their wish to sign them together in early 1996 (Memorandum... 1995). Despite this declaration, only the framework agreement was signed in January 1996 in Pskov, while the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses was signed only on 20 August 1997 in Moscow (MoE 2001).

In accordance with Article 7 of the Pskov (1996) Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environment, the Commission of Environmental Cooperation has been established. However, it has not yet had any meetings. The Joint Commission on Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses has been established according to Article 5 of the Moscow (1997) Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses. The Joint Commission has held regular meetings every year since 1998 (Minutes... 1998–2001). At its first meeting in Tallinn on 19 May 1998, the Joint Commission established 4 working groups – a working group on water management, water protection, monitoring and scientific research, and a working group on cooperation with local authorities, inhabitants, international as well as non-governmental organisations. These working groups prepare and exchange information bilaterally, present their reports regularly to the Joint Commission, thus strengthening both official relations between environmental authorities as well as personal contacts between the involved experts. It can be seen that the emergence of Estonian – Russian environmental cooperation is firmly based on the following scheme: firstly, countries are preparing legal ground for their collaboration, and secondly, they establish joint commissions to deal with the implementation of goals set in the agreements. The ongoing environmental cooperation can be described as a set of international regime-like arrangements, concentrated on protection and use of biological resources, as well as on the protection of the shared natural resource – Lake Peipsi and its watershed – itself.

The shared natural resource – Lake Peipsi

Lake Peipsi is the fourth largest lake after Ladoga, Onega and Vänern in Europe as well as the largest international lake in Europe. Its surface area is 3555 km², 44% of which is located on Estonian and 56% on Russian territory. The lake consists of three parts: northern Lake Peipsi/ Chudskoe with a surface area of 2613 km² and a volume of 21.79 km³, southern Lake Pihkva/Pskovskoe, with a surface area of 709 km² and a volume of 2.68 km³, and the connecting narrow strait-like Lake Lämmijärv/Tjoploe, with a surface area of 236 km² and a volume of 0.60 km³. Lake Peipsi belongs to the watershed of Narva river, which connects

the lake with the Gulf of Finland in the Baltic Sea. The watershed, including the lake itself, has an area of 47 814 square kilometres, which is shared mainly between Estonia and the Russian Federation and to a minor extent Latvia. About 240 rivers and streams flow into Lake Peipsi, the biggest of them are River Velikaya of the Russian Federation and River Emajõgi of Estonia. The total length of Estonian – Russian border line is 332.9 kilometres, 37.9% of which (126.2 km) lies on the Lake Peipsi, 22.7% (75.5 km) along the Narva river and related waterbodies. The biological diversity in the Lake Peipsi area is very rich, 35% of the area is covered by forests. There are large untouched coastal areas, serving as important sites on the East-Atlantic flyway of migration route of the birds (Roll et al 1998). Different small-scale economic activities in the watershed of Lake Peipsi are sources of income for local population on both shores of the lake – fisheries, agriculture, timber industry and food processing. The bottom deposits of the lake, the first data of which are recorded since the end of the 19th century, hold significant reserves of curative mud and building materials (Pihu and Raukas 1999), thus creating favourable conditions for the development of recreational business and small-scale building material industry. The most extensive economic activity, and at the same time the most significant environmental problem, is mining and processing of the most important natural resource in the region, the oil-shale. In Estonia, its north-eastern oil-shale mining and processing region is defined as the most problematic environmental pollution area (NES 1997).

Eutrophication, i.e. enrichment of water by nutrient salts that will accelerate the growth of algae and higher forms of plants, has been and still is considered as the major environmental problem of Lake Peipsi. The main pollutants causing this phenomenon are nitrogen and phosphorus, carried into the lake mainly by rivers. Pollution sources can be divided into point sources – wastewater discharged into rivers, and diffuse sources – mainly agricultural activities, using organic and mineral fertilizers. The oil-shale industry, situated in the northern part of the Lake Peipsi region, pollutes the lake mainly with sulphates, phenoles, heavy metals and organic compounds. There are no major polluting industrial enterprises directly on the shores of the lake. Two bigger cities are responsible for the bulk of point source pollution – from Estonia the second largest city Tartu, discharging its wastewaters into River Emajõgi and from the Russian Federation the city of Pskov, discharging its wastewaters into River Velikaya. In 1996, the total nitrogen load introduced into the lake via the catchment area was about 19 000 tons per year (33% of that originated from Estonia's territory), and the total phosphorus load was 580 tons per year (36% of that originated from Estonia's territory) (Loigu et al 1999:233). The quality of the water in the lake has recently improved compared to the 1970s and the 1980s due to sharp decrease in agricultural activities, reduced amounts of wastewater discharges, as well as improvement of wastewater treatment facilities in Pskov and Tartu. Since 1988, the use of mineral fertilizers, both in Estonia and in the Pskov region of the Russian Federation, has decreased 7-8 times, the number of dairy cows and pigs has decreased more than 50%, and the pollution load from agriculture has significantly decreased since

1990. Nutrient load from forests, mires and wetlands, as well as deposition load on the lake surface remained the same as at the beginning of the 1990s (Roll et al 1998). Since around 1950, ecological conditions of the Lake Peipsi have been constantly worsening until the mid-1990s, and only since 1993 the oxygen conditions in the lake have started to improve. Despite the decrease of the use of fertilizers, sharply reduced number of cattle, as well as improvement of wastewater purification, especially in Pskov and Tartu, the impact of the earlier extensive pollution can still be felt. Since the second half of the 1990s, however, the sanitary-hygienic conditions of the water of Lake Peipsi can be considered as generally satisfactory. According to organoleptic properties, and sanitary-chemical and bacteriological indicators of water, the lake meets the requirements set for recreational waterbodies (Saava 1999:234).

Formation and structure of the multinational Lake Peipsi epistemic community

Scientific research of the environment of Lake Peipsi started already in the first half of the 19th century. The first studies, which mainly concentrated on hydrology and biology of the lake, were carried out after the catastrophic inundations of 1840 and 1844. A network of hydrological stations was developed already in the 1920s. In 1964 the work was started for the creation of the complex annual hydrobiological monitoring system, and since 1982 the centrally planned monitoring has been carried out in close collaboration between Estonian and Russian experts (Pihu and Raukas 1999:231). After disintegration of the USSR in 1991, this joint monitoring has stopped and the concerned non-governmental circles from both shores of the lake have started to take steps to improve this situation. The international project "Regulation of Boundary Environmental Problems Between Estonia and Russian Federation in Peipsi-Pihkva Lakes Watershed" began its operations in 1993 with grant support from two scientific institutions – the International Research and Exchanges Board of the USA and the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy of Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. Wide range of non-governmental as well as governmental or municipal scientific institutions were involved in the project both from Estonian and Russian side. The main actors from Estonian side were the Estonian Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, the Water Protection Laboratory of the Tallinn Technical University, the Institute of Geography of the Tartu University, the Institute of Ecology of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Economics of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Zoology and Botany of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, the Estonian Management Institute and the Board of Fisheries. Founders of the project from the Russian side were the Russian Center for Environmental Law, the Russian-American Program for Conflictology, the Department of Geography and Geoecology of St. Petersburg University, the Laboratory of Water Quality of the State Hydrological Institute,

the State Research Institute of Lakes Fisheries, as well as its local Pskov Department, the Pskov Regional Department of Environmental Protection, the Regional Planning Center, the Sociological Center and the Pskov State Pedagogical Institute (Information Bulletin... 1993). The project was aimed at renewing the once-existing Estonian-Russian collaboration in environmental management, monitoring and research of Lake Peipsi by organising joint meetings, reviving professional contacts between researchers and developing proposals for possible joint lake management institutions.

In 1994, the project was reorganised into the international non-profit non-governmental organisation Lake Peipsi Project (LPP), aimed at developing transboundary cooperation in the Estonian-Russian border area (Roll and Romano 1999). Contribution to the development of communication, mutual understanding about the issues of sustainable development and working towards a higher quality of environment of Lake Peipsi and its watershed were among the main aims of the Lake Peipsi Project. In 1998, the Center for Transboundary Cooperation (CTC) was established. It has grown out of the Lake Peipsi Project and its main aim was to promote sustainable development and cross border cooperation in the border area of the Baltic countries and the Russian Federation (CTC description). In 2000, the CTC was again renamed – this time into the Peipsi CTC, acknowledging the main mission of the centre – continuing promotion of transboundary collaboration, but foremost in the Lake Peipsi region and for the sake of its cleaner environment (Peipsi-Chudskoe... 2000). This institution – CTC – which has been carrying out its activities under different titles since 1993, has become the central actor in bringing together interested scientific and other non-governmental institutions, or in other words it has been and still is acting as central or unifying institution of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community. Its work is grounded on project-based activities, where each new project is financed by different donor countries and is implemented together with different members of the epistemic community from both shores of the lake. The organisational structure of the CTC is designed in the way that facilitates promotion of transnational diffusion of information and development of informal networks of local stakeholders. The central office of the CTC is located in Tartu – the most important academic centre in the region, while local offices are located in border areas both in Estonia and in the Russian Federation (Peipsi-Chudskoe... 1998: 27). Thus, the CTC brings to the region international know-how and financial resources, develops actively informal networks and links between members of the epistemic community and acts, therefore, as effective transnational channel of information.

Numerous projects and activities undertaken by the Lake Peipsi Project and the CTC have been supported by various members of international society – states and international organisations. International organisations, such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union through its different programmes, the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) and the United

Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE), have been active in promoting cooperation in the region mainly by supporting exchange of information, designing and contributing financially to the projects aimed at strengthening local sustainable development initiatives as well as facilitating the inflow of knowledge and experience from wider international scene. The latter has mainly been the aim of UNECE, which has promoted and encouraged implementation of principles and provisions of the Helsinki 1992 Convention on the Protection and Use of International Lakes and Transboundary Watercourses. There has also been remarkable interest from individual donor countries to participate in environmental activities and promote collaboration around the lake. The environmental monitoring project of Lake Peipsi has been supported by Sweden since 1995, environmental infrastructure projects in the Lake Peipsi area have benefited mainly from the support by Finland, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and the European Union. These countries, as well as Great Britain, the Netherlands and the USA together with Estonia and Latvia, have also substantially contributed to the exchange of know-how and information, as well as provided other “softer” forms of assistance (CTC supporters).

The role of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community in the formation and maintenance of bilateral cooperation regime

At the beginning of the 1990s, political climate between Estonia and the Russian Federation was far from friendly, there was a high degree of mistrust and uncertainty among policy-makers in both countries concerning further development of bilateral relations. The LPP's main task was to bring together scientific potential dispersed in the region and rebuild trust and information sharing among scientific circles. This task has successfully been accomplished and favourable ground for epistemic policy coordination created. The Lake Peipsi epistemic community has thereafter influenced different stages of policy process aimed at creation and maintenance of transboundary lake Peipsi protection regime. The epistemic community has been most beneficial in the phases of policy innovation and diffusion, as well as in advocating the merits of established regime. In the phase of emergence of the formal cooperation regime, ecological epistemic communities are seen as entities generating and providing information and new ideas for policy-makers, minimising uncertainties before entering into new international policy deals and assisting policy-makers in identifying state interests. Their role is to frame issues for policy-makers, generate widely accepted scientific information emphasising the urgency of joint intergovernmental actions by backing their governments with providing credible scientific proofs, which are equally understandable and acceptable for all involved countries. The Lake Peipsi project has organised several international workshops of concerned scientists, which supported governments on their way to sign bilateral cooperation agreements by providing scientific evidence about the urgency of the problem, which

could not be solved unilaterally. At the workshop organised and carried out by the project on 2–3 November 1993 in Võrtsjärve Limnological Station in Estonia, a declaration was adopted, which provided scientific evidence concerning the deterioration of the state of the environment of Lake Peipsi and urged, among others, the governments of Estonia and the Russian Federation to sign an agreement on the protection and management of the Lake Peipsi watershed (Declaration... 1993). From 9 to 12 August 1995, the first international Regional Ecological Scientific Conference and Round-table on Involvement of the Public to the Management Issues of the Lake Peipsi Watershed, was held in Pskov with more than 60 participants from Estonia, Russia, Latvia and the USA. Experts were representing mainly scientific circles and the non-governmental sector. The conference drew again attention to the worsening of ecological situation of Lake Peipsi and issued an appeal to governments to urgently take appropriate actions, including the early signing of a framework agreement on cooperation in the field of environmental protection and an agreement on protection and management of the Lake Peipsi watershed (Decision of... 1995).

One of the most outstanding achievements of the epistemic community in influencing policy process has been the creation of effective channels for trans-boundary diffusion of information. As noted earlier, the central office of the CTC is located in Tartu, being thus open for new international ideas and information. The CTC attracts international know-how and financial resources and spreads this know-how through its local office to the Pskov region of the Russian Federation. Workshops and seminars held in the Russian Federation, which introduce international experience and advocate different aspects of sustainable development, as well as benefits of joint management of natural resources, have been organised by Russian members of epistemic community. Representatives of regional and local environmental authorities of Pskov and Leningrad regional governments have always been among the participants. Meetings and other events organised in one country are always open for participants from the other side of the border (CTC projects). The CTC acts as an efficient channel of transnational information sharing in the Lake Peipsi region, both between the members of epistemic community themselves as well as between authorities and civil society. Thus, the Lake Peipsi epistemic community has materialised its potential to influence the policy process – new ideas and information have easily been communicated to their colleagues in the neighbouring country, who in turn disseminated these ideas to decision-makers of this region or country. In addition, members of epistemic community have also disseminated information about the activities in the region among wider international audience by publishing annual reports, proceedings of bigger conferences and scientific articles (e.g. Peipsi-Chudskoe... 1998, Peipsi-Chudskoe... 2000, Roll and Sults 1998, Roll and Romano 1999, Stålnacke and Roll 2002), as well as managing the web site of the CTC.

As of policy persistence, the main role of epistemic communities is seen in advocating the merits of the formal regime by monitoring and making public the Parties' success or failure in implementing the regimes' principles and formal

obligations, or in other words in acting as “watchdogs”. In achieving this, one of their most important functions is to generate and provide information and new ideas both for public and policy-makers in order to maintain cooperation and not to let it “live only on paper”. Besides, with the previously mentioned bigger workshops, organised in the phase of the emergence of formal regime, the Lake Peipsi epistemic community has continuously been organising seminars and gatherings throughout the 1990s. Their role as “awareness-raisers” for both larger public and decision-makers is even more crucial at the stage of maintaining the pace of cooperation than at the initial phase of establishing co-operation. During recent years, the CTC has organised many major international seminars – on the management of transboundary waterbodies in the Russian Federation, held in Pskov in December 2000; on the groundwater management in the Narva River and Lake Peipsi basin, held in Tartu in April 2001; and on nutrient load and eutrophication in the Narva River and Lake Peipsi basin, held in Pskov in June 2001. All these seminars emphasised the importance of bilateral cooperation in solving the discussed problems and drew on positive examples acquired in the work of Joint Commission on Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses since 1998. The CTC is also running an international project aimed at capacity building of the members of the Joint Commission on Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses and the four working groups. The main objectives of the project are to enhance the awareness of the members of the commission, as well as of local authorities on environmental problems and measures related to the environmental management of the joint basin, and to improve the dissemination of relevant information using Internet and other sources of information-sharing (CTC projects).

Due to the scarcity of governmental experts with high expertise in the area of transboundary waters’ management, deriving from the low number of population in Estonia, the non-governmental members of the epistemic community are directly involved in the work of the Joint Commission on Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses, enthusiastically taking part in the activities of different working groups. The working group on cooperation with local authorities, inhabitants, international and non-governmental organisations is led from Estonian side by the head of the CTC, thus providing a direct link between the official deliberations of the Joint Commission and the most active stakeholder of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community. For example, for the fourth meeting of the Joint Commission, held in St. Petersburg in 2001, individual members of the epistemic community were responsible for collecting and presenting the analysis concerning the dynamics of the state of transboundary waterbodies, information on the state of the studies on drinking water and on the realisation of the water management measures in the region. They were also presenting information and making proposals on the elaboration of joint criteria and standards concerning emergency situations, use of shared water resources, joint scientific studies, joint monitoring programmes and exchange of related information (Minutes of... 2001). Thus, in the case of Estonia, key members of the

epistemic community have been directly involved in the work of the official intergovernmental commission, that makes them also partly responsible for the effective implementation of the formal cooperation regime. There are also dangers if the epistemic community becomes too much entwined with government. The epistemic community may lose its independence and critical role as an efficient “watchdog”. On the other hand, official politics may have too much influence on research, thus threatening its objectivity. These dangers have not materialised, but they should not be underestimated in future.

Conclusions

Disintegration of the Soviet Union allowed Estonia to take appropriate actions in order to turn back to where she considers herself to belong – to the Western culture and traditions. However, her geographical location does not allow to forget the political reality and the need to re-establish close cooperation with the eastern neighbour – the Russian Federation. Right after regaining independence, Estonia was busy with learning and quickly accepting “western” principles and rules of behaviour governing global as well as bilateral environmental relations. Negotiations to conclude bilateral framework agreements on cooperation in the field of environmental protection with western countries – Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Germany – as well as with Central and Eastern European countries – Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary – have not taken more than one year (MoE 2001). An unusually long time from the beginning of negotiations of bilateral Estonian – Russian framework agreement until its signing (1991–1996) indicates, on the one hand, the low priority, and on the other, inexperience and unwillingness of both countries to adapt quickly to changed political circumstances. Estonia’s inability to quickly develop bilateral cooperation with the Russian Federation can be explained on the one hand as unwillingness and mistrust to deal with the partner, which is seen as the successor of the occupying country – the Soviet Union. On the other hand, since Estonia’s overwhelming priority in the 1990s was to re-establish her direct contacts with the western world, the lack of interest as well as scarce resources – both financial and institutional – did not allow her to be simultaneously active also in the “eastern direction”. Relatively inert behaviour of the Russian Federation can be explained by the difficulty in accepting the changed political reality in dealing with its former “Soviet Republic” even in such a “low politics” area as environmental protection. Since the 1960s, the Soviet Union had signed seven bilateral environmental agreements and protocols with Estonia’s northern neighbour Finland, developing thus a comprehensive environmental cooperation regime between the two states. Therefore, it is not surprising that already on 29 April 1992 the governments of Finland and the Russian Federation signed in Moscow the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection, which was later followed by several more specific agreements (Kuokkanen 2001). At the other extreme, Estonia’s southern neighbour Latvia,

which shared Estonia's fate of being incorporated into the USSR in 1940, did not succeed in building up an environmental cooperation regime, based on legal instruments with the Russian Federation. Estonia stands in between – she has managed, despite the lack of political enthusiasm, to establish quite an impressive legal basis for bilateral cooperation with her eastern neighbour. However, the real implementation of established bilateral environmental regime still needs to be improved. Between 1994 and 1997, one intergovernmental framework agreement in the field of environmental protection, two agreements in the field of fisheries and one agreement on transboundary waterbodies' protection and management have been signed. Estonia and the Russian Federation have officially established two joint intergovernmental committees in order to implement their environmental protection goals – one according to the Pskov (1996) Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Environment, and another in accordance with the Moscow (1997) Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses. The Joint Commission on the Protection and Sustainable Use of Transboundary Watercourses has met regularly once a year, while the Joint Commission established according to the Pskov (1996) Agreement, has not yet had any official meetings. This clearly indicates that the real interest and driving force for bilateral environmental cooperation between Estonia and the Russian Federation is the shared natural resource – Lake Peipsi and the related ecological and economic benefits.

The state of the environment of Lake Peipsi, the biggest international lake in Europe, has been constantly worsening over the last half century. Estonia and the Russian Federation have taken steps to improve the ecological condition of the lake. These steps, however, have been taken separately, rather than in cooperation. Drastic decline of agricultural activities in the 1990s has not been a result of goal-oriented policies in either state, installation of new wastewater purification facilities in Pskov in the late 1980s/early 1990s and in Tartu in the second half of the 1990s have been unilateral actions carried out with international support. The worsening of ecological situation of the lake has quite naturally been the object of concern for interested people and institutions, overwhelmingly with scientific background. Scientific research of Lake Peipsi started already in the first half of the 19th century and cooperation between Estonian and Russian scientific experts has reinforced since 1960s. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Lake Peipsi epistemic community, or the network of multi-national experts who were ready to engage in a joint policy mission for the sake of the lake, has emerged and became active in the circumstances where there was a real threat of breaking off existing activities. At the beginning of the 1990s, right after the disintegration of the USSR, the scientific community on both shores of the lake has begun to institutionalise and build consensus among themselves in order to influence the policy-makers in their respective countries to establish the international Lake Peipsi protection regime. The multi-national Lake Peipsi epistemic community emerged and became operational in 1993. It has concentrated around the activities of the institution, carrying on its activities under different titles – the Lake Peipsi

Project, the Center for Transboundary Cooperation and the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation. This epistemic community consists of a large number of scientific institutions – governmental, municipal and non-governmental – from both shores of the lake, encompassing mainly natural as well as social scientists. This community has openly declared their goals – renewal of bilateral collaboration in environmental management, monitoring and research of Lake Peipsi in order to avoid further worsening of its ecological condition, and promotion of the principles of sustainable development. They aimed at gathering and disseminating relevant information, encouraging policy-makers in both countries to establish and maintain a joint Lake Peipsi protection and management regime, as well as proposing possible models for joint management of the lake and its resources. Members of international environmental society – bilateral donor countries, environmental conventions and international environmental organisations – have actively, but indirectly, encouraged the establishment of Estonian-Russian bilateral environmental cooperation regime by supporting actions of the core institutions of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community. Actions by members of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community have had a positive impact on the emergence and maintenance of transboundary Lake Peipsi governance and management regime. A link can be observed between the activities of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community and developments on governmental level. Both in 1993 and in 1995, when environmental authorities of Estonia and the Russian Federation expressed their readiness to conclude negotiations, the epistemic community has backed up these positive sentiments by providing scientific evidence about the problem, by urging authorities not to delay the process, and by proposing models for the joint management of the lake. After official establishment of bilateral Lake Peipsi protection regime in 1997, the epistemic community has influenced different stages of policy process aimed at successful maintenance of the established international regime. It has been most beneficial in the phases of policy innovation and diffusion, as well as in advocating the merits of established regime. The members of the Lake Peipsi epistemic community have been successful in promoting official cooperation and have played also the role of a “watchdog”: they have backed their governments in entering into official legal relations with the neighbouring country, they have produced scientific background evidence concerning the urgency of the matter, they have provided information for public and proposed new ideas for policy-makers. In the case of Estonia individual members of epistemic community have also been directly involved in the work of the official intergovernmental commission, which is responsible for the implementation of the agreement on transboundary waters. This makes them also responsible for the effective implementation of the formal cooperation regime. Such a dual role of ecological epistemic community – on the one hand acting as watchdogs for a successful implementation of international transboundary waters regime, and on the other being partly responsible for implementing this regime – has proved to be successful from the point of view of keeping the signed bilateral agreement “alive”. It can finally be concluded that the existence of a large ecologically and

economically valuable shared natural resource with broader international importance, together with an active knowledge-oriented group, which is ready to engage in policy mission for the sake of this natural resource – the epistemic community, have played a vital role in the emergence and maintenance of cooperation between state actors. This potential can be turned into real cooperative behaviour even if countries, having a different cultural background, size and political goals, have suspicious or even hostile attitude towards each other.

Address:

Tallinn Pedagogical University
Chair of Geoecology
Toompuiestee 24,
15172 Tallinn, Estonia

Ph: 372 + 6262 841

telefax: 372 + 6262 845

E-mail: andres.kratovits@ekm.envir.ee

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