GROUP IDENTITY DYNAMICS OF ESTONIAN AND POLISH STUDENTS IN THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS

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Abstract. In the present EU enlargement process, traditional aspects of national identities of the applicant countries have been under continuous and significant change. Changes in cultural and national identity crucially intertwine with the changes in the environment – with the political and economic transformations taking place in these societies. Alongside the changes in the multiple layers of cultural and national identities, a common European identity is consolidating by EU integration, which might complement, compete with, shape or replace the existing identities.

The results of the study are: 1) comparison of Polish and Estonian students' (as specific sensitive groups in society) Euro-attitudes to certain essential features of the European Union integration (empirical data on personal psychological level has been collected); 2) the basic factors which are influencing Estonian and Polish students' attitudes in the current EU accession phase have been determined (year 2000). Comparison of the Euro-attitudes of the mentioned groups provides us with necessary information for further interpretation of more extensive process of forming social group' identities. The results obtained in the framework of this study of Estonian and Polish students, enrich the knowledge in the formation of a common European identity.

1. Introduction

The formation of common European identities as a general phenomenon will be one of the biggest challenges for the EU in the future, when its structure will include almost all of Europe. Will the enlargement of the EU be accompanied by a certain feeling of identity in all member states, and if so, what will it be like, and will it be equally valid across member states and for people (demos) in these states? As Victor Perez-Diaz says: "For the Europeans, Europe is not an external

object of knowledge. As observers, "we" are located within the field of observation and are required to deal with Europe, and the EU, in a variety of theoretical and practical ways. And first, we start by knowing Europe indirectly, through what we "really know", which, for the majority of Europeans, is usually little more than our own country" (Victor Perez-Diaz 2000).

Contemporary European identity has been examined by quite a large spectrum of researchers from Central and Eastern European Countries (Drulák 2001). European self-image and European identity is reflected in the country's acceptance of postmodern ideologies and value systems. The main question – European Identity – defined as sameness.

As Richard Münch says: "Der Prozess der europäischen Integration ... verlangt jetzt in zunehmendem Masse die Einbeziehung der Bürger und den Wandel ihrer Identität hin zu Europa. Das heisst, sie müssen sich darauf einstellen, sich selbst nicht nur als Deutsche, Franzosen, Belgier usw. zu verstehen, sondern auch als Europäer. Sie müssen befähigt werden, weitreichendere und vielfältigere Loyalitäts-ansprüche miteinander in Einklang zu bringen. Ihre nationale Identität müssen sie mit der europäischen Identität koordinieren. Ohne diesen Identitätswandel droht das europäische Projekt an der mangelnden Kooperationsbereitschaft der Bürger zu scheitern." (Münch 1998).

The national and sub-national level must remain a focus for cultural identity and for the ethnic community. It is not the only existing understanding. Communication in culture and education could in their turn promote the identification and unification of European political space, as expressed by Michel Foucher. Communication can encourage the consolidation of the collective dimension, leaving national communication space largely untouched, at the same time leaving the question about political space open and finding from national culture and history more justification to common Europe (Foucher 1998/2000). Foucher is interested in the creation of more legitimacy to European political space. It needs more discussions and proposals.

The European identity is a notion, which is strongly rooted in the EU applicant countries' social and political discourse. As Bo Stråth says, "Europe is a discourse which is translated into a political and ideological project" (Stråth 2000). Enlargement of European Union as a political and economic transformation causes sometimes painful changes in cultural and ethnic identities. In Estonia one can witness public debates about the potential threat to the uniqueness of our ethnic identity. Euro-scepticism as a key word has gained a rather ambiguous and contradictory response in the public opinion of Estonian elite. The magazine of the elite, "Eesti Ekspress" (supplement – "Areen") has published an idea that tries to express the attitudes of the elite at the beginning of the 20th century in a different light – "we have been Estonians, but we will become Europeans!" This vision expressed by Andres Langemets for the future of losing identity cannot be misunderstood. The gradual change of the national "face" of the Estonians (as the author sees it, an orientation towards others) is described as a national destruction, which occurs during several generations. The author as a sceptic is certain, that "the path chosen

by the people is the national path; projected to the future and acceptable" (Langemets 2000*)*. Several other Estonian writers and humanitarians interpret EU issues also in a sceptical way (Eurosild 2001). It is considered a supreme power from outside having certain negative features.

The Baltic states bordering a politically and economically unstable Russia are particularly interested in close foreign and security policy ties with the rest of Europe, since quite a number of Moscow politicians have not yet accepted that Estonia (and Latvia and Lithuania) have left their sphere of influence. Accession to the EU will primarily increase Estonia's soft security. The stability ensuing from the cooperation within the EU reduces the chance of a political or economic crisis in Russia being transferred to Estonia. But that is not the case in Poland. The main reason for this is the different size of the population of the country.

In Poland one can discover totally different reasons for the rise of Euro-scepticism, and since summer 1999 a constant drop in popular support to potential "Yes" vote in the EU accession referendum by 15%. According to Polish sociologist Miroslawa Marody, Polish bureaucrats are desperately against the abolishment of the cronyism that favours them, and have quite a large influence in society (Hausner and Marody 1999).

As already mentioned, the process of political and economic transition in Eastern European countries causes complex patterns of change in the cultural and national identity, also a stronger support to European identity by former carriers and admirers of Soviet identity. Another type of identity, based on 50 years of top-down influence of hegemonic Soviet ideology is somewhat slowing down the normal bottom-up democratic collective identity dynamics common in Europe. For cultural and language reasons, this influence was even more devastating to Russians (in Estonia). This could cause some frustration in adapting to European way of life. But empirical studies show rather positive signs.

According to Eurobarometers of Central and Eastern Europe (and of Baltic states in 1991), Estonia exhibits a statistically verifiable larger support to EU enlargement by Estonian Russians already from the years 1996–1997 (CEEB-1997 and CEEB-1998*)*. The same trend was observable also in popular opinion polls of *NEW BALTIC BAROMETER III and IV*, carried out in November 1998, and in February 2000. Also according to the last Barometer Poll (Figure 1), the difference in EU-support among the two main ethnic groups in Estonia was 15% (by Estonians 49% and by Russians 64% correspondingly when summing up "strongly in favour" and "somewhat in favour" categories of the answers), but in Latvia and Lithuania only 3% and 6% respectively (Rose 2000).

Estonians do not often see the fundamental difference in the top-down and bottom-up build-up of Soviet and European identity, and are quite sceptical of any identity, different from their own national identity.

Figure 1. What do you think of the idea of your country joining the European Union?
(New Baltic Barometer IV, Spring, 2000, %)
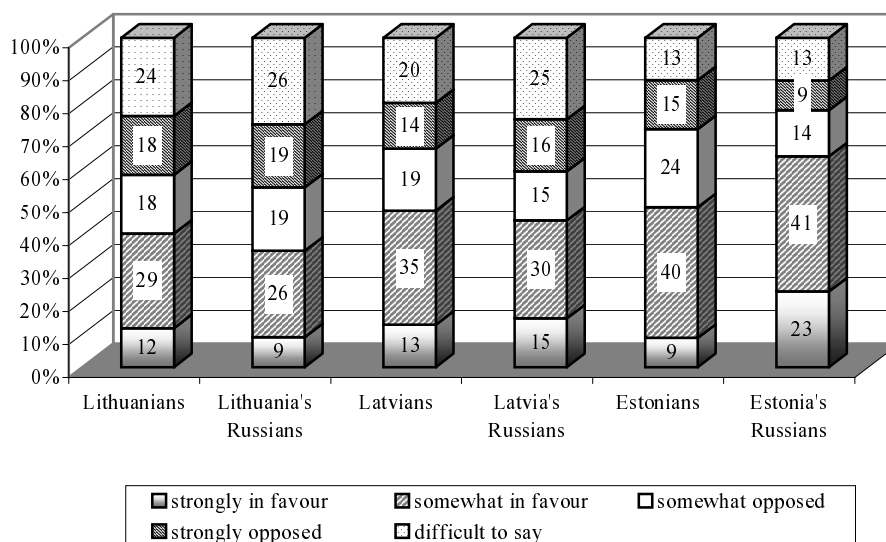
2. Method

Personal identity has been in focus of studies in social psychology for rather a long time. Modernity and post-modernity are reforming all institutions of our society in quite a profound way (Inglehart 1997). All these changes accumulate in the changes of our personal identity, which turns out to be a key parameter of following these changes. The increasing interconnection between the two extremes of extensionality and intentionality: globalising the influences on the one hand and personal dispositions is a distinctive feature of modernity (Giddens 1994:1).

Personal identity is determined in the present article in a classical sense as a totality of one's self-construal, in which the way one construes oneself in present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past, and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future (Weinreich 1989). Group identity as a social construct is defined by the shared sameness of people belonging to the same group, by their common narrative and largely matching attitudes and value estimations. The same applies to the ethnic (cultural) and national identity (nationality, citizenship) groups.

The aim of the current research programme was to outline the complex of the peculiar characteristics of identity change in society, which are occurring during the European Union enlargement process both in accession countries and in the EU member countries. There exists a necessity to study transition difficulties of the enlargement process and to elaborate possible identity conflicts by analysing a broad monitoring data set, develop prognoses and models.

Identity evolution in the societies of CEE and NIS countries has been significantly influenced by the earlier closed political regime. It is diverse, depending on democratic development. Or more specifically, on the discouraging factors based on the memories of national groups in the mentioned countries from the period of their inclusion in the influence zone of the former Soviet Union. Whole societies of these countries are going through an identity change by transferring from the Soviet (top-down) type of personal identity and mentality to the emerging all-European identity.

The clash of top-down and bottom-up approaches is not only a Baltic challenge. The East German researchers led by Karl Ulrich Mayer explain the process of mobility as East Germany's education and training were certified by the Unification Treaty. This, in addition to vocational mobility (Mayer 1999) but also via legal norms, is going to change one's identity.

The legal space is usually seen as an environment in identity formation. The identity and environment, however, are both social constructs and their division line depends on the question under study. It is often justified to see the legal dimension as an important dimension of European identity and legal norms as internalised norms.

The European Union has its own specific legal space, which exerts influence on the formation of national semi-sovereign legal spaces and through that on the individual value preferences. We are dealing with the legislation of supranational body, ruling over the jurisdiction of member countries, and demanding from member countries a new type of loyalty. Here a question arises: are the accession countries ready to abandon part of their recently gained legal sovereignty?

The basic values and corresponding legal space of the European Union originate in the generally recognised principles, e.g. the rule of law, (legal stability – being sure that a state follows law), equality principle (equal court procedures for everybody) and non-discrimination, proportionality, transparency and legal supervision. The human rights are included in the legal space of the EU (Craig and Harlow 1998). For accession to the European Union, it is not enough to have only a formal harmonisation of laws. Laws should also be in concordance with the existing basic value preferences, causing certain self-regulation. Written and unwritten laws should be accepted also by newcomers. As a new feature, we can thus detect a certain anxiety in the public opinion of the accession countries. It derives from being a small nation in the European Union and prompts Anatol Kuklinski to wonder, quite rightly, whether the CEE countries have acquired a sufficient potential of adaptation in order to survive well the process of creative adjustment to the general condition and rules of games dominating in the European Union (Kukliński 1995:437–454).

Keeping in mind the previous arguments, one can draw a conclusion that there exists an urgent need for a deeper analysis of the accession capabilities of the accession countries. Deeper, in fact, than presented in previous official opinions of EU attorneys and country report made on the basis of official statistics. Political discussion needs to be fortified by more scientifically justified arguments, based on

the comparative study of the relevant aspects of accession countries, and by additional monitoring data.

In the current project, national identity is understood (in a generally accepted way) to be larger than ethnic identity, as a sameness of the inhabitants, people of one country. It can be later distinguished by ethnic identity, which in our case matches the borders of language.

One of the hypotheses concerns the existing large fluctuations of different public opinion research data of popular attitudes to EU integration. Simple public opinion research data reflect current mentality rather formally, because of quite a narrow spectrum of questions. These attitudes are formed under the turbulent influence of media discourse and ignore some essential sides of the real interests in European integration, which could turn out to be important in a later accession phase. We agree that sometimes hegemonic and emancipated representations propagated by the news media are selectively able to suppress the real interests of people and groups. But it is also wise to have an account of a larger set of attitudes, which could influence possible behaviour in the long run.

Especially when attitudes contain obvious contradictions in themselves or if compared with the representations propagated by media. In this study we try to draw useful conclusions for planning successive accession campaigns in Estonia, and why not in Poland as well. Influence of postmodern-society (*Bürgergesell-schaft)* to *Öffentlichkeit* has been comprehensively studied in works of Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1991).

2.1 Participants and measurement

European past contains plenty of single ideas and more complex paradigms, which could be presented as a common European cultural background. Western ideas of personalism, liberalism, the rule of (written) law, principles of human rights and human equality are good examples. Keeping in mind these more or less extensively shared ideas and paradigms, one can define the historical and cultural closeness to Europe as affinities of people sharing a common experience of European history. In this respect, the study of the elite is important because of their crucial influence in the accession process, for example in referendum campaigns and in general forming of public opinion.

From the viewpoint of interdisciplinary research methodology, changes will be analysed in the self-image of different collective (elite groups, different age and employment groups) and individual actors. On the one hand, data from Euro-barometers and expert interviews will be used. On the other, the method elaborated by Prof. P. Weinreich for research of the personal structure of identity will be applied to get an overall understanding about the different aspects of the enlargement of European Union (Weinreich, 1989). For applying Peter Wein-reich's ISA instrument, similar groups of students have been interviewed. Students were specially chosen in our study for several reasons. First, they are quite a homogenous group in society, reflecting to a large extent idealistic aspirations of

societies. The attitudes of students are not yet so much diversified by their personal experience, which inevitably changes their coherence already in a couple of years after leaving university.

The students form a social group who has not been much in focus of European studies. The current research team analysed the EU-attitudes of students with the method of focus group interviews in year 1997, and the results are published in the monograph "Estonia on the threshold of European Union" (Ruutsoo and Kirch 1998). The mentioned study revealed an existing social non-adjustment of students to the speed of EU enlargement and their difficulties in absorbing the information about European Union.

In Poland, students of political sciences at Warsaw University (n = 66) were chosen. In Estonia, three groups were investigated. From Tallinn Pedagogical University – sociology (graduate, postgraduate and MA students) (n = 25), from Estonian Business School – students (n = 35) and from Narva students from 2 private universities (n = 31). The investigated student samples had a slight variation in age. 1980 dominated as the birth year for the Estonian and Polish students. In Tallinn only every tenth was older than 23, but in Narva, two third of Russians were older than 23.

The methodological aspects have been explained more thoroughly in the book (Kirch and Laitin 1994). The latter Peter Weinreich's ISA instrument has also been used in current work in the elaboration of bipolar constructs in the context of research hypotheses and in adapting a corresponding computer programme for the needs of the current task to analyse the social cognition about European integration by students of both countries. The questionnaire of the study consisted of 13 bipolar constructs, covering 13 more or less independent dimensions of EU attitudes (see Annex I). Constructs reflected, for example, personal attitudes to the level of economic liberalism in the EU, free movement of people in the EU, the role of EU legislation in comparison with national legislation. As an example – one concrete bipolar construct of ISA instrument: *Do you think that...EU is on its way towards a bureaucratic organisation, unable to reform itself, or whether EU keeps his ability to develop and reform.*

Entities (selves) where respondents had to put her/himself in place of each construct were (by *state* the authors mean Estonia or Poland depending on the respondents' origin):

- Me as I am now
- *State's* business circles
- Person whom I honour and admire
- Ethnic minorities in *the state*
- Me in 1997
- *State's* cultural elite
- Euro-optimists in the *state*
- Me as I would like to be
- *State's* Government
- Me when representing *the state* at EU negotiations in Brussels

- Euro-sceptics in *the state*
- Person whom I don't like at all

To obtain additional information about the attitudes inside the student groups, parameters like a) country, ethnicity, gender b) attitudes "yes", "no" and "not yet decided" in the EU referendum have been used for determining the subgroups for additional statistical elaboration. Routine (personal and group) identity analysis indexes like "contra identification" and "idealistic identification" have been used. The value of the indices always lies between 0 and 1. This index value is given on the y-axis of the three illustrating Figures presented in the article. The value of index has been considered weak when 0...0.3, medium 0.3..0.7 and strong when above 0.7.

3. The obtained results

3.1. Strength of attitude to the accession of Estonia or Poland to the EU

The largest differences are seen without even applying the statistical apparatus, especially in the attitude to the country's (Estonia or Poland) accession to the European Union. Let us look first at the Estonian Russians. The support of male students of Estonian Russians to EU accession was 66% and the average of Russians was 48% (the support of female students among the Russians was only one third). The average support of Estonians to the EU accession was 42% – slightly below Russians, and this tendency is also confirmed by other studies. The average support of Poles to the EU accession was 83% and it is clearly higher than all corresponding Estonian numbers.

To take one step further, it is difficult not to see that in Estonia and in Poland, younger people turn out to be more idealistic and more inclined to Euro-optimism. The exception was the Russian male students in the city of Narva, where one can actually notice a reverse correlation – older Russians were more in favour of Estonia's accession to the EU.

3.2 The study on individual psychological level

Our consciousness is not just a playground for media ideas, which try to overshadow our own real interests in the common strive to be a postmodern society. The individual psychological level also reflects all social tensions and conflicts that sometimes get anchored to the EU accession issues. This tendency is possible to detect when applying the ISA instrument.

Let us start with pointing out the clearest tendencies revealed in using the ISA instrument. If we look at the contra-identification indexes (Fig. 2) we can see that most students are contra-identifying themselves with the entity called "Euro-sceptics" (Poles 0.56, Russians 0.42, Estonians 0.49). "Euro-sceptics" are even more contra-identified than a "disliked person" (Person whom I don't like at all). If we compare it to the attitude of the rest of significant others, this tendency is

evident. But one should note that students are not in very warm relations with "Euro-optimists" either, and this attitude has turned out to be cooler.

Figure 2. ISA Contra-Identification Index of Estonian and Polish students by ethnicity
(May-Oct. 2000, n = 157)
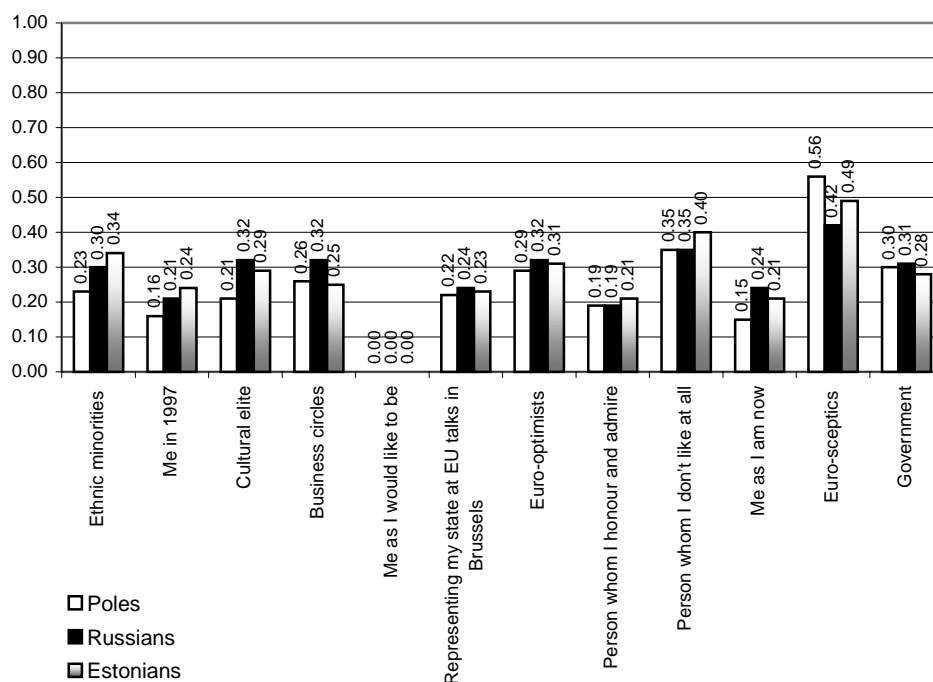
Students in general, and Estonia's Russian students in particular, have a rather critical attitude towards their governments. We see this tendency even in Poland, especially exemplified by Polish female students (contra-identification index 0.34) as the general attitude to the government is quite neutral (Polish male students' contra-identification index 0.26).

Critical of the Polish government are the same people who are against Poland's accession to the EU – mostly right-wing national conservatives, the traditionalists. As Ireneusz Krzeminski says, for most Poles the problem of integrating into Europe is not the question of joining or not joining. The question is rather how to do it, and what this decision means for me, as a person, or for my category, or my professional group, or my region. Undoubtedly, a very practical perspective is dominant (Krzeminski 2001).

Fig. 3 (Contra-Identification Index of Estonian and Polish students by university/department) exemplifies a significant difference between the attitudes of students at the Tallinn Pedagogical University who are critical of Government (0.35) vs. Estonian Business School (0.22 only). Criticism is dependent on the

students' speciality as the Tallinn Pedagogical University sociology students clearly express their contra-identification even against Euro-optimists in Estonia (0.41), highest among all groups under consideration.

Figure 3. ISA Contra-Identification Index of Estonian and Polish students by university/department (May-Oct. 2000, n = 157)
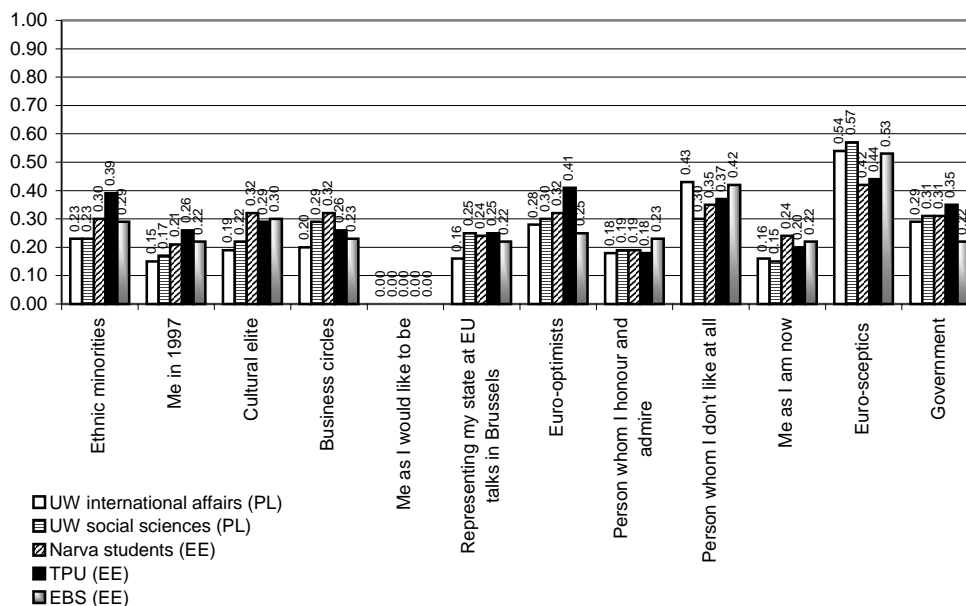

Fig. 4 (Idealistic Identification Index of Estonian and Polish students by university/department) depicts idealistic identification by groups. Once again it confirms the difference between the two Estonian student groups. The index value is 0.74 with Government for EBS and significantly less (0.60) in the case of TPU students. As expected, EBS expresses solidarity with the views of Estonian business circles (0.72). One can see the tolerance of EBS students towards ethnic minorities in Estonia (and generally) as 0.62 is the highest index value of all groups of idealistic identification with minorities.

Estonians and Poles both have high index values (0.62–0.69) to the cultural elite. The Estonian Russians' attitude towards cultural elite is a bit more hesitant (difference with Estonians is nearly 0.1). The high absolute value of this index exemplifies the perception of high standards of cultural environment, the existence of a dialogue between the old and new generations of elite.

To sum up – we are justified to say that in Estonian and Polish student societies almost similar attitudes to the accession to the European Union prevail.

According to the latest monograph of Krakow sociologists, students represent mostly elitist families, whose support to the European Union is between 80–85%.

In November 1999, 74% of the Polish students supported Poland's accession to the European Union (Gorniak, 2000).

It is also essential to obtain confirmation about the essence of their personal European identity compared to their other identities, e.g. the Estonian identity, etc. This observation caused Antje Herrberg to note: in all the Baltic countries… politicians "like many others in Eastern and Central Europe, also want to show which Europe is good for them" (Herrberg, 1998*).*

Figure 4. ISA Idealistic Identification Index of Estonian and Polish students by university/department (May-Oct. 2000, n = 157)
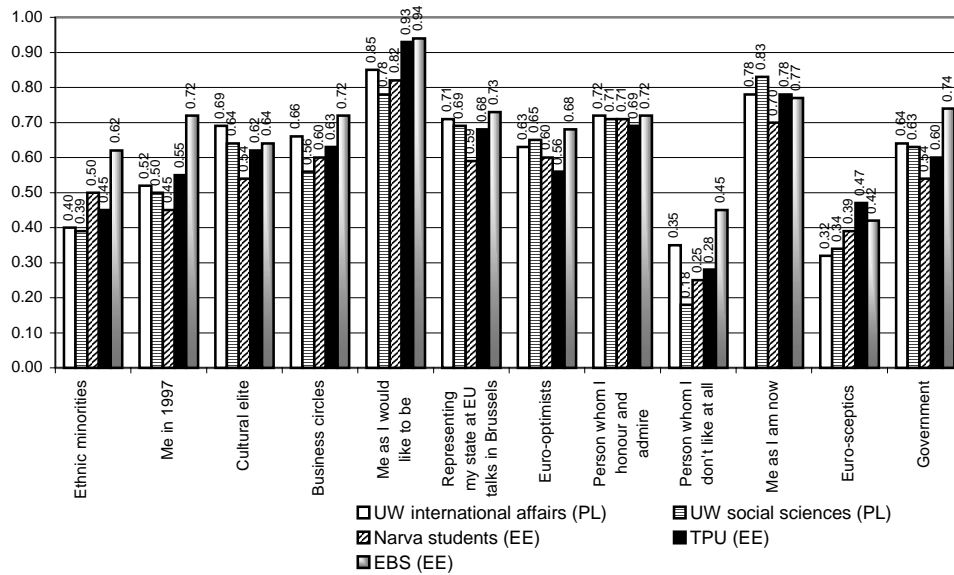
4. Discussion

As we know, the present European Union members expect from new members, first and foremost, stability and predictability in their behaviour. It is possible to predict the behaviour, linking economic and social policy realities and changes in national identity. This constitutes a larger framework for the all-sided describing and forecasting of general and specific changes in Estonia in the process of accession to the European Union. What are the problems that will hinder or become problematic for European identity?

First. Above all it is the origin, as especially the Russians and to some extent Estonians still carry with them elements of Soviet identity, although this is clearly diminishing. Because the basis for this identity has vanished, we are here witnes-

sing a disappearing phenomenon. But in East-Virumaa one can still encounter an attitude that someone else "higher up" should solve all their problems.

One of the most important factors in the success of the accession countries is the attitude of the young to the European integration, their potential engagement in the transforming of the society and their attitude to European values, legal tradition and co-operation practices. Relying on the latest publications of Polish sociologists about the European Union, we could presume that Polish society is a bit more fragmented than the Estonian one (Polen und Europa, 2000). Their students' origin represents the groups of people in society that have traditionally held a higher opinion about accession to the European Union (Hausner and Marody 1999).

Second. The consolidation of common European identity will emerge as one of the most important challenges of the future of European enlargement. Is the member status accompanied with the feeling of the common European identity in every country in the European Union? How does the formation of this common mentality happen? Does it express itself in the same way as in the current member countries today? European integration does not necessarily constitute a shared cultural homogeneity. It is first and foremost the formation of political institutions with their normative and political identity and the establishing of a common market. It can be argued generally that the pace of forming a common mentality is faster in regions that have a similar cultural environment (Valk 1998). On the other hand, there are also significant problems concerning changes in identity deriving from the major psychological differences within the population of the accession countries. How is the population of new member states willing to accommodate to the existing European identity structure? The idea of the enlargement of the EU is that in addition to the broadening of the EU structure, the European mentality is going to spread as well. For the researchers it is necessary to know to what degree the new contingent – the previous communist block – is going to identify itself with Europe and how important they deem Europe to be. In this context it is interesting to see how the three Baltic countries could be distinguished against the background of other CEE countries like the Visegrad countries or Bulgaria-Romania.

We can attribute some tendencies, which were found in the study, to the phenomenon of opening up the Polish and Estonian societies. The attitude to the Euro-sceptics in some way resembles the established patterns of dissent in these societies in general. Encouraging more calm attitudes in these questions, a wider spreading of cultural patterns of tolerance in these societies is a question of time.

In the present EU enlargement process, traditional aspects of national identities of the applicant countries have been undergoing a continuous and significant change. Changes in cultural and national identity crucially intertwine with the changes in the environment – with the political and economic transformations taking place in these societies. Alongside with the changes in the multiple layers of cultural and national identities, a common European identity is consolidating by EU integration, which might complement, compete with, shape or replace the

existing identities. The results of the current study would significantly increase the level of understanding the common foundations of unity between the different regions of Eastern Europe, which are also essentially unique. As Poland and Estonia in the Baltic Sea region are entering the European Union, a better understanding will help to ease the pre-accession difficulties in order to acquire the political readiness necessary for accession.

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Annex 1

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 the EU policies (especially in agriculture)
2R New member states adapt into existing system, the EU policies do not change very much as a consequence
3L EU is under way to a bureaucratic organisation, unable to reform oneself
3R EU retains the ability to develop and reform
4L Regional co-operation (Visegrad, Nordic, Baltic) is more important for successful accession to EU
4R Bilateral negotiations with Brussels is more essential for successful accession
5L EU is capable to guarantee peace, stable development and security
5R EU is not able to cope with conflicts and guarantee security in every member state
6L Minorities rights protection is guaranteed in the EU
6R Minorities rights protection in EU is not well enough guaranteed
7L Common law of EU is an essential guarantee for democracy in the member states
7R EU has to intervene permanently into domestic politics of its member states as existing legislation is not sufficient for guaranteeing stability
8L Free movement of employees between the member states gives better job opportunities for people

8R Common labour market causes many problems due to the migrants adaptation

9L In the EU human rights protection is guaranteed well enough

9R Human rights protection in the EU has become an empty cliché

10L EU-accession endangers the preservation (development) of Polish language and culture

10R EU membership promotes and encourages the development of Polish language and culture

11L Primary are the liberties and welfare of EU citizens

11R Primary are the aims of the EU as supranational body

12L EU is a supranational formation that in a certain degree restricts decision-making and independence of the states themselves

12R EU is a voluntary union, originating based on? common decision-making and rights delegated to the union

13L Partial legalisation of drugs will contribute to the restriction of illegal drugs use

13R Partial legislation of drugs will contribute to the spread of drugs use