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Russia and the OSCE- The Influence of Interested Third and Disinterested Fourth Parties on the Conflicts in Estonia and Moldova

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I. Introduction

This article aims to analyse the influence of external actors on the domestic conditions surrounding the conflicts in Estonia and Moldova under the guiding question: Why did the Moldovan conflict turn violent while the Estonian remained peaceful?

Thus, the main question here is not on the causes of conflict, but on the causes of the use of violence in the course of the conflict. The assumption is that parties to a conflict have to amass sufficient material and socio-psychological conflict capacity (*Konfliktfähigkeit*) in order to resort to violence.

By analysing the influence of external actors on the course of events in Moldova and Estonia, I am not trying to uncover the underlying causes of the conflict as such. My aim is to isolate the contribution of third and fourth parties at the conflict level, especially with regard to the development of the socio-psychological and material conflict potential among the parties.

In order to analyse the influence of interested third and more or less disinterested fourth parties on the course of events in Moldova and Estonia one has, of course, to take into account the internal developments in these two states. It is crucial to distinguish actions that have been taken by outsiders and at what stage of the conflict and what the internal field looked like at that time. While outsiders may not influence the course of a given conflict, the impact their actions have is determined by various factors at the internal level. However while concentrating on external actors I will outline the internal factors just briefly in this article².

For the Moldovan case, which will be discussed first, Russia, the Ukraine, and Romania are identified as interested third parties, while the OSCE and the UN have been involved as disinterested fourth parties. In the Estonian case, only Russia will be discussed as an interested third party, while the Nordic countries will be included alongside the OSCE and other international organizations in the group of more or less disinterested fourth parties.

¹ This article was written in the framework of the research project "Integration and nation-building in bi-cultural post-Soviet societies, the cases of Moldova and Estonia", that was jointly financed by The Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian University Council over the Program for Eastern Europe. The findings of this project will be published in Kolstø (2001).

² For a broad review of the internal factors see the respective contributions in the aforementioned publication.

II. The Dniester Conflict -- Russia's War or the International Community's Failed Prevention?

A. *Russia and the 14th Army*

In order to determine Russia's impact on the events in Moldova it is important to distinguish between the official Russian Foreign Policy, on the one hand, and the unofficial 'side track' diplomacy of Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi and the red-brown forces in the State Duma, on the other. While President Yeltsin supported Moldovan independence, Alexander Rutskoi posed as the protector of the Russian population and the Russian military personnel in Moldova. (Litvak 1996:215) The pro-Soviet forces in Moscow were natural allies of the Dniester leadership from the very outset. To be sure, the view expressed by some leaders of the Moldovan Popular Front, that the Dniester problem was a product of the Soviet center pure and simple and would have been instantly 'resolved' if Moldova had agreed to become a party to a renewed Soviet Union (Interview with Valeriu Matei, Chisinau, October 1998) seems too simplistic. It does not take into account the objectively existing contradictions emerging in Moldovan society in 1988/89, which, however, will not be discussed in depth in this article. The fact that pro-Soviet forces in Moscow had a decisive impact on the course of events in Moldova, however, is indisputable.

In September 1990, troops from the Soviet Ministry of the Interior protected the Congress in Tiraspol that declared the independence of the PMSSR. At the same time Soviet paramilitaries were supplying Dniester volunteers with weapon (Kaufman 1996:130). Until the putsch in August 1991 the Dniester leadership was being backed by pro-Soviet forces from Moscow, including the KGB, and thereby able to consolidate its hold on the Dniester industrial centers. In this period, Chisinau effectively lost control over these parts of Dniestria although it managed to hold on to some police stations, *in casu* in Bender. Moldovan security forces were able to arrest the Dniester leader Igor Smirnov in the aftermath of the putsch, but when Dniestria started a blockade against the right bank and threatened to escalate the conflict by continuous strikes and blockades Smirnov was released. The readiness—material and psychological—to engage in a civil war was less developed at this stage in Moldova than in Dniestria—even though it was believed that the conservative forces in Moscow, that had backed the Dniester leadership until now, had been defeated. The crucial factor in this period was that parts of the 14th Army were stationed in Dniestria. The officers of these units refused to switch to Moldovan jurisdiction and declared that they would remain loyal to the leadership of the PMSSR (Gribincea 1998:25). They expressed their readiness to come to the defense of the Dniester region (Kaufman/Bowers 1998:132) and supplied the newly created Dniester defense forces with arms. The commander of the 14th Army General Gennadii Yakovlev even accepted for a brief period

the post of Dniester Minister of Defense. Although his successor, Iurii Netkachev, was more eager to keep the 14th Army out of the brewing conflict he was unable to do so. Most of the 14th Army personnel were native to the region and therefore not outside actors, but part of the society in which the conflict had emerged. The officers of the 14th Army started to train the Dniester paramilitaries and equipped them with arms partly on their own accord, partly as a result of some pressure brought to bear from Moscow. Official Russian authorities had no direct control over the military units stationed in Dniestria and it is unclear to what extent Tiraspol headquarters really controlled all of its sub-units (Mörike 1998:124).

Thus, although the Dniester leadership in September 1991 lost its direct support from Moscow it gained the crucial support of the Soviet Military stationed in the region. This support was important not only from a material, but also from a psychological point of view. Indeed, far from feeling abandoned in September 1991, the Dniester leadership felt strengthened. Moreover, they perceived the region as a basis from where the fight for a renewed Soviet Union should start. The discussions on a possible union of Moldova and Romania and the discriminatory policy of the Druc government in 1990-91 had also given the Dniester leadership powerful ammunition in its aggressive propaganda campaign. It was therefore ready to raise the level of violence and started a ‘creeping putsch’ (Socor 1992) in the winter of 1991-92 in order to bring the whole of Dniestria and Bendery under its control.

When the violent conflict triggered by the creeping putsch escalated into outright war during the spring of 1992 the Dniester side was now fully able to conduct a violent conflict. The Dniesters were socially and psychologically prepared to use force and they were well equipped with large amounts of small arms as well as with armored personnel carriers and even tanks (Gribincea 1998:26, 89). The Moldovan Government, which had become less nationalistic after the ousting of Prime Minister Mircea Druc in May 1991, initially, in fact, took a defensive stance. Moldovan police and armed volunteers basically tried to hold on to the positions they already controlled and, in contrast to the media-campaign in Dniestria, (Hanne 1998:21) there was no active pro-war propaganda in official media. However, perceiving the Dniester secession as a threat to Moldova’s independence and apparently miscalculating both the readiness of the 14th Army to engage openly on the Dniester side and the reluctance of Russian President Yeltsin to restrain the Dniesters, the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur finally ordered the assault on Bendery. The result was a bloodbath in a decisive military defeat for the Moldovan side. The 14th Army, since June 1992 under General Lebed’s command and thus back under Moscow’s control, helped to restore and to secure peace in the aftermath of the Bendery tragedy, but it also secured Dniestria’s de facto secession.

The Russian Government which at least until the outbreak of hostilities in Dniestria had conducted a liberal foreign policy, might be held accountable for the actions taken by the 14th Army under Lebed’s command, but not earlier. In September 1991 the 14th Army had practically ceased taking orders from Moscow and Yeltsin’s decision to transfer the 14th Army from CIS to Russian jurisdiction by decree on 1

April 1992 was countered by the Dniester leader Igor Smirnov with an invitation to the officers to join the Dniester guard (Mörike 1998:125). Only when General Lebed took over command at the height of hostilities in June 1992 was the maverick army brought back under Moscow's control. Initially, in fact, the Moldovan President Mircea Snegur regarded the Russian President as an ally against the pro-Soviet forces³. Consequently, Snegur blamed only conservative forces in Russia for the actions of the 14th Army and asked Yeltsin to take measures.⁴

As far as the Russian President and his Foreign Minister were concerned there was no active support for the Dniester leadership. At the same time, however, not much pressure was being put on other Russian actors to restrain them from lending support to the Dniester cause either. Unlike the Baltics, Moldova was not closely monitored from the West and hence, there was not much need for the Russian Government to curtail the actions of nationalistic forces (McGwire 1998:86). Yeltsin did therefore not interfere to stop Rutskoi's support for Dniestria and declared the actions taken by members of the 14th Army the business of the concerned local population (Gribincea 1998:27). These actions, as well as the opening of branches of Russian banks in Dniestria and the visit of Vice-President Rutskoi and Presidential Adviser Sergei Stankevich to Dniestria, however, encouraged the Dniester leadership to take a firm stance against Chisinau. Moreover, the Russian media and even intelligence units of the Odessa Military Command undertook a massive pro-Dniester, anti-Moldovan media campaign, further emboldening the Dniesters. Thus, the official declarations by Foreign Minister Kozyrev and President Yeltsin in 1992 notwithstanding, the overall influence of Russian actors on the Moldovan conflict played a considerable role in its escalation. In Moldova, where apparently no Western interests were at stake, conservative forces had considerable freedom to act without clear countermeasures taken by the Russian government. The material and psychological backing the Dniester leadership received from parts of the 14th Army as well as from conservative forces in Moscow considerably enhanced their capacity to engage in armed conflict.

B. Two Less Interested Third Parties: Romania and the Ukraine

Neither Romania nor the Ukraine had a decisive influence on the course of events in Dniestria. Both countries participated in the quadripartite mechanism, which was set up in spring 1992 in order to find a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiations and to monitor the agreed cease-fires. However, the mechanism failed, mainly for two reasons: First, it did not include the Dniester side, and as PMR was not effectively controlled by Russia this meant that this negotiation body did not include all conflicting parties. Second, in the course of 1992 Kozyrev had been compelled to change his multilateral foreign

³ Interview with the former Security Adviser to the Moldovan President, Nicolae Chirtoaca, Chisinau August 1998.

⁴ See *Moldova Suverana* 29 February 1992 and 7 March 1992.

policy in a more unilateral direction. Russia now preferred a process that would keep both Romania and Ukraine out of Dniester affairs.

Moreover, when the conflict slowly escalated in 1991 both countries were mainly preoccupied with internal problems. The Ukraine was still in the process of becoming an independent country while the post-Communist Romanian leadership was drawn between its nationalist reflexes to help its Moldovan brethren, on the one hand, and its general orientation toward Moscow, on the other. Thus, the Romanian support for Moldova was half-hearted. It is true that Romania did deliver small amounts of arms (Gribincea 1998:33) and, in so doing, may have enhanced the material and socio-psychological conflict preparedness of the Moldovan side. However, the claims that Romania supplied the Moldovan side with large amounts of arms, soldiers, and volunteers are products of Dniester and Russian propaganda.⁵

For Ukraine, the Dniester conflict was a sensitive issue for different reasons. Any changes of borders in the region could result in a domino effect, questioning also Ukraine's sovereignty over Northern Bucovina and Southern Bessarabia, which had been transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pact. Moreover, a success for the separatist regime in Tiraspol could give a boost for like minded extremists on Crimea. Like other governments in the region, Kiev was not at all interested in opening up Pandora's box.

The Ukraine had no interest in a permanent Russian military presence in its back yard, nor does it today, but the country was also concerned about the fate of the numerous Ukrainian population in Dniestria. The allegiances of the latter were split between Chisinau and Tiraspol and the Ukrainian population has not clearly taken side in the conflict⁶, making it even more difficult for Kiev to develop a consistent policy. Notwithstanding the lack of interest to support pro-Soviet forces in Dniestria the Ukraine was not able -- and it may well be that not everybody at the local level was willing -- to pre-empt the influx of armed Cossacks to Dniestria from Ukrainian soil. Thus, although no direct negative influences were existent in 1991-92, Kiev took no decisive actions in this period either.

So although Romania and the Ukraine took a principally pro-Moldovan stance, calling for a peaceful solution of the conflict and for the preservation of Moldova's territorial integrity, they lacked the means, and sometimes also the will, to influence developments in this direction.

C. Too Late, too Little—the OSCE and other International Efforts in Moldova

A recent article in *The Economist* (26 June 1999) claimed that Moldova is 'a country not so much forgotten as never remembered.' That this is true can hardly be disputed, at least as regards Western

⁵ Which is still the case, see for example Ozhiganov (1997).

⁶ For instance the predominantly Ukrainian village Molovata Noua on the left bank of the Dniester has been loyal to the Chisinau Government until today.

Europe. This historical lack of interest concerning the fate of this small strip of land east of the Prut was even more pronounced ten years ago and certainly played a role in regard to the Dniester conflict.

Moldova was admitted to the OSCE (then the CSCE) on 30 January, 1992 and to the United Nations on 2 March of the same year.

One may wonder whether the international recognition of the new state within its Soviet borders strengthened the confidence of Moldovan leaders and thus, contributed to the development of their socio-psychological conflict capacity. Although there is no clear evidence to that, this cannot be ruled out altogether. In any case, the preventive effect of the OSCE and the UN was quite limited.

When the Dniester conflict deteriorated into outright war, Moldova was already a member of these two organizations, although it had been so only for a short while. However, the foundations of the war had been laid in 1990/91 when Moldova was still a part of the Soviet Union and the escalation process leading to the outbreak of large-scale violence started immediately after Moldova gained independence in August 1991.

Thus, when President Snegur took the floor at the OSCE Summit in Helsinki and before the United Nations in New York in order to ask the international community for support, the time for early conflict prevention measures had already passed. However, decisive initiatives to pursue late preventative measures were not forthcoming either. The only international mediation efforts at this stage took place without Western involvement within the framework of CIS consultations and in the framework of the mentioned quadripartite mechanism.

A UN Fact Finding Mission was sent to Moldova only after the hostilities had culminated in June 1992⁷ and also the efforts made by the OSCE gained momentum too late. A OSCE Rapporteur Mission, invited to investigate the implementation of OSCE commitments, visited Moldova in March 1992 and gave a warning of the mounting tensions in the Dnestrian region. Following this report, the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE decided to keep the situation under review, but no decision for a direct involvement by the Organization was made until 14 August 1992. On that date the Chairman-in-Office mandated Adam Rotfeld as his Personal Representative to 'examine the appeal to the OSCE that it should contribute to settlement of the conflict' (15-CSO/Journal 2). Following up the conclusions drawn by Rotfeld in his final report, the Committee of Senior Officials of the OSCE, decided on 4 February 1993 to establish a long term Mission to Moldova (19-CSO/Journal 3 - Annex 3). The Mission, which became operational in April 1993, had a decisive stabilizing effect.⁸

⁷ "Misiunea de ancheta a ONU la Chisinau", *Moldova Suverana* 30 June 1992.

⁸ For an analysis of the work of the OSCE Mission to Moldova see *inter alia* Büscher (1995, 1999), Troebst (1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1998) and Welberts (1995).

The confidence and security-building measures and the mediation efforts undertaken by this Mission considerably contributed to the transformation of the conflict into a series of negotiations. A resumption of hostilities in Moldova seems unlikely today, although a resolution to the conflict is not in sight as yet.

Assessing the influence of the uninterested fourth parties in the Moldovan conflict on the basis of this short outline, we can conclude that they, to all intents and purposes, were absent in the crucial pre-war phase for three reasons:

- (1) The international community was mainly preoccupied with the crises in the Gulf and in former Yugoslavia.
- (2) The new OSCE structures for conflict prevention and conflict management were not yet effectively in place.
- (3) A general lack of interest in Moldovan affairs kept them from taking any measures, even from putting pressure on Russia.

III. Estonia—Conflict Below the Level of War

A. *The Role of Russia in the Estonian Conflict*

The Russian influence on the events in Estonia has, like in Moldova, to be seen in the light of the existence of different foreign policy actors in Moscow and against the backdrop of shifting foreign policies toward the so-called ‘near abroad.’ (see Crow 1993; Melvin 1994, 1995; Kolstø 1995). Especially, the latter has to be taken into account when analyzing the development of the conflict in Estonia in order to determine Russia’s influence on the course of events there.

After Russia proclaimed its sovereignty in June 1990, Boris Yeltsin and his reform-minded entourage had in fact been advocates of Estonian independence (Estonia and Russia 1998:17). In this early period, Russian and Baltic leaders were united in their opposition to the Soviet leadership and the pro-Soviet forces in the Baltic Republics. Thus, when OMON-troops of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior wreaked bloodshed in Vilnius and Riga in January 1991, Yeltsin traveled to Tallinn in order to back the Baltic leaders. The Russian President also opposed plans for a reunification of the Narva region with Russia, a scheme that came up in the summer of 1991 (Aklaev 1995:21). On 24 August 1991 Russia recognized Estonia’s independence even before the Soviet Union did so.

Thus, although the pro-Soviet forces united in the Intermovement and the OSTK had some backing from Moscow during the tense period of 1990-91, it was not the Russian Government that supported them, but the conservative Communists. In the aftermath of the failed putsch they were temporarily without support

from Russia. In contrast to the Moldovan situation, the Estonian Government was able to crack down upon the pro-Soviet forces not only in Tallinn, but also in the Russian-dominated industrial centers in the north-east. The city councils of Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe and Narva were dissolved and some of the radical pro-Soviet leaders were arrested (Kolstø 1995: 127, 133).

The basically friendly approach taken by the liberal Russian Government toward the Baltic states initially prevailed. The official Russian foreign policy makers, President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, were mainly interested in the economic aspects of foreign policy, and thus, in good relations with the West (Melvin 1995:1; Järve, 1997:233). The problems of the Russian diaspora were not high on the Government's agenda in 1991-92 (Jurado:1998:8). The settlers were supposed to receiving the citizenship of their host state and, if problems were to arise, they should be dealt with within the framework of national courts or international organizations such as the OSCE (Melvin 1995:11). As the Estonian-Russian Agreement from 12 January 1991 stipulated, any person living on the territory of either Estonia or the RFSR had the right to receive or retain the citizenship of the RSFSR or the Republic of Estonia in accordance with the free expression of his or her will (Kolstø 1995:116). This also held true for the Estonian case, of course. This agreement and the general 'disinterest' of the Russian government in the diaspora issue in 1991-92 actually had a stabilizing effect on the Estonian-Russian relationship. At the time, the reform-minded part of the Russian-speaking population was convinced that they would find their proper place in Estonian society and that they would be granted full rights including citizenship (Kolstø 1995:128). Thus, approximately 30 percent of non-Estonians voted for Estonian independence in the referendum on 3 March 1991 and another 30 percent are said to have expressed a wait-and-see attitude by not participating in the referendum (Kirch 1995:444).

Thus, in the very sensitive period of 1991-92, as the ground was being prepared for a violent outcome of the Dniester conflict, the Russian Government played a de-escalating role in Estonia: on the one hand by not supporting radical groups and by strengthening moderate groups on the other. At the same time, there were fewer possibilities for other actors from Russia to influence events in Estonia than in Moldova. The border was controlled effectively by Estonian border guards and no maverick units of the Soviet Army were ready to supply radicals with large amounts of small arms, thus strengthening their conflict potential. Despite frequent strikes and demonstrations in the Narva region, Tallinn also managed to keep control over the industrial centers in the north-east.

Estonian-Russian relations became more strained, however, when the 1938 Estonian Law on Citizenship was reintroduced along with quite a few restricting amendments on 26 February 1992, making the vast majority of the 600,000 Russian-speakers in Estonia stateless persons. This law, together with the adoption of the new constitution in June and further measures taken by the right-wing Government of Mart Laar, elected in September 1992, triggered a new crisis in Estonia. Moderate Russians who had supported Estonian independence felt betrayed and radical groups again gained momentum. Unlike the

internationalist propaganda promulgated by the Intermovement 1990-91, the tunes now became more nationalist in content.

At the same time, the liberal foreign policy of Andrei Kozyrev came increasingly under fire in Russia and the influence of so called national-democrats was growing. Following the war in Dniestria and the new developments in the Baltics, protecting the Russian diaspora⁹ became a priority in Russian foreign policy. (Jurado 1998:9). Consequently, the stance *vis-à-vis* Estonia became much tougher. Although Kozyrev still used the framework of international organizations like the OSCE (see section below) in order to protect Russian minorities in the ‘near abroad,’ unilateral measures increasingly came to the fore. Russia cut off the gas supply to Estonia temporarily and, in October 1992, President Yeltsin, linking the issue of Russian troops in Estonia with the fate of the Russian diaspora, announced the suspension of the troops’ withdrawal. However, in contrast to the chauvinists in the red-brown spectrum of Russian politics, the centrist-orientated national-democrats advocated only economic and diplomatic pressure (Melvin 1995:18).

When the debate on the new Estonian Law on Aliens stirred up emotions in spring 1993, the making of Russian foreign policy had already shifted from the liberals to the national-democrats (Crow 1993). The Aliens Law not only aggravated tensions within Estonia, especially in the north-east, it also provoked a strong reaction from the Russian side, including *inter alia* threats to implement economic sanctions against Estonia. However, unlike some radical forces the Russian Government did not threaten to impose military sanctions.¹⁰ In any case, although there were still some 7,000 Russian troops in Estonia, none of them were stationed in the Narva region¹¹. Thus, there was no ‘14th Army factor’ in Estonia enhancing the material and socio-psychological conflict capacity of the radicals in the north-east.

Moreover, the war in Dniestria even proved to have a negative impact on the inclination of Russian-speakers in the Narva region to resort to armed violence. To be sure, fears among them of being expelled from Estonia ran high after the debate on the Aliens Law began and disappointment with the Estonians grew even among moderate Russian-speakers. Moreover, the leadership of the Narva City Council faced imminent political obliteration in the upcoming local elections as the right to be elected was reserved for Estonian citizens. Thus, the decision to hold the long debated referendums on a special status for Narva and Sillamäe on 16 and 17 July was a logical reaction. However, the referendum was not a starting point

⁹ Who the Russian state actually considered worthy of protection among the Russian diaspora was a much disputed issue which also passed through different stages. The initial restriction to Russian “citizens” (*grazhdane*) was abandoned in late 1992 and terms like Russian-speakers (*russkoiazychnye*) and compatriots (*sootchestvenniki*) became widely used. As most of the Russian-speakers in Estonia are indeed Russians from an “ethnic” point of view this debate is of marginal relevance for this study. For more background see *inter alia* Jurado (1998), Kolstø (1995), Melvin (1994, 1995).

¹⁰ See Andrei V. Kozyrev: Heed a Russian ‘Cry of Despair’ in Estonia. *The International Herald Tribune* 14.08.1993.

¹¹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 25 June 1993.

for violent secession,¹² as in Dniestria. The lesson learned from the events in Moldova and Georgia was that there are no alternatives to negotiations.¹³

After the Estonian Local Elections and Yeltsin's bloody victory over the Parliament in October 1993, the radical forces in the Narva region as well as in Moscow were marginalized and more moderate political forces were emerging (Melvin 1995:49). Even so, there was consensus in Russia that ethnic Russians suffered injustices in Estonia, and the liberal-democratic forces in the Russian Government pushed for the conclusion of a treaty on the withdrawal of Russian troops. Finally, an agreement was reached to pull out all troops by 31 August 1994 (Kozhmiakin 1998:46; Estonia and Russia 1998:21).

Thus, it is fair to say that the tense period in the inter-ethnic relations in Estonia after the summer of 1991 did not escalate. One of the reasons for this situation was that Russian support for its diaspora was strictly confined to diplomatic and economic pressure. But this is only one part of the story. The conflict-prevention measures taken by the OSCE and other international organizations, which were virtually absent in the Moldovan case, also played a part. Moreover, the internal Estonian setting was also crucial, especially the limited support for radicals among the Russian-speaking urbanites¹⁴ and the more or less effective control of the Narva region and the borders by Estonian authorities. These and other factors severely diminished the material and socio-psychological conflict capacity of radical forces in the Estonian case and thus hindered the outbreak of full-scale violence.

As far as contradictions within the society and the perceptions of the respective sides are concerned, Estonia might have been even more conflict prone than Moldova. The question of war and peace, however, is decided by the means a conflict is dealt with.

Some tensions still remain in Estonia and the new Russian nationalism which came to the fore in late 1993 led to a more pro-active and, from an Estonian point of view, sometimes threatening Russian policy (Melvin 1994:44-48 and 1995:18-24; Jurado 1998). This was especially so with regard to several statements made by Yeltsin and Kozyrev throughout the first half of 1994, indicating a possible delay of the agreed withdrawal of Russian forces.¹⁵ However, the troops were finally pulled out, and after 1994, as Elena Jurado has noted,

"Unilateralism gave way to a renewed interest in co-operating with international organizations. More importantly, the use of force was increasingly rejected in favor of cultural mechanisms for protecting the diaspora, such as promoting Russian as a second state language, sponsoring Russian cinema, theatre and literature abroad, and preserving Russian monuments" (Jurado 1998:11).

¹² This was actually an option supported by no more than 10 percent of the population in the north-east (Smith and Wilson 1997:857).

¹³ *Izvestiia* 20 July 1993.

¹⁴ 'By 1991, Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia were the least-pro Soviet settlers in the USSR.' (Melvin 1995:36).

¹⁵ See for example, *The Baltic Independent* 7-13 January and 15-21 July 1994; *Reuter* 18 April 1994.

The Russian Government does not actively support radical groups although economic sanctions and strong-arm rhetoric have remained a permanent part of the Russian policy towards Estonia over the last years. An example to this is for instance suggestions about a Russian invasion of Estonia in a newspaper article on the ‘Strategy for reforming the military forces of the Russian Federation’ (Estonia and Russia 1998:24).. As far as the hardliners among the Russian-speaking in Estonia are concerned, they—like their counterparts in Dniestria—side with the red-brown forces in the Russian State Duma. They remain highly critical of Yeltsin and his allies and call for tougher measures against the Estonian Government.¹⁶

While Russia certainly has exerted intense diplomatic, economic, and psychological pressure on Estonia in order to influence the Estonian policy toward its Russian population, it has to be said clearly that the Russian influence on the Estonian conflict was not deleterious in the sense of provoking an outbreak of violence. On the other hand, although Russia sometimes played a de-escalatory role, it can hardly be argued that the Estonian conflict remained below the level of violence, *as a result* of Russia’s foreign policy.

B. Conflict Prevention — the OSCE and other IGOs in Estonia

Although most Western and especially the Nordic countries have shown a special interests in developments in Estonia since 1988, outright involvement in the events there could start only after Estonia regained independence in August 1991. Estonia was admitted to the OSCE (then CSCE) on 10 September 1991 and to the United Nations on 17 September. The Council of Europe also initiated its admission process at that time, linking it to an intensive program of visits, reports and inspection of laws. In line with its foreign policy approach during that time, Russia seized upon these international organizations in order to protest the violations of human rights in Estonia (Hurlburt 1997:229). Thus, international organizations became involved in the Estonian conflict at a fairly early stage. As has been argued before, in summer/autumn of 1991 the radical forces among the Russians in Estonia were in retreat, and did not enjoy much support either from Moscow or among the local Russian-speaking population (Smith and Wilson 1997; Birkenbach 1998:7) Moreover, the overall societal foundations in Estonia were conducive to a peaceful conflict management. A culture of non-violence prevailed, and most social actors in Estonia found themselves bound by Western standards of human rights and democratic values. Also the main governmental actors were inclined to use peaceful methods for conflict resolution (Birkenbach: 1997:29.) Thus, unlike in Dniestria where the first casualties were reported already in late 1990 and where the socio-

¹⁶ See for example: Pyotr Rozhok: Russkie den’gi v Estonskuiu trubu, Molodezh Estonii, Russkie Telegraf 01.09.1997.

psychological and material conditions for the wide application of violent means were already in place in 1991, the preconditions for the use of early conflict-prevention measures were still in place in Estonia. When tensions rose in the summer of 1993, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoel was already active and all parties accepted his involvement. The same was true with regard to the OSCE long-term Mission, established in February 1993.¹⁷ Moreover, several fact-finding missions from OSCE/ODIHR, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development as well as several NGOs were sent in after the reintroduction of the Citizenship Law,¹⁸ giving all parties substantive legal arguments for their cause. The ‘facts’ identified by these reports were partly contradictory which means that no really undisputed facts were established (Birkenbach 1997:32) However, both sides could single out convenient parts from these reports and put them to use in the public debate. This helped to keep the conflict peaceful by putting a premium on political and legal arguments rather than on violence. Moreover, the international attention afforded the conflict must itself be regarded as an important preventive factor.

As mentioned, besides establishing certain facts regarding the Estonian policy toward the Russia-speaking population, IGOs made several constructive recommendations in order to improve the relationships between the two communities. In the case of the Council of Europe the fulfillment of these recommendations involved elaborating conditions for Estonia’s admission to the CoE. By contrast, admission to the OSCE was ‘free of charge’ for Estonia and, as far as the OSCE-principles laid down in the Helsinki Final Act, and in the Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension and others are concerned, they are just politically binding ‘soft laws.’ However, given Estonia’s long-term objective of close association with the West and its need for Western security assurances *vis-à-vis* Russia, it could not but listen to Western recommendations—at least up to a point. As the debate on new language requirements and other critical remarks by the OSCE in 1999 (OSCE/ODIHR 1999:16) demonstrate, these recommendations are rarely implemented without additional incentives or a measure of diplomatic pressure being brought to bear to ease their passage. Especially the linkage made by the European Union between the adoption of the High Commissioner’s recommendations and the possibility of EU membership for Estonia was a strong inducement for the Estonian Government. Without these linkages the OSCE’s influence on Estonian policy toward the Russian-speaking population would certainly have been lower. This again is demonstrated by the Estonian view that the OSCE should terminate its activities in the country as Estonia gets closer to EU admission.

Thus, the OSCE and other IGOs had some incentives and leverages at hand to influence Estonia’s policy toward the Russian-speaking population. These organizations were able to strengthen the hand of the

¹⁷ For an analysis of the work of the CSCE/OSCE Mission to Estonia, see *inter alia*, Birkenbach (2000), Pettai (1999), Nishimura (1999), Lahelma (1999), Törnudd (1994).

¹⁸ For a selection of reports see Birkenbach (1997:96).

moderate forces on the Estonian side (*ibid.* 9) as well as to bolster the Estonian commitment to adhere to the standards of Western human rights and democratic values in general through their interconnecting and mutually reinforcing efforts. This way they could achieve legislative improvements regarding the status of Russian-speakers in Estonia (Law on Aliens, Law on the Estonian Government to renounce the use of force).

The OSCE long-term Mission played a special part in the conflict prevention activities of the international community. It was the only institution that was permanently present on the ground and had close contacts with Estonian officials on all levels as well as with representatives of the Russian-speaking communities and ordinary people. The Mission has undertaken a kind of continuous lobbying of Estonian politicians in order to change the most conflict-generating provisions in the Estonian legislation, but it has also dealt with individual cases. It has thus acted 'as a safety-valve for the non-citizen population, often not knowing where else to turn to with their problems.' (Lahelma 1999:25). Moreover, the Mission has monitored elections and language exams and has tried also to facilitate dialogue between the communities by organizing round-tables, seminars, and workshops. Lately, it became also more engaged in the organization of special integration projects for the non-Estonian population. Especially during the crisis situation arising in the summer of 1993 the Mission was very active, defusing tensions through conversations with and mediation between leaders in Narva and Estonian Government officials (OSCE Mission to Estonia 1993a; Törnudd 1994:73-86). It combined these mediation efforts with monitoring and early warning work (Lahelma 1999:35). During this period the Mission pressed also for the establishment of a body for institutionalized dialogue, which was finally set up as the Presidential Round Table (OSCE Mission to Estonia 1993b).

Thus, it is noteworthy that the OSCE not only acted upon the Estonian Government, but also upon the representatives of the Russian-speakers and finally upon the individual members of the community itself. In particular it tried to defuse tensions arising from administrative problems and misperceptions. Moreover, also on the non-Estonian side, the standing of moderate forces grew thanks to involvement by the OSCE and subsequent official contacts and invitations to seminars, the receipt of funds for projects and NGOs etc. However, as was the case on the Estonian side, not everybody on the non-Estonian side was happy with the work of the OSCE.¹⁹ But being criticized by radicals from both sides, and praised by the moderates²⁰ is perhaps not the worst thing that can happen to an outside party in a conflict situation.

We cannot know for sure whether war would have broken out in Estonia without the involvement of the OSCE and other IGOs. It seems safe to say, however, that the conflict prevention activities undertaken by

¹⁹ This is widely documented in the Estonian Russian-language press. See for example *Molodezh Estonii* 11 April 1995, 19 July 1997, 28 July 1997, or *Estonia* 2 July 1997, 7 July 1997 and 10 July 1997.

²⁰ Positive comments on the Mission were expressed to the author by, *inter alia*, the Russian MP Sergei Ivanov, the Russian member of the Narva City Council Vladimir Khomiakov, and the then Minister without Portfolio Andra Veideman, in the course of personal interviews conducted in Tallinn in September 1998 and in Narva in March 1999.

these organizations influenced developments in Estonia a positive direction.²¹ Fears and doubts among the Russian-speaking population were considerably reduced and moderate forces were empowered on both sides, thus, making it more difficult for radical forces to gain ground. A societal base for the peaceful resolution of conflicts was already in place and was further strengthened by the establishment of additional mechanisms, like the Presidential Round Table.

IV. Conclusions

Starting from the assumption that the roots of internal conflicts can be found within the given society, I have nevertheless argued that external actors can influence the course of events to a certain extent. This is especially true for the conflict level where outsiders may enhance or curtail the material and socio-psychological conflict capacity of the parties to a conflict. They might do so, however, only within certain limits. For example, if at least one party to a conflict has already reached a crucial level in their conflict capacity and consequently is ready to use force, outside interventions in order to prevent war have to have a different shape than when no such readiness to use force exists. In other words, if the time for early prevention has passed, late prevention and crisis management are the only options left.

In the Moldovan case, the period when early prevention through outside actors might have been successful, such involvement was clearly missing as it was in the period for late prevention. Disinterested fourth parties got involved in the conflict only at the stage of postwar conflict management. This is not to incriminate solely the OSCE and the UN. In the Estonian case, the conflict did not escalate at an early stage mainly for reasons that can be found at the level of civil society, thus buying time for effective prevention measures to be conducted. If the OSCE had had more time to take effective measures before the outbreak of hostilities, the escalation from conflict to war might have been prevented also in Moldova. But this is pure speculation. What remains to be said in the Estonian case is that effective conflict prevention through disinterested fourth parties took place because there was (a) an opportunity and (b) an interest to do so. By contrast, in the Moldovan case there was (a) only a limited window of opportunity to undertake preventive action and (b) also an equally limited interest to do so.

As far as Russia's influence on the conflicts in Estonia and Moldova is concerned it can be said that the decisive difference in these two cases cannot be found in official Russian foreign policy. The decisive external factor to enhance the conflict capacity of the radicals in Dniestria was the presence of the 14th Army in Moldova. Given the fact that Moldova, unlike Estonia, lost control over the Russified industrial

²¹ For a critical assessment see (Birckenbach 1997:49-60).

centers, other outsiders like Cossacks or semi-official Russian delegations could also enter the region, giving the radicals a further boost. Both factors were absent in Estonia where Western interests provided an additional shield against Russian provocations.

Thus, if there had been no maverick 14th Army in Moldova, and decisive Western interests in peace and stability in Moldova, the Dniester conflict might have avoided the path leading to war. But this is again speculation. The overall conclusion of this article is that in the Moldovan case we can identify a strongly negative Russian impact and a lack of impact from the West and IGOs on the conflict level, whereas we have a lack of negative Russian impact and a decidedly positive impact from the West and IGOs in the Estonian case. It would be an exaggeration to argue that Russian influence and the 14th Army caused the war in Dniestria while the OSCE saved the peace in Narva, but we can say that the settings on the societal level in Moldova and Estonia were considerably influenced by these two factors.

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