The new Eastern neighbours of the European Union on the way to
democracy

How to support civil society?

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Foreword

This study gives an overview of the relations of Estonia and the EU with three countries now situated at the Eastern border of the EU: Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The main focus of the study is the development of democracy and civil society in the three countries where the transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union has not been running as smoothly as in Estonia.

The aim of the study is to help the Estonian state and first and foremost the non-governmental organisations to find efficient ways of passing the experience of our own transition period to the countries who share a similar fate and whose problems today remind us partly of the first years of the restoration of Estonian independence.

In order to be able to help our neighbours it is inevitable to know their needs, objectives and problems. The material used in the study includes interviews made by experts from the target countries with the leaders and active members of the non-governmental organisations in the three countries. The study also takes a look at the relations of Estonia with the three new Eastern neighbours of the EU. On the basis of this data and analysis the research group presents recommendations to Estonian non-governmental organisations, government and politicians.

The research group came to the conclusion that during its process of establishing civil society Estonia has gained a lot of experience that can be helpful for Ukrainian, Moldovan and Belarussian organisations. Assistance and good advice is needed for instance regarding cooperation between non-governmental organisations themselves and between non-governmental organisations and the public sector (including municipalities) as well as relations with the EU.

The research group consisted of Kristi Raik from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Vahur Made from the Estonian School of Diplomacy, Margit Säre from the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation and columnist Enn Soosaar. Each article expresses the personal opinions and interpretations of the author, which are not necessarily shared by other members of the group. However, the final conclusions and recommendations are common to the group.

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The European Union and the Neighbourhood Policy:

Current possibilities, prospects for the future

Relations with neighbouring countries became especially important and active in the European Union after the end of the Cold War when the post World War II division of Europe into two ideologically and militarily hostile camps ended. All eight Central and Eastern European countries that became new members of the EU on May 1, 2004, had co-operated closely with old member states prior to the enlargement. The conscious influence on the progress of the neighbouring countries through various forms of co-operation played a significant role in the democratisation process of the former totalitarian countries and in their more or less smooth transition from planned to market economy.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a special concept and field of activities is a considerably new initiative launched in 2003. Implementation of any policy is connected to specific people and projects. Thus the success of the ENP will to a large extent depend on how the participants perceive the needs and, above all, the possibilities they are facing.

The following will try to give an overview of the problems and perspectives that affect or may affect the approach and framework for action of the EU now and in the near future. Broad co-operation with neighbouring countries, including, for instance, planting the seed of democracy on the other side of the border, is a part of the purposeful action of the European Union and its citizens. Nevertheless, we need to understand that our options are limited and even if the ambitions to improve the world have fascinated Europeans for ages, the EU is and will remain in its essence a union that unites its members and manages their everyday lives.

At the same time we, Europeans, definitely need to realise that by far not everything will go, and neither can go, too smoothly in our beloved Europe because we are dealing with a union created and led by people, i.e. creatures full of contradictions. The Old World united or in the process of being united is facing serious problems and bottlenecks. We do not need only goals towards which to move but also analyses – and those should be much deeper and more comprehensive than the ones done thus far – to see what the progress towards these goals would bring along. Hurrah-optimism that seems to captivate many people nowadays is not a good instrument for building up a common future. After the last round of enlargement it has become especially clear the EU must avoid ostrich tactics and should be ready and capable to cope with irritating and complicated key issues.

Below I will not try to give, nor to find solutions. I just wish to pay heed to the fact that the problems concerning the present and the future of Europe and its neighbourhood relations require a much wider attention than given to it up to now. Besides acknowledging the possible pros it is necessary to critically point out also the
possible cons. The objective of the following discussion is to help the implementers of the European Neighbourhood Policy to see and to understand, as realistically and thoroughly as possible, the challenges and alternatives before them.

Enlargement as an engine for progress

The European Union has faced up to two questions since its establishment: (a) whether, where and how to enlarge and (b) how to build up the relations with its closest neighbours. These issues emerged already when the EU was still called the European Economic Union and its six founding members – four winners of World War II (France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg) and two defeated countries (Germany, Italy) – directed their attention from internal to external affairs within the framework of the 1958 Treaties of Rome.

The first question mentioned above found a practical solution in 1973 when Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the six core-members. The accession of additional full members in 1981, 1986, 1995 and 2004 confirmed that enlargement is an engine for progress of the European Union and a justification for its existence. It is interesting to note that the maximum number of states joining at the same time was three until 1995 and it rose markedly to ten in 2004. The enlargements so far have followed the principle that the Union should retain its more or less compact geographical unity after the admission of new countries.

EU’s political influence on economic co-operation with neighbouring countries has always been there and we must not underestimate the hidden pressure and visible support thanks to which power in Greece was peacefully changed from a military junta to civil government (1974) and Portugal after the elimination of Salazar and Caetano from power (1974) and Spain after the death of Franco (1975), were transformed into Western type of democracies without shocks or setbacks. The role of the EU has been even more significant in the metamorphosis of the Central and Eastern Europe (the three Baltic states included) after the ultimate collapse of the Soviet empire early in the 1990s. Without the direct interference in our “internal affairs” by the European Union and also by the United States of America the transition from planned to free market economy and the liberation from paralysing remnants of totalitarianism could not have gone as fast and successful as they did. The chance to become a full member of the EU after fulfilling the clearly prescribed conditions – political and economic criteria – encouraged both the leading elite as well as the majority of the citizens of the eight countries to make an effort to discipline themselves and change in a way that could hardly have been achieved if an attractive objective had not been offered.

The idea of a united Europe is based on two postulates. First: the free movement of capital, goods, labour and services guarantees political stability and economic welfare. Thus, the larger the territory and the population encompassed by the EU, the higher the number of people who can hope for an increased living standard and the more influential the area where democracy is the basis of the social order. Second: the neighbouring countries should not be left alone with their problems, they should be politically and economically supported. Thereby it is considered that the most secure guarantee that disciplines problematic countries is to tie them to the EU. It is preferred to offer the carrot but using the stick cannot be ruled out either, including, for instance, pressure, limited sanctions or delaying the accession.
However, no country can become a full member of the Union unless they can pass the threshold and fulfil the established criteria.

**Enlargement continues**

Currently the European Commission is holding accession negotiations with Romania and Bulgaria. The negotiations have been so successful that both countries have been promised to join in 2007. Nevertheless, difficulties with the integration of eight poor post-socialist and post-totalitarian newcomers to the family of old wealthy countries with long democratic traditions may daunt Brussels. Therefore the next round of enlargement may be delayed. On the other hand there is no doubt that Romania, Bulgaria and, either together or after them, also Croatia will become full members of the EU.

After that Albania and three former members of the Yugoslav Federation (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro-Kosovo and Macedonia) will be left outside the Union in the Balkans. These countries have more serious bottlenecks in their past and present than any other earlier candidate. Considering their geographical location in South-East Europe, i.e. the fact that in the future they will be surrounded by member states from the North, East and South. It is however, difficult to assume that the EU will leave them as an extraterritorial area.

**Sooner or later the whole Balkan region will be in the European Union.** All the same we can speculate whether the EU will try to redraw the political map of the area before absorbing it, so that the administrative borders will follow the settlements of ethnic communities in a more considerate way than until now. Or perhaps the EU would hope that accession itself would stabilize the situation and neutralize ethnic and/or religious tensions.

By requiring prior fulfilment of various criteria, the EU has set high admission standards. However, it was clearly seen already in the previous round of enlargement that it would be feasible to make concessions about a candidate’s economic readiness, the implementation of legislation and progress in democracy, if old members considered it prudent to make a political decision to accept one or another country in any case. It is likely that the importance of the above-mentioned factor will increase with the next enlargements, i.e. political arguments will have a more significant impact on the decision whether to speed up or slow down the process of enlargement.

For three European countries, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland, the door has been open already for years. It is hard to assess when the three will use this opportunity. We could presume that in Norway, and thereafter in Iceland, there could be a change of mind after future elections, and citizens will start to understand something that has been clear to the political elite and economic circles for a long time: that it is more beneficial to be inside, i.e. involved in decision-making process than just to be accepted as a trading partner and to be dependent on the other European countries, who decide the legal acts and regulations that are regularly produced in Brussels.

Thus we may presume that in ten-fifteen years the whole Old World that can be united on their mutual geopolitical and cultural background will be united and that the number of EU member states will exceeded thirty and its population half a billion. In other words, these European nations, which have historically been and in the majority continue to be either Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox in South-East Europe, plus communities of a few million
Muslims in the Balkans, would have formed a union where more or less similar principles and values will be followed in their political and economic activities.

**Clouds gathering on the horizon**

In December 2004 the European Council decided to start accession negotiations with Turkey. Several problems arise in connection with this, including the question of the borders of Europe as well as that/these of the European Union. A number of top politicians of EU countries have publicly expressed doubt, and will most likely do so in the future, about how wise and reasonable is the decision concerning the accession of a Middle-Eastern country to the European Union. In any case the talks are going to last for a long time - ten or even more years. At the same time we cannot exclude the possibility that even in the event of positive results at the negotiating table, the European Commission would not recommend full membership to Turkey. This would be a precedent not experienced in the EU before.

The problem should be understood by no means in a simplified manner: if Turkey acts like this, we will accept it, if like that, we will not. The EU needs Turkey with a fully functioning democracy and market economy just like Turkey needs the EU as a strategic partner. The basic question is whether EU enlargement to the Asia Minor and later even further is reasonable. In order to find an answer we need to consider various issues. The negotiations cannot be limited to just economic calculations. We must take into consideration also the human factor and the danger that the union in permanent and unrestricted expansion might lose its capacity to be as operational and manageable as expected.

In any case, there are a number of issues concerning the enlargement that Europeans should discuss and comprehend. For instance: (a) what will be the reaction of the citizens of the Union to the newcomers, i.e. to the workforce enjoying the right of free movement, who come from the societies quite different in their cultural, religious and jurisdictional background? Their understanding of the social role of an individual and of what is going on in our world has been shaped by values and assumptions diverse from those of “proper” Europeans. All European nations know from their own experience that friction and tensions occur between alien communities and particularly with ethnic minorities averting integration. (b) How will the EU management structures and the decision-making mechanisms function if the population of the new member is one of the largest and its GDP per capita one of the lowest? (c) What mess would be created within the EU and in the relations with Turkey if a situation arises where the economic and political talks have finished successfully but several member states put the accession treaty to a vote and the Turkish candidacy is turned down and the accession treaty not ratified?

Turkey and other neighbouring countries in the East, Southeast and South with whom the EU is interested in having extensive co-operation should not be left aside or neglected. In the near future the EU should seriously consider whether the enlargement could be carried out on the basis of a bilateral compromise. In other words: would it be possible to alter the model used since 1973 and to work out and to implement a so-called status of a semi-related-member state for our prospective partners? The economic (and partly also political) connections of such a country with the EU would be closer than those of a current associated member. However, not all rights, freedoms and duties of a full member of the EU would be applied (more specifically: they would be applied selectively). It would be a solution for the future from which both sides would probably benefit.
Turkish approach to special partnership is negative. “All or nothing” was the message of the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan to the EU heads of states that decided on December 17, 2004, in Brussels to start accession negotiations with the large neighbour in the Southeast. At the moment it looks as if accession negotiations would start and in the coming years continue exactly from this position. And indeed, why should Turkey – at least initially - agree to less than full membership.

The New Neighbourhood Policy

The problems are not limited to Turkey. Recently the question of Ukraine has come up. A solution left up in the air would not satisfy Kiev either. Turkey is at least in the category of a candidate country and in the near future Brussels will start accession negotiations with Ankara. At the same time the association of Ukraine with the united Europe is vague. Indeed, the new model of relations with neighbours, called the European Neighbourhood Policy, which has recently been elaborated exactly to deal with this type of neighbouring countries, should bring direct benefits to Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and several other independent states by or close to the Eastern EU border.

In one way or another, the two last months of 2004 put the EU decision-makers face to face with another problem having no simple solution. **What to do with Ukraine?** How much should the EU interfere with shaping the country’s vision of the future? The Western-minded Viktor Yushchenko won the presidential elections in the third (!) round thanks to the Orange Revolution, more specifically: thanks to the persistent and dedicated support of the active part of the civil society. Just like Georgians a year earlier, the Ukrainians demonstrated, on the one hand, deep dissatisfaction with the progress of the country thus far and, on the other hand, the wish to be the master in their own house. The President, after being sworn into office, declared that one of his first foreign policy objectives was to initiate a three-year reform programme, harmonised with the EU, which would target freedom of speech, legality, respect for democratic values, free market, competition, fight against corruption, etc. Yushchenko hopes to get the country moving in the right direction already by 2007 and wishes to start official negotiations concerning Ukrainian accession to the EU in the same year. In fact, the new leadership has gone even further with their ambitious goals. During his visit to Germany in March 2005 Yushchenko declared that the Ukrainian accession to the EU will surely take place before 2016 (**Allgemeine Zeitung Mainz**, 09.03.2005).

EU member states, the European Commission and the European Parliament are obliged to come up with a position fairly soon **defining the conditions for Ukraine to start the accession talks and deciding the height of the jumping bar that this country has to leap over** in order to become a member. The EU cannot say “no” to an official application when it is presented because EU documents give a right of appeal to all European countries. Let us cite the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe where article I-1 paragraph 2 clearly states that “The Union shall be open to all European States which respect its values and are committed to promoting them together”. **Compared to Turkey Ukraine is a European country par excellence** – fifth as regards its size of population (not considering Russia).

At the same time **Ukrainian preparations for EU membership thus far are, as a matter of fact, insufficient** and it is by no means certain that Kiev will be able in three years to transform the country to the extent that Brussels would agree to start official accession
negotiations with it. For sure two additional factors should be taken into account in the case of Ukraine. While any country outside the EU does not oppose the accession of Turkey, neither Brussels nor Kiev can disregard Russia's attitude concerning Ukraine. And suppose Ukrainians will face the real choice, say, in ten or fifteen years – will the majority prefer full membership in the EU on the assumption that the relations with its Slavonic neighbour to the East may weaken, or be put in jeopardy?

**Does enlargement have limits?**

Let us come back to the question that was already mentioned before and that has unfortunately been discussed very little in the EU so far. Thus, does enlargement have any limits, and if it does, how should we determine them? Is there a line the EU must not overstep, for instance a maximum number of member states, or the size of the population (how many eating mouths and working hands), or to the size of territory that should not be exceeded? How and to what extent should the historical, cultural and religious background and, in a broad sense, the mentality of the acceding countries be taken into account at enlargement? Whether and to what extent should be considered the attitudes and opinions of the ordinary citizens forming the Union, especially if it is known (on the basis of opinion polls) that the majority of commoners has a sceptical, even xenophobic approach to newcomers, that is being afraid of losing their specific local characteristics and expressing a clear opposition or dissatisfaction to the blending of nations?

Two so-called ideological postulates of European unification were mentioned earlier. It is necessary to add a third one because the EU was founded to achieve success and results. Thus the question of the question is: what is the optimal size that still ensures that the union of countries and nations can function efficiently and is still manageable? It is not a theoretical speculation but a practical, even existential necessity. Europeans cannot let the situation to get out of hand so they will not find one nice day that the EU has turned into a big monster that cannot be administered democratically and kept functioning in an efficient way. Europeans have to avoid facing the fact in the future that internal tensions and opposing interests of different regions and ethnic communities are greater than the capacity and will of the Union to solve them.

Besides the EU there are three large regions in the world that are economically and politically integrated: China (population 1.299 million, literacy 86%, GDP per capita $5000), India (population 1.065 million, literacy 59.5%, GDP per capita $2900) and the USA (population 293 million, literacy 97%, GDP per capita $37,800). By the way, the same source, The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2005, from where these statistics are quoted, gives the following figures concerning Estonia: 1.341 million, 99.8% and $12 300.

For obvious reasons the EU cannot follow the traits of the two largest countries. Although the Chinese economy is developing rapidly, there is a one-party dictatorship in the country, while health and social protection for the whole population are almost non-existent and environmental problems are going to affect us like a bomb with a time fuse, etc. Although India is one of the largest democracies in the world, extensive poverty and the lack of initiative by the majority of the citizens hinder the development of the country. As a typical developing country, India can ensure decent education, health care and pension insurance just for the wealthy minority. The first tenth of the population – 130 million in China and 106 million in India – impresses with its largeness, potential and industry. They are the initiators
and producers of the society, but also the main profiteers. EU’s goal and justification for existence is, however, different – a balanced development of the whole society.

We do have to learn a lot from the USA, especially when we accept the most important difference: the USA is a country of immigrants and a melting pot of nations while the EU consists of, and will do so in the future, of many countries and nations who are all interested in preserving their individual characteristics (language, culture, special local traits). The EU cannot directly pursue the success story of the USA.

In the other hand, Europeans should be aware of the fact that the last extensive enlargements that brought about a significant increase of US territory took place in the middle of the 19th century – later on only smaller territories with relatively small populations have been attached or acceded. Mississippi joined the union in 1817 as the 20th state, Wisconsin merged in 1848 as the 30th state, South Dakota in 1889 as the 40th state and Utah in 1896 as the 45th. Afterwards Oklahoma joined in 1907, New Mexico and Arizona in 1912, and as the two last ones, Alaska and Hawaii, in 1959. In the 20th century no one spoke seriously about the political integration (let us stress the word political) of Mexico, Central-America or the islands in the Caribbean Sea with the USA. Therefore it can be concluded that obviously a well functioning state, or a union of states, does have an optimal size. The Americans have, in any case, understood that too large a union might have its drawbacks.

More or less integration?

Further integration between member states has been a long-lasting goal of the EU. However, it has not been possible to agree how far it is reasonable to go with internal coherence and what would be the recommended level of mutual integration within the Union to be reached, for example, by 2015 or 2030. One of the reasons for that is the reluctance most member states have against a structure that could, or should be defined as the United States of Europe. They see a bureaucratic federal state decreasing their decision-making power and influence and are afraid that it will, in any case, reduce ethnic and regional peculiarities.

As a remark it should be noted that European nations do not have a common and widely accepted definition and an implementation model for a federation. The etymological approach (foederatus in Latin means being in a union, connected by a treaty) does not help and the EU cannot take example of the current federations (Switzerland, Germany, the UK or the USA). Biased politicians on purpose often mix it up and claim that a federal state is the same as an unitary state. Let us point out also that doubts and fears about making the EU more compact concern first and foremost political integration, i.e. the accumulation of power to the central institutions, structures and bureaucracy. No one seems to oppose economic integration, on the condition that the principles of liberal market economy will be preserved.

The question of the level of integration between countries in the future EU is not an academic one. A lot will depend on the choice the Europeans are going to make. Actually, political integration, the limits of enlargement and the Neighbourhood Policy are in mutual correlation. The main rule is: a less integrated union favours enlargement, whereas more integration and mutual co-operation within the EU makes the Union more selective (if not opposing) towards the accession of new members. In fact, the Neighbourhood Policy will depend on what is going to prevail, in other words, on the choice of the European nations – to
what extent they will turn their attention, resources and readiness for compromise to internal questions and to what extent to foreign affairs.

It is possible to **foresee three ways of development** for the coming decades in the EU. We cannot predict now, in 2005, which of them will become a reality. **All the scenarios have their pros and cons, supporters and opponents.** The fact that the EU has not come to an agreement concerning the main question – in the case of which scenario the pros outweigh the cons – makes the decision even more complicated. Therefore we cannot either rule out the **fourth, i.e. the black scenario**, according to which the decision-makers in the EU decision-making bodies (European Parliament, European Commission, EU Council, European Council and referenda in member states) are unable to reach an agreement, and thus both the enlargement as well as internal integration will depend on the opportunistic and changing positions of the unstable majority.

First: **enlargement will continue according to the model used until now.** The door is open for every country that has reached the necessary minimum level in the democratisation process and is able more or less, to fulfil the established criteria concerning free market, legislation, administrative capacity, etc. In fifteen years all Southeast European countries, Turkey and Ukraine are going to be full members of the EU. Accession negotiations are being held with three Tran Caucasian and several Middle-Eastern and North-African countries. The EU has become the largest economic area in the world. The four freedoms of the common market are being followed and it is still believed that the best way to restrain unstable neighbours and to show the world European tolerance and solidarity is to engage with them through the Union. Although the Constitutional Treaty is in force, the EU has become a weak conglomerate. Within the large Europe there is a new EU with a limited number of members whose main aim is deepening mutual integration.

Second: **the EU becomes closed – a Fortress Europe is formed.** The accession of Southeast European countries is delayed. With great difficulties the seven in the region are finally accepted as members and by this enlargement is declared to be finished. The Old World has been united in its historical-cultural and geopolitical “integrity”. In the future attention is mainly turned towards internal problems and to ensure the super union’s capability to act. This will bring along many drastic changes. Immigration to the EU is strictly limited, the EU requires unconditional respect from foreigners for what is regarded to be European values and accepts as an inevitability differences between the wealthy and the poor, the old and the new member states, etc. Conservatism in politics is dominating. Economic co-operation with neighbours continues but with obstacles. As a counter-reaction to the closing of the EU door, the Turks, Eastern-Slavs and Arabs may try to form their own alternative economic-political structures.

Third: **the EU is looking for a compromise.** Enlargement slows down but does not finish completely. The hurrah-optimists are calmed down and a balance is sought between real possibilities and courageous future visions, aiming to avoid the EU from becoming a poorly managed and malfunctioning economic colossus. Such new forms and possibilities of co-operation and cohabitation with neighbours are looked for that would be flexible and would not constitute an inhibiting burden for the EU.

**Neighbours are not alike**
Let us emphasize again that in 2005 it is difficult (in fact, even impossible) to predict how large the EU is going to be and how weak or strong will be the bonds that will unite member states in the future. At the same time it is clear that the states bordering our large Union all the way from Northeast to Southwest are different in terms of their background, political structures and future objectives. We can also be sure that the EU continues to be interested in deeper economic co-operation with its neighbours as well as in the fact that the neighbours would, as much as possible accept the same principles; the values of market economy and democracy that the EU member states are guided by.

We can broadly divide the neighbours into four groups.

(1) Countries that will join the EU sooner or later – Southeast Europe, including the whole Balkan area. As mentioned earlier, besides the economic and political readiness of the countries involved, the political decisions of the European Council and/or the European Commission will play an important role, which may either speed up or slow down the real admission process.

Countries with which the EU is very much interested in having a close relationship but whose full membership is, nevertheless, problematic – Turkey. Some problems concerning Turkey were mentioned above. A deeper look at them is not the subject of this analysis. Let us just point out that Turkey is becoming a key country in many respects. If the negotiators of the EU should be able to elaborate the qualifications of a privileged partner (or semi-member) and make it acceptable to Turkey, then the same status could be offered to several other countries as well who may now or in the future knock on EU’s door. On the other hand, if Turkey becomes a full member of the EU in ten years, it will not be the last acceding country. Enlargement will, as a matter of fact, become permanent and holding back new candidates, if they would come up, will be almost impossible. Indeed, if the EU has moved beyond the boundaries of geopolitical Europe, why should not also North-Africa and Middle-East or maybe even ancient Persia and Central-Asia become members of the common market (selectively as a start but in corpore later). Though it is the music of distant future we must at least be aware of the potential developments.

Countries in the East that could, in case of favourable developments, become either full or half members of the EU at an undetermined time in the future. Among these countries there are first and foremost Ukraine and Moldova. However, neither Belarus, Georgia, Armenia nor Azerbaijan could be excluded, if we mention only the administrative units of the former Soviet Union. At present the relations of the EU with these countries are based on different projects and initiatives deriving from the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Countries that in the foreseeable future will most probably remain the EU’s strategic economic partners without an interest to become a full member of the EU – Russia. Also the USA, Canada or even Australia and New-Zealand could be added conditionally to this list.
Estonia and the European Neighbourhood Policy

In the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the interest of Estonia as a full member of the EU (and the interest of the European Movement in Estonia) is naturally focused on the countries with which we partly share the same experience, i.e. on the so-called former Soviet republics. Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians know and understand these former republics better than any other current or future neighbours of the EU. In addition, we can be a real life example for them – it is, indeed, possible to move from Soviet totalitarianism and its countless remnants to a wiser and more humanly oriented society. The path is full of pitfalls and the victor’s wreath does not turn out to be what was dreamt off. Despite that, it is worth the effort to direct the country on to the road where principles and rules of behaviour are based on democracy.

Already before the Soviet Union ultimately collapsed and ended its juridical existence in December 1991, the three Baltic states had re-established their independence, which had been de facto but not de jure ended by Soviet annexation in 1940. In the 1990s contacts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with their Eastern neighbours were reduced to minimal economic and diplomatic relations. At that time the three states tried to find ways and means for co-operation with countries in the West and started extensive preparations to become eligible for accession to the EU and NATO. Prime Minister Tiit Vähi presented an application for Estonia’s accession to the EU on the basis of Article O of the Treaty of the European Union. It was signed on November 24, 1995. The goal was reached in less than ten years.

All the other twelve former Soviet republics formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Allegedly its structure was going to be similar to the one of the British Commonwealth of Nations. In reality Moscow considered the CIS as an instrument with which to re-establish its political and economic superpower within the territory that had been a part of the Russian, i.e. the Soviet empire before World War II. The extreme arrogance and roughness intended to achieve the goal instead produced a backlash. The CIS as a political union has been a failure from the very beginning. Economic co-operation has been more successful, but the constant efforts of Moscow to use economic levers as an tool for political pressure have hindered co-operation. Furthermore, the five Central-Asian countries together with Azerbaijan and Belarus stopped playing with democracy in the beginning of the 1990s and have instead adopted rule by a power clique led by a dictatorial president.

The CIS continues to exist with difficulties. Only a minority of politicians seem firmly to share the belief that it could become a unifying and constructive power in the post-Soviet era. Beside, or rather instead of the CIS, a political, economic and defence union, so-called Grand-Slavia, is being formed. It is expected to unite all areas of Eastern Slavs, including besides Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan (or at least its Western and Northern regions). It is too early to tell whether this will work out and whether a new and well-functioning federal state will be founded. Ukraine will be the key factor with its aspiration and need for independence. If the Ukrainian society is able to carry out the fundamental reforms planned by new leaders in power, the attractiveness of a federal union based on ethnic ties will be significantly decreased. Nevertheless it would be naïve to believe that there are no forces in Moscow, Minsk and Kiev working towards the implementation of such a union. In any case, the ups and downs of the attempts to unite Eastern Slavs would affect the nature and the success of the Neighbourhood Policy carried out by the EU and Estonia.
Four former Soviet republics

This report mainly focuses on three Eastern neighbours of the EU: Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The relations of Estonia, as an EU member state, with these three countries are discussed and scenarios for the present and future relations with them are envisaged. Russia has a special relationship with the EU that is not encompassed by the European Neighbourhood Policy. Nevertheless, Russia influences directly and indirectly both the development of these three countries as well as the relations of Estonia and the EU with them. Thus I will hereby give a short overview of Russia and its future perspectives.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The Russian Federation is the only neighbour outside the EU with whom Estonia shares land, sea and air boundaries. North of Lake Peipus we are in direct contact with the Leningrad Oblast and South of the lake with the Pskov Oblast.

Although sometimes it has been expressed that accession to the European Union and NATO is also a goal for Russia in the long run, lately such speculations have diminished. No matter how the Kremlin saw the future of Russia during the rule of Boris Yeltsin, the current political elite (mainly with KGB alias FSB background) surrounding Vladimir Putin after his attainment of the presidency, has established as the main goal of the state to restore the lost might and influence of Russia. They see the future as a multi-polar word, where Russia will be one of the four or five superpowers moulding the world order. The leaders in Kremlin probably can imagine, so it seems, that the only way for their country to be powerful and feared once more: the disintegrated empire has to be re-united again. The renewal of control, as fully as possible, over the territory once reigned by Russian tsars and later by secretaries general of Communist Party of the Soviet Union is regarded as a prerequisite for the renaissance of Russia.

The new-old structure to be created is often called a liberal empire by its architects. This euphemism is obviously used to stress that Moscow’s aim is not to annex neighbouring territories, but to establish spheres of influence – economic and political – around Russia. However, it looks like the changes are inadequate, both for restoring the empire and for enforcing “liberal” influence over close neighbours. The new structure is mainly to be created on the basis of old models, i.e. mostly on the same out-dated and inefficient structures of governing the state and commanding the society, which led to the collapse of Tsarist Russia, as well as the Soviet Union.

Paradoxically, there are many signs indicating that Russians do hope to restore their derzhava in the traditional way. Power is again being collected to one place, i.e. Moscow, and thus into the hands of a single leading clique. Everyday management of the country is handed over to a corrupt hierarchical bureaucracy, while individual rights are restricted in the name of the “bright future”, which will never arrive. Dissident or even alternative thinking is not tolerated, media is suppressed and the monopoly of propaganda belongs essentially to the ones in power. At the same time a situation is created where the largest ethnic community (Russian-speakers) has a privileged status, compared to other smaller ones, and considers its mission to reduce the ethnic diversity of multinational and multicultural Russia. Unfortunately there are too many ordinary Russians who consider such a reduction as an indispensable precondition.
for ensuring the fulfilment of their long-awaited goal – one nation, one language, one religion, one tsar.

Furthermore, the guiding principle is, according to the teachings of Bolsheviks, that the weaker and more dispersed the provinces and close neighbours, the stronger the state. All the colonial empires that reached their apogee in the 19th century collapsed in the 20th century. The Russian empire was geographically the most compact and thus it was the longest to last. Although there are reasons to be critical and sceptical about the attempts to restore Russian former power and magnitude with neo-imperial means, Europeans should, however, take the efforts of Moscow to turn back the wheel of history seriously. In any case we are going to see repetitive attempts to do this during the coming years and the direct and indirect consequences what a restoration of an empire (doomed to fail in the long run) would bring along.

The European Union and Estonia have to bear in mind that the democratisation of Russia has stopped for an undetermined period of time and that Moscow’s political and economic aggressiveness towards its “near-abroad neighbours” has increased. The quiet, but persistent expansion of the Chinese to the North and the powerful expansion of Islam fundamentalism may create a situation in Far East, Siberia and Central Asia forcing Russia to pay more attention to these regions. Thus the ambivalent approach of Russia to its Western neighbours (including the Baltic states) could, due to the circumstances, turn towards a more rational one. Unfortunately there is no evidence at present of this kind of change of mind and we have to be ready for that Kremlin will continue to actively oppose the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in the countries, which it considers to be its “near-abroad neighbours”.

UKRAINE

Ukraine is undoubtedly and justifiably the key country of the post-Soviet region. The scenario the Ukrainians will choose for their progression is going to be determined by much more than their own future. A negative attitude by Ukraine could hinder, or even end the expansion of the Russian “liberal imperialism”. Among the CIS countries, Ukraine and Georgia are the only ones where the active citizens in their majority have clearly expressed their will to be on their own and to base reforms in the society on the democratic principles of the West. However, it should be stressed that despite a dozen years of independence, Ukraine is still in an vassal relationship with Russia (a increasing debt, manipulative dependence on its industry, energy dependency, etc). And the Russian-speaking population is not likely to feel themselves as Ukrainian-minded as an independent state might expect from its citizens.

The democratisation process commencing early in the 1990s in a promising way did not yield the expected results. Many years that could have been used for consolidating their independence and promoting patriotism have been lost due to the infighting between the different interest groups of politicians. A lot still depends on who has gained the power and how the ruling elite is utilizing its position in the society. The obvious interference of Moscow with the Ukrainian presidential elections in 2004 should have provoked a strong international condemnation, unfortunately the European Union and the United States of America preferred to confine themselves to a formal expression of discontent.
We certainly do not have the right to classify Ukraine as a failed state. On the other hand a critical observer cannot be too optimistic even after the electoral triumph of a president orientated towards Europe. At the same time we should ask what would be the optimal scenario for the independent Ukraine, which could be accomplished in the next ten years. The fact that Brussels lacks an adequate vision of the future for the state with the sixth largest population in Europe makes the situation even more complicated. Since the interest of the EU and some of its member states towards the Russian market is rising and as the dependence on Russian raw materials will rather increase than decrease in the future, it is hard to believe that Brussels will be able to ignore the opposition of Moscow to the changes in Ukraine, which are considered by the Kremlin to be anti-Russian.

One option for Ukraine is to consider bilateral discussions to establish some kind of a mediator state between the EU and Russia. Kiev fosters co-operation with the West and the East without belonging to any of the camps. Unfortunately we cannot exclude another line of development either: Russian influence yields results. In any case, Ukraine is standing at the crossroads. In principle there are three choices: (a) democracy according to the Western model, (b) autocracy according to the Eastern model together with participation in the establishment of a possible new Slavonic Federation based on close relations of three Ethnic Brothers (Russia, Belarus and Ukraine), and (c) independence according to the Ukrainian model, i.e. independence at the level available to an European state in the 21st century. Which direction would be followed depends, on one hand, on the skills of the new administration and its ability to implement given promises and on the other hand, on the flexibility and wisdom in implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy.

BELARUS

Belarus is the only country within the geographic area of Europe (the Ural mountains marking its eastern border), still ruled by a real dictator. Unfortunately we have to be extra sceptical in regard to the prospects for Belarus. Nevertheless, the seeds of democracy should be sown also there, and even by larger buckets than elsewhere.

At the same time everyone involved in implementing the European Neighbourhood Policy in Belarus should take into consideration several factors, which are either unknown, or ignored by nearby EU states, or affecting other EU states only in an indirect way. The interests of Moscow towards Belarus are especially deeply rooted as it considers the region as a historical and integral part of Russia. Without the opportunistic aspirations of the Kremlin Lukashenko would not have been such an absolute ruler for so many years and the extensive anti-democratic actions which constitute part of everyday life in Belarus would not be possible in “the heart of Europe”.

The EU is not that interested in Minsk that it would consider jeopardising its relations with Moscow in order to wholeheartedly support a independence movement, which could arise after the current dictator, is ousted from power. Furthermore, the majority of Belarussians find it difficult to identify themselves as an independent people (Russian language is rather the first than the second language in their country). It is sad but if the nation does not wish, nor has the strength to be on its own, then it is hard to believe that significant changes are going to take place.
MOLDOVA

Moldova is a state whose future depends to a large extent on its two neighbours – Ukraine and Romania. If the Russian influence should again increase in Kiev, Chişinău could become Kishinyov again. And the other way around, democratisation process in Ukraine may bring Moldova along. The admission of Romania to the EU would give new impetus to the people of Moldova to lead their country towards a more reasonable path. It is feasible that Romania having joined the EU, the door of the Union will be opened also to former Bessarabia, either as the historical province of Romania or as an independent administrative unit.

In any case, the likelihood that Moldova will in the long run become a member of the EU is higher than that of any other country in CIS. Moldova is the only country in the CIS that can rely in its appeal on the country’s pre-1940 status, which was terminated by the secret agreement between Stalin and Hitler dividing up large areas in Central and Northern Europe between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Becoming a EU member state requires, however, significant reforms within the society and in the structures and values of state government. The anti-Russian and pro-Western approach of the current President should be considered as a opportunistic change of attitude – at least as long as Chişinău has not presented visible and certain evidence of its political transformation.

Conclusion

The European Union is entering a phase where the decisions, which have to be taken during the next ten years, will determine its future progress and orientations for a long time. Hopefully the twenty-five member states will be able to ratify the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The Treaty is an important step forward but it does not by far solve all the problems the EU is facing today and tomorrow. I am not so blue-eyed that I would expect a clear answer for each question coming up. And I do not think the present generation should decide for the next generations how is it right and most prudent for them to manage the world and make it a good place to live in for the majority of the people. But on the other hand I would like to stress that before taking the Big Step – before taking the European Union out of its historical, geographical and cultural borders – we need balanced answers to many questions never discussed or discussed only casually up to now.

We also need a wise decision about the level of integration within the EU. In other words: the objective we, Europeans, have for the near future is to come to an agreement concerning the development models that are expressed by such terms as Wider Europe, future expansion, integration, federalisation, core Europe, special partnership with neighbours. We are facing many decisions and choices determining the direction of movement for the Old World for several decades. But even if "final" decisions will not be found, it is unavoidable to accept the existence of the problems and to discuss them from various aspects.

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Democracy and civil society in the new Eastern neighbours of the EU: Foreign aid and local needs

In 1950 there were 22 democratic countries in the world. By 2004 the number had increased to 119. The wave of democratisation that started in the 1970s has been more extensive than ever before, comprising tens of countries all over the world, including Southern and Eastern Europe. The triumph of democracy should still not be called the end of history in the manner of Fukuyama – democracies continue to face several external and internal threats. However, we may say that democracy has become the single internationally accepted model of society. This is proven by the attempts of several authoritarian leaders to create a democratic façade and try to prove to the world that they govern according to democratic principles or that they are at least moving in that direction. The triumph of democracy is also proven by the increasing number of countries that are in the process of democratisation, as well as the active support of foreign governments and organisations to such development.

This article starts with a reflection of the links between democracy and international politics. I will try to answer the question why the promotion of democracy has become a significant part of the foreign policy of democratic countries and the activity of many international organisations. I will also shortly discuss the activities of the EU in promoting democracy and civil society. This will be followed by an overview of civil society in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, which is based, among other sources, on interviews carried out with members of NGOs in the three countries. The analysis will point out the weak and strong sides, expectations and needs of civil society in these countries, on the basis of which NGOs of Estonia and other foreign countries can develop their activities in the EU’s Eastern neighbourhood.

Democracy and international politics – from realism to idealism

Until the end of the Cold War the model of government was considered an internal matter of each country. Respect for national sovereignty held a central place in international relations. Thus, for instance, the protection of human rights or political freedoms as part of a country’s foreign policy was not an internationally accepted norm. This does not mean, however, that both the Western and the Eastern block, especially the USA and the Soviet Union, did not strongly propagate their model of society in the world. It was an important means of fight between the two blocks where the whole foreign policy arsenal was used from diplomacy to war.

As we know democracy won and thus democracy promotion became an internationally recognised foreign policy objective after the end of the Cold War. Human rights and political freedoms have become international norms and their protection stands above national sovereignty. There are few countries in the world that clearly and systematically ignore these norms – among them is Belarus that is in the focus of this study. In order not to give a too
optimistic picture of the situation, we need to acknowledge that extensive infringement of
democratic norms can still be found in many countries that call themselves democracies. The
majority of countries in the world, however, do not in principle question democracy as the
best form of society known to us. Also the majority of countries nowadays consider
democracy promotion as a justified and acceptable foreign policy activity. Enhancing
democracy has indeed assumed an important role in the foreign policy of Western countries
and in the activity of many international organisations.

Why do Western countries spend a lot of funds for supporting democracy outside their
borders? The question can be explained both from a realistic, idealistic and pragmatic
perspective. The realist understanding of international relations as a struggle for power
between states gives an explanation to why for instance both for the US and the Soviet Union
it was so important to spread their model of society during the Cold War: it served the aim of
maximising of their power in the world. In a similar way the forceful democracy promotion
policy of the US today can be explained as an activity directed to strengthening its
international position of influence. It also profits other Western countries if their model of
society is spread across the world.

From an idealistic point of view democracy promotion is about making the world a better
place and implementing one’s values, in other words following a democratic mission. From
the standpoint of the people who share these values, promoting democracy and human rights
is simply a good and right thing to do. We may also talk about a moral duty to support
democratisation in these countries where help is needed. It is not, however, justified from this
perspective to use force and impose our democratic values on others.

Both the realistic and idealistic approach can be supported by pragmatic arguments. The most
famous idealistic explanation, for which we can also find support from world politics, is the
thesis of democratic peace by Immanuel Kant, suggesting that democratic countries do not
wage war with each other. Spreading democracy thus enhances peace and stability in the
world. Studies of international politics have given some support to this theory but it is
debatable whether the main reason for peaceful relations between democratic countries is
actually democracy or other factors. It is also necessary to note that this rule does not apply to
countries where the democratisation process is only in the beginning and where the new
regime has not become well-established. As opposed to the thesis of Kant, such countries are
relatively unstable and participate more often than average in military conflicts. Thus the
promoters of democracy have to take into account the fact that democratisation adds peace
and stability in the long run but its effect in the short-term can be the opposite: the likelihood
of conflicts and wars increases.

In addition to peace and stability, democracy has other positive side-effects that provide
pragmatic arguments for democracy promotion – these are first and foremost human rights,
more efficient administration and lower level of corruption. Democracy is also connected to
economic growth and improvement of general welfare. We need to ask again whether there is
merel correlation or whether democracy really is the reason for such positive effects to occur.
These questions are being studied by several social scientists. In the meanwhile, assumptions
about various positive implications of democracy are commonly used in support of
democracy promotion policy of Western countries.
Democracy promotion as a part of EU foreign policy: support for the strong?

Democracy promotion is a fairly new activity for the EU: it started properly only in the beginning of the 1990s. As an exception and a kind of a starting point one should mention the southern enlargement of the 1970s and 1980s, one of the most important objectives of which was to safeguard the establishment of democracy in Spain, Portugal and Greece. By contrast, the EU development aid during the Cold War was strictly neutral and non-political, according to the international norms of that time. As the end of the Cold War brought along changes in the international environment and in the abovementioned norms, the EU also started to change the basis and objectives of its foreign relations. Democracy promotion by the EU was first directed to Eastern Europe that was becoming free from communism. Support to democracy was added to the programmes of development aid some time later, in early 1990s, when various other donors (with the World Bank in the lead) had already carried out such changes.4

Nowadays the so-called European values - in addition to democracy, human rights, rule of law, social justice, environmental protection, etc - form the basis of the EU foreign policy, including the Neighbourhood Policy. It is believed that these principles are not simply values in their own right but also means to support economic development, safety and security. In reality these noble goals are often in contradiction with the economic and strategic interests of the EU and its member states. Nevertheless, it is important that these values are stressed in principle and the EU at least aims to implement them and to develop its democracy promotion policy.

Compared to the US that, if necessary, does not step back from using extreme measures including military attack in the name of promoting democracy, the EU prefers a softer approach. Exerting military power is excluded and from among other measures the EU prefers the carrot rather than the stick. Democracy is supported first and foremost through diplomacy, expert advice and financial support. It is also characteristic of the EU to promote democracy in countries where the democratisation process has already started. The EU has not dealt with overthrowing dictatorships.

Paradoxically, the more successful the country, the bigger the EU support to it. Thus it can be said that where the lack of democracy is the biggest there the help is the smallest. Candidate countries that are anyway close to fulfilling EU standards receive most support. One explanation to this is that more successful countries are able to use the aid in the most efficient way. It is also known that the success of democratisation depends mostly on the internal will of the country – democracy cannot be forced upon from outside. Thus it is the easiest and most effective to support countries where a national consensus regarding the direction of reforms has been reached.

However, Belarus is an outstanding example showing that a passive approach to a dictatorship does not bring satisfactory results. Lately the EU has started to reconsider its policy towards Belarus and develop a more active strategy, as it has reached the conclusion that Europeans cannot just silently accept a dictatorship in their immediate neighbourhood.

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4 For an overview, see Karen Smith 2003, pp. 122–144.
Ukraine provides evidence of how irreplaceable internal changes are. The Orange Revolution has given a boost to both internal and the external forces that wish to support democracy. The EU among others is increasing the aid directed to Ukraine. Although the success of reforms depends first and foremost on the Ukrainians themselves, the EU may give irreplaceable and decisive additional support. Estonia knows from its own experience that national efforts bring along a change in the approach of the EU and an increase in support. One of the main recommendations from Estonia to Ukraine and Moldova is, indeed, that it is necessary to focus on the homework and prove yourself through that – then help will come also from outside.

Enlargement must be considered as the most effective, maybe even the only effective instrument of the EU for democracy promotion. Hereby we once again need to point out that through enlargement the EU supports those states that have already been successful anyway. The EU has provided candidate countries with significant support in developing democracy but the biggest work has been done by the states themselves. It cannot be said that the EU has had a decisive influence on democratisation in other external countries. Different EU aid programmes have, however, strengthened elements of democracy in many countries, for example Ukraine. The efficiency of enlargement in promoting democracy and economic reforms is a strong argument in favour of the need to give the European countries that are in the process of democratisation a clear perspective of accession. It means that for instance as regards Ukraine, full membership should be set as a common goal and the EU should actively support that objective.

Another special characteristic of the EU democracy promotion policy, which is reflected also in this study, is its focus on civil society: considerable share of EU support is given to bottom-up initiatives of citizens aiming to improve their own life and the society as well as to influence decision-making processes. The US also strongly supports civil society but it does not have an equally significant role in their foreign policy.) Strong civil society is considered to be a basis for democracy, rule of law and market economy. The awareness of citizens of their rights and duties and their readiness to act according to these are inevitable in creating a Western type of society. Therefore the EU has actively supported civil initiative in candidate countries and it is an important element in the EU Neighbourhood Policy.

Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus have so far received support from different programmes directed to the CIS countries. Most of the aid has been given through the TACIS programme but to some extent also through specific programmes, e.g. the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. All the three countries have also participated in projects connected to the Interreg programme, but since the Interreg funds can only be used in member states, the participation of Ukraine and other neighbours has been funded from the TACIS programme. Differences in the programmes directed to different countries (there are specific programmes for member states, the Phare programme for candidate countries and Tacis for Eastern Europe) have made cooperation, including cross-border cooperation (as discussed in Margit Säre’s article) more complicated. This problem should be solved by the new European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI), to be started in 2007, which will cover all the assistance directed to neighbouring countries, including Russia. The new system

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6 http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ceeca/tacis/
should facilitate the application for funding to projects that include members from both sides of the EU border. The support provided through the ENPI will be based on the European Neighbourhood Policy strategy and the Action Plans agreed bilaterally with different neighbouring countries.

**The situation and needs of civil society in the EU’s new Eastern neighbours**

**On the method of the study**

In order to find out what help is needed by civil society of the EU’s new Eastern neighbours, a number of interviews were carried out in the framework of this project with representatives of local NGOs. Thus, the following analysis is primarily based on the experience, opinions and expectations of the active members of local NGOs. In addition, earlier studies and discussions with experts from both EU neighbouring countries as well as different member states have been used as sources of the study.

The number of NGOs interviewed is the following: 11 in Ukraine, 9 in Belarus and 15 in Moldova. Different regions and fields of activity were represented. One selection criterion was that all the NGOs had received foreign aid, out of them less than half from the EU. The interviews were carried out in January and February 2005. They were conducted by local partners on the basis of a questionnaire designed by the research group (ref. Annex 3). The interviews were semi-structured; in addition to the questionnaire several other issues that came up were discussed. The local partners wrote a separate report about each interview. The names of the local partners and the people interviewed are presented at the end of the article (Annexes 1 and 2).

In Belarus, due to the totalitarian regime, it was obviously more difficult to carry out open interviews because people live in a constant fear of repressions. However, the people interviewed both in Belarus and the other two countries were mostly frank, open and ready to provide criticism both as regards their own field of activity, the state authorities as well as foreign donors. (Only in a couple of interviews in Moldova the interviewees did not want to comment on questions of more political nature and only told about the experience of their own NGO.) The level of the interviews gave a good impression: the answers were mostly well thought-through and grounded. The interviewees had a thorough understanding of the role of civil society, its weaknesses and needs in their country. They also had a strong will to improve the situation with their activity. They evaluated the activities of their own NGOs generally positively, although also some weaknesses were pointed out. It should be stressed again that the interviewees represented different regions and types of organisations. The views expressed within each country differed to some extent because the interviewees grounded their opinions on their personal experience. However, in each country there were also a lot of common opinions expressed in several interviews.

**Similarities and differences of three civil societies**

According to the interviews, the strong sides of NGOs in all the three countries are the following:
- the number of NGOs is fairly large, all fields of activities are covered;
• there is a considerable number of active and professional people with a lot of experience;
• NGOs offer good possibilities for self-realisation, especially for young people;
• NGOs are flexible and innovative, they promote reforms and quickly adapt to changes;
• NGO networks exist although their cooperation could be improved;
• many NGOs have active relations with democratic foreign countries.

There are many common problems that occur in all the three countries:
• civil society is still weak and distant and unknown to a large part of the population;
• the general attitude towards NGOs is sceptical (better in Ukraine than in the other two countries);
• constant lack of resources (both funds and active people);
• domestic sources of funding are almost missing; support from the state, private sector and individuals is inexistent or minimal;
• due to the abovementioned facts the NGOs depend on foreign aid;
• unhealthy competition between NGOs because all compete for the same funds;
• weak sustainability of NGOs, living from project to project;
• there is lack of openness, corruption, use of aid on wrong purposes, influence of clan and family relations in the activities of the NGOs;
• a lack of a common civil society strategy;
• many existing (i.e. registered) organisations do not really function;
• little knowledge of English.

All the countries presented the same criticism on the address of foreign donors. The results are similar to earlier studies on the same topic carried out in other countries.
• donors do not know the local conditions well enough;
• donors do not cooperate sufficiently with local NGOs;
• support is provided to different projects and not to the sustainability of NGOs;
• donors regularly support the same, well-known organisations; therefore some NGOs have acquired a monopoly position and it is difficult for new applicants to receive aid;
• coordination between donors is weak;
• the EU is considered the most bureaucratic donor and its procedure of receiving support the most complicated one; however, transparency and clear criteria of giving aid were considered positive as regards the EU.

The evaluations of foreign aid differed a lot in the three countries. The aid received was evaluated most positively in Ukraine where several interviewees pointed out the significant effect of foreign aid on the outburst of the Orange Revolution. Also in Moldova there was mainly a positive attitude towards donors. In Belarus, by contrast, the interviewees were much more negative in their evaluation of foreign assistance, expressing disappointment and bitterness about the low level and ineffectiveness of aid. The results are not surprising because Belarus has indeed received much less support than any of its neighbouring countries. The reason, however, is to be found in Belarus itself – in a totalitarian regime the provision of help has been complicated and it requires a different approach than in case of countries that are in the process of democratisation. Western donors have only recently started to work out a coordinated strategy with the aim of increasing the aid directed to Belarus and making it more efficient.
Ukraine

It is hard to overestimate the impact of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution on the mentality in the society, especially among NGOs. It has also significantly influenced the approach of the EU and other foreign organisation towards Ukraine. The mass demonstrations that took place in the end of 2004, where hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians bravely and persistently demanded justice and democracy, reached the mind of every Ukrainian as well as the whole world. The message was clear: Ukraine wished to seriously start reforms aimed at democracy, free market economy and integration into the EU. The new President Yushchenko and his government have now started to implement these goals.

It also needs to be noted that almost half of the Ukrainians (44% of those who participated in the third round of presidential elections) sincerely supported the opposition candidate, the former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovitch. The first election results brought the victory to Yanukovitch because of massive falsification of votes, but the number of his supporters is still large. Yanukovitch would have tied Ukraine more strongly to Russia and continued the non-democratic model of government created by the former President Kuchma. Most of the supporters of Yanukovitch live in the Eastern regions of Ukraine. The presidential elections somewhat increased tensions in relations between the West and the East, ethnic Ukrainians and Russians. However, Ukraine cannot be compared to the Baltic countries in this respect: ethnic identity does not play by far as strong a role in Ukraine, and the two main ethnic groups, Ukrainians and Russians, are united by countless historic, economic, cultural and social ties between people. Yushchenko has declared that he aims to be the President of the whole Ukraine and protect the unity of the state and the nation.

Ukraine may at the moment be considered the most dynamic country in Europe. The last time Europe experienced something similar was during the collapse of the Soviet regime in the late 1980s. As we, Estonians, very well know the euphoria of that time was soon followed by grey and tough everyday life. Ukraine cannot escape this either. The implementation of the changes that Yushchenko promised is going to take more time than many of the people who bravely demonstrated in the wintery Kiev were hoping for. As stressed above, the success of the changes will depend first and foremost on Ukrainians themselves. At the same time the future of Ukraine has a significant importance to its neighbours, the whole Europe and the US. No one could expect the Orange Revolution neither in the West nor in the East. As a result both the European Union and Russia were forced to thoroughly reconsider their policy towards Ukraine.

The EU has welcomed the change of direction that took place in Ukraine but at the same time the Orange Revolution has caused the EU plenty of additional work and problems. Finding solutions to these is not an easy task. Ukraine has for years been indicating its wish to join the EU but has earlier not expressed a serious intention to implement the necessary reforms. Hence it was easy for the EU to refuse. Now the situation has changed: Yushchenko does not only ask for the prospect of accession but is in any case trying to implement a reform plan that takes his country closer to EU criteria. The EU promises to support the reforms but is not ready to talk about the Ukrainian membership in the EU.

One of the most important reasons why the EU is so cautious about Ukraine is Russia. It is indeed hard to overestimate the importance of Ukraine for Russia. For instance Zbigniew Brzezinski, a well-known American analyst, has considered Ukraine a determining factor for the development of Russia and stressed the geopolitical key position of Ukraine between the
West and the East. According to Brzezinski, Russia can remain a Eurasian empire only in the case it maintains control over Ukraine.

The vision of Brzezinski represents geopolitical realism that sees the West and Russia as two separate and competing centres of power. From that point of view an independent and democratic Ukraine means a loss for Russia. A similar approach has dominated also in Russia where an independent and Western-oriented Ukraine has been considered as a threat and as a scenario that significantly reduces the power of Russia, which should be prevented in every possible way. The majority of EU member states do not wish to see the question of Ukraine as a geopolitical fight between the West and Russia where the victory of one side automatically means the defeat of the other. The EU prefers an idealistic and softer approach to reforms in Ukraine, in accordance with its democracy promotion policy described above. An important part of its approach is support to civil society. Unfortunately we need to acknowledge that since Russia has distanced from democratic values in the last years, it is hard to avoid an increase of tensions and opposition between the EU and Russia.

About Ukrainian NGOs

Civil society is more active and stronger in Ukraine than in the two neighbouring countries. The representatives of the NGOs that were interviewed were optimistic, stressing the role of civil society in the Orange Revolution. Many problems that were acute before the revolution have almost disappeared by now. The regime of Kuchma tried to influence NGOs and restrict their activities and it controlled and limited public discussion. The attitude of the state towards NGOs was negative. State powers tried to damage the image of NGOs, e.g. by accusing them publicly of representing foreign countries and acting against national interests.

After the Orange Revolution it has become possible for independent NGOs to influence political decision-making in Ukraine. Anyone may freely criticise the state and participate in public debate. Control over the state power is possible at all levels. However, it is a great challenge to NGOs to actually practice control and to exert influence on the state. Cooperation with the public sector is limited by the lack of necessary procedures and the tradition of non-transparent policy making. At local level cooperation is made more complicated by the weakness of local government.

Several interviewees pointed out the growing professionalism of NGOs during the last ten years. Also general citizen awareness has improved. Third sector umbrella organisations and networks exist and NGOs understand more and more that cooperation with partners is necessary and useful. Informal coordination and consulting between organisations was also pointed out as a positive element.

Despite optimism the interviewees acknowledged that civil society is yet weak in Ukraine and there are a lot of problems. The opinions expressed in the interviews were sometimes contradictory. For instance, the activeness of people and their interest towards NGOs was rated both high as well as low. In addition to the abovementioned problems differences between East and West Ukraine were pointed out: civil society is significantly stronger in Western Ukraine that has been historically linked to the West and where the mentality of people is more similar to that in Western Europe. The gap between towns and rural areas was also considered problematic: civil society is fairly active in towns but very weak in the countryside.
The influence of the Orange Revolution on civil society is mainly positive but also a few problematic side effects should be mentioned. First, the gap between the West and the East strengthened during the revolution. It is reflected also in the activities of NGOs and their cooperation. Second, the revolution brought about a phenomenon known also in other post-communist countries: many people who worked in professional NGOs have now moved to work for the state, which weakens the third sector.

As regards foreign aid, many interviewees stressed European integration and the need to receive concrete support that would help Ukraine to implement EU norms. The assistance directed to NGOs should support the orientation towards the EU, for instance help to develop contacts and cooperation with partners from the EU. In addition, training on how to manage and finance NGOs, on information exchange within the third sector, etc was considered necessary, although quite a lot of this type of training has been provided in Ukraine already. There is also need for support that would help to develop cooperation with the public sector and improve the capacity of NGOs to influence and participate in decision-making process.

Moldova

The Ukrainian Orange Revolution was not repeated in the parliamentary elections in Moldova held in March 2005. The Communist party that has lead the country for a long time won the elections with 46% of the votes. Despite that also Moldova, just like Ukraine, has taken a decisive turn: the communists have renounced their orientation towards Russia and made a choice in favour of European integration.

Moldova has been one of the most democratic countries in the CIS, but it does not mean much more than fulfilling minimum criteria of democracy: after regaining independence in 1991, elections have been relatively free and political parties as well as NGOs have been established. At the same time public debate, especially in electronic media, is strongly influenced by the state; corruption is widespread; political competition characteristic of democratic countries is weakly developed and the population is fighting with everyday problems without showing much interest or activeness towards societal activities. Corruption is also found in the third sector. Poverty is behind many of the problems: Moldova is the poorest country in Europe and its economic potential is not among the best ones (in that respect Ukraine is in a much better situation: its economy grows rapidly and successfully attracts foreign investors).

The biggest problem of Moldova in Transdnistria – an extremely poor mini-state that has declared itself independent but has not been internationally recognised, and is founded upon the presence of Russian military forces and illegal trade. The possibilities of Estonia and the EU to support the rest of Moldova do not, however, directly depend on the problem of Transdnistria. The problem can only be solved through high-level international negotiations where the EU and Russia have to be among the main parties. The issues of Transdnistria left aside, the European Union relations with Moldova are very similar to its relations with Ukraine. Certainly, due to its smallness Moldova does not have a too high importance for the EU, but its small size has its advantages. First, implementing reforms in a small country is generally easier. Second, the integration of Moldova is a lot easier for the EU than the integration of Ukraine. After the accession of Romania, Moldova will become a small
neighbouring country of the EU and its intention to become an EU member state will most likely sooner or later bear fruits.

**About Moldovan NGOs**

The number of registered NGOs in Moldova is fairly high, more than 2700. However, many of them are not active. The interviewees evaluated the situation of civil society in their country as fairly weak. The majority thought, however, that it is developing in a positive direction but there were also opposite opinions. The weak cooperation between NGOs was emphasised more in Moldova than in Ukraine or Belarus. There are umbrella organisations but these do not operate effectively. Similarly to Ukraine the activities of NGOs are centred into larger towns.

It was pointed out as positive that a lot of young people work in NGOs, which provides them good possibilities for self-realisation and is even an alternative to emigrating (emigration is more common in Moldova than in any other European country). It was also mentioned that the participation of NGOs in decision-making concerning societal matters has increased to some extent during the last years, to a great extent thanks to the influence of foreign donors. The attitude of the public sector towards NGOs has become more positive and the readiness to cooperate has increased. On the other hand, the interviewees complained that the state does not support NGOs and sets bureaucratic obstacles to their activities. The legal basis for the operation of NGOs is inadequate (for instance the state does not favour the support of the business sector to NGOs) and the existing legislation is often breached.

NGOs are not well-known in the society and there is sceptical attitude towards them. Some of the interviewees found that many NGOs defend the interests of narrow interest groups, are too much centred around the leader and too far from the people. It was also mentioned that there are serious social problems in Moldovan society but NGOs turn too little attention to them. The level of services that the NGOs provide is not always high.

The influence of foreign aid was rated as fairly positive (but not as positive as in Ukraine). At the same time it was mentioned that aid does not always correspond to local needs; for instance, projects and even organisations have been created because foreign aid has been available and not on the basis of local need or initiative. It was also pointed out that it is necessary to be careful in the selection of local partners in order to avoid misuse of aid.

In the future support is expected first and foremost in the following areas:

- cooperation between NGOs, centres, networks;
- cooperation with partners in the EU;
- independent media;
- support to less developed regions, improvement of regional balance;
- general training for NGOs: management, financing, etc;
- cooperation with the public sector both at local as well as national level.

**Belarus**

As it is well known, the main problem of civil society in Belarus is the totalitarian regime of President Lukashenko. A decisive turn was taken in 1996 when Lukashenko, by falsifying
election results ensured his stay in power. The elections that have been held after that have been far from democratic or free. The activities of political parties, independent media and civil society organisations have been limited to a significant extent. Repressions and intimidation of people have been increased during election campaigns. Electronic media is fully under state control and independent newspapers are discouraged or closed.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine has had a strong impact on Belarus. Lukashenko has strengthened state control with an aim to prevent the spread of the Ukrainian events to Belarus. Western-minded organisations have been closed down, new bureaucratic obstacles have been created to hinder the activities of NGOs, journalists and activists have been harassed (in several cases even imprisoned), etc. This has, however, had an opposite effect to the one wished for. Ukraine has made the people of Belarus rethink their alternatives. Support to Lukashenko, that had stayed fairly high for years, has decreased. The wish of Western-minded people to initiate changes has increased.

The EU has practically frozen its relations with Belarus after 1996. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1995 is still not ratified. At the same time Europe has not actively tried to change the regime in Belarus: the EU has confined itself to declarations and isolation. Neither does the new European Neighbourhood Policy allow more active interaction. The ENP does in principle encompass Belarus, but in practice it is not possible to implement the policy as long as the regime stays authoritarian. The EU has given some support to NGOs but many projects have failed due to the opposition of the Belarussian authorities or delays caused by bureaucratic procedures.

However, the EU has started to develop a new strategy concerning Belarus, aimed at replacing the current regime with democracy. First and foremost it turns attention to the presidential elections to be held 2006 that will determine whether Lukashenko will stay in power. The EU, its member states and other democratic countries and organisations should now jointly support a united democratic opposition campaign that would be able to offer a credible alternative to Lukashenko.

The support should not be limited to activities prior to the elections. In addition, there is a great need for the EU to establish a long-term strategy of supporting NGOs. The strategy should include increased aid to independent organisations and also awareness-raising among ordinary people about the EU. This can most efficiently be done through projects that improve people’s lives: alleviate social problems, improve infrastructure, support educational activities and youth work, strengthen local governments, etc. In the current situation it is hard to carry out even such non-political activities since the authorities try to hinder any support from and relations with the West. In principle such activities are, however, permitted and to some extent possible.

**About Belarussian NGOs**

There are 2400 registered NGOs in Belarus but many of them operate under state control. Belarussian NGOs may be divided into four groups:

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10 On the basis of an analysis of the Belarus Open Society Foundation.
1) **GoNGOs** – fake NGOs that are created by the government, fully support the regime and are dependent on the government;

2) **PostGoNGOs** – organisations deriving from the Soviet period, mainly trade unions that also depend on the government and are under its control. Some of them have, to a certain degree, developed towards independent NGOs;

3) **DoNGOs** – organisations that have been founded by donors and whose relationship with society is often weak;

4) **Real NGOs** – organisations that operate on grass-root level and are created on local initiative.

There are a few hundred really independent NGOs. Some of them are not officially registered, some of them have been closed down by the authorities but still continue to operate. As independent NGOs are not legally allowed to operate, many of them exist informally. This concerns also networks that are, in a way, umbrella organisations. In addition to informal networks independent NGOs are united by the “Assembly of Democratic NGOs” created in 1997. Although cooperation structures exist, many interviewees considered real cooperation as limited. At the same time it was found that the direction taken recently is positive.

The potential of the civil society in Belarus is proven by the fact that despite repressions several hundred NGOs continue their activity thanks to brave, dedicated and professional people who work for the organisations. They have proven their ability to get organised rapidly, learn fast and adjust to changes. Like in Moldova, in Belarus the role of NGOs as a means of self-realisation was emphasised.

In the current situation Belarussian independent NGOs should be politically active, irrespective of their main field of activity. In order for NGOs to have any future at all in Belarus they have to promote regime change. It should be carried out through cooperation between NGOs and democratic political parties.

Belarussian authorities have made registration of organisations almost impossible. Also more and more fines are demanded from NGOs. The authorities have drawn up black lists on organisations that are not allowed to initiate projects or receive foreign aid. The state makes propaganda against NGOs in public media, accusing many well-known organisations or their active members of breaching laws, damaging national interests, etc.

At the local level NGOs cooperate to some extent with public authorities. Local authorities often have a critical opinion of Lukashenko (although not of course publicly). However, there is often fear of cooperation with NGOs or no interest towards it or it is not considered necessary.

The interviewees were also critical of their own sphere of activity. Many Belarussian NGOs are elitarian and have little contact with the wider public. They constitute ”democratic ghettos ”that include a very small number of people. There is an effort to do something for the people but not **together with** the people. There are also organisations that operate rather for themselves and the interests of their members than the ones of the wider public.

People are afraid of participating in organisations because the propaganda has scared them off. Activeness is also decreased by the fact that the general national and societal awareness is low. The image of NGOs is not good either. Many people are especially sceptical about political parties but also about NGOs connected with politics. The reason is not only the state
propaganda but also the low level of success of the organisations. It is believed that NGOs do not offer solutions to the problems of ordinary people.

The resources of Belarussian NGOs are even smaller than in Moldova. There are practically no local resources, the sponsors have been discouraged. Organisations depend on foreign aid which is small compared to neighbouring countries. The state hinders in many ways the reception of foreign aid. Unlike in most countries in the world, the aid is taxed by government. It is necessary to apply for a special permit to carry out projects, but these are hard to get hold of even for non-political projects (e.g. in the social or environmental field).

The situation has recently become worse, so that it is difficult to receive foreign aid through formal channels. Representatives of many donors have left the country. Donors have weak contacts with NGOs and lack information about local conditions, and therefore the priorities of the donors do not often respond to local needs. The relations of some experts employed by the donors, including some local experts, with NGOs and the people are weak. The subjective opinion of the experts involved influences the decisions of the donors. It was also considered problematic that the provision of aid is often not transparent, which creates unhealthy competition and deteriorates the image of NGOs. It was regarded positive that the EU operates in a more transparent way than many other donors.

Foreign donors have often given in to the obstacles created by the government without trying to actively demand the government to change its actions. The low level of coordination between providers of foreign aid has led to inefficiency and overlap of activities. For instance before the elections in 2001 there was some effort to coordinate foreign aid but it was not sufficient.

Unlike Ukraine and Moldova, the interviewees in Belarus did not consider it a problem that the activities of NGOs and foreign aid were concentrated to bigger towns. On the contrary, many of them thought that local NGOs are maybe even supported too much compared to the total amount of aid, as it is for political reasons easier to support local activity.

The areas that need support are the following:
- long-term projects in cooperation with international partners, participation in international networks;
- cooperation with partners in the EU;
- trainings, seminars and exchange programmes abroad;
- contacts and communication with the wider public;
- infrastructure of NGOs: centres, networks (some interviewees, however, were sceptical about the centres);
- protection of human rights, legal aid to citizens;
- political activities;
- unregistered organisations that cannot receive aid through formal channels but that have a significant role in the process of democratisation;
- support to the cooperation of democratic political parties and NGOs prior to elections with the aim of a broad-based campaign, mobilisation of the electorate, etc;
- social work
- adult education on civil society;
- scientific and analytical work;
- cooperation with local authorities (to the extent that this is possible);
support to the least developed regions: there is a need for technological equipment, contacts, training.

In conclusion it should be stressed that foreign aid is of extreme importance to Belarus, but what is needed even more is stronger support to democratic reforms in the Belarussian society. Citing a local interview: “the future depends on the Belarussian people themselves – as long as this is not understood, nothing will change”.

**Conclusion: the wave of democratisation moves on**

The interviews showed that the atmosphere in the three countries is very different. In Ukraine people are optimistic after the Orange Revolution and willing to work for the strengthening of democracy. In Moldova there is a high level of passiveness, although there are also quite many active NGOs. The main problem of the society as well as NGOs tends to be poverty. The state does not directly hinder the activities of civil society but does not support them either. In Belarus there is a lot of pessimism and bitterness and Western-minded people tend to blame the West, accusing it of passiveness and indifference. Lukashenko’s government has become more and more totalitarian. However, the events in Ukraine have given hope that a regime change is possible.

The democratisation of Ukraine may indeed give an irreplaceable encouragement to democratic forces in neighbouring countries, especially in Russia but also in Belarus and other (semi) authoritarian countries of CIS. The success of the EU’s policy towards the East depends greatly on the democratisation of its Eastern neighbours. The EU’s aim is to avoid struggle between spheres of power and the creation of new dividing lines on the Eastern border. For that purpose it is necessary to include neighbours in the integration process, but this is possible only if the neighbours respect European values. Democracy, the rule of law and protection of human rights constitute the moral foundation of the EU with regard to which no concessions should be made. Ukraine has made a big step towards these values and is rightly expecting a considerably stronger support from the EU.

One message received in all the three countries was that the future of democracy in the society is closely linked with integration to the EU. In other words: strong, concrete, practical support to reforms is expected from Europe. By contrast, the majority of interviewees assessed the influence of Russia as negative because Russia has in recent years distanced from democratic principles. Many Ukrainians, however, believed that Ukraine will have a positive impact on Russia, encouraging its democratic forces. Belarussians believed that the events in Ukraine improve their possibilities to move towards democracy.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from the interviews is that belief in the possibility of democracy and the European model of society as well as the will to achieve these exists in all the three countries. The wave of democratisation has not stopped in Eastern Europe, and the interests and values of democratic countries (including Estonia) require that they continue to promote it.
ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. Partners

Moldova: Nicoleta Culava, Project Manager, UNDP Moldova

Ukraine: Julia Tishtshenko, Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research

Belarus: Siarhei Alfer, D.Sc., Vice Director of Belarussian Center for Constitutionalism and Comparative Legal Studies

ANNEX 2. Organisations interviewed

**UKRAINE**

1. Creative Centre “Counterpart”, Kiev / Творчий центр Каутнерпарт, г. Києв


3. Centre of Civil Initiatives, Perechin, Transcarpathia / "Центр об'єктивних ініціатив", г. Перечин, Закарпатська область

4. Monitoring of Free Press in Crimea, Simferopol / Моніторинг свободи слова в Криму, г. Симферополь

5. Humanitarian Consortium “Geneza”, Lvov / Гуманітарний консорціум Генеза, г. Львів

6. Foundation of Europe XXI, Kiev / Фонд Європа ХХІ, г. Київ

7. Committee of Ukrainian Voters, head of the representation in Kherson, Kherson / Комітет виборців України, голова представництва в г. Херсон, г. Херсон

8. Centre of Media Reform in Ivano-Frankovsk, Ivano-Frankovsk / Центр медіа-реформ в г. Івано-Франківськ, г. Івано-Франківськ

9. Youth Information Centre, social youth organisation of the town of Chernigov, Chernigov / Молодіжний інформаційний центр, Чернігівська міська молодіжна об'єднання, г. Чернігів

10. Centre of Studies on Regional Politics, Sumy / Центр досліджень регіональної політики, г. Суми

11. Centre of Social Technologies of Podolsk, Zhmerinka, Vinnica Oblast / Подольський центр соціальних технологій, г. Жмеринка, Вінницька область.
1. Agency for Cooperation and Training in Agriculture
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
31 August 98, office 401
Phone: +373 21 05 41, phone/fax: +373 21 06 95
www.acsa.md

2. Rural Development Center
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
Stefan cel Mare 180, office 901a
Phone: +373 29 54 37, +373 29 54 38
www.microfinance.md

3. Consulting and Credit in Agriculture
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
Stefan cel Mare 162, office1603
Phone: +373 21 00 89, +373 21 00 94

4. Public Association for Information from Singera
Singera, Republic of Moldova 35, 31 August Street
Phone/fax: +373 41 37 09
www.curaj.net/radios

5. Independent Journalism Center
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
53, Sciuiev Street
Phone: +373 71 62 47

6. Center for Human Rights of Moldova
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
16, Sfatul Tarii Street
Phone: +373 23 48 00
Fax: +373 24 50 94
E-mail: cpdom@mdl.net

7. International Society for Human Rights, Moldova Section
MD-2005, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
21 Renasterii Bd., office 19
Phone: +373 43 33 27
Fax: +373 43 33 27
www.iatp.md/rights

8. Informational Youth Center “World Window”
3300 MD Tiraspol, Republic of Moldova (Transdnistria)
Phone: +373 56 78 46 99
Fax: +373 56 79 35 90
E-mail: worldwindow@mail.ru
9. Association of Young Lawyers and Researchers
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova,
4 Socoleni Street, of. 10
Phone: +373 79 40 29 56

10. Women’s Association of Sanatauca
Sanatauca, Floresti District, Republic of Moldova
Phone: +373 250 66 219, +373 250 66 239
Fax: +373 25 06 62 89

11. SOMATO
Balti, Republic of Moldova
23 A Sevcenco Street
Phone/fax: +373 23 13 50 89
E-mail: somjana@mdl.net
Jana Chihai, Chairperson

12. SIRIUS
Soroca, Republic of Moldova
19 Alexandru cel Bun Street, of. 18-19
Phone: +373 23 02 65 62
Fax: +373 23 02 65 76
E-mail: al@mtc-sr.md

13. DACIA
Soroca, Republic of Moldova
Phone: +373 79 44 93 73
E-mail: crtdacia@mail.md

14. Moldova National Youth Council
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova
40/2 Lomonosov Str.
Phone: +373 79 69 49
Fax: +373 79 69 49
E-mail: info@cntm.md
www.cntm.md

15. Cultura-Lex
Causeni, Republic of Moldova
31 M. Eminescu Street, office. 53
Phone/fax +373 24 32 36 34, +373 24 32 20 10
E-mail: cultura_lex@moldova.cc

BELARUS

1. Lev Sapienha Foundation
Minsk 220123, V. Khoruzhay str. 13-416
ANNEX 3. Interview questionnaire

Background: we start with specific questions concerning the experience of the interviewees, more general and politically sensitive questions are in the end. The interview is qualitative, except in case of a few questions where answers can be rated from 1 to 10. If necessary, the interviewer may ask additional questions, e.g. if important topics are raised during the interview that are not mentioned in the questionnaire. It is essential to explore questions that are regarded as important by the interviewees and not to be restricted by the given framework. As regards questions marked with *, it is not necessary to ask all of them.

I. Experience of one’s own organisation

- Has your organisation received foreign aid from the EU or other sources? (As a rule interviews were conducted only with the NGOs that had received support from the West.) From whom, how much?

- Please describe the project(s) that received funding:
  - Objectives of the project?
  - How did you learn about the possibility to receive assistance?
o Please describe the preparation of the application: who participated in the process? Were the questions asked by the donor clear and well-grounded? Were you in contact with the representative(s) of the donor?

o Please describe the preparation of the project: was the project carried out according to the plan? If not, what did change and for which reasons?

o How do you assess the results of the project? Did you achieve the objectives set in the beginning? How was the post-evaluation of the project carried out?

o How do you evaluate cooperation with the donors? Did any problems or differences of opinion occur? Which exactly?

o What is your final assessment of the project? (rate on the scale from 1 to 10)

II. The general situation of civil society and foreign aid

- How would you describe civil society in your country?
- Has the movement during recent years been towards the positive or the negative?
- What are the strengths of civil society in your country?
- What are the weaknesses of civil society in your country?
- How do NGOs cooperate?
- What are the main obstacles to the activity of civil society? (political, social, economical)
  o the state does not favour the operation of NGOs
  o inadequate legal framework
  o few people are interested in participation
  o the possibilities for NGOs to influence the development of the society are considered low or inexistent
  o insufficient resources
  o other

- How do you assess the foreign aid directed to civil society during the last 10 years? Which assistance has been received? Has it helped to solve the abovementioned problems?

- Which problems and shortcomings do you see in connection with foreign aid provided to NGOs?
  o the amounts of support are too low
  o donors do not know local conditions
  o donors do not cooperate sufficiently with local NGOs
  o bureaucracy, e.g. drafting applications and reporting is too complicated
  o first and foremost organisations in the capital get support, a limited target group; weaker social groups and other regions do not receive (as much) support
  o single projects are supported but the sustainability of NGOs is not ensured
  o NGOs depend on Western donors and try to fulfil their expectations; connections with the donor are stronger than relations with local people
  o Coordination between donors is weak or lacking
  o which final assessment would you give to Western donors in the field of NGOs, i.e. how successful is Western support for NGOs in your country? Please rate on the scale from 1 to 10.
What kind of assistance is needed by NGOs in general and your organisation in particular?
- different fields: social work, environment, organisations for women, human rights, political organisations, etc
- infrastructure of NGOs (centres, networks, etc)
- training
- regional balance, including support to less developed regions
- relations of NGOs with political institutions
- cooperation at local level between the first, second and third sector
- cooperation with EU organisations
- other

Good examples: could you mention a successful project of another NGO that has received support? An unsuccessful project? Please describe why the project was successful/unsuccessful.

III. General situation of democracy in the country and the possibilities of the EU and NGOs to promote it.
- How do you assess the general situation of democracy in your country? What are the main shortcomings, weaknesses, problems?
- What kind of support to democracy do you expect from the EU?
- Do you believe that the future of democracy in your country will depend on how close the relations of your country with the EU are going to be?
- How does the development of and relations with Russia influence democracy in your country?

ANNEX 4. Literature


EXLINEA: Estonian-Russian, Finnish-Russian. Polish-Ukrainian and other case studies of cross-border cooperation on the home page of EXLINEA, www.exlinea.org


**Estonia’s bilateral relations with Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova**

This chapter studies the relations of Estonia with Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova since 1991. Relations between states form an important part of the framework within which Estonian NGOs operate when they develop or start to develop their activities in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. This framework is shaped by diplomatic, political, economic and cultural relations and is directly influenced by the development of international relations.

**Estonia and Belarus**

**Political relations**

The political relations between Estonia and Belarus are rather modest. This acknowledgement can be considered both surprising as well as expected. Surprising because although Estonia and Belarus are not neighbours, they are located close to each other. In European terms Belarus is, both as regards its territory and the size of population, a relatively big country (area 207,600 km² and population 10.3 million). Estonian economic relations with Belarus are relatively well-developed. Despite that the political relations of Estonia and Belarus cannot be considered as normal relations between states.

Developments in the internal politics of Belarus have led to the freezing of Estonian-Belarussian relations. In 1994 Alexander Lukashenko became the President of Belarus and the ten years of his governance has ruined Belarussian relations with the European Union and the USA, Belarus has fallen into international isolation and become a country with the most authoritarian regime in Europe.

Although the European Union and Belarus signed the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) in 1995, it has not been ratified by the parties yet. In 1997 the Council of Ministers of the European Union decided that member states should avoid direct political contact with Belarus and that political relations with Minsk are allowed only through the Presidency or the “troika” of the European Union. The aim of the radical policy towards Belarus is to counteract the internal policy decisions of President Lukashenko (falsifying election results, suppression of the opposition, banning of free media, sabotaging the activities of the OSCE mission in Minsk, etc.)

Estonia has followed the example of the European Union in its relations with Belarus. Although there are no direct conflicts or matters of dispute between Estonia and Belarus, the authoritarian regime of Lukashenko has been a real obstacle for the establishment normal political relations. No high level visits have taken place neither from Estonia to Belarus nor

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the opposite. Estonian officials avoid political contacts with the high and medium level public officials of Belarus. Relations between states concern only non-political issues and the agreements signed are of technical nature.

The modest political relations are reflected also in the diplomatic relations of the countries. Diplomatic relations between Estonia and Belarus were established in 1992. Estonia opened its Consulate General in Minsk in 1995. The consulate is headed by a chargé d'affaires ad interim. Belarus is the only country in the close neighbourhood of Estonia where Estonia does not have an embassy. Also Belarus has a consulate in Estonia.

President Lukashenko has for many years carried out a policy of establishing a Russian-Belarussian federal state and this has made Belarus a true partner for Russia. Belarus has had an opposing attitude towards European integration and the enlargement of NATO. President Lukashenko has, similarly to the leaders of Russia, attacked Estonia and Latvia concerning the question of their Russian-speaking minority. As both a candidate country and a member state of the European Union, Estonia has in its turn, severely criticised the authoritarian decisions of President Lukashenko. Most recently in October 2004, when Lukashenko – clearly falsifying election results - ensured himself the post of President for life with an absolute majority in the Belarussian Parliament. Both the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kristiina Ojuland, and the Head of the Legal Committee in the Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia), Väino Linde (who was an OSCE observer at the elections in Belarus) pointed out the undemocratic nature of the elections.

Estonian politicians quite clearly see Belarus as an undemocratic country with Russian-oriented mentality. At the same time Estonia would certainly be ready to support the democratisation of Belarus as soon as there was a real possibility that that would occur. Most likely the victory of Viktor Yushchenko in the elections in December 2004 will have its effect also on Belarus and will help the country to exit international isolation.

**Economic relations**

Despite modest political relations, economic relations between Estonia and Belarus are relatively active. Economic contacts established during the Soviet Union period have been preserved and these have developed further in the new conditions. Several joint enterprises have been found between Estonia and Belarus.

Belarus is an important transit country for Estonia. A large amount of goods are transported to European Union member states, Ukraine and Russia through Belarus. Estonia uses the Belarussian air space for direct flights to Kiev. According to the data of the Bank of Estonia the direct investment of Estonia to Belarus as of 30 December 2003 was EEK 5.2 million and from Belarus to Estonia EEK 2.9 million.

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14 Toomas Savi (Deputy-Chairman of the the Riigikogu). The EU has to assist in the democratisation process of its Eastern neighbours (EL peab kaasa aitama idanaabrite demokratisseerimisele). Postimees, 05.05.2004.
Since also the European Union is interested in developing economic relations with Belarus, despite the low level of political relations, it can be assumed that economic relations between Estonia and Belarus will rather develop and widen than the opposite.

**Cultural relations**

Approximately 28 000 Belarusians live in Estonia. In 1994 the Estonian-Belarussian Cultural Society was founded and its six departments merged into the Estonian Association of Belarusians in 2001. Already for eight years the Estonian Belarussian Cultural Society has organised the Estonian–Belarussian cultural festival “Spotkannye” (Meeting) where Belarussian cultural figures or performers have always participated. The Estonian Belarussian Cultural Society is also an organiser of the traditional festival “Slavonian Wreath”.

**Development co-operation**

Just as Estonian and Belarussian political relations have remained modest, development co-operation has yet to become very active. Some projects have, however, been implemented. In 2000 Estonia organised a summer camp at Loksa for children who suffered in the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe. In 2002 the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs arranged a seminar on the World Trade Organisation for Belarussian state officials.

**Estonia and Ukraine**

**Political relations**

Unlike with Belarus, Estonian political, economic and cultural relations with Ukraine are very active. There are several reasons for that. The Ukrainian political system, during both President Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) and President Leonid Kutchma (1994-2005) has been considerably more democratic and open than the regime of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus. With the government of the Western-minded President Viktor Yushchenko, we may predict that Estonian-Ukrainian relations will become even more active and diverse.

Ukraine is a large country in the European context (area 603 700 km², population 48.1 million). Both the European Union and NATO need to take into consideration the possible membership of Ukraine. Ukraine has also repeatedly expressed its wish to join these organisations.

Estonia has always considered the developments in Ukraine of great importance. The existence of a democratic Ukraine balances authoritarian tendencies in Russia and is therefore a guarantee for Estonia that Russia will not return to its former borders. Estonia has tried to support democratic developments in Ukraine and severely criticised Russian interference with Ukrainian internal politics.

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Prior to the presidential elections in 2004 Estonian public interest towards Ukraine reached the top. There were speculations about both the election results as well as the reactions of Russia in the media. For instance the director of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, Andres Kasekamp, claimed that after the victory of Viktor Yushchenko Russia is going to exert strong pressure on Ukraine. Kasekamp predicted that Russia is will impose economic sanctions to Ukraine and Moscow will try to agitate the Russian minority against Kiev.\textsuperscript{16}

A considerable number of Estonian observers, including members of the Riigikogu, followed all rounds of Ukrainian presidential elections. Their opinion of the first (October 2004) and second (November 2004) round of the elections was highly critical. Thus the Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, Marko Mihkelson, noted when commenting the first round of the elections: “In case it will be found that the elections cannot be deemed democratic, it will definitely create tensions not only in the Estonian-Ukrainian relations but in the Ukrainian relations with the whole European Union”.\textsuperscript{17} The events taking place in the Ukrainian presidential elections were considered as a larger fight between Russia and the European Union.\textsuperscript{18} Ukraine was advised to follow the example of the Rose Revolution that took place in Georgia in 2003 (a bloodless \textit{coup d’etat} which resulted with a Western-minded President to come to power in the former Soviet Republic) and to avoid the events in Belarus.\textsuperscript{19}

In December 2004, after the victory of Viktor Yushchenko in the elections, the Orange Revolution, cancellation of the second round of presidential elections by the Ukrainian Constitutional Court and the holding of a repeat second round, it is even important than before for Estonia to support pro-Western reforms in Ukraine. Including its rapprochement to the European Union.\textsuperscript{20} At the same time Estonia hopes that the influence of the democratic coup in Ukraine will reach Belarus and Moldova, as a result of which also these countries are going to be governed by a Western-minded elite.

Diplomatic relations were established between Estonia and Ukraine in 1992. Both states have opened an embassy in the capital of the other. There is an Estonian Ukrainian parliamentary group in the Riigikogu. A similar friendship group operates also in the Ukrainian parliament. Many high-level political visits have taken place between Estonia and Ukraine. There is a considerable number of agreements between the two countries: Ukraine and Estonia have signed 50 agreements.

\textbf{Economic relations}

\textsuperscript{16}Erkki Bahovski. Ukraine may steer towards repeated elections (\textit{Ukraina võib tüürida kordusvalimiste suunas}). Postimees, 30.11.2004.

\textsuperscript{17}Riina Tallo. Ukrainian elections lacked democracy (\textit{Ukraina valimistel nappis demokraatiat}). Postimees, 02.11.2004.


\textsuperscript{20}Further reading: the issues of ”Diplomaatia” on Ukraine (13.10.2004 and 16.01.2005).
Ukraine has always been an important trade partner for Estonia. In 1993 an intergovernmental joint committee was established between Estonia and Ukraine concentrating on developing economic and trade relations. As regards Estonian exports, Ukraine is the twelfth largest importer, and as regards import to Estonia, Ukraine is the sixth largest exporter. In 2003 Estonian exports to Ukraine were worth EEK 1.137 billion, imports from Ukraine EEK 3.894 billion. The most important export articles were products of food industry (fish and fish products), metals and metal products, raw paper and paper products. The main import articles were vehicles (ships and locomotives), metals and metal products and products of food industry.

Due to Estonian accession to the European Union the Estonian-Ukrainian free trade agreement ceased to be in force. It has decreased trade between Estonia and Ukraine, especially as regards Estonian export to Ukraine. Ukrainian accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), that can take place already in the end of 2005, gives a reason to presume that the level of trade from the period of the free trade agreement will be gradually recovered. When Ukraine will become a member of the WTO the European Union will have a possibility to offer Ukraine a free trade agreement or other regimes of more favourable trading. It would recuperate the most-favoured-nation treatment in Estonian-Ukrainian trade relations. According to the data of the Bank of Estonia Estonian enterprises have invested to Ukraine EEK 341.1 million as of the end of 2003 that forms 2.7% of the total amount of Estonian foreign investment. Ukrainian direct investment to Estonia constituted EEK 15.6 million in the end of 2003.

Co-operation between regions

Several Estonian and Ukrainian regions have established or are about to establish direct relations, signing co-operation agreements and carrying out mutual visits. Some examples of co-operation contacts: Tallinn-Kiev, Tallinn-Odessa, Tartu county and Ivano-Frankovsk, Hiiumaa county and the region of Kherson, Valga county and the district of Shatskiy.

In establishing co-operation relations Estonian towns and counties have not limited themselves with just the Western-oriented West-Ukraine. Economic and cultural co-operation takes place also with towns and oblasts in East-Ukraine.

Development co-operation

Besides Georgia, Ukraine is one of the most important target countries as regards Estonian development co-operation. Estonia has carried out training projects directed to Ukraine in co-operation with Canada and the United Kingdom. Ukrainian state officials have received training on certification, veterinary medicine, privatisation, monetary reform, banking and WTO. In co-operation with Canada, Latvia and Lithuania a four-year training programme on economic management was started in October 2000 for Ukrainian civil servants (Canada-Ukraine-Baltic Economic Management Training Program – CUBE MTP). In the framework of development co-operation the Estonian School of Diplomacy carries out in-service training for young Ukrainian diplomats.

21 At negotiations with the European Union Estonia declared its wish to maintain the free trade agreement with Ukraine. Since it is not in harmony with the EU common customs and foreign trade policy, Estonia had to give up the intention.
Cultural and educational co-operation

After 1991 contacts between Estonian and Ukrainian universities have developed rapidly. Contacts have been established between the University of Tartu and the University of Lviv, Estonian Agricultural University and National Agricultural University of Ukraine, Tallinn Technical University and Kiev Polytechnical Institute, the Estonian School of Diplomacy and the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Tallinn Pedagogical University and Kiev Pedagogical University.

Estonian and Ukraine have signed several co-operation agreements in the field of education and science. In February 1996 an intergovernmental agreement on the mutual recognition of educational documents was signed. There is also active cooperation on the basis of the cooperation plans signed by the ministries of education (the last cooperation protocol was signed on 3 January 2002 in Tartu). In 2000 a cooperation agreement was signed between Estonian Academy of Sciences and Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

An intergovernmental agreement on co-operation in the area of culture, education and science, signed in 1994, and an agreement on cultural co-operation, signed in 1996, provide a legal framework for Estonian-Ukrainian cultural co-operation.

Ukrainians in Estonia and Estonians in Ukraine

According to the data from the last census approximately 30 000 Ukrainians live in Estonia that is the second biggest national minority in Estonia. The biggest and oldest Ukrainian organisation in Estonia is the Ukrainian Community in Estonia. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church operates in Estonia.


Estonia and Moldova

Political relations

Bilateral relations between Estonia and Moldova are in the initial phase of development. Moldova does not by far have such an economic and political importance for Estonia as Ukraine and even Belarus. The geographical distance is greater and there were practically no bilateral relations prior to 1991. Also the small size of both countries (Moldova: area 33 843 km$^2$ and population 4.4 million) and the low level of resources have not allowed the relations to be developed actively. So far Moldova is for Estonia as well as Estonia is for Moldova a terra incognita. This, however, does not mean that there would be no development potential in the relations of the two countries.

From September 2002 the Estonian representative of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Marianne Mikko, leads the EU-Moldova friendship delegation of the European Parliament. According to the assessment of Mikko, Moldova is, despite its level of poverty (Moldova is considered to be the poorest country in Europe) a surprisingly democratic country where the opposition can act freely. Both Mikko and Estonian foreign policy makers consider the Moldovan President, ex-communist Vladimir Voronin (in office since 2001) a relatively flexible politician who is disappointed in Russia and has turned his country in the direction of integration with the European Union and NATO.

The tone of Mikko’s comments of may, nevertheless, create highly optimistic feelings in the reader. Since 2004 when Voronin took over the national and Western-oriented rhetoric of the opposition, he has achieved the weakening and the splitting of the opposition. Several opposition forces that in 2003 acted as competitors to Voronin and the communists have by now lost their popularity.

In the Parliamentary elections held in March 2005 Moldovan communists won 55 seats, i.e. absolute majority, in the Parliament of 101 members. The Russian-minded party, Democratic Moldova, which however supports Moldovan accession to NATO came on the second place. The Moldovan Christian-Democratic People’s Party that most clearly supports the Western and Romanian orientation was clearly on the third place. Other parties did not exceed the 6 percent election threshold. According to international observers the elections were generally honest, just the support of the Moldovan national media mainly to communists was criticised.

Thus a relatively peculiar internal policy situation has developed in Moldova where the political forces that earlier supported orientation towards communism and Russia have turned to the west and are talking about the possible Moldovan membership in the European Union and NATO in the future. So far the Western oriented processes have led to accomplishing the

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24 The reason for the disappointment of Voronini is the problem of Transdnistria. In 1940 the Soviet Union united Transdnistria that was inhabited by Ukrainians and Russians with Bessarabia conquered from Romania. Within the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic created by Stalin Transdnistria was the main industrial area. In 1990 Transdnistria, afraid of the reestablishment of Romanian power in Moldova, proclaimed itself independent. Until no state has recognised Transdnistria. From 1991 to 1992 battles with the Moldavian Army took place in Transdnistria. Over 700 people died. When Russia interfered, Moldovan Army withdrew. Russian 14th Army remained in Transdnistria together with Russian and Ukrainian peace-keeping forces.

The area of is 4000 km², population 400 000, capital Tiraspol. Transdnistria uses the flag, coat of arms and anthem of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. Transdnistria has its own Parliament and currency. Since 1990 President Igor Smirnov is on power.

In the beginning of his term President Vladimir Voronin tried to bring Moldova closer to Russian offering Moscow a a large scale co-operation agreement as regards governing Transdnistria and making Russian one of the official languages of Moldova. However, Voronin began to distance from Moscow as soon as it became clear that the opposition is strong enough to arrange mass demonstrations against his politics in Chișinău and that Moscow is not ready to take steps to respond to his gestures of rapprochement.

In 1999 Russia promised OSCE to withdraw its military forces from Transdnistria but has later repeatedly reneged from the plan. In the beginning of 2004 Russia declared that it does not intend to fulfill the duty unconditionally. Most likely the precondition of withdrawing its army is the fulfillment of Transdnistrian political aspirations. This is probably a confederation where Transdnistria would, in principle, be independent and at equal footing with the rest of Moldova as regards foreign relations.

25 However, in the 2005 Parliamentary elections communists lost a lot of seats as compared to the elections in 2001 when they won 71 seats out of 101.
possible withdrawal of the Russian army from Moldova, however, the Western orientation has not become the dominant ideology in the country at promoting the development of democratic institutions. For Moldova to become a really Western state, the EU and the USA have to strongly assist in solving the Transdniestrian problem. Moldova also needs to experience that the accession of Romania to the European Union has a positive influence on Moldovan-Romanian relations.26

Estonia and Moldova cooperate mainly in international organisations. Estonian, together with the Czech Republic, is one of the most active OSCE members that regularly demands the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova.27 The Estonian government has during the last three years supported the withdrawal of the army from Moldova with EUR 10 000 each year, transferring the funds to the Moldova assistance fund established by the OSCE. Estonia is ready to continue the assistance. Together with EU member states Estonia has enforced a visa ban on the political leaders of Transdniestria.

Diplomatic relations between Estonia and Moldova were established in 1992. Estonia covers Moldova from its embassy in Kiev. The Moldovan ambassador to Estonia resides in Minsk.

Economic relations

Estonian and Moldovan economic relations are modest. According to the data on trade from recent years, Moldova’s share in the turnover of Estonian foreign trade has been less than 0.01%. As regards trade of main articles, Moldova was on the 56th place in 2002 and on the 68th place in 2003 among Estonian trading partners.

On the basis of the data of the Bank of Estonia as of 30 December 2003 the total amount of Moldovan direct investment to Estonia was EEK 2.1 million. According to official data there is no direct investment from Estonia to Moldova.

Development co-operation

The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs assists Moldova since 2004 in building up institutions necessary for European integration. The support is provided in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom and the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Chișinău.

Cultural relations

A Romanian-Moldova cultural society has been active in Estonia since 1989. For years the head of the society was Veronika Palandi who was named the honorary consul of Romania in Estonia in 2000. In the framework of the Association of National Cultures (“Lyra”), the

26 Marianne Mikko. There is yet another state at the border of the East and the West (Veel üks ida ja lääne piiril riik). Postimees, 21.01.2005.
27 Editorial. There are still countries that should be exited (Veel on maid, kust tuleks välja minna). Eesti Päevaleht, 31.07.2004.
Moldovan Cultural Society "Luchaferul" carries out its activities in Estonia. Approximately 8000 Moldovans live in Estonia and around 100 Estonians live in Moldova.

**Estonia looking for a neighbourhood policy and directions of development co-operation**

Estonia does not have a framework document concerning the EU Neighbourhood Policy. Nevertheless, since 2002 Estonia has gradually worked out its positions as regards matters of Neighbourhood Policy. These positions have become a part of the rhetoric of Estonian foreign policy. These are expressed at diplomatic meetings and at public presentations held by diplomats. Estonian positions on Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova could be summarised as follows:

- **Belarus.** Estonia does not support the isolation of Belarus from Europe, leaving Belarus to a grey zone. Estonia is in favour of the idea of creating a European Union information centre in Minsk. Estonia is also of the opinion that the European Commission should open its office in Belarus. Estonia is ready to provide assistance to Belarussian NGOs.

- **Ukraine.** The main position of Estonian concerning Ukraine is that in its Neighbourhood Policy the European Union should treat Ukraine separately from Russia. Estonian believes that Ukraine has to develop reforms oriented to democracy and market economy and Estonia is ready to introduce its experience in implementing such reforms. The opinion of Estonia is that membership in the European Union is the strongest motivator for carrying out reforms. Therefore Estonia considers it important that the European Union should offer Ukraine the perspective of membership.

- **Moldova.** Regarding Moldova Estonia at the moment considers essential the withdrawal or the Russian Army from Transdnistria. In addition, Estonia is of the opinion that the European Commission should open its representative in Moldova or at least send there its special representative.

The new neighbours of the European Union are also of considerable importance for Estonian development co-operation. Estonia has been a donor country from 1998. The amount of development aid has remained low so far (ref. Margit Säre’s article). The preferred regions for aid have been Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (including countries in the Western Balkans) and South-Caucasia. Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova have been mentioned among the main targets countries. In 2004 Estonia directed 36% of its development aid to Georgia and 23% to Ukraine. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the main areas of development cooperation are the following: preparation of the target countries of the EU Neighbourhood Policy for accession to international organisations, especially to WTO, training and development projects on information technology and projects on the development of public administration.

Estonia hopes that when in 2007 the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument is started, Estonians will be able to significantly expand its operation in the target countries in the East.

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Conclusion

How is the direction taken by Estonia placed in the larger European context? Estonia is looking for its role in the European Union. It would be logical to concentrate on Russia but the low level of Estonian-Russian relations forms an obstacle to that. In 2003 the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs financed three projects in Estonia, Latvia and Russia to find out why cross-border co-operation between Estonia and Russia as well as Latvia and Russia has remained modest. The common conclusion that was reached by all the three projects was that successful cross-border co-operation is hindered by the lack of friendly relations between Estonia and Russia and Latvia and Russia.  

Certainly, extensive prioritisation of small countries and a complete neglect of cooperation with Russia would be a mistake for Estonia. For example, a more active participation in the projects in the framework of the Northern Dimension could provide a good channel for Estonia to cooperate with Russia. The focus of the Northern Dimension projects on environmental and social issues and practical co-operation at local level is relatively neutral and non-political, thus helping to cross tensions in bilateral relations.

However, for the Northern dimension to justify itself for Estonia as a co-operation model with Russia, the current content and ideology of the Northern Dimension have to change. So far the Northern Dimension has been mainly a unilateral initiative of Finland (and to a lesser extent also of Sweden and Denmark). In its nature is has constituted bilateral cooperation under the name of the European Union where the funds necessary have come from the Nordic countries. Russia has been relatively passive towards the initiatives and financing of the programme and has expressed its criticism about its activities.

Thus it is understandable that Estonia considers these countries where the environment for co-operation is friendlier as more important from the point of view of the neighbourhood policy and development co-operation.

The possibilities of Estonia to assist in the democratic development of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and maybe also Belarus in the future are considerably better than in case of Russia. Therefore it is not surprising that Estonia has, in recent years, turned more and more attention to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.  

The European Neighbourhood Policy (that Russia has distanced itself from wishing to have special relations with the European Union in the framework of the Four Spaces agreement) provides a good possibility to expand these activities. Estonia is specialising on the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union who are now neighbours of the European Union.

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33 The European Neighbourhood Policy (http://europe.eu.int/comm/world/enp/index_en.htm).
The active participation of Estonian in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova has an important political undertone. Democratic shifts will decrease the influence of Russia in the countries of former Soviet Union and may thus be considered as security guarantors for Estonia. Estonia does not have the power to initiate such shifts but is therefore even more ready to offer its reform and integration experience to states that are ready to distance from the authoritarian regime strengthening in Russia and to move closer to the European Union and NATO.

However, Estonia should not limit itself to post-revolutionary reconstruction in its policies directed to the EU’s Eastern neighbours. The status of Belarus and Moldova is in the long run equally important for Estonia as the one of Ukraine. Poland and Lithuania are very active towards Belarus, despite the authoritarian Russian-oriented regime. Estonia should also implement a more active policy on Belarus, trying to bring its interests concerning Belarus closer to the ones of Lithuania and Poland. As regards Moldova, Estonia should not only focus on the problem of Transdnistria but try to provide its assistance, so that the Moldovan political elite and society would be interested in entering into closer relations with the European Union also despite the problem of Transdnistria and respect European values and understanding of democracy.

The new neighbours in the East constitute a region with large possibilities for Estonian NGOs. Developing relations with these countries is a priority for Estonia. At the same time Estonian NGOs need to take into account that operation in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova but also in South-Caucasia do not constitute just bilateral relations. Both NGOs and the Estonian state need to set its relations with the countries into the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy and its programmes provides good possibilities to cooperate with European Union partners and increase Estonian influence and resources. It is also useful to have co-operation with different European Union member states that have similar interests and objectives towards the new neighbours in the East.
Co-operation of Estonian non-governmental organisations with partners in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and North-West Russia

During the last couple of years Estonia has turned from an aid-receiving to an aid-providing country. This is on the one hand thanks to the social and economic development of the country and on the other due to the accession to the European Union, where development aid constitutes an important part of foreign policy. The principles of Estonian development co-operation were approved in 2003. According to these, the priority of Estonia is to share its experience of carrying out reforms with those countries that are now going through similar reforms that Estonian did a few years ago: thus mainly with the CIS and the Balkan countries. Focusing on the neighbouring countries to the East of the European Union is thus characteristic to Estonian (as well as to several other new European Union member states’) development aid and therefore, in case of Estonia, development aid partly coincides with the objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Estonian development aid also encompasses cross-border cooperation with the CIS countries.

The principles of Estonian development co-operation stress the significant role of NGOs in elaborating policies, working out and implementing specific projects and introducing the subject to the Estonian population.

According to the principles Estonia can share its reform experience especially well in the following fields:
- public administration and institutional development,
- support for accession to international organisations,
- development of civil society,
- development of the system of civil protection,
- information and communication technology,
- environmental protection.

This chapter introduces the activities of Estonian NGOs directed to the CIS, especially Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, as well as the Pskov and Leningrad Oblast in Russia. An overview is given of the fields, funders and partners of the projects in the countries of the CIS. The main problems that have occurred during projects and possibilities for solving them along with future perspectives for continuing and strengthening co-operation between NGOs are also discussed.

The experience of Estonian NGOs in cross-border and development co-operation with the CIS countries

34 The principles of Estonian development co-operation (Eesti arengukoostöö põhimõtted). RTI, 27.01.2003 http://www.vm.ee/
Estonian NGOs do not yet have a long-lasting experience in implementing projects of development aid and co-operation; there are also very few NGOs for whom this type of co-operation is the main aim of its activities. However, during recent years new associations have been founded that have successfully carried out projects with partners from Belarus, Ukraine and North-Western Russia. Several of these projects have received support from European Union programmes or from the Estonian development co-operation programme.

Several NGOs whose fields of activity are the provision of social services, environment or education, have initiated development projects in these areas. The strong side of such NGOs is the experience of working in a special field. This experience can be used in projects of development co-operation or in educational and informational activities related to development co-operation.

The Open Estonia Foundation, the European Movement in Estonia, the Estonian Fund for Nature, the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation, the Regional Environmental Center Estonia (REC Estonia) and the e-Governance Academy have been the most active partners in carrying out development co-operation projects with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus.

Below a short description will follow of the most important projects of these organisations.

- **The European Movement in Estonia** has during the last couple of years started to actively develop projects with NGOs in North-Western Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus with the general aim of promoting the development of democracy and civil society in these countries. For instance, there is a project “New possibilities of youth cooperation for the European Union of 25 member states and its Eastern neighbours” that is financed by the European Commission Youth programme. Project partners are Center Strategy (St. Petersburg), Association Adept (Moldova) and the European Movement in Belarus and Ukraine. The aim of the project is to support cross-border co-operation of the European Union and its new Eastern neighbours directed towards the youth.

- **The Estonian Fund for Nature** (ELF) has carried out several joint actions with the Sami from the Kola Peninsula, including seminars, providing consultations and elaborating a development plan during the last couple of years. In addition, a conference “Land and People” has been arranged twice on the Kola Peninsula.

Through the projects the Estonian Fund for Nature has helped the Sami to establish several associations based on kinship, through which they would have a possibility to ensure sources of living: apply for land for long-term use, deal with traditional fields of trade, etc.

- **The Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation** - the main co-operation projects have been on environmental protection and water management, also training programmes for NGOs and municipal leaders by the Lake Peipsi both on the Estonian

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36 www.euroopaliikumine.ee
37 www.elfond.ee
38 www.ctc.ee
and Russian side have been carried out. The organisation’s new direction is projects of
development co-operation in Ukraine and Central-Asia.

As a very positive example of the organisation’s projects is the summer school on
cross-border co-operation held in Estonia in 2004 with participants from NGOs and
local and central governments from the Baltic states, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova.

- **The e-Governance Academy** (EGA)\(^39\) has held trainings on e-government both for
  state officials as well as specialists from NGOs and research institutions of the CIS
countries (including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova). In 2004 more than 200
  higher officials from 17 countries, mainly from Central-Asia, Transcaucasia and the
  Balkans, received training through the Academy.

- **The Regional Environmental Center Estonia (REC Estonia)**\(^40\) has implemented
  projects in the field of environment, e.g. a large project "Schools for sustainability in
  the Baltic States" together with the representatives of the movement Global Action
  Plan from St. Petersburg (as well as with partners from the Netherlands, Latvia and
  Lithuania). It was easy to find common goals with project partners from St. Petersburg
  – the interests of the parties concerning education on sustainable development
  coincided.

REC Estonia has also started to actively find co-operation partners in Belarus in order
to prepare joint projects on environmental education. The headquarters of REC in
Hungary supported the fact finding mission of REC Estonia to Belarus in 2004.

- **The Open Estonia Foundation**\(^41\) is starting a programme in 2005 in support of civil
  society in Belarus. The aim of the project is increasing the influence of
democratically-minded civil society in Belarus and developing international
communication between citizens and associations in Belarus and Western countries.
The objective is also to support the dissemination of democratic thinking in the
country as a whole. The planned activities are study trips to Estonia, information
seminars and trainings both in Estonia and in Belarus, publishing information
materials, etc.

Many of the abovementioned organisations have pointed out the following problems in
relations with the Eastern partners:
- communication problems (little information in internet, low level of development of
  communication technology),
- different working culture and culture of communication,
- higher level of centralisation in Eastern countries and need to harmonise all activities
  with the authorities,
- visa regime (time consuming and expensive),
- problems with finding donors.

Several of the abovementioned problems are not related to the third sector and it is difficult
for NGOs to do something to solve them. Among such problems are, for instance, the

\(^{39}\) [www.ega.ee](http://www.ega.ee)

\(^{40}\) [www.recestonia.ee](http://www.recestonia.ee)

\(^{41}\) [www.oef.org.ee](http://www.oef.org.ee)
expensive and time consuming visa procedure with the CIS countries, higher level of centralisation in countries in the East and partly problems with funding, i.e. the low number of financing programmes that would support at the same time NGOs in both Estonia as well as in the countries of the CIS.

At the same time it is natural that the working and communication culture of different countries is not similar and that instead of criticising the working culture in Russia, Moldova, the Balkans or elsewhere an effort should be made to understand it and take it into account. In the beginning it may, though, take a lot of time and effort to get to know one’s co-operation partner. It is recommended to hold frequent face-to-face meetings, discuss problems and fix rules together.

**Initiative to create an umbrella organisation for Estonian NGOs dealing with development and cross-border co-operation: Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation**

A highly positive initiative that encompasses organisations dealing with development cooperation is the creation of the Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation in 2003, the main aim of which is improving the efficiency of Estonian policy on development co-operation, practical promoting of development co-operation and informing the public about relevant issues. The Roundtable consists of 17 organisations and more than 70 individuals.

The member organisations of the Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation are:

- Amnesty International Estonia
- Open Estonia Foundation
- Caritas Estonia
- European Movement in Estonia
- Estonian Green Movement-FoE
- Estonian Refugee Council
- Estonian Society for Nature Conservation
- United Nations Association of Estonia
- Estonian Fund for Nature
- Jaan Tõnisson Institute
- Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation
- Regional Environmental Center Estonia (REC Estonia)
- Estonian Women’s Studies and Resource Centre
- e-Governance Academy
- Johannes Mihkelson Centre
- People to People Estonia
- Women’s Training Centre

All the members of the Roundtable have either carried out development co-operation or plan to do so in the near future. At the same time only about half of them have co-operation experience with the CIS countries. The other organisations have operated in a larger

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42 Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation information portal, www.terveilm.net
international scale, including countries in the Balkans or Africa. The small experience of Estonian NGOs in development co-operation is reflected also in the fact that none of the member organisations of the Roundtable have development co-operation as its main objective. (Either development aid, i.e. aid to another country in the form of funds, other material assistance or know-how or humanitarian aid, i.e. material assistance for alleviating the consequences of natural or other catastrophes.) Cross-border co-operation on the Estonian-Russian border area has been mentioned among the aims of the activities of the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation.

In addition to the member organisations the Roundtable has more than 70 individual members (politicians, state officials, lecturers, etc).

**Information work on development co-operation in Estonia**

Information work has mainly been carried out by the Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation through its roundtables and the information portal *Terveilm* ([www.terveilm.net](http://www.terveilm.net)) that was opened in 2004 and that provides information on development co-operation both in Estonian and in English. In addition, a lot of materials on development co-operation are available at the internet site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([http://www.vm.ee/est/kat_47/2998.html](http://www.vm.ee/est/kat_47/2998.html)) offering information about basic documents of development co-operation, objectives of international organisations and development co-operation in Estonia.

In December 2003 the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Development Co-operation Association EUROSTEP, Open Estonia Foundation and the Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation organised an international conference “Opening world: development co-operation in new Europe”. It was a highly positive example of how the representatives of the European Commission, Estonian government and NGOs discussed the future perspectives of development co-operation. The conference explained what can be done by the government and the NGOs to make activities connected to development co-operation and humanitarian aid more efficient in Estonia.

In June 2004 the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Riigikogu held a roundtable “Engaging the third sector into the elaboration of foreign policy” where the positions and proposals of the Committee were presented. The members of the Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation were also present. In addition, in March 2005 the Committee convened NGOs that deal with Russia. Representatives of the Open Estonia Foundation, Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation, Estonian Fund for Nature, European Movement in Estonia and the NGO Fenno-Ugria Foundation. The representatives of NGOs stressed that they expect a clearer East-oriented policy from the Estonian state along with higher financial support.

In the end of 2004 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a brochure “Estonia assists. Estonian Development Co-operation” that gives a short overview of the directions of Estonian development co-operation, its main target countries and fields where Estonia has shared its reform experience.

The activities mentioned above indicate that Estonia considers NGOs as significant and serious partner in carrying out development co-operation: NGOs are engaged both to the
elaboration and the implementation of policies. The funds directed to development co-operation of NGOs from the state budget have also increased.

**Other organisations cooperating with the CIS countries**

In addition to the Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation there are several other organisations that either regularly cooperate or have carried out some projects with the countries of the CIS.

**Co-operation in (higher) education and research**

Universities and research institutions form a highly active sector where co-operation partners are sought both from the East and the West.

The University of Tartu EuroCollege\(^{43}\) can be pointed out as a very good example, having a long-standing co-operation experience with the St. Petersburg State University and the Pskov Volnyi Institute. In autumn 2004 the project “Network Transition Studies” was initiated with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers where, in addition to partners from Denmark, Norway and Sweden partners are involved from the International Relations Institute of the St. Petersburg State University, Novgorod State University, Pskov State Pedagogical Institute and the St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Finance.

There has been a long-lasting and active co-operation also between the Narva College of the University of Tartu\(^ {44}\) and the Pskov State Pedagogical Institute. Co-operation plans have been signed also between the Narva College and the Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University as well as between the Narva College and the Pskov State Pedagogical Institute.

In 2004 the Narva College arranged a study visit to Estonia for the representatives of municipalities and NGOs from towns in Moldova, the Baltic states and Bender in the framework of the project “Managing Local Problems in Multicultural Communities”. Open Estonia Foundation supported the event. One of the results of the project was the plan to publish a handbook on the development of the third sector in Moldova.

The Estonian School of Diplomacy\(^ {45}\) has also actively co-operated with partners from the East. From 2003 to 2004 the Estonian School of Diplomacy held two training projects: one for the students of the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and the second for young Ukrainian diplomats on the subject of the European Union and NATO. A co-operation agreement was signed with the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine in 2003.

The main partners of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute in their co-operation with the CIS countries have been the Pskov and Leningrad Oblast. For instance, in 2003 a project to provide training to the leaders of the tourism sector in Pskov Oblast was carried out, also two conferences were organised on Estonian and Russian (regional) economic co-operation together with the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation.

\(^{43}\) [www.ec.ut.ee/ec/](http://www.ec.ut.ee/ec/)

\(^{44}\) [http://narva.ut.ee/](http://narva.ut.ee/)

\(^{45}\) [www.edk.edu.ee/](http://www.edk.edu.ee/)
In addition to practical projects the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute has implemented several large-scale study projects in co-operation with Russia. In 2003 a study was held concerning the reasons for the low level cross-border co-operation between Estonian regions and the Pskov Oblast where the partner from the Russian side was Centre “Vozrozhdenye” from Pskov.46

Cultural organisations

Cultural societies constitute a separate form of co-operation with the countries of the CIS. The main objective of the organisations is keeping contacts with the kin state and keeping and promoting national culture.

The Russian cultural centre located in Tallinn has organised several theatre projects in cooperation with theatres and playwrights from St. Petersburg and Moscow. The Ukrainian Estonian Society and the Belarussian Cultural Centre “Batkaushtchnyna” are other larger cultural societies in Estonia.

The town of Narva is rich in the number of cultural organisations. There are 15 organisations representing different nationalities, e.g. the Narva Town Slavic Cultural Society “Svyatogor”, the Narva Belarus Society “Syabry”, Estonian-Belarussian Cultural Society “Spadchina”, Narva Ukrainian national community. The high number of cultural societies can be explained by the rate of national minorities that form 95% of the population of the town.

The activities of cultural societies are usually limited to the field of culture and therefore projects promoting democracy are generally not carried out.

Co-operation with kindred peoples

Co-operation with kindred peoples constitutes a separate direction in Estonian development co-operation. NGO Fenno-Ugria Foundation, re-established in 1991, is an umbrella organisation uniting Estonian organisations and foundations that are interested in co-operation with the kindred peoples. The Foundation deals with the coordination of kinship related work, information exchange between Estonian organisations and with the kindred peoples and introduction of Finno-Ugric nations in Estonia. The Foundation coordinates the co-operation between a broad range of organisations both nationally and internationally and exchanges contacts with the Finno-Ugric republics in the Russian Federation. Conferences are arranged and sending delegations from Estonia to the kindred peoples in Russia is organised. For instance, in August 2004 IV World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples was held in Tallinn.

Co-operation Council of the Estonian-Latvian-Russian Border Region / Pskov-Livonia Euroregion

The Co-operation Council was founded in 1996 with the aim of strengthening co-operation in the Estonian, Latvian and Russian border region. In 2003 the Co-operation Council was renamed Pskov-Livonia Euroregion. Valga, Võru and Põlva county in Estonia, Aluksne,
Balvi, Valkai and Ludza county in Latvia and Pskov, Pechory, Pytalovo, Palkino and Sebezh district in Russia participate in the co-operation. As of now it is the only Euroregion on the Estonian-Russian border.

The organisation has implemented a variety of projects on tourism, environmental education and development of entrepreneurship. However, it has not developed into the administrative centre of cross-border co-operation in the region. The main problems of the organisation are connected to administrative and financial questions – it is difficult to get support for projects where both an EU member state (former candidate country) and Russia participate.

NGO Civil Training Centre

The Civil Training Centre is an organisation with the objective of organising trainings to promote civil activeness of people and developing women’s and children’s activities. In co-operation with women’s organisations from Finland, Sweden, North-Western Russia and Estonia the Centre has implemented a project aiming to improve women’s activeness of participating in elections. The project partner in the Russian side was the League of Russian Women Voters and the project was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In addition to the NGOs that already actively co-operate with partners from the East, there are also such organisations that have just started to prepare projects and look for partners in the CIS countries. For instance, the representatives of the Estonian Women’s Chain for Collaboration were at a fact-finding mission in Moldova in 2004 to find a co-operation partner for future projects. The representatives of the organisation pointed out several problems in developing co-operation with Moldova, e.g. projects can be implemented only through umbrella organisations and not separately with smaller member organisations.

Funding of development and cross-border co-operation projects

The Development Co-operation Programme of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Development Co-operation Programme of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been a significant donor for development projects of Estonian NGOs with the CIS countries. Support has been provided through the Programme to almost all the abovementioned NGOs that have carried out co-operation projects with North-Western Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

1998 was the first year when the Estonian state allocated funds for development and humanitarian aid. Then the total amount of funds was EEK 5 527 157. It should be mentioned that in 1998 and 1999 no funds were provided to NGOs. The funds were distributed, as national aid, to alleviating the consequences of natural catastrophes, as voluntary donations to UN and OSCE foundations and for training of state officials of the CIS countries. Later on projects implemented by NGOs have received financing and its rate has gradually increased.

In 2003 the Development Co-operation Programme supported 23 projects with EEK 6 998 867 in total whereas six of the projects were carried out by NGOs. Only two projects
dealing with co-operation with the Western CIS countries received funding: the project “Training programme for leaders in the tourism sector in the Pskov Oblast” by the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute and the continuation project “Developing the capacity of the organisations of the Sami on the Kola Peninsula II” by the Estonian Fund for Nature.

In 2004 the Development Co-operation Programme of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also supported 23 projects of which almost half were belonged to NGOs and foundations. However, just three were directed towards developing co-operation with North-Western Russia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus:

1. The Eastgate project providing support for promoting cross-border co-operation of NGOs with partners in the East (target areas being North-Western Russia, Ukraine and Moldova) - carried out by the European Movement in Estonia and the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation
2. Training on the European Union and NATO for the students of the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine - held by the Estonian School of Diplomacy
3. The project “Establishment of the Beregovoye Cultural and Development Centre in Crimea, Ukraine” - implemented by the Society of Merivälja Aedlinn.

In 2004 EEK 8 million was targeted for development and humanitarian aid in the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, constituting on average just around EEK 6 per capita. Estonian development aid in total in 2003 was 0.02% of GNP. The aim of the United Nations is to increase resources for development co-operation up to 0.7% of GNP. The average rate of development aid in European Union member states is currently 0.35% of GNP and the aim is to increase it up to 0.39% of GNP.47

The maximum amount of support for projects funded from the Development Co-operation Programme is small – EEK 300 000 – which covers the costs of a trip for a group of specialists from the CIS countries to Estonia along with a few smaller expenses, however, no longer projects can be financed from that.

The Programmes of the European Union

NGOs both in Estonia as well as in our Eastern neighbours have had a wide range of possibilities through different European Union programmes to apply for financial support to their projects. The application of different financing schemes for EU candidate countries (Estonia until May 2004) and the CIS countries has constituted the main problem. It has therefore been very complicated to receive funds through one programme for joint projects where both an EU candidate country and a CIS country participate. Estonian NGOs have mainly applied for funds from PHARE programmes but, according to the regulations, organisations from Russia, Ukraine or other countries of the CIS cannot be engaged as project partners within the programme. Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus have been covered by the TACIS programme. It has theoretically been possible to implement a joint project so that the Estonian side applies for resources from the PHARE and the CIS countries from the TACIS programme. However, since the programme deadlines, priorities and other details are considerably different, there are very few projects that have been financed like that.

Now when Estonia is a member of the European Union it is possible to participate in various new programmes. The INTERREG programme is mostly related to cross-border co-operation, supporting interregional co-operation both with close neighbours and other countries across the European Union, however, the problem is that the partners that are not from European Union member states are not eligible for financing. The European Commission has promised to simplify the rules of the INTERREG programme in the framework of the new Neighbourhood Policy. In the future it should be possible to have partner organisations from the European Union member states and other countries in one and the same programme.

There are several other European Union programmes with a more specific orientation providing funds for co-operation with Eastern neighbours. For instance, the European Commission YOUTH Programme has supported a project of the European Movement in Estonia, “New possibilities of youth co-operation for the European Union of 25 member states and its Eastern neighbours”, assisting in covering travel expenses of the representatives of Russian, Moldovan and Belarussian organisations. It is also possible to finance research projects from the Sixth Framework Programme.48

The East-East programme of the Open Society Institute

The East-East programme of the Open Society Institute has lasted already for several years, aiming to develop co-operation between organisations and specialists from Central and Eastern European countries and the promote exchange of experience. The programme provides support for international initiatives of a practical nature with the objective of exchanging knowledge and experience to resolve current public issues. Priority is given to the following topics: role and capacity of NGOs, integration of socially disadvantaged groups into society, European integration, social initiatives and social policy in the context of economic and political reforms, influencing policies, civil society.

In the framework of the East-East programme participation in seminars, trainings or study visits taking place in Estonia, the countries of the CIS or the European Union candidate countries has been supported. The organisation of seminars and conferences has also been financed.

The Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers has offered modest support and scholarships to specialists from Estonian NGOs, local governments and other areas (in lesser amounts). The Nordic Council of Ministers has financed the small-scale activities in order to establish and support co-operation networks between organisations in the Nordic countries, the Baltic States and North-Western Russia. The Nordic Council of Ministers has, for instance, funded a project by the Civil Training Centre with participants from women’s organisations from Finland, Sweden, North-Western Russia and Estonia. A project by the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation has also received support where schools located at the Estonian and Russian border region participated in an international summer camp. Also various co-operation projects between universities have been financed by the Council.

The US Embassy has supported NGOs through its travel assistance. For example, Estonian NGOs (with the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations being the applicant) received funding for participation in the NGO Forum of Baltic Sea States in St. Petersburg in 2002. A project of the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation was financed in the framework of which schools from Pechory (Pskov Oblast) and Põlva County co-operated.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has supported a number of environmental projects of Estonian NGOs that have engaged Russian organisations as co-operation partners.

In addition to the abovementioned sources Estonian NGOs have received assistance for their cross-border co-operation projects from other embassies or through programmes mediated by them, e.g. the Canadian Official Development Assistance for Central Europe (ODACE) programme, MATRA Programme of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, it should be noted that the majority of bilateral aid that NGOs could apply for is no longer available now when Estonia is a member of the European Union.

**Conclusion**

Regional co-operation is one of the most efficient means of reducing the gaps between countries of different level of development. The European Commission and governments of European Union member states, including Estonia, have started to support regional co-operation more and more.

Summarising the above, there are still few NGOs in Estonia that are engaged with cross-border and development co-operation oriented to North-West Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. There are around ten organisations that deal with such co-operation on a daily basis. As target areas, the most popular are our closest neighbours – the Leningrad and Pskov Oblast (bordering Estonia) but also Ukraine that has directed its foreign policy priorities more and more towards the European Union.

Estonian NGOs co-operate less with Belarus and Moldova. The main reason for that is the low level of contacts, information and financing. At the same time there is an increasing interest for co-operation with Belarus. Open Estonia Foundation is about to start a large-scale project to strengthen civil society in Belarus and to develop relations between NGOs in Estonia and Belarus. A couple of Estonian NGOs have held fact-finding missions to Belarus.

Estonian NGOs have practically not yet discovered Moldova as a target country for development co-operation. Moldova has been a partner in very few projects together with other partners from the CIS countries. As reasons for that, it has been pointed out that Moldova is relatively far away, few contacts have been established and its main partners have been Romania and older European Union member states.

The main areas in which Estonian NGOs have co-operated with the CIS countries are the following:
- sharing Estonian experience in implementing reforms through trainings and study visits; providing information on the European Union and NATO; joint studies on European Union enlargement with partners in the East;
- activities in the field of environment: education, water management;
- cultural co-operation, preservation of cultural heritage and co-operation between kindred peoples.

In addition, educational and research institutions are also involved in cross-border and development co-operation projects and local governments have carried out various joint activities (in the Estonian-Russian border area).

Financial support has been received, among other institutions and programmes, from the European Commission, the Development Co-operation Programme of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Open Estonia Foundation, the East-East programme of the Open Society Institute and several foreign embassies.
ANNEX 1. Concepts

Development co-operation – co-operation that encompasses development and humanitarian aid.49

Development aid – financial and other material aid and know-how provided to the target country.

Humanitarian aid – financial and other material aid provided to the target country to alleviate the consequences of natural or human-made catastrophes.

Cross-border co-operation – common activities carried out between regions, municipalities, enterprises, institutionalised interest groups and individuals located on two sides of a state border directed to achieve an objective.50 The most regular form of cooperation is economical, but there is also ecological, cultural and religious cooperation.51

ANNEX 2. Overview of some cross-border co-operation and development co-operation projects


Funder: the European Commission YOUTH programme
Leading organisation: the European Movement in Estonia
Partners: the NGO Strategy (Latvia), the Center Strategy (St. Petersburg, Russia), the Association Adept (Moldova), the European Movement in Belarus, the European Movement in Ukraine, the Center for Integration Research and Projects (CIRP) (St. Petersburg, Russia)

The aim of the project is to support cross-border co-operation among young people in the European Union and its new neighbouring countries in the East. In the framework of the project a five-day seminar is held for young people and those who work with them in Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

2) Project of the Estonian School of Diplomacy: Training on the European Union and NATO for the students of the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

Funder: the Development Co-operation Programme of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Partner: the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

49 The Principles of Estonian development co-operation. RTI, 27.01.2003 http://www.vm.ee/
50 VADE MECUM. Cross-border and inter-regional co-operation on external border of the EU. Association of European Border Regions 1997.
The project aims to further develop co-operation relations, established in 2003, between the Estonian School of Diplomacy and the Diplomatic Academy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and thereby also between the Estonian and Ukrainian foreign service. During the project the students of the Diplomatic Academy learn about Estonian experience on the European Union and transatlantic relations. The training supports the objective of Ukraine to strengthen its integration with the European Union and NATO.

The Estonian School of Diplomacy and the Ukrainian Diplomatic Academy signed a co-operation agreement in 2003. The first training for the students of the Academy was held in Tallinn in October-November 2003. The wider goal of the project is to work out a training programme (including a study programme, materials and tests) introducing Estonian experience on integration with the European Union and NATO. In the future young diplomats also from other transition countries could be involved in the programme. The training would be directed to states that have set as their goal accession to the European Union and NATO or countries that consider it necessary to widen their co-operation with the organisations.

3) Summer school on cross-border co-operation at Värksa

Supporters: the Phare SPF programme and the Canadian International Development Agency
Partners: the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation and the European Movement in Estonia

On 8-14 August 2004 the Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation and the European Movement in Estonia organised a summer school on cross-border co-operation in Värksa, Estonia. Altogether 35 representatives from Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russia, Ukrainian, Belarussian and Moldovan NGOs, ministries, county and local governments participated in the summer school. The subjects discussed were the development and role of cross-border co-operation in Europe, Euroregions, EU programmes supporting cross-border co-operation and regional development, youth co-operation and cross-border economic co-operation. The speakers were officials from ministries, representatives of Euroregions and NGOs and lecturers from universities from the Baltic countries, Russia and Ukraine.

4) Support to the Sami community in Russia

Supporters: Danish and Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Leading organisation: Estonian Fund for Nature

Experts from the Estonian Fund for Nature together with Danish and Norwegian experts participated for a year in the project elaborating a development plan and providing consultations for the associations of the Sami from the Kola Peninsula. The development plan determines the next initiatives concerning the health, culture, hunting, keeping reindeer, children’s education and nature protection of the Sami. The aim of the consultations is helping to restore the rights of the Sami for land, so that they would have the possibility to return to their traditional lifestyle. The first Sami association has already received land for keeping reindeer and there is hope also for other communities to get land for traditional use.
The experts also helped to establish the Sami Fund for Nature on the Kola Peninsula. The new Fund for Nature aims to map nature observations on the peninsula and in the regions of significant importance for the Sami. Another objective of the Sami Fund for Nature is to further protect the nature of the peninsula. In 2004 help was provided through the programme to develop a Sami organisation, “Clean Springs”, also a juridical seminar on land rights and the second conference “Land and People” were organised.

5) Establishment of the Beregovoye Cultural and Development Centre

Leading organisation: NGO Society of Merivälja Aedlinn
Target country: Crimea, Ukraine
Partners: the Office of the President of the Republic of Estonia, the Ukrainian Estonian Society, the Crimean Estonian Cultural Society, several Estonian companies (Sadolin, Edelaraudtee, EE Grupp)

The objective of the project is first and foremost to develop civil society and to create motivation for social and economic initiatives among the people of Crimea. It is also intended to improve the entrepreneurial environment and promote human- and nature-friendly lifestyle, based on the successful experience of Estonia. In order to accomplish these goals trainings, common events, seminars and conferences will be organised.

6) Co-operation project between schools in Pechory, Räpina and Värksa “Know your neighbours”

Funders: the Development Co-operation Programme of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the US Embassy

The following institutions participated in the project: Räpina Gymnasium (pupils studying in both Estonian and Russian language), Värksa Gymnasium, Pechory Gymnasium no 2 (studies in Estonian) and Pechory Gymnasium no 3 (studies in Russian). Activities were carried out both for pupils as well as teachers.

In the beginning of the project a competition was called in the schools on research and creative works. A two-day excursion to Pechory was organised for the Estonian children participating in the competition; a group of Estonian and Russian pupils attended a cultural festival “Slovyanskie Klyutschki”. A joint summer camp focusing on culture was held for the children on the shore of Lake Peipsi, at Remniki. It was also possible to purchase technological equipment necessary for the schools (computers, printers, and stereo system).

ANNEX 3. Internet sites used for the article

e-Governance Academy (E- Riigi Akadeemia Sihtasutus) : www.ega.ee
Estonian Refugee Council (Eesti Pagulasab): http://estref.org.ee/
Peipsi Center for Transboundary Co-operation (Peipsi Koostöö Keskus): [www.ctc.ee](http://www.ctc.ee)

University of Tartu EuroCollege (Tartu Ülikooli Euroopa Kolledž): [www.ec.ut.ee](http://www.ec.ut.ee)

European Movement in Estonia (Eesti Euroopa Liikumine): [www.euroopaliikumine.ee](http://www.euroopaliikumine.ee)

Estonian Roundtable for Development Co-operation (Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud) information portal: [www.terveilm.net](http://www.terveilm.net)

Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Eesti Välisministeerium): [www.vm.ee](http://www.vm.ee)


Estonian Fund for Nature (Eestimaa Looduse Fond): [www.elfond.ee](http://www.elfond.ee)


Estonian School of Diplomacy (Eesti Diplomaatide Kool): [www.edk.edu.ee](http://www.edk.edu.ee)


**ANNEX 4. Useful links on NGOs in North-Western Russia, Ukraine and Moldova**

Catalogue of NGOs in Ukraine: [www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org)

GURT Resource Center for NGO development: [www.gurt.org.ua](http://www.gurt.org.ua)

Network of NGOs in Moldova: [www.contact.md](http://www.contact.md)

Citizens’ movement in Belarus “Partnership”: [www.partnerstva.org](http://www.partnerstva.org)

Data base of NGOs in Pskov: [www.ngo.pskov.ru](http://www.ngo.pskov.ru)

Center “Strategy” in St. Petersburg: [www.strategy-spb.ru](http://www.strategy-spb.ru)
Summary and recommendations

Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus differ from each other considerably both as regards the current political situation as well as the prospects for the near future. Therefore the local conditions and the needs of civil society are also different.

- Intensive reforms are taking place in Ukraine where the priority of the state is European integration. Thus there is a favourable ground for receiving foreign aid. First and foremost assistance that helps to strengthen relations with the European Union is welcome, but in general all areas are open for aid. It should be kept in mind that there are numerous Western donors and European Union organisations operating in Ukraine, especially after the Orange Revolution. It would therefore be useful for Estonian NGOs to develop co-operation, in addition to bilateral projects, with NGOs from other European Union member states. Estonian NGOs could establish and enhance relations with Lithuania, Poland and other countries actively working in the area. Ukraine may become a good base for Estonian NGOs for developing their activities in Belarus and Moldova.

- Also Moldova is now a relatively free and open country that has made its choice in favour of European integration. The main problem of Moldova is Transdnistria, a very poor minestate that has proclaimed itself independent but has not been internationally recognised, and that is founded upon the presence of the Russian military forces and illegal trade. The possibilities of Estonian NGOs to be active elsewhere in Moldova do not, however, directly depend on the problem of Transdnistria. Solving the problem is a high level international issue. So far Moldova is practically an undiscovered country for Estonian NGOs, but activities in this direction are worth developing. Romanian accession to the European Union in 2007 considerably improves Moldovan prospects to strengthen its relations with the European Union and to even become a member of the Union in the future. Estonian NGOs could contact their partners in Romania when intending to develop their activities in Moldova.

- Due to its authoritarian regime, assisting the Belarussian civil society is much more complicated but therefore also the more necessary. Rapid changes should not be expected and activities should be planned for a longer period. Possibilities for open and legal co-operation are very limited as the political leadership tries to prevent the operation of independent associations in the country. Control and repressions have been strengthened during the last year. At the same time also local readiness for resistance as well as interest towards the European Union have increased to some extent. It is the easiest and the least dangerous for Estonian NGOs to carry out non-political co-operation at local level. This helps indirectly to create conditions for establishing a free and open society in the future. Estonian NGOs can also assist in the democratisation process by disseminating information on the European Union and Estonia. As the internet is under the control of the authorities, traditional media – publications and the radio – are the most suitable means for providing information. Offering possibilities for training and self-improvement in Estonia are also highly welcome and necessary.
Building up civil society in Estonia has provided Estonian NGOs with a vast experience that is of interest to Ukraine and Moldova. It can be shared through seminars, trainings and different co-operation projects. Especially the following subjects should be pointed out:

- raising awareness on the third sector in the society; explaining the notion, values and objectives of civil society (e.g. the publication “Foorum” in Estonia);
- co-operation between NGOs and the state (the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept; provision of social services to the state),
- co-operation between NGOs, development of networks and infrastructure of civil society (e.g. the Roundtable of Estonian Non-Profit Organizations),
- co-operation of NGOs with partners in the European Union,
- general knowledge on the European Union, conditions of accession to the EU, influence of the EU to citizens, etc. (Elementary information on the European Union is especially necessary in Belarus.)

Some other specific recommendations both to the government and the NGOs, taking into account the needs and expectations of our neighbours in the East:

- Exchange programmes and trainings in Estonia are of interest to all the neighbours of the European Union. In addition to specific knowledge the visits offer a possibility to see and experience how Estonia has changed during the last fifteen years and what is it like in a new EU member state, a former republic of the Soviet Union.
- The low level of organisational sustainability is a general problem. Donors support short-term projects and do not spend on building up an organisation or covering its administrative costs. In order to promote sustainable organisations, support to the infrastructure of the organisations should be considered in addition to financing specific activities.
- It is also a problem that the same organisations receive support from year to year since they are known to donors and have learned how to apply for funds. Therefore particular attention should be turned to the fact that the circle of aid receivers should not stay too narrow and new organisations should also get support. The organisations that are in active relations with the Western donors might lose touch with local people and their expectations – the so-called ghettos of democracy may be created engaging just a small circle of local activists.
- In addition to the abovementioned topics for training, it is necessary to teach English in all the three countries. Low English language skills constitute a major obstacle for co-operation with partners in the EU.
- Among specific fields, the social sector would need considerable support by donors. NGOs could help in alleviating social problems and supporting weaker groups in the society. The need for the activities of the NGOs is very high because state resources are scarce in this area in all the three countries. Work in the social sphere is an efficient tool to make NGOs well-known in the society.
- It is of utmost importance to know local conditions when providing aid in a country. When sharing the experience of Estonia it is essential to learn which experience is, indeed, useful and how can it be applied in the other society. Thus the provision of aid requires constant learning and dialogue also by the donor.
From the point of view of the Estonian state the following issues need to be stressed:

- Support to civil society in other countries is perhaps primarily connected to moral, idealistic and altruistic considerations: helping those who need help is a human thing to do. **However, from the point of view of the Estonian government, supporting democratisation in the Eastern neighbours of the European Union is also a political and strategic objective of primary importance.** Strengthening democracy in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU increases Estonian security and improves stability and welfare in the region in the long run.

- **Supporting the Eastern neighbours of the European Union is an important measure also for strengthening the Estonian position in the European Union.** Assistance to the implementation of reforms in the Eastern neighbours of the EU is a very suitable niche for Estonia in the EU foreign policy. The volume of aid should be increased. In addition to helping the neighbours, this would bring the amount of the development aid provided by Estonia closer to the level of aid that is expected from an EU member state. However, support to the Eastern neighbours of the European Union cannot be merely considered as development aid. (It is also an international responsibility of Estonia to increase aid to the least developed countries in the world.)

- Although Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus are not direct neighbours of Estonia, the interests of Estonia with respect to these countries are similar to those of Poland and Lithuania who have been operating most actively in this field. Co-operation with Poland and Lithuania in the area should be developed. At the same time the Nordic countries have become more active towards the new Eastern neighbours of the European Union and are ready to develop co-operation projects also with the Baltic countries and Poland. This supports the Estonian objectives in the EU’s Eastern neighbourhood.