

Small States Conflict Resolution (CR)

ESTONIA

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Small States International Relations and Diplomacy - Historical Background

- On **24 February 1918**, independence was declared.
- **1920 Tartu Peace Treaty** between Estonia and Soviet Russia.
- Military base agreement between Estonia and the Soviet Union in September 1939.
- 1940 Soviet, from 1941 to 1944 German, since 1944 Soviet occupation of Estonia.
- **20 August 1991** Estonia regained independence.
- A member of **the United Nations** since 1991.
- A member of the **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)** since 1991.
- A member of the **Council of Europe** since 1993.
- A member of **NATO** since 2004.
- A member state of **the European Union** since 2004.
- A member of **OECD** since 2010.

Small States & Conflict Resolution: Major current conflict & issues

- No open and violent current conflict. Several socially divisive or 'sensitive' issues. For example:
- **Migration**, both with regard to labour, humanitarian (asylum) as well as other types of migration.
 - ✓ Very conservative national migration policy. Immigration quota 0.01% of permanent residents.
 - ✓ Value and solidarity crisis during 2015 European migration crisis. Little knowledge and understanding of migration in the society. Fears fuelled by populist politicians.
 - ✓ Immigration seen as one of the main issues in the EU (65% of population according to Eurobarometer 2018).
 - ✓ Shortage of high-skilled labour and the need to involve foreign workers. Increasing numbers of foreign labour from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. Active in the construction, agriculture etc.
- **Language of education**, due to limited integration of Estonian and Russian communities. The attempt to introduce 'a unified Estonian school' a very sensitive topic related to identity politics.
- **Citizenship** - approximately 5,9% of population with undefined citizenship. Multiple citizenship is not allowed, but is more and more common in practice (constitutional conflict).
- **LGBT rights** as a socially divisive topic.

Small States & CR: Defining the nature and resolution of conflict

- **Polarization** of party politics, reflecting the value conflicts in the society, and feeding them.
- Fears and concerns related to **historic background** and traumatic experiences of Soviet occupation.
- No strong political party based on the Russian-speaking population. Different dependence of parties on 'Russian votes'.
- **Foreign influence**. Russia using 'soft' means to bolster up divisive lines in the Estonian society.
- Little tradition of **civic activism**.
- However, increasing role for civil society organizations and outspoken **leaders** working towards integration, multi-culturalism, tolerance and human rights.

Small States & Conflict Resolution – institutional mechanisms within your country

- As there is no open and violent conflict, the divisive issues are dealt with in the framework of **regular policy-making and implementation**.
- Increasing acknowledgement and practical methods for **participative policy-making** and open government within public administration. Differing values on the political level.
- **Alternative dispute resolution (ADR)** modestly developed. Most pronounced and well-known probably in labour issues and consumer protection. The need to develop mediation skills and society's trust in ADR.
- The **Chancellor of Justice** scrutinises legislation of the legislative and executive branch of government and of local authorities so as to ensure conformity with the law. From 1999 s/he has also the duties of ombudsman to guarantee the protection of the constitutional rights and freedoms of people, and some other human rights duties (e.g. Prevention of torture and other cruel or degrading treatment; protection of children's rights etc.).
- The Chancellor of Justice has addressed the sensitive societal issues repeatedly from the constitutional perspective.
- **Internationally**, the aim to contribute to conflict resolution abroad through participation in military and civilian missions.

Small States & CR- Societal beliefs & public opinion

- Value conflicts in the society, on some issues running through families (e.g. Asylum, LGBT rights).
- Societal beliefs and public opinion influenced by the historical background.
- Different stances in the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities. Russian-speaking community often more conservative (e.g. With regard to LGBT rights).
- Russian-speaking community following Russian media and often living in the Russian media sphere.
- Limited knowledge and understanding in the society on some issues that are new, e.g. asylum issues and different types of migration.
- Shrinking Russian-language media in Estonia. Shrinking paper-based media. Increasing role for social media.

Small States & CR: Challenges & Learning

- Societal integration as the main challenge. A complex policy problem.
- **Polarization** of party politics, feeding value conflicts in the society.
- Normalization of assaultive language and derogation of expert opinion by populist politicians.
- The increasing role of social media in enforcing the divisive lines in the society.
- Mediation and interactive governance as a solution.
- The importance of strong civil society.
- The importance of democratic institutions in the era of populist politics.