

HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, PERSONAL LIFE EXPERIENCES AND THE ORIENTATION OF ESTONIAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE WEST, 1988–1991

Kaarel Piirimäe and Pertti Grönholm

ABSTRACT

The years 1988 to 1991 were a critical juncture in the history of Estonia. Crucial steps were taken during this time to assure that Estonian foreign policy would not be directed toward the East but primarily toward the integration with the West. In times of uncertainty and institutional flux, strong individuals with ideational power matter the most. This article examines the influence of Foreign Minister Lennart Meri's and Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar's experiences and historical consciousness on their visions of Estonia's future position in international affairs. Life stories help understand differences in their horizons of expectation, and their choices in conducting Estonian diplomacy.

Keywords: historical imagination, critical junctures, foreign policy analysis, Soviet Union, Baltic states, Lennart Meri

Much has been written about the Baltic states' success in breaking away from Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and their decisive "return to the West"¹ via radical economic, social and politi-

Research for this article was supported by the "Reimagining Futures in the European North at the End of the Cold War" project which was financed by the Academy of Finland. Funding was also obtained from the "Estonia, the Baltic states and the Collapse of the Soviet Union: New Perspectives on the End of the Cold War" project, financed by the Estonian Research Council, and the "Myths, Cultural Tools and Functions – Historical Narratives in Constructing and Consolidating National Identity in 20th and 21st Century Estonia" project, which was financed by the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (TIAS, University of Turku). The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, whose suggestions helped to significantly improve the original draft.

¹ The phrase is used as a chapter heading by Andres Kasekamp in *A history of the Baltic states* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 172–197. Also see *Return to the Western world: cultural and political perspectives on the Estonian post-communist transition*, ed. by Marju Lauristin, Peeter Vihalemm (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1997).

cal reform. The Baltic states' re-orientation toward the West immediately after independence was regained, as well as the denial and defying of their Soviet past has almost been taken for granted. This paper will scrutinize this assumption by studying the pre-history of Estonian foreign policy, from 1988 to 1991, that is, in the years immediately preceding the regaining of independence in August 1991. We argue that at this time Estonia had several alternative paths of development, with pro-Western integration being just one option, albeit probably the most popular. The key figure during this period was Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar (b. 1950), whose historical imagination and prognoses for the future were arguably the most important for Estonia's policies at the time. These did not point unequivocally to a desire to "return to the West". Yet, in the context of the unsettled constitutional and institutional landscape of the time, the legitimacy of Savisaar's government was in doubt and intense competition ensued between several groups and individuals who were vying to gain the authority to identify and articulate Estonian interests in external affairs. The central question of this paper concerns how Estonia developed a coherent, decisively pro-Western approach, despite the confusion in the critical years before independence.

There is as yet no in-depth analysis of this formative period, which proved to have lasting influence on Estonia's position, orientation, and choices on the international stage.² The political sociologist Richard Mole has focused on Estonian, as well as Latvian and Lithuanian, relations with Russia, but his analysis starts mostly from 1992.³ There is also the underlying problem that Mole tends to consider identities, upon which foreign policies rest, in essentialist terms as solid and immutable; as something that is constituted in reaction to a national other, that is, Russia or the Soviet Union.⁴ Maria Mälksoo has pointed out, however, that identities are not only constructed through interactions with other states, but also in interaction with their own societies and the multiple identities and discourses

² Toomas Alatalu's articles, which are marked by a polemical style, are an exception. See Toomas Alatalu, "Peaminister Edgar Savisaare välispoliitiline ponnistus 'Ida + Ida-Euroopa' (mis jäi ajaloolle jalgu)", *Poliitika, riigiteadus, rahvusvahelised suhted*, 6 (2014), 52–80; Toomas Alatalu, "Eesti välispoliitiline kontseptsioon – unistus ja ulme 1990–1993", *ibid.*, 81–116; Toomas Alatalu, "Eesti poliitikute 1990ndate aastate geopolitiilised visioonid", *Poliitika, riigiteadus, rahvusvahelised suhted*, 5 (2013), 112–141.

³ Richard Mole, *The Baltic states from the Soviet Union to the European Union: identity, discourse and power in the post-Communist transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁴ Mole, *The Baltic states from the Soviet Union to the European Union*, 80, 83. It should be noted that "Russia" and the "Soviet past" are not exactly the same.

that constitute these groups.⁵ Focusing on a monolithic ethno-national identity, based on a particular reading of national history, has the disadvantage of passing over debates and struggles regarding the competing interpretations of history, the multiple views of identity and the visions of the future that were particularly pronounced between 1988–91.⁶ Moreover, in order for a narrative not to become a reading of the present into the past (or even an abuse of history in the Foucauldian sense),⁷ one cannot ignore the role of contingency.

To view the deterioration of Estonian–Russian relations in 1992 as inevitable – resulting from conflicting memories – is to read history backwards. Before 1992, the clash of identities did not run along the border of Estonia and Russia, but crisscrossed societies on both sides. As the sociologist Peeter Vihalemm has noted, in the period between 1988–91 there was active political co-operation between democratic forces in Russia and those in the Baltic states, based on common perceptions of the Soviet era as being undemocratic and illegitimate.⁸ We argue that instead of the existence of a single ethno-nationalist identity constructing itself against the Russian or the Soviet “other”, there were multiple discourses and identities in the Estonian society, which not only reflected struggles over domestic policy,

⁵ Maria Mälksoo, *The politics of becoming European: a genealogy of Polish and Baltic post-Cold War security imaginaries*, PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 2007), 16; Maria Mälksoo, *The politics of becoming European: a study of Polish and Baltic post-Cold War security imaginaries* (London: Routledge, 2010), 11, 15.

⁶ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper point to the danger of regarding identity in essentialist terms, as was the case with the presentation of class in Marxist histories of class struggle. See Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, *Theory and Society*, 29:1 (2000), 1–47. In Mole’s narrative, the present Baltic–Russian conflict appears as an almost inevitable result of past identity formations.

⁷ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche. Genealogy. History”, *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 96–130. When interpreting Nietzsche, Foucault criticizes teleological approaches that search for the origins (*Ursprung*) of institutions, morals and values from the vantage point of the present.

⁸ Peeter Vihalemm, “National spaces in the Baltic area”, *Return to the Western world*, 137. For example, there was an anti-imperialist faction within the Democratic Russia movement, headed by the historian Yuri Afanasyev and the physicist Lev Ponomaryov: Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The tragedy of Russia’s reforms: market Bolshevism against democracy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 333–334. For more on Democratic Russia and its eventual support for a free exit from the Union, see Geoffrey A. Hosking, Jonathan Aves, and Peter J. S. Duncan, *The road to post-Communism: independent political movements in the former Soviet Union, 1985–1991* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992), 94–100.

but also the different and often uncoordinated visions and activities in the international arena.⁹

Our hypothesis is that the period analyzed in our article marked a “critical juncture” in Estonian foreign policy, as it eliminated a number of alternative paths of development and created path dependences that shaped the country’s foreign policy for decades. According to Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Kelemen, a critical juncture is a situation when structural constraints relax. This results in an increase in the range of choices available to powerful political actors in order to remodel existing institutions. It is a time when agency is paramount.¹⁰ The political landscape of Estonia from 1988 to 1991 does seem to match the description of a critical juncture: the situation was in constant flux, old institutions were changing and being replaced by alternatives that claimed legitimacy and power. Hierarchies of power were ambivalent, thereby undermining the sway of powerful actors of institutional constraint that would normally diminish the range of choices available in times of stability. We believe agency was important in this period and therefore we will analyze the role of a number of key individuals, particularly Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar and Foreign Minister Lennart Meri, in the process of the monopolization of foreign policy by the state, and the underlining historical representations.

Thus, the notion of a critical juncture allows us to employ “methodological individualism” in our focus on the backgrounds, identities and interests of the key players in the rivalry over Estonian foreign policy. It is through these individuals that the competition of ideas about Estonia’s history, and history’s meaning for the present, were played out. It was eventually through these individuals that ideas had an impact on key events and the development of institutions. Using Michael Mann’s adaptation of a metaphor by Max Weber, ideas were not merely “switchmen” at railway junctions that direct actors to pre-laid paths, but “tracklayers” that made

⁹ The suspension of state building until after August 1991 explains the sending of mixed signals, intentionally or not, to the Russian minority. See Timofey Agarin, *A cat’s lick: democratisation and minority communities in the post-Soviet Baltic* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 88–92. The suspension of state building also explains the difficulties encountered with the Russian government already in 1992, most importantly over the citizenship laws. See Juhan Värk, *Venemaa positiivse hõlvamise poliitika ja teiste välispoliitiliste liinide mõjud Eesti-Vene suhetele aastail 1991–2011*, PhD thesis (Tallinn University of Technology, 2012), 56–60.

¹⁰ Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, “The study of critical junctures: theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism”, *World Politics*, 59:3 (2007), 341–369.

social action possible.¹¹ As John A. Hall has noted, the most dramatic way ideas can change social reality is arguably through their ability to lay tracks for the formation of new identities that have the capacity to link people across space. Ideas can thus create new communities of people with shared beliefs and interests. Historically, Hall observes, intellectuals have had the greatest potential to exert such “ideological power”.¹² We may indeed find a disproportionate number of intellectuals among the key actors who led the revolution in Estonia in 1987–91. Savisaar and Meri were such actors.

Why focus on historical imagination in analyzing foreign policy? First, it is a widely shared belief among researchers within history and political and social studies that the political arguments of the national movements in the Baltic Soviet Republics were firmly rooted in historical consciousness and imagination, national narratives and the restoration of suppressed cultural memory. In the 1980s, official Soviet historiography had to face up to growing suspicion and resistance from intellectuals and the public at large, which stemmed from orally preserved memories and nationalist counter-histories.¹³ Secondly, we agree with scholars who assume a constitutive link between collective identity, understood through references to historical discursive practices, and security and foreign policy.¹⁴ Therefore, in order to pursue a credible foreign policy, government ministers need to construct and articulate a blueprint within a relatively stable discursive framework, underpinned by a few core narratives (foundational myths) about the nation and the state.¹⁵ These narratives are constitutive elements of collective self-identifications and therefore of interests.

Hence, we think that the struggle to identify Estonian interests in the international arena was closely interrelated with debates over history. Indeed, as discourses are tied up with questions of power, those debates amounted to a competition for discursive hegemony, meaning the power

¹¹ John A. Hall, “Ideas and Social Sciences”, *Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutions, and political change*, ed. by Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 48–51.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cynthia S. Kaplan, “Setting the political agenda: cultural discourse in the Estonian tradition”, *Empire to nation: historical perspectives on the making of the modern world*, ed. by Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayah, Eric van Young (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 342; Pertti Grönholm, “Nostalgian ja utopian välissä: historiallisen tiedon käyttö ja tehtävät Viron jälleenitsenäistymisen kamppailuissa vuosina 1987–1991”, *Historiallinen aikakauskirja*, 2 (2012), 175–176.

¹⁴ Mälksoo, *The politics of becoming European* (2010), 55.

¹⁵ Ole Wæver, “Identity, communities and foreign policy: discourse analysis as foreign policy theory”, *European integration and national identity: the challenge of the Nordic states*, ed. by Lene Hansen and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 2002), 33–34.

to not only interpret the past, but also future events. Furthermore, as each sovereign state needs to have a single, coherent foreign policy, it is unavoidable that a state sanctions a particular version of the nation's past. The state in fact creates an official history that becomes the basis of sovereign diplomacy.¹⁶ Because historical imagination underlines much of the argumentation on key foreign-policy issues, history must be identified as the "key organizing principle" in the construction of foreign policy.¹⁷ In the next section we will look more closely at the struggles over the interpretation of Estonia's past and the political implications thereof.

The main body of primary sources consulted during our research consists of statements, interviews, writings, speeches and the published memoirs of leading political actors within Estonian national movements, including Edgar Savisaar, Lennart Meri, Marju Lauristin, Mart Laar, Trivimi Velliste, Endel Lippmaa. Selected commentaries and interviews with other Estonian contemporaries have also been consulted.

Restorers versus reformers

The crucial question for the development of Estonian foreign policy between 1988 and 1991 was whether the country would become a reformed post-Soviet republic that retained some of its Soviet-era institutions and traditions, or a restored republic that would seek to shed (or deny) its Soviet past by claiming continuity with the state that existed before 1940. It was on this very issue that the Estonian national movement split into two competing camps in 1988, at the time when it began to emerge from the underground and take organizational forms.¹⁸ This cleavage was not based on

¹⁶ This has been stated succinctly by Hussein Banai: "State sanctioned diplomacy [...] is in large measure the practice of mediating state-sanctioned histories," Hussein Banai, "Diplomatic imaginations: mediating estrangement in world society", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 27:3 (2014), 459–474.

¹⁷ Tom Nijhuis, "Historical memory and the plea for a national interests based German foreign policy", *Czech Sociological Review*, 6:2 (1998), 205–217, 206; Bernhard Stahl, "Wie nationale Geschichte(n) europäische Außenpolitik begründen: der Deutsche und Französische Diskurs im Kosovo-Krieg und in der Irak-Krise", *Zweite Offene Sektionstagung Internationale Politik der DVPW, Darmstadt* (2007), 1–31.

¹⁸ Vello Pettai, *Framing the past as future: the power of legal restorationism in Estonia*, unpublished PhD thesis (Columbia University, 2004). Despite the existing differences, we accept the view that restorers and reformers, as well as nationally-minded communists, can be viewed as belonging to an overarching Estonian national movement. See Aili Aareleid-Tart and Hank Johnston, "Generations, microcohorts, and long-term mobilization: the Estonian national movement, 1940–1991", *Sociological Perspectives*, 43:4 (2000), 671–698.

ethnic divisions, but rather on how people related to their shared past and personal life experiences under the Soviet system (we do not consider the pro-Union groups, who were mostly composed of immigrants of the later decades of the Soviet period).¹⁹

The early phase of the so-called Singing Revolution (1988–89) was the apotheosis of unity within the Estonian national movement, as most nationally-minded groups were gathered under the umbrella of the Popular Front (hereafter PF). The PF brought together environmental activists, nationally-minded members of the Communist Party of Estonia (*Eesti-maa Kommunistlik Partei*, hereafter CPE), economic experts working on the program of economic self-management (*Isemajandav Eesti*, hereafter IME), heritage preservationists and many other groups. However, the highly emotional wave that was most visibly manifested in mass rallies and rock concerts did not defuse interpersonal frictions nor did it eradicate fundamental differences within national revolutionary thinking.²⁰

We discern two ideal-type groups when generalizing on the experiences and key choices of people under the Soviet system. On the one side, there were people who perceived recent Soviet past as a period of illegal, corrupt and criminal rule by foreign occupiers assisted by local collaborators.²¹ Looking back at their own lives and careers, these people – often dissidents and their followers – could take pride in (and draw political capital from) having not compromised with the occupying power and with their own consciences. They had not joined the Communist Party for career opportunities or personal gain, nor had they assisted the KGB by informing on colleagues and friends. These choices meant that they would normally not reach high positions in society and would have only limited experience in management and administration at the governmental level. The choices and experiences of dissidents encapsulated the extreme wing of this group, as the majority of the population never went from passive resistance to actively opposing the Soviet regime, which almost invariably led to repression against the individuals concerned.²²

¹⁹ The best study of the mostly Russian-speaking minorities is Agarin, *A cat's lick*.

²⁰ Marju Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine: peatükke kirjutamata elulooraamatust. Valik artikleid ja intervjuusid 1970–2009* (Tallinn: Eesti Ajalehed, 2010), 125–126.

²¹ For an interesting view of the dilemmas facing Soviet citizens and the choices of dissidents, see “A transcript of a conversation between Rein Taagepera and ERSP in Tartu on December 28, 1988”. The document is located at the Estonian National Archives [hereafter RA] ERAF.9601.1.99. We were able to consult a copy sent to us by Rein Taagepera, with the permission of Mart Orav, editor of the journal *Akadeemia*.

²² For the experience of dissidents from a generational point of view, see Aarelaid-Tart and Johnston, “Generations, Microcohorts”. For a typical example of an intellectual-

In this regard, dissidents had always been marginal in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR), but since 1987 they were able to emerge from the underground and inspire large sections of the public. By 1990 they had organized a mass movement, the Congress of Estonia, which they established with the goal of restoring the pre-1940 Estonian Republic on the basis of legal continuity and the doctrine of non-recognition of the Soviet occupation that had been upheld by most Western countries since 1940. This discourse was focused on narratives of a Golden Age before the Second World War and the status of Estonians as victims of Soviet repression. There were also strong religious undertones. Furthermore, they framed their movement around a narrative that highlighted how Estonians were being turned into a minority in their own country through a policy of mass immigration that had been encouraged by the Soviet authorities. Thus, this discourse was directed at an uncompromising negation of Soviet reality.²³

Cynthia S. Kaplan has called this group “radical restorers”.²⁴ Between 1988 and 1990, they formed three proto-parties: the Estonian Independence Party (*Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei*, hereafter EIP), the Estonian Heritage Society (*Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts*, hereafter EHS) and the Estonian Christian Union (*Eesti Kristliku Liit*). These groups not only acted as the main challengers to Soviet rule (including the CPE) but also to the “moderate reformers” of the PF. The most notable figures at the time were Tunne Kelam of the EIP and Trivimi Velliste of the EHS, but they were soon challenged by activists from the younger generation, especially those associated with the Young Tartu Circle (students interested in history and heritage) and Walhalla (socially active students) at the University of Tartu in the 1980s.²⁵ The restorers based their vision of the future on the idea that the Baltic republics were not legally part of the USSR and therefore could

dissident who had been dismissed from his academic job and ended up working as a nightwatchman, see Tunne Kelam, *Eluloointervjuu: valik artikleid ja esinemisi* (Tallinn: SE & JS, 1999).

²³ The best documentary collection of the Congress of Estonia is *Eesti Kongress: siis ja praegu*, ed. by Eve Pärnaste (Tallinn: Riigikantselei: SE & JS, 2000). For the views of professional historians, see Meike Wulf and Pertti Grönholm, “Generating meaning across generations: the role of historians in the codification of history in Soviet and post-Soviet Estonia”, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 41:3 (2010), 351–382. For an example of historical narratives on the Republic of Estonia between 1918–40, see the highly influential Mart Laar, Lauri Vahtre, Heiki Valk, *Kodu lugu, II* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1989). Also see a critical commentary of the volume: Evald Laasi, “Ühest ebaõnnestunud ajalooalast väljaandest (M. Laar, L. Vahtre, H. Valk. *Kodu lugu, II*)”, *Vikerkaar*, 6 (1990), 86.

²⁴ Kaplan, “Setting the political agenda”, 342.

²⁵ *Tartu tudengid kuumadel kaheksakümnendatel: almanahh 2015*, ed. by Ivo Rull (Tallinn: Rull & Rumm, 2015).

not be expected to secede from the Soviet Union. Their campaign for justice was focused on establishing the truth about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (hereafter MRP) of 1939, which they claimed led to the annexation of the Baltic states in 1940. They hoped that international recognition of this historic wrong would lead to – or at least greatly facilitate – the restoration of independence. Their use of historical knowledge and narratives was thus politically motivated. In August 1987 they began to organize demonstrations framed around the MRP and to start the so-called calendar demonstrations marking important national anniversaries, such as the signing of the Estonian–Soviet Peace Treaty in 1920.

As a result of the historical-legalist view of Estonia's past, the Congress of Estonia opposed the reformist agenda of the PF, on the grounds that any attempt to reform the Soviet system would only legitimize existing Soviet institutions. The reforms of the ESSR, including those of the government of Edgar Savisaar after April 1990, were viewed suspiciously as efforts to camouflage the continuation of an unlawful occupation. The Congress of Estonia criticized, for example, the restoration of the blue-black-white tricolor as the official flag of the ESSR.²⁶

On the other side of the political divide were the “reformers”, who had made “compromises” in order to make advances in the social hierarchy of Estonian society.²⁷ A clean political record was necessary in order to reach higher positions in government, the administration or in management. These roles also demanded membership in the CPE or at least political loyalty. Social and economic benefits, such as receiving a new apartment or car buying permits, also depended on having a clean political slate. Acquiring permission to travel abroad was sometimes linked to official orders to report on fellow-travelers or acquaintances in a foreign country. Lennart Meri's record was tainted, for example, when it became known that he reported to the KGB after traveling abroad, even though these reports did not implicate any individuals.²⁸ The cultural elites were well-off in the Soviet system, but their artistic freedom was limited to what

²⁶ The speech delivered by Trivimi Velliste at a ceremony marking the 71st anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Estonia, 24 February 1989, *Muinsuskaitse Seltsi Sõnumid*, 3 (March 1989).

²⁷ Alec Nove, “Is there a ruling class in the USSR?”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 27:4 (1975), 615–638; Alec Nove, “The class nature of the Soviet Union revisited”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 35:3 (1983), 298–312.

²⁸ For a view that Meri was essentially collaborating with the regime, see Indrek Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti: vaateid KGB, EKP ja VEKSA arhiividokumentide põhjal* (Tallinn: UMARA, 1996), 280.

was deemed ideologically permissible. Indeed, most people had tried to manage their lives as best as they could and this also meant going against their own conscience – even if this only meant bribing officials or shouting slogans at official demonstrations – and for this reason there was a lot of cynicism and little genuine sympathy for the self-inflicted sufferings of dissidents. Because of the instinct of staying on the safe side, this group, a loose one admittedly, would choose moderate forms of political activism that did not court danger and immediate repression by the regime.²⁹

The PF, formed in 1988, was perceived by most Estonians as a safe form of activism. The organization was founded and steered by the younger cadres of the CPE, along with some well-established liberal figures from the Estonian cultural elites. The PF, led by Edgar Savisaar, Marju Lauristin, Peet Kask, Heinz Valk, Mati Hint and others, initially welcomed perestroika, as they perceived that it was necessary to support Gorbachev's reform initiative as a means to escape the "suffocating stagnation" of Soviet life.³⁰

The reformists called for greater economic autonomy and an ethnically non-exclusive form of democracy, but did not aim for full independence before 1989. A number of leading figures in the PF belonged to the "generation of the 1960s", who had experienced the temporary liberalization of cultural life in the Baltic SSRs. They were left bitterly disappointed by the suppression of the freedom of expression and the overall cultural and economic stagnation under Brezhnev. Many felt that perestroika marked a second wave of the thaw of the 1950s–60s.³¹ This was the post-war generation that had secured positions inside academia, the local administration and the CPE. They had experienced personal success and had memories that made it difficult for them to simply write off the Soviet period as a gross mistake.³² Their vision of the Estonian future was a mix of moderate reform politics and ideas about an open future, including a wide variety of

²⁹ Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 166–178, on dissidents see pages 70–72.

³⁰ Kaarel Piirimäe's interview with Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm, 13 August 2015 (in authors' possession).

³¹ Such was the opinion of Edgar Savisaar, who considered himself part of the 1960s generation. See Edgar Savisaar, *Revolutsioon jätkub* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1988), 41–56. Savisaar presented perestroika as a renewal of the efforts of reform that had been blocked in 1964. See also Rein Veidemann, "Kuuekümnendate põlvkond Eesti kultuuris ja ühiskonnas", *Sirp*, 27 September 1991; Rein Raudvere, "Rahvarinne viis vene tankide hirmu", *Maaleht*, 17 August 2008, Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 322–323.

³² For an example of someone who was able to adapt to the Soviet system, at least partially, see Hindrek-Peeter Meri, *Tagasivaateid veerevast vagunist* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2008). H.-P. Meri (b. 1934) was the younger brother of Lennart Meri and devoted the best part of his life to improving the Soviet system.

societal models that ranged from liberal state socialism (Hungary) to the Nordic welfare state (Finland, Sweden, *etc.*).

In 1988 the PF was unquestionably the leading reform-minded organization. However, the following year the restorers conceived a form of mobilization that allowed them to become a serious rival. In early 1989 they began to form citizen committees to register citizens of the pre-1940 republic and their descendants, including those from the Estonian diaspora. The unique campaign of registering citizens of a *de jure* existing state proved immensely popular, as it turned into a symbolic referendum against the Soviet occupation and also promised to exclude Soviet-era immigrants from future decisions on the constitution of the state.³³ On Independence Day on 24 February 1990, registered citizens had the opportunity to elect a parliament, the Congress of Estonia, which allegedly represented the true will of the Estonian nation. Elections were timed to forestall elections to a new Supreme Soviet in March. Some even claimed that the Supreme Soviet had become redundant.³⁴ A similar congress came into being in Latvia.³⁵

The success of the Estonian committees thus placed the PF on the horns of a dilemma. Edgar Savisaar, the PF's leader, viewed the restorationist and nostalgic goal of returning to a Golden Age as unrealistic (more on this below), but more importantly he was also concerned about losing his power base. Savisaar could either try to ignore the challenge of the Congress and focus on winning a majority in the coming elections to the Supreme Soviet, which was still the legal parliament according to existing Soviet law, or try to use his popularity to gain a position of influence within the Congress. Eventually, he decided in favor of the second option. However, because of his own procrastination the candidates of the PF had insufficient time to campaign and therefore did not gain enough seats to control the Congress. Subsequently, the Congress posed a serious challenge to Savisaar's authority once he became Prime Minister in April 1990.

³³ On the start of citizens' registration, see *Eesti Kongress*, 27–31. Those immigrants who had declared a desire to become citizens of an independent Estonia could take part in the Congress of Estonia as non-voting members. See "Eesti Kongressi statuut ja kodukord", *Eesti Kongress*, 287.

³⁴ Trivimi Velliste, "Miks ilma Ülemnõukoguta?", *Muinsuskaitse Seltsi Sõnumid*, February 1990; Rein Taagepera in *Eesti Ekspress*, 9 March 1990. Latvians elected their Supreme Soviet on the same day, 18 March. Lithuanian elections had taken place on 24 February and had resulted in the Lithuanian declaration of independence on 11 March.

³⁵ Eduards Bruno Deksnis, Tālavš Jundzis, *The parliamentary route to the restoration of Latvian statehood, 1989–1993* (Riga: Latvian Academy of Sciences, Baltic Centre for Strategic Studies, 2010), 61–63.

It is important to note, however, that despite their differences over historical interpretation, both the reformists and radical restorers needed each other. According to Lauristin's analysis of July 1991, each bloc actually benefited from the competition.³⁶

Persons and institutions: competition over foreign policy

The newly-elected Supreme Soviet convened on 29 March 1990. It was the first democratic parliament of Estonia since the Second World War.³⁷ It immediately announced the beginning of a transition to full independence. This initiative fell short of declaring full independence, as Lithuania had done earlier in the same month. Savisaar's cabinet promptly instigated intense diplomatic activities abroad. Foreign Minister Lennart Meri was responsible for diplomatic operations in the West, while Endel Lippmaa, known as the "Minister of the East", was to negotiate with the Soviet Union. The goal was to talk to Moscow on an equal footing, as a sovereign state on the basis of the Treaty of Tartu of 1920.³⁸ Savisaar became a visible figure on the international stage, alongside Arnold Rüütel, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (a post comparable with the office of the president).

Yet, Savisaar's cabinet lacked the legitimacy that is taken for granted in established democracies, as this was regarded as a time of transition that was supposed to result in a transfer of power to legitimate institutions of a restored Republic.³⁹ The Congress of Estonia convened between 11–12 March and discussed declaring itself the supreme authority in Estonia. Fearing the use of force by Moscow, however, it stepped back from such a move and consequently operated as a kind of shadow parliament in opposition. Some

³⁶ Asta Niinemets: "Elus juhtub täpselt see, mis juhtub", *Postimees*, 24 July 24 1991, Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 316. However, in a 1993 interview Lauristin noted that in the spring of 1990 she had been deeply worried about the strong antagonisms within the Estonian national movement and called for a mutual approach and consensus. See Kalle Muuli, "Marju Lauristin ei taha ajaratast tagasi pöörata", *Postimees*, 20 August 1993, Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 321.

³⁷ It is questionable, however, whether the Soviet garrison troops, who could also send their representatives to the Supreme Soviet, followed the democratic procedure.

³⁸ "Eesti NSV kõigi tasandite rahvasaadikute täiskogu deklaratsioon riikliku iseseisvuse küsimuses", February 2, 1990; <<https://vp2001-2006.president.ee/et/ametitegevus/?gid=72919>> (accessed 13 June 2016). "Otsus Eesti Vabariigi Ülemnõukogu tegevusprogrammist üleminekuperioodil Eesti Vabariigi iseseisvuse taastamiseni ja valitsemise ajutisest korrast", 16 May 1990, <<http://estlex.com/tasuta/index.php?id=8&aktid=2899&asutus=23&fd=1&grupp=1&leht=12>> (accessed 13 June 2016).

³⁹ Lauristin and Vihalemm, *Return to the Western world*, 95.

members of the Congress were also elected to the Supreme Soviet; this group became an important lever *vis-à-vis* the political balance in parliament.⁴⁰

The historical-legalistic idea that the Congress of Estonia was the only legitimate organ that could represent Estonian citizens meant that the body was determined to have its own representation in international affairs. The Estonian Committee, the Congress's executive organ, therefore included a commission for external affairs. According to archival documents preserved at the Estonian National Library, it was supposed to formulate positions on foreign-policy, co-ordinate domestically with other political organizations, represent the Congress abroad and develop contacts with foreign governments and "other powerful circles". This entailed quasi-diplomatic activities on the international stage. The other important area of activities was in regard to the Soviet Union. This was primarily focused on the management of relations with the central authorities in Moscow, but also with the emerging democratic opposition movements in Russia. Contacts with the other Soviet republics were also a priority, but most important was engaging with Latvia and Lithuania in order to maintain a common positions *vis-à-vis* Mikhail Gorbachev.⁴¹

The Committee's desire to co-operate with the PF was shown in their attempt to co-opt their leaders. Indeed, the Committee's external affairs commission included almost all of the key figures in Savisaar's government: Savisaar, Lennart Meri, Endel Lippmaa, Marju Lauristin and Ülo Nugis, who would become head of the negotiating team with Gorbachev. The commission's composition anticipated the division of responsibilities in Savisaar's cabinet, with Lippmaa being responsible for relations with the East and Meri with the West.⁴²

Savisaar was elected Prime Minister on 3 April 1990, and the following week his ministers were elected to office one-by-one by the Supreme Soviet according to the old Soviet tradition. Foreign Minister Meri failed to gain the support of the foreign commission of the Supreme Soviet, which expressed its concern about the candidate's competence.⁴³ According to the law of the ESSR government, enacted on 6 December 1989, the chairman

⁴⁰ *Eesti Kongress*, 72, 302.

⁴¹ Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu (National Library of Estonia, hereafter RR), 2.1.148: Commissions of the Estonian Committee, Archive of the Congress of Estonia 1989–1992. It has to be noted that the impact of the Estonian Committee in international affairs seemed to be negligible and largely limited to co-operating with the Estonian diaspora abroad.

⁴² RR, 2.1.107: 3rd meeting of the Estonian Committee, March 23, 1990, Eesti Komitee istungite protokollid 1–3.

⁴³ Alatalu, "Eesti välispoliitiline kontseptsioon", 90.

of the government could not dismiss ministers without the consent of the Supreme Soviet. This led to the awkward situation of the prime minister having to work with ministers he did not trust, but who enjoyed the support of parliament.⁴⁴

The relatively weak position of the prime minister *vis-à-vis* powerful ministries, which often had strong vested interests, partly explains the lack of co-ordination in policies, including foreign affairs. Since Savisaar only became prime minister with the help of the votes controlled by the Congress (Mart Laar, Kaido Kama, Illar Hallaste, *etc.*) in the Supreme Soviet, he had to build bridges with this rival organization. Indeed, the choice of Meri and Lippmaa reflects his desire to strengthen his cabinet with authoritative figures across the political divide.⁴⁵ Lippmaa had been elected a member of the Supreme Soviet and the Congress, while Lennart Meri had been elected to the Congress and to its executive Committee only.⁴⁶ As members of the war generation, who were ten to twenty years older than the post-war generation, which was most active in politics (Lauristin, Savisaar, Velliste), they were deemed to be above the bickering that beset the various factions.⁴⁷

This also meant that Savisaar experienced much greater difficulties in controlling their work. One of Meri's deputies, Enn Liimets, still remembers Meri's utter lack of respect for Savisaar's wishes and instructions.⁴⁸ The same is true for Lippmaa, who would openly challenge Savisaar in the spring of 1991 over the government's policies toward the considerable Russian minority in North-East Estonia.⁴⁹ As a result, Savisaar had difficulties in coordinating the government's work on foreign policy. Naturally he had no sway over the activities of the Congress, with which Savisaar came to an open breach in May 1990. By September 1990, the issue of monopolizing state diplomacy in Estonia became the subject of public concern.

⁴⁴ For the case involving Jaak Tamm, the Minister of Energetics and Industry, see Edgar Savisaar, *Peaminister: Eesti lähiajalugu 1990–1992* (Tartu: Kleio, 2004), 597–598.

⁴⁵ Mart Laar claims that Meri's appointment as foreign minister was Congress's condition for supporting Savisaar's candidacy for the post of prime minister. Information shared by Mart Laar with Kaarel Piirimäe, Tartu, 23 September 2015.

⁴⁶ Meri acknowledged having "personal difficulties" with belonging to both the PF and the Congress of Estonia. See Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 288.

⁴⁷ On the influence of different generations, see Wulf and Grönholm, "Generating meaning across generations", 371–372; Aarelaid-Tart and Johnston, "Generations, micro-cohorts".

⁴⁸ Kaarel Piirimäe's interviews with Enn Liimets, Kohila, 8 July 2014 and 19 November 2014 (in the authors' possession).

⁴⁹ Tiit Kändler, *Endel Lippmaa: mees parima ninaga: dokumentaalne teadusromaan* (Tallinn: Ajakirjade Kirjastus, 2012), 254–255.

In an affair, which the overzealous press presumptuously called the Estonian Watergate, President Rüütel hired a US solicitor to represent Estonian interests in the United States.⁵⁰ The Estonian government was authorized by Rüütel to pay the lawyer's office an undefined sum in the event of Estonia being recognized *de jure* by the US government. Meri initially knew nothing about the transaction. When he did find out he helped leak information about it to the press and fired an official in the foreign ministry, Kalle Tenno, who was being used as a go-between by both Rüütel and Lippmaa in the United States behind Meri's back.⁵¹ Savisaar asked Meri and Lippmaa to declare that they adhered to a single Estonian foreign policy, but the public was not convinced.⁵² Personal ambition and power struggles lay behind this lack of co-ordination, but strategic differences were also present: the desire of Rüütel and Lippmaa to gain *de jure* recognition went against the doctrine of legal continuity. In fact, the US government was already recognizing Estonia as a *de jure* state, but could not recognize Savisaar's government or its plenipotentiaries as being the *de facto* government that controlled Estonian territory. From a legal point of view, the Savisaar administration was merely an interim authority that could not claim international recognition.⁵³

Although Lippmaa was supposed to focus on relations with the Soviet Union, a lack of success in Moscow induced him to turn his attention toward the West. As Lippmaa's path began to cross with Meri, the foreign minister publicly suggested that his old friend be presented with a compass.⁵⁴ In November 1990, Meri and Lippmaa, who were former classmates and old friends, squabbled over who should sit in a chair designated for the Estonian minister at a meeting with the US Secretary of State, James Baker, in Paris. This embarrassing incident was only resolved when an

⁵⁰ The company was Donovan Leisure, Rogovin, Hugel & Schiller, which had already worked for the government of Indrek Toome since 1989.

⁵¹ Tenno insisted that he left the ministry willingly, and that he had represented the present Estonian Republic, not the republic that had been occupied in 1940 and was represented by consul Ernst Jaakson in the United States. See "Kalle Tenno oma tegevusest", *Edasi*, 14 December 1990.

⁵² "Eesti välispoliitika on ühtne," *Päevaleht*, 7 October 1990; "Kes teeb Eesti välispoliitikat?", *Päevaleht*, 7 October 1990.

⁵³ Ernst Jaakson, Consul General of the Republic of Estonia in the United States, "Diplomaatiliste suhete küsimused" [A note on questions concerning diplomatic relations], New York, 2 April 1991, private papers of Enn Liimets in possession of Enn Liimets (Kohila, Estonia).

⁵⁴ "Valitsuse pressikonverents", *Eesti Päevaleht*, 11 November 1990.

additional chair was brought into the room.⁵⁵ Savisaar tactfully supported both his ministers. Lennart Meri declared that the differences were only tactical; his diplomacy emphasized dialogue and the search for common interests, while Lippmaa used legalistic arguments to exert pressure on foreign governments. However, Meri insisted that everyone shared the same basic goals.⁵⁶ However, observers were not convinced and identified at least five different players and conceptions in contemporary Estonian diplomacy. Tõnu Parming, an Estonian-American scholar associated with the Congress of Estonia, and with close connections to the State Department, warned that such chaos had been unimportant during Estonia's isolation from world affairs, but was now becoming a serious liability. He highlighted how Washington officials were wondering who actually represented the country. Parming understood the difficulty of developing sovereign diplomacy without an effective foreign ministry.⁵⁷

Similar perceptions were emerging in London. The lack of communication between Arnold Rüütel and Lennart Meri was noted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in November 1990, when the two politicians asked to meet the British Prime Minister separately. The British also detected a rivalry between Savisaar and Rüütel.⁵⁸

It is probably true that a crude power struggle took place during the process,⁵⁹ but we suggest that people's views on history and their experiences of the past were initially more important to their visions and actions than considerations of power. In the following section we will focus on two individuals who exerted extensive influence on Estonia's choices in foreign affairs, starting with Edgar Savisaar and continuing with Lennart Meri. We will analyze their views on foreign policy from the perspective of their life experiences and the resulting historical imaginations.

⁵⁵ Recollections of Jüri Luik in *Teine tulemine, 2: välisministeeriumi taasloomise lugu*, ed. by Eva Eek-Pajuste (Tallinn: Välisministeerium, 2008), 162.

⁵⁶ "Lennart Meri kompetentsi piiridest välispoliitikas", *Edasi*, 20 December 1990.

⁵⁷ "Eesti välispoliitikas viis erinevat liini", *Eesti Päevaleht*, 22 September 1990. In September, Parming identified five players: Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar, ministers Lennart Meri, Endel Lippmaa, Arnold Rüütel and Ülo Nugis (Chairman of the Estonian Supreme Soviet and leader of a delegation conducting negotiations with Moscow). He also highlighted the role of the Congress of Estonia.

⁵⁸ George Edgar, Soviet department, brief about Lennart Meri's visit to the UK on 4–7 November 1990, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, documents released under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 request no. 0122-16 (Kaarel Piirimäe).

⁵⁹ David J. Smith, Artis Pabriks, Aldis Purs and Thomas Lane, *The Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London: Routledge, 2002), 71 (Thomas Lane citing Riina Kionka).

Edgar Savisaar. History and foreign policy

Edgar Savisaar was born in 1950 in a prison into an Estonian family who were enduring long sentences for resisting Stalin-era collectivization.⁶⁰ As with most young careerists of the post-war generation, Savisaar was active in the Komsomol, the communist youth organization. He graduated with a history degree from the University of Tartu and worked as a history teacher between 1973 and 1976. In 1980 he completed a candidate of sciences degree with a dissertation on the socio-philosophical basis of the work of the Club of Rome.⁶¹ From 1982, Savisaar worked as a docent (associate professor) at the Academy of Sciences of the ESSR, whilst also forging an administrative career in the Tallinn district authorities and continuing to undertake party work for the Komsomol. Between 1985 and 1988 he acted as the head of department at the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) of the ESSR. He then became director of research at Mainor, the first consulting company in the USSR. Mainor became a unique center of progressive economic and social thought and management in the Soviet Union.⁶² At the time, Savisaar was already active in politics, organizing the PF and working on the IME program that he had helped to initiate in August 1987. In 1989 Savisaar was elected to be a member of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, while also holding prominent positions in the government of the ESSR.

In the 1980s, Savisaar was a productive publicist, writing about the Komsomol, local administration and management. In a book on global problems and scenarios for the future he warned that symptoms of a global crisis were affecting capitalist and socialist systems, but emphasized that there were no long-term solutions within the capitalist mode of production.⁶³ His most notable work during this period appeared in 1988 and was on perestroika. The book, entitled *The revolution continues*, showed Savisaar

⁶⁰ Tarmo Vahter, "Avastus arhiivist: Savisaare vanemad pandi vangi, sest nad protestisid kolhoosi vastu", *Eesti Ekspress*, 31 May 2010.

⁶¹ Edgar Savisaar, *Sotsial'no-filosoofskie osnovy' rabot Rimskogo kluba po global'nomu modelirovaniyu: avtoreferat kandidata filosoofskikh nauk* (Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut im. V. I. Lenina, 1981).

⁶² Mati Laos, *Mainori lugu* (Tallinn: Mainor, 2014).

⁶³ Lembit Valt, Edgar Savisaar, *Gloabalprobleemid ja tulevikustsenaariumid* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1983), 26; Kalju Ots, Edgar Savisaar, *Rahvasaadiku pilguga: Tallinna Mererajooni Rahvasaadikute Nõukogu töökogemusi* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1983); Edgar Savisaar, *Tööviljakus. Töödistsipliin. Tööaeg* (Tallinn: Valgus, 1986); Edgar Savisaar, Roland Vinkel, *Looduskaitse ja õpilasmalev: 1985. a. läbiviidud eksperimendi tulemused* (Tallinn: Eesti Õpilasmaleva Keskstaap, 1986);

to be a devotee of Gorbachev's new thinking: a progressive Leninist fighting against Stalinist "deformations", the bureaucracy and corruption. The declared objective of the PF, which he launched in April 1988, was to support perestroika, according to Leninist principles. Thus, this initiative seems to have been a genuine policy strategy, as opposed to a tactical move intended to camouflage other aims, as has sometimes been claimed.⁶⁴

Savisaar's progressive mindset and aversion to nostalgia was already apparent in a speech he delivered at the founding Congress of the PF held between 1–2 October 1988. He positioned his movement as a centrist organization, between what he saw as the two extremes in Estonian politics: Stalinists and nationalists. As he wrote: "The peculiarity of Estonia is that the common feature of the extremes on either side is their nostalgia and their turn towards the past. The dreams of both [camps] are from the end of the 1930s."⁶⁵ As regards national "radicals", Savisaar deplored their lack of understanding *vis-à-vis* the belief that content was more important than form. He wrote that they "wish in any case to restore state independence without realizing that national self-determination can come in very many forms". Instead of independence, the PF offered sovereignty, economic self-management, humanism and democracy.⁶⁶ In Marju Lauristin's opinion, The PF preferred smooth progress towards a democratic society over the full restoration of a historical state. In July 1991, Lauristin still considered this latter policy as "national romanticism".⁶⁷ At the Congress of the PF in 1988, Hando Runnel, a prominent poet who later joined the Congress of Estonia, noted that the movement was half-hearted about disclosing some aspects of the country's history.⁶⁸

Initially, the leaders of the PF shared the same cautious approach regarding the elaboration of historical narratives and arguments in politics as their moderate party comrades who still supported the CPE in 1988 and 1989. For example, Jaak Allik, a renowned drama director, CPE member and later a member of the Supreme Soviet, saw the radical restorers as unrealistic dreamers and compared them to the Estonian Communists of the 1940s who believed in changing everything overnight. According

⁶⁴ Edgar Savisaar, *Revolutsioon jätkub* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1988); *Eestimaa Rahvarinne: harta: üldprogramm: vastu võetud Eestimaa Rahvarinde Rahvakongressil 2. okt. 1988* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1988).

⁶⁵ *Rahvakongress: Eestimaa Rahvarinde kongress 1.–2. okt. 1988: materjalide kogumik*, ed. by J. Nõmm, A. Ottenson (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1988), 20.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Niinemets, "Elus juhtub täpselt see, mis juhtub"; Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 312.

⁶⁸ Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 144.

to Allik, the nationalist restorers dreamed of achieving their utopia by changing “objective facts”. He thought that both ideas were unrealistic: “Some want to turn the wheel of history backwards; some want to turn the wheel fast forward.”⁶⁹ In 1987 and 1988, the CPE attacked their rivals several times by accusing them of “speculating with nationalist sentiment and historical memory”.⁷⁰

In 1988, the “horizon of expectations” of the PF leaders was still dominated by a vision of a future Estonia as a society that would be organized according to the principles of “Socialism with a human face”. According to Heinz Valk, the first milestone for Estonia would come when the nation became a sovereign socialist state that was an autonomous, but not fully independent.⁷¹ The PF viewed itself as the leading force in Estonia in paving the way gradually towards a realistic transition from a socialist republic within the USSR to a modern social-democratic society. This mindset also rejected the nationalistic historical imagination that inspired the nostalgic utopianism of the radical restorers.

By the spring of 1989, the leadership of the PF, Savisaar included, realized the power of historical arguments in the struggle against Gorbachev. According to Lauristin, this realization gradually emerged as a result of contact with foreign diplomats and politicians. Subsequently, the leadership came to believe that it was much more realistic to emphasize the uniqueness of the Baltic case, rather than to argue for the dissolution of the entire Soviet Union, as had hitherto been the objective of the PF. For tactical reasons the PF therefore turned the thesis of legal continuity, which had thus far been the exclusive concern of dissidents, into its main vehicle for achieving independence.⁷²

On becoming a member of the Soviet Congress of Peoples’ Deputies in May 1989, Savisaar was the main animating force, beside the academician Endel Lippmaa, behind the effort to set up a commission to investigate the secret protocols of the MRP of 1939, and to revoke the results of the Nazi–Soviet collaboration for the Baltic states.⁷³ Savisaar’s energy and

⁶⁹ Jaak Allik, “Neobolševism Eestis”, *Sakala*, 3 June 1989.

⁷⁰ Grönholm, “Nostalgian ja utopian välissä”, 179.

⁷¹ Heinz Valk, “Laulev revolutsioon”, *Sirp ja vasar*, 17 June 1988.

⁷² Interview with Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm; Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 297. However, in 1991 Lauristin refuted the argument that this was a tactical move. Instead, she explained that the movement had needed more time to re-orientate itself. This was especially the case for the leaders of the PF, who finally managed to overcome the mental barrier erected over the question of legal continuity. See Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 316.

⁷³ According to Heiki Lindpere, Savisaar became the deputy chairman of the commission to investigate the pact. See Heiki Lindpere, *The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: challenging*

organizational talent pushed forward the work of the MRP commission despite obstruction by Valentin Falin, the chairman of the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, his supporters within the commission, and the passivity of Alexander Yakovlev, the chairman who was taking instructions directly from Gorbachev.⁷⁴ After substantial pressure was exerted from Estonian and other Baltic members, Yakovlev finally came to their support. On 24 December 1989, the Peoples' Congress passed a historic declaration that acknowledged for the first time the existence of the secret protocol and declared it legally null and void.⁷⁵

As the Baltic states saw it, the decision of the Congress had opened the door to a restoration of independence. The idea of state continuity had been made part of Estonian law. On 12 November 1989 the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR declared that the country was an occupied and annexed state.⁷⁶ On 2 February 1990 it announced its intention to start negotiations with Moscow on the basis of the legal validity of the Treaty of Tartu of 1920, and on 30 March 1990 it announced the beginning of the process for restoring full sovereign status to the Republic.⁷⁷ However, even after becoming prime

Soviet history (Tallinn: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2009), 21. According to Keiji Sato, he was just an ordinary member. See Keiji Sato, "The Molotov-Ribbentrop commission and claims of post-Soviet secessionist territories to sovereignty", *Demokrati-zatsiya*, 18:2 (2010), 148–159, 149. For Soviet falsifications concerning the history of the MRP more generally, see Jan Lipinsky, "Reception and historiography of the MRP in (Soviet) Russia – historians and their responsibility", draft article in authors' possession, due to appear in 2017.

⁷⁴ Lindpere, *Challenging Soviet history*, 23–25, 30–31, 35, 39. This is confirmed indirectly by Yakovlev, who refers to Baltic positions as "extremely radical". See A. N. Yakovlev, *Sumerki* (Moscow: Materik, 2003), 419. Yakovlev was probably misled by Gorbachev's decision to withhold existing documents from the public, *ibid.*, 422. According to Sato, Savisaar repeatedly pleaded with members of the commission for them not to link the MRP to the question of the secession of the republics. See Sato, "The Molotov-Ribbentrop commission", 152. This may have been a tactical move.

⁷⁵ Sato, "The Molotov-Ribbentrop commission". The declaration fell short of linking the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in 1940, as Gorbachev insisted on limiting the commission's mandate to investigating the events of 1939. In the circumstances, the decision of 24 December 1989 was probably the best outcome the Baltic delegates could achieve. It has to be noted that even Yakovlev, ostensibly a liberal, could not accept the link between the MRP and the annexation of the Baltic states. See Alexander Jakowlew, *Offener Schluss: ein Reformier zieht Bilanz* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1992), 111.

⁷⁶ At this time, even the communist party had accepted the occupation as a fact, "EKP Keskkomitee büroo avaldus seoses 1940. aasta sündmustega Eestis", *Poliitika*, 7 (1990), 2–3.

⁷⁷ *Valikkogumik Eesti NSV Ülemnõukogu XI koosseisu poolt vastuvõetud seadusandlikest aktidest* (Tallinn, 1990), 63–64, 88–89; "Constitutional status of Estonia", *Riigi Teataja*, 29 March 1990.

minister in April 1990, Savisaar seemed to consider state continuity as a straightjacket that needlessly limited his freedom of maneuver, despite the declarations and decrees of the Supreme Soviet of the ESSR.

Even while working to secure condemnation of the MRP in the fall of 1989, Savisaar's legal advisers developed the concept of the "third republic". According to this theory, which was fashioned as a counter move against the challenge of the Citizens' Committees, the pre-war republic could not be restored, but it was possible and more advantageous to create a *new* state. The third republic, according to Savisaar, not only had to incorporate pre-war traditions, but also had to take advantage of the intellectual and material capital accumulated during the Soviet period.⁷⁸ The concept clearly had supporters in Estonian society, most of all among the *nomenklatura*,⁷⁹ but it had no chance of success in public discourse. Indeed, Savisaar never raised it again after 1989,⁸⁰ but the banner raised suspicions and was subsequently actively used by political opponents.⁸¹ According to Lauristin, during the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991 some radical restorers were still afraid that the Estonian Supreme Soviet would issue a proclamation announcing a "third republic".⁸²

Savisaar intentionally fuelled these suspicions by criticizing historical continuity in several public appearances. This was evident, for example, in a speech he delivered in June 1990 in commemoration of Carl Robert Jakobson, a hero of the period of National Awakening in the nineteenth century. In clearly identifying with this iconic figure, Savisaar claimed that Jakobson "had no abstract notion of Estonianness *de jure*; Estonia – this meant having two feet on the ground".⁸³ Invoking deeply engrained symbols and stereotypes from Estonian history, Savisaar was presenting himself as a proponent of realism, while implying that his opposition was naively clinging to the nostalgic idea of returning to a distant wonderland.

⁷⁸ Savisaar developed these ideas on Estonian Radio, which were later published in *Reede*, 22 September 1989. Also see the article by the lawyer Jüri Pöld, "Kolmanda Vabariigi süünd", *Edasi*, 21 September 1989.

⁷⁹ For instance, Bruno Saul, the chairman of the council of ministers from 1984 to 1988, supported this view. See Bruno Saul, *Meie aeg* (Tallinn: Maalehe raamat, 2006), 57–58. According to Marju Lauristin, Indrek Toome also liked the third-republic idea. This opinion was expressed in an interview with Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm.

⁸⁰ Kaarel Piirimäe's interview with Rein Taagepera, Tartu, 14 May 2015 (in the authors' possession); Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 95.

⁸¹ RR, 2.1.57, l. 53–60: The speech delivered by Tunne Kelam at the 4th Congress of Estonia, 16 March 1991.

⁸² Lauristin, *Punane ja sinine*, 137.

⁸³ "Speech [delivered] on Victory Day, 23 June 1990, at Kurgja Mansion at the grave of Carl Robert Jakobson", Edgar Savisaar, *Kõned* (Tallinn: Olion, 1990), 62–63.

It should be noted that Jakobson had been charged as expressing pro-Russian feelings by the younger generation.⁸⁴

There were ample grounds for suspecting that the formation of a third republic remained Savisaar's preferred option. The idea of legal continuity proved useful in the arguments of those seeking to regain independence, but the more practical aspects of the idea – the restitution of property to former owners and the denial of citizenship rights to post-1940 immigrants, *etc.* – were difficult for him to accept. As regards property reform, Savisaar has explained that his hesitance was a result of his unwillingness to open up the wounds that had been inflicted on Estonian villages during the Soviet nationalization drives of the 1940s and the 1950s. This process affected his own family deeply.⁸⁵

Savisaar's foreign-policy initiatives were plagued by opposition fears that he would make too many concessions to the Soviet Union or Russia. The first conflict emerged over the government's effort to take control of Estonia's borders, establishing a so-called "economic border" with Russia. The problem for the Congress of Estonia was that this border followed the *de facto* border delineated by Stalin in 1944–45, and not the *de jure* demarcation lines established by the Treaty of Tartu in 1920, thus compromising the principle of *restitutio ad integrum*. It was clear from the Committee's announcement regarding the question that it was concerned about Savisaar's government being able to achieve international recognition on the grounds that it was now able to control its territory as a sovereign state.⁸⁶ According to the Committee, this turn of events would only legitimize a regime that was still essentially an occupying administration. The Committee also deplored Savisaar's deal with the Ministry of the Interior of the USSR – the so-called Savisaar-Bakatin Agreement – about transferring authority over the police force to the ESSR, and also the payment of

⁸⁴ Mart Laar remembers a tribunal organized by the student group "Young-Tartu", which charged C. R. Jakobson with pro-Russianness, whilst exonerating Jakob Hurt, who was closer to the Baltic Germans. See Mart Laar, *Pööre: mälestusi I* (Tallinn: Read, 2015), 16. Savisaar developed the habit of putting on the robes of historical figures, comparing himself to Konstantin Päts, for example, in the fall of 1990 and even to Jaan Tõnisson in early 1992.

⁸⁵ Savisaar, *Peaminister*, 334. Savisaar's principle advisor on privatization at the time, Erik Terk, has explained the relative slowness of reforms in the sector by outlining a number of objective factors. See Erik Terk, *Privatization in Estonia: ideas, process, results* (Tallinn: Estonian Institute for Future Studies, 2000), 41–51; Erik Terk to Kaarel Piirimäe, Tallinn, 12 October 2015.

⁸⁶ RR, 2.1.111, p. 250: Kokkuvõtte Eesti Komitee istungi protokollist nr. 25. 27 September 1990; 2.1.111, p. 257: Eesti Komitee koosoleku märgukiri piirikontrolli kohta.

taxes to the USSR.⁸⁷ The committee also protested about Savisaar's letter to Senator Alan Dixon of the US Congress, in which the prime minister had ostensibly requested diplomatic recognition.⁸⁸

In retrospect, it is difficult to contemplate what else Savisaar could have done in the circumstances to assert Estonia's sovereignty: to take control of Estonian territory and negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet institutions. Trivimi Velliste, one of the leaders of the Congress of Estonia, later acknowledged that from the point of view of practical day-to-day decisions, no neat line could be drawn between seceding from the USSR and restoring independence: "eventually, you had to establish some sort of ministries, etc. You needed to control the borders, even if it was not clear where the border exactly ran."⁸⁹

Some other former critics and opponents are less sympathetic. Mart Nutt, a rising star in the foreign ministry under Lennart Meri, claims that Savisaar wished to sign a new union treaty to stay in the Soviet Union and even conspired to associate Estonia with the Commonwealth of Independent States after the dissolution of the USSR.⁹⁰ Marju Lauristin, an ally of Savisaar at the time, dismisses such allegations as fantasy. Nevertheless, she notes that "Savisaar had and still has an Eastern European *habitus*" in the bourgeois sense. As opposed to Meri, he felt much more comfortable travelling in the East than in the West, and Savisaar had adopted the paradigm, popular among many Western Sovietologists, that "the [Soviet] system could be developed in a better way".⁹¹

Indeed, in his memoirs Savisaar is quite candid about his skepticism toward the Western capitalist model.⁹² In December 1991, he delivered a speech at the Congress of Future Estonia in which he argued that the Western "market mechanism" provided no solution to global problems and had failed as a long-term strategy. This was very much in the spirit of his 1983 book on global problems. Savisaar further warned against trying to copy the Western trajectory of development and suggested that Estonia should try to achieve Western standards of living without giving up

⁸⁷ RR, 2.1.112, l. 157: Eesti Komitee poliitiline avaldus, 1 November 1990. On the Savisaar-Bakatin agreement, see Savisaar, *Peaminister*, 300–309.

⁸⁸ RR, 2.1.115, l. 44: Eesti Komitee märgukiri Eesti riikluse alustest, 21 February 1991.

⁸⁹ Kaarel Piirimäe's interview with Trivimi Velliste, Tartu, 14 January 2015 (in the authors' possession).

⁹⁰ Interview of Kaarel Piirimäe and Holger Mölder with Mart Nutt, Tallinn, 6 April 2015 (in the authors' possession).

⁹¹ Interview with Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm.

⁹² Savisaar, *Peaminister*, 789–795.

its own system of values. The most effective model, according to Savisaar, was an elitist, centralized system like that of Japan, which would offer a short-cut towards higher living standards without needing to accept the high social and environmental costs.⁹³ Moreover, Estonia would remain associated with the Soviet Union in some form – if only to help the West avoid an outright social catastrophe in the territories of the former USSR.⁹⁴

Even on this occasion, in late 1991 after independence had been secured, Savisaar deplored the folly of the restorers who ignored the Soviet experience of the previous fifty years. Savisaar's keen interest in continuing to influence the political process in Russia should also be noted. This reflected the original idealist thought of the PF and its goal of aligning with Russian liberals in order to help the democratic process in the USSR. Savisaar's paradigm, if it had been allowed to prevail in Estonian politics beyond 1991, might indeed have tied Estonia with processes in the East and delayed, if not hindered, Estonia's reform and "return to the West". In the following section we will compare Savisaar's visions, informed by his life experience under the Soviet system, with the historical imagination of Lennart Meri.

Lennart Meri and the restoration of the foreign ministry

In contrast to Savisaar's supposedly "Eastern European *habitus*", Lennart Meri appeared to embody the vestiges of Europeanness still present in Estonia after fifty years of enforced Soviet rule, with his knowledge of languages and Western cultural tropes. The idea that Estonia had never parted with Europe, but Europe had left Estonia, later became a recurring theme in Meri's speeches and diplomacy.⁹⁵

Meri's father, Georg-Peeter Meri (1900–83), had been a promising career diplomat before the Second World War. Lennart still had fond memories of his father's diplomatic postings and his years as a schoolboy in pre-war Berlin and Paris. His childhood was cut short by the Soviet occupation. In 1941 he was deported to Siberia with his mother and younger brother, whereas his father was separated from the family and was sentenced to death (he escaped execution). Georg-Peeter Meri was kept alive in Butyrka Prison by express order of Lavrenti Beria, because of his agreement to co-operate with Soviet counter-intelligence organizations. This relationship lasted

⁹³ Savisaar, *Peaminister*, 789–795.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 789.

⁹⁵ Pertti Grönholm, "Wars, suffering and survival in public history speeches by Estonian Presidents (1992–2012)", unpublished presentation delivered at the Yale Baltic-Scandinavian Studies Conference, 13–15 March 2014.

until the mid-1950s, when he felt safe to betray his masters. Even though this remained a well-preserved secret, his father's mysterious connections to the KGB may have given Lennart Meri an "untouchable" air under the Soviet regime. As a writer and filmmaker, Lennart Meri traveled abroad frequently, even though he was not a member of the CPE. Unsurprisingly, this caused envy among his peer and rumors circulated of his work for the KGB, which were, nonetheless, groundless.⁹⁶

Meri stepped into office with a restorationist mindset. Foreign affairs, particularly the inept and tragic diplomacy of 1939–40, had been a frequent topic at his family's kitchen table. In a letter to voters, as a candidate for the elections to the Supreme Soviet in March 1990, he said his family had known of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact since September 1939. Meri had had the opportunity to see documents related to the MRP on his trip to the Hoover Institute in the US in 1979, and he kept a copy of the secret protocol at his home.⁹⁷ In 1989 he was involved in collecting material about the pact that was to be presented at the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow.

Meri was also active in the Estonian Heritage Society since its establishment in 1987, even though he was more critical of the pre-war regime of Konstantin Päts than, for example, the EHS leader Trivimi Velliste.⁹⁸ Within the EHS, past events, especially the harshly repressed Estonian experiences of loss, resistance, suffering and survival, formed a new framework for the future-oriented basis of national politics. Between 1987 and 1989 the radical restorers, especially the EHS, envisioned the moral, social and economic collapse of the Soviet system. The corruption of Soviet legitimacy in all spheres of society and the state formed the "horizon of expectations" of the radical restorers and also influenced their ideas about Estonian foreign policy.⁹⁹

In the fall of 1989, Meri established the Estonian Institute, which was designed to send Estonian students abroad to study and to open Estonian cultural centers in foreign capitals that could be turned into diplomatic

⁹⁶ Jürjo, *Pagulus ja Nõukogude Eesti*, 280; Meri, *Tagasivaateid veerevast vagunist*.

⁹⁷ Lennart Meri, "Kallis valija", at Nõmme, 14 March 1990, Lennart Meri's personal papers in the possession of Mart Meri. This information was supplied by Mart Meri, Tallinn, 26 August 2015. Meri has said that he received a copy of the secret protocol in 1953 by post and kept it at home, Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 278.

⁹⁸ Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 264; interview with Trivimi Velliste; Laar, *Pööre*, 18. Meri was present at the second meeting of the heritage society, if not earlier.

⁹⁹ Grönholm, "Nostalgian ja utopian välissä," 181. See also Trivimi Velliste's speech delivered at the unveiling of President Konstantin Päts' monument in Tahkuranna on 25 June 1989, *Muinsuskaitse Seltsi Sõnumid*, 8:12 (1989).

representations upon the restoration of independence.¹⁰⁰ Meri actively sought practical and financial support from Western countries and was remarkably successful in this venture. The most important financial support for establishing an independent Estonian foreign policy came from the government of Finland, which secretly funneled hundreds of thousands of marks through the Finnish Ministry of Culture, Finnish NGO's and the Tuglas Society to the Estonian Institute in Helsinki between 1990 and 1991. The Finns also equipped Meri and his staff with secure mobile phones, office space, cars, *etc.*¹⁰¹ On becoming foreign minister, Meri brought most of the young staff of the Estonian Institute into the foreign ministry, along with the benefits of the contacts and network affiliations he had established abroad.

On his first day as foreign minister, Meri symbolically gathered the staff of the small Soviet-type foreign ministry and announced that everyone had been fired.¹⁰² More important than the actual result (he had no authority to dismiss officials at will) was the symbolic significance of Meri's act: it was clear that a new era had dawned in the institution. But this was not supposed to be a step into an unknown and uncertain future, but rather a restoration of the foreign ministry of the pre-war era.¹⁰³

Looking at the period from the point of view of institutional history, it is clear that the foreign ministry in Estonia underwent significant transformation. It changed from being a Soviet institution, which was not a foreign ministry in the conventional sense but a local section of the all-Union foreign ministry chiefly responsible for foreign propaganda (and consular affairs),¹⁰⁴ into an embryonic ministry with a full range of functions. Before the regaining of independence in August 1991, the staff consisted of only about fifty people, and its work was rather chaotic, as it was largely dependent on Lennart Meri's intuition, charm and energy.¹⁰⁵ Proper

¹⁰⁰ Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 273.

¹⁰¹ Heikki Rausmaa, *Kyllä kulttuurin nimissä voi harrastella aika paljon: Suomen ja Viron poliittiset suhteet keväästä 1988 diplomaattisuhteiden solmimiseen elokuussa 1991*, PhD dissertation (University of Helsinki, 2013), 190–191, 194.

¹⁰² Tiina Freiberg's recollections in *Teine tulemine*, 51. Peep Jahilo remembers Meri quipping that "there are many relative things in the world". See Peep Jahilo's recollections in *Teine tulemine*, 47.

¹⁰³ Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 300.

¹⁰⁴ It should not be overlooked, however, that the foreign ministry had changed quite significantly since the adoption of Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign affairs. There is no space in the present article to discuss the impact of perestroika on republican foreign activities.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, the recollections of Clyde Kull, *Teine tulemine*, 68.

bureaucratic procedures were only gradually established after August 1991. What mattered most, however, was the almost complete change of personnel and the influx of young people, whom Meri encouraged, nurtured and protected. In contrast to Savisaar, Meri trusted young people, who came practically straight from university, to make the most important decisions (usually while he was not present). An influential group within the ministry formed the political department and included Jüri Luik (who was closest to Meri), Mart Nutt, Indrek Kannik and Tiit Pruuli.¹⁰⁶ Their most valued qualification was English, which at the time was quite rare among the old bureaucracy. Equally important was their mindset, which was supposedly uncorrupted by the Soviet system. Even if they had intended to make careers in the system – Nutt, for example, had decided to enter the CPE – times had begun to change before they could become part of the establishment. The foreign ministry also contained numerous Estonians who had been living abroad, such as Toivo Klaar and Peeter Mehisto, who brought much-needed language skills and a dynamic work ethic to this post-Soviet institution. As a result of these changes, the ministry obtained a distinctly Western outlook.

Toomas Alatalu has questioned the basis of Meri's foreign affairs doctrine and has concluded that he had none: he simply accepted whatever advice he could from abroad.¹⁰⁷ Alatalu is right in the sense that Meri never presented a written doctrine, despite consistent pressure from the foreign commission of the Supreme Soviet to do so. Alatalu is also correct when he notes that the commission's purpose was to undermine Meri's position, rather than to engage in dialogue. In this regard, Meri did well to ignore the commission as much as he could.¹⁰⁸ The inclusion of former prominent communists or careerists in the commission, like Indrek Toome or Tiit Made,¹⁰⁹ made Meri cautious, as the group was trying to impinge on the foreign ministry's executive autonomy. It was a characteristic ploy of Meri to send a deputy to represent the foreign ministry – in this instance

¹⁰⁶ Jüri Luik's recollections in *Teine tulemine*, 158.

¹⁰⁷ Alatalu, "Eesti välispoliitiline kontseptsioon", 81–116.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Tiit Made was a former attaché of the Soviet Embassy in Stockholm. Predictably, Made's posting at the Soviet Embassy gave rise to rumors of him being a KGB operative. These allegations were unfounded, although anyone in Made's position had to report to intelligence organizations. The foreign commission became a vehicle for Made's ambitions and his poorly concealed desire to rise to the post of foreign minister.

Enn Liimets, a former high-ranking communist turned Soviet diplomat – rather than meeting the commission personally.¹¹⁰

In this connection it is necessary to note that Meri employed some former members of the establishment without ever explaining these decisions to his young disciples. One such employee was the lawyer Rein Müllerson, an ethnic Estonian who had already made a career in Moscow and had irked national activists with his anti-independence remarks. Despite this Meri appointed him second deputy foreign minister alongside Liimets. Meri's choice might have been based on a reliance on people who knew "how things worked" in Soviet bureaucracy and in Moscow. Hence, he wanted to tap into the practical and diplomatic experience of someone like Liimets, or the knowledge of international law of someone like Müllerson.¹¹¹ Meri's political flirtation with members of the former *nomenklatura* showed the complexity of his character, resulting from his experiences during Soviet rule.

Perhaps because Meri's political career constitutes a difficult case for academic analysis, his tenure in the foreign ministry has been most adequately captured not by scholars, but by the author Mihkel Mutt in his novel *Rahvusvaheline mees (The International Man)*. Mutt worked as Meri's press chief,¹¹² and in his novel the protagonist, Chief Rudolfo, is presented symbolically as a dancer who can master all the world's rhythms, choreographing his dances to circumstances. He is able to behave and act in Europe with a degree of smoothness unprecedented among his peers in the East. However, the figure of a dancer can also be taken as the portrayal of someone who is accustomed to "managing" his life under a repressive regime that is dominated by the Party and the KGB. Rudolfo is sufficiently flexible to get along with Paks (Fat), who is presented as a sinister and menacing figure of the Soviet type, whom everyone in the ministry fears, except

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Enn Liimets; see also Alatalu, "Eesti välispoliitiline kontseptsioon", 110.

¹¹¹ Meri confided that Müllerson was a "difficult choice" even to foreign diplomats (Archive of the Foreign Ministry of Estonia, Tallinn (Eesti Välisministeeriumi Arhiiv, hereafter EVA): Meri's conversation with the US consul George Albert Krol, 1 July 1991, kohtumiste üleskirjutused). Two years earlier Müllerson had made "relatively pro-Moscow statements". But in "More about nations' right to self-determination", *Moscow News* (17–24 March 1991) Müllerson criticized the Union center harshly and argued for the independence of union republics. In 1993 Meri blocked the Estonian government's attempt to prevent former leading communists from being able to participate in privatization, Laar, *Pööre*, 102–104.

¹¹² Mihkel Mutt, *Rahvusvaheline mees* (Tallinn, 1994); available in Finnish: *Missio Viro* (Helsinki: Kivijalka, 1997). For a perceptive commentary, see Linda Kaljundi, "Eesti lugu: Mihkel Mutt 'Rahvusvaheline mees'", *Eesti Päevaleht*, 14 August 2009.

the chief. Needless to say, Paks is a caricature of Edgar Savisaar. Moreover, Mutt detects an underlining generational factor in power struggles in the ministry: the young stars team up with the pre-war generation of Rudolfo to push the middle-aged post-war generation, led and protected by Paks, out of the ministry, excluding it from Estonia's future.

Returning to the question of foreign-policy doctrine, Meri stated that his goal was to restore the Republic of Estonia on the basis of state continuity.¹¹³ According to Jüri Luik, legal continuity was his trump card on the international scene and to preserve this precious asset, the foreign ministry intervened in domestic politics more actively than is common in normal times. At government meetings, Meri resolutely blocked all motions that he perceived would weaken the claim to legal continuity.¹¹⁴ As to practical diplomacy, Meri had a more flexible position: meetings with foreign diplomats were also partly used as a means of transmitting useful instructions as to whom the Estonians should meet, what aspects should be emphasized, etc.¹¹⁵ His talks with diplomats, like the Swedish Consul in Leningrad, Dag Sebastian Ahlander, or Paul Goble, the head of the Baltic desk at the US Department of State, were unusually frank. But rather than revealing any weakness, these conversations showed his intelligence and his ability to listen and to learn from people who possessed knowledge and experience that Estonia lacked at the time.¹¹⁶

From the very beginning of his political career Meri emphasized that foreign policy was essentially a dialogue,¹¹⁷ thus contrasting his diplomacy with the Congress of Estonia and Endel Lippmaa. Meri was hopeful that he could convince the West and Moscow of the utility of setting the Baltic states free. In an article dwelling on different tactics in Estonian foreign policy, he contrasted Lippmaa's approach of making announcements at mass rallies to his search for compromise.¹¹⁸

However, in Meri's opinion the best guarantee of securing Estonia's eventual return to Europe was to not only sound European, but also to

¹¹³ Lennart Meri, "Kompetentsi piiridest välispoliitikas", *Edasi*, 20 December 1990.

¹¹⁴ Jüri Luik in *Teine tulemine*, 161.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹¹⁶ EVA: Lennart Meri's meeting with Curtis W. Kamman and Paul Goble, 13 May 1991; Lennart Meri's meeting with Dag Sebastian Ahlander, 18 October 1990; Lennart Meri's meeting with Dag Sebastian Ahlander, 13 November 1990, Välisministri kohtumiste üleskirjutused, kõned (projektid), taustadokumendid 1990–1992.

¹¹⁷ "Maailmarändurist välisministriks. Lennart Meri: mistahes poliitika on alati dialoog", *Päevaleht*, 19 April 1990.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*; EVA: "Elu võimalikkusest poliitikas", Lennart Meri's speech in Helsinki, 26 November 1990, Lennart Meri kohtumiste teesid ja taustadokumendid 1990–1992.

actually think and act as Europeans. In this regard he later remembered having a fractious relationship with Savisaar, who did not completely understand that Estonia should become a genuinely Western country.¹¹⁹ As a prerequisite of Estonia becoming part of the communicative space of the West,¹²⁰ Meri's interest in information verged on being a fixation. Throughout the occupation years he had maintained a very personal link with the West via radio, keeping abreast with latest developments and maintaining his language skills. It was Meri who nominated Radio Free Europe for the Nobel Prize in 1991.¹²¹ He directed his energies to obtaining the right technical equipment in order to connect Estonia to the outside world without the interference of the KGB, which was still controlling Estonian borders and landline communications.¹²² As a man who represented a bridge between the present and pre-war Europe, he could also be surprisingly futuristic.

Conclusion

The hypothesis of our research was that the period under study in this article constituted a "critical juncture" in the formation of Estonian foreign policy. Indeed, the time from 1988 to 1991 comprised all the features marking an important watershed: there was a lot of competition over foreign policy, state institutions were in disarray and different groups and powerful individuals were competing for authority and power. Intellectuals held a disproportionately strong position in defining the values and interests of Estonian society after the transition from Soviet Estonia to the new independent republic. In terms of the history of the Estonian foreign ministry, the years 1990–91 were probably crucial for its development as a modern, Western-looking institution, which would help realize Estonia's ambition of joining powerful Western institutions, including the EU and NATO.¹²³

The most important cleavage that developed within the national movement was based on conflicting interpretations of the past and personal life

¹¹⁹ Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 310.

¹²⁰ *Peaminister Edgar Savisaare valitsuse programm* (Tallinn: Riigikantselei trükikoda, 1990), 6.

¹²¹ "Päevakaja: Eesti välisminister Lennart Meri Islandil", *Eesti raadio*, 22 February 1991, <<http://arhiiv.err.ee/guid/17897>> (accessed 13 June 2016).

¹²² Viljar Meister's recollections in *Teine tulemine*, 60–61.

¹²³ More research needs to be done to reach a more definitive conclusion as to which period was a "critical juncture" in the development of Estonian foreign policy, but it seems that Meri's promotion of young cadres before August 1991 was one of the most important factors that influenced Estonian diplomacy in the following decades. Kaarel Piirimäe's interview with Jüri Luik, Tallinn, 9 December 2015 (in the authors' possession).

experiences, as many scholars have already shown. We have analyzed how these differences influenced the construction of Estonian foreign policy and diplomacy. We have focused on two key players in defining Estonian identity and interests in the international arena: Prime Minister Edgar Savisaar and Foreign Minister Lennart Meri. Both were intellectuals with no shortage of ideational power necessary for laying “tracks” in order to forge new identities and interests. We think that Savisaar’s skepticism with regard to the West, his lingering attachment towards the East and his conviction that there had been much that was positive in the Soviet period that could be maintained in the “third republic”, had a lot to do with his generational mindset. In contrast to Meri, who vividly remembered life in free Estonia, Savisaar had little experience of any other society other than the Soviet Union. In a passionate article that defended his generation’s right and responsibility to remain in politics, he complained: “It is no longer considered polite to acknowledge that [...] there was not only occupation, but also normal life: people worked and sweated, lived, loved and brought up children [...] We are not yet a lost generation.”¹²⁴ What emerges from this writing is a sense of bitterness that his generation – people who had devoted much of their lives to improving life in Soviet Estonia – is being isolated from the politics of independent Estonia based on accusations, erroneous or not, that they co-operated with the Soviet regime.

We detect no hesitation on the part of Meri about the need for Estonia to return to Europe as quickly as possible. The Europe Meri was imagining was the idealized pre-war Europe of his childhood, which he still remembered and cherished as a counter-world to Soviet reality.¹²⁵ He had made compromises with the regime and had used possibilities within the system for personal gain, but his view had always been that the Soviet occupation had to be transitory.¹²⁶ Hence, in the late 1980s he welcomed movements that sought to restore historical truths and eventually to restore the greatest of “treasures”:¹²⁷ the pre-war republic. He thought the third republic, an idea supported by Savisaar, was a “completely absurd” idea that legitimized

¹²⁴ Edgar Savisaar, “Veel ei ole me jõudnud vabasse vette”, *Sirp*, 22 November 1991. This was in response to the announcement that Enn Põldroos, a veteran of the PF, was leaving politics.

¹²⁵ Laar, *Pööre*, 167.

¹²⁶ On this point see for example the testimony of a British diplomat who met Meri in Tallinn in summer 1981, J. K. Gordon, “Meeting with Lennart Meri”, 2 July 1981, FCO 28/4603, National Archives, United Kingdom.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

the quislings of 1940 and their descendants.¹²⁸ Meri did not find natural allies in the post-war generation of Edgar Savisaar, but in the younger generation (the transitional generation¹²⁹) that looked suspiciously upon the post-war generation as people who had been corrupted by the Soviet system. It was for this reason that he staffed the new foreign ministry with very young people, who were flexible, open to influences from the West and were able to learn quickly.¹³⁰ Meri fiercely guarded the autonomy of the ministry against encroachments from the old bureaucracy and Savisaar himself. He even assured that he would be succeeded in his post by someone directly from the West – the Swedish Estonian Jaan Manitski – when he was forced to resign in April 1992.¹³¹ That Estonia was restored on the principle of legal identity with the pre-war republic was assured, at least partly, by the foreign ministry under Meri.

Finally, looking at the figure of Savisaar, his values and the interests he represented, we think there was an alternative to Estonia's decisive return to the West. His progressive mindset and his desire to influence processes in the former Soviet Union would have thwarted Estonia's reform for a considerable time. Paradoxically, the quickest way back to Europe was via the past: the restorers of the pre-war republic, whom Savisaar castigated as naïve and unsophisticated, actually proved to be the most radical reformers (as shown by the government of Mart Laar that was formed in 1992). One of the prices Estonia (and also Latvia and Lithuania) had to pay for its return to the West, besides the high social costs of acute transformation and liberal economic policies, was the deterioration of relations with Russia, which had hoped to keep the states under some sort of tutelage. This was exactly what Savisaar had warned against before he was forced to resign in January 1992.¹³²

It has to be pointed out that the individuals-based point of view that we decided to adopt in this paper is not the only way to historicize the Baltic states' return to the West. What we were not able to do was to draw comparisons with similar processes in Lithuania, Latvia or the other former Soviet republics. For example, it can be suggested that the rivalry between Vytautas Landsbergis, the Lithuanian Chairman of the Supreme Soviet,

¹²⁸ Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 289.

¹²⁹ Wulf and Grönholm, "Generating meaning across generations", 369–372.

¹³⁰ Interview with Jüri Luik.

¹³¹ On Manitski as successor, Oplatka, *Lennart Meri*, 342.

¹³² Savisaar, "Veel ei ole me jõudnud". Pointing at Estonia's laws that left the Russian-speaking minority without citizenship, he anticipated "long-term tensions in relations with the East".

and Prime Minister Kazimira Prunskienė was analogous to that of Meri and Savisaar; but that the Lithuanian foreign minister Algirdas Saudargas never played an independent role equal to that of Meri.¹³³ Another area, which should be left for future analyses, is the relative popularity of either returning to the West or steering a middle course between the East and the West among the wider public, and how the shifting opinions affected politics. Our work also has implications for Soviet studies more generally, all of which we have not been able to discuss. For example there is the debate to what extent the *homo sovieticus* of late Socialism was actually Soviet. This research, at least the example of Lennart Meri, seems to support the view that informal associations and networks did create a non-Soviet space in which the cultivation of non-Soviet ideas, the survival of non-Soviet people so to speak, were possible.¹³⁴

Last but not least, beside societal aspects one could consider international ones: the remarkable continuity from the pre-war to the post-Cold War era, which the father Georg and son Lennart Meri represented, gives credence to the view that the Baltic question had not been solved but only placed into a “cold storage” after the end of the Second World War,¹³⁵ and this poses interesting questions about the basis of state continuity in practical politics and not just in international law.

KAAREL PIIRIMÄE (b. 1979) is a Research Fellow at the Institute of History and Archaeology of the University of Tartu and Senior Research Fellow at the Estonian War Museum.*

PERTTI GRÖNHOLM (b. 1966) is a Collegium Researcher at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies (TIAS) and a Docent at the Department of European and World History at the University of Turku.**

¹³³ The authors like to thank Emilija Pundziute Gallois, PhD student at Sciences Po, for insightful comments upon which this paragraph is based.

¹³⁴ For a view that everyone, excluding only active dissidents, lived a Soviet way of life, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was forever until it was no more: the last Soviet generation* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006). This has been contested among others by Ainė Ramonaitė, “Creating one’s own reality as resistance: the shape of ‘parallel society’ in Soviet Lithuania”, *Lithuanian Historical Studies*, 15 (2010), 79–106.

¹³⁵ Kaarel Piirimäe, *Roosevelt, Churchill and the Baltic question: allied relations during the Second World War* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 157.

* Correspondence: Institute of History and Archaeology, University of Tartu, Jakobi 2, 51014 Tartu, Estonia. E-mail: kaarel.piirimae@ut.ee

** Correspondence: European and World History, University of Turku, FI-20014. E-mail: pergro@utu.fi

KOKKUVÕTE: *Ajalooteadvus, isiklikud elukogemused ja Eesti välispoliitika pöördumine Läände, 1988–1991*

Riikide julgeoleku- ja välispoliitikat kujundab kollektiivne identiteet, mis toetub ühiskonnas poolehoiu võitnud ajaloodiskursusele. Stabiilse ja usaldusväärse välispoliitika tegemiseks peavad valitsused suutma konstrueerida ja sõnastada alusnarratiive (loomismüüte) rahvuse ja riigi kujunemisest ning arengust. Nendest lugudest kujuneb diskursiivne raamistik, milles sõnastatakse rahvuse tulevikueesmärgid ja huvid rahvusvahelises poliitikas. Kuna suveräänne riik vajab välispoliitikas ja diplomaatias ühtsust, kiidab iga valitsus heaks teatud ajaloonarratiivid ning heidab kõrvale teised. Suveräänne diplomaatia nõuab ametliku ajaloo olemasolu. Seega põhimõtteliselt kujutab riikidevaheline diplomaatia läbirääkimisi erisuguste ajalootõlgenduste vahel (näide: eri ajaloonägemustest tulenevad erimeelsused Eesti-Vene suhetes).

Eesti oli aastatel 1988 kuni 1991 jõudnud teelahkmele (kasutame ingliskeelset mõistet *critical juncture*). Nõukogulikust riigikorrast teise riigikorda üle minnes valitses institutsionaalne kaos. Mõningaid asutusi, nagu välisministeerium, tuli alles üles ehitama hakata. Sellises olukorras saavad otsustavaks üksikud tugevad ja ideelised isiksused. Olulisteks faktoriteks on nende inimeste elukogemus ning tõlgendused ajaloost.

Käesolev artikkel analüüsib välisminister Lennart Meri ja peaminister Edgar Savisaare eluloo, kogemuste ning ajalooteadvuse mõju nende tulevikunägemustele. Uurime, kuidas kogemustele toetunud ootused kujundasid nende otsuseid ja käitumist kriitilistel hetkedel.

Uuritud perioodil kujunes kaks põhimõtteliselt lahknevat seisukohta Eesti minevikust ja järelkult ka tulevikust. Ühed olid taastajad ja teised olid reformijad. Savisaar paigutub oma vaadetelt reformijate hulka. Ta nägi Nõukogude perioodis mõndagi positiivset, mida ära kasutada ka tulevikus. Tema “kolmanda vabariigi” kontseptsioon peegeldas paljude teistegi sõjajärgse põlvkonna-kaaslaste seisukohti. Savisaar ei olnud veendunud, et Lääne kapitalism kätkeb endas lahendusi globaalprobleemidele. Tundes end kodusemalt postsovetlikus ruumis kui Läänes, suunas Savisaar oma diplomaatilise tegevuse teraviku suhetele Nõukogude Liidu ja Nõukogude liiduvabariikidega. Sellele valikule aitas kaasa ka tööjaotus Savisaare valitsuses.

Meri oli vaadetelt pigem taastaja kui reformija. Olles sündinud ennesõjaegses Eesti Vabariigis, kandis ta kogu okupatsiooniaja hinges nägemust vabast Eestist, mis on osa vabast Euroopast. Ta hoidis Lääne

kultuuriruumiga pidevat sidet, kuna see “alternatiivmaailm” aitas toime tulla Nõukogude ühiskonna rusuva reaalsusega. Meri oli küll läinud Nõukogude režiimiga teatavatele kompromissidele, nagu enamik teisi, kuid ta uskus alati, et okupatsioon on pikemas perspektiivis mööduv. 1980. aastatel osales ta aktiivselt liikumistes, mis püüdsid ajaloolist tõe päeva-valgele tuua. Meri oli veendunud, et Savisaare idee kolmandast vabariigist on “täiesti absurdne” mõte, millega tahetakse heaks kiita 1940. aasta kvislingeid ja nende järeltulijaid. Meri loomulikud liitlased ei olnud mitte sõjajärgses põlvkonnas, vaid nooremate hulgas, kes suhtusid vanemasse, Nõukogude ühiskonnas “karastunud” põlvkonda umbusklikult. Meri võttis välisministeeriumi tööle noori, kelle põhilisteks eelisteks olid keelteoskus, kogenumatus ja õppimisvõime. Just Meri ajal kujunes välisministeeriumist Euroopale suunatud moodne ametkond, mis kindlustas Eesti püüdlusi integreeruda Läände.

Eesti otsustav pöördumine Läände ei olnud ettemääratud ega paratamatu. Järeldame, et Eesti kõige radikaalsemad, läänemeelsed reformijad olid just taastajad, kelle paleuseks, kuid mitte kinnisideeks, oli sõjajärgne Eesti. Seega, paradoksaalselt läks otsetee tulevikku mineviku kaudu.

