

Travel Report
By Karin Sildam (EURUS)

First of all I would like to thank the Centre for European Studies for granting me the opportunity to go to Estonia to do research for my MA research essay. To say the least, this trip proved to be highly useful and enlightening for my research.

The question that I set out to research was: Did the EU accession process require Estonia to make significant changes in its national policies? In my mind, this question is important as the enlargement process is not finished yet and therefore based on the analysis of this last round of accessions we have to see whether any improvements have to be made to the integration process. Especially now that France and the Netherlands had voted 'NO' on the common EU constitution, the enlargement process has to be re-evaluated. I decided to look at the EU enlargement process from Estonia's point of view, using Estonia's accession process as a case study. Though Estonia's accession experience does not reflect that of the other 7 CEECs, one can deduce similar patterns in the way that their integration process occurred.

Insights gained from interviews were quite revealing. All three interviewees supported my initial predictions that Estonia had to make only a few significant changes in its national policies. These changes were made in the areas of: economic policies; citizenship laws; environmental regulations; energy and agricultural policies. However, the most important point to be made here is that in all areas except for two (citizenship laws and economic policies), the Estonian government made changes quite willingly.

Though, the lack of a large number of problems during the accession process might seem to cripple my research, I believe it is just the opposite. One of the conclusions that I made from the interviews and from my research was that the most important objective for the Estonian officials conducting the accession talks was just to get into the EU. The overwhelming belief was that once you are in the 'club' you can start making changes that are favourable to your country. Thus, the accession talks were relatively swift and smooth. However, it is precisely because the accession talks were smooth and Estonia did not take time to discuss or fight for its positions that Estonia will have problems in the near future. Though it is too early to see all of the problems, some are already becoming apparent (i.e. the EU pressuring Estonia to issue permanent residence status to the ex-soviet military officials who remained living in Estonia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.)

Conducting interviews, reading/watching media and talking to the people on street, strengthened my belief in the importance of my research. This trip has put a face to my research. Further, I was also able to get articles/books on agriculture and energy policies that were not accessible to me here in Canada. For this, I am indebted to the Centre for European Studies.

Thank you,

Karin Sildam