BALANCING BETWEEN SOLIDARITY AND RESPONSIBILITY: ESTONIA IN THE EU REFUGEE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT After the establishment of the Schengen area, it was expected that its members would develop a common policy on external border management and protecting external borders. As the current refugee crisis has revealed, some countries have not met their obligations, which has led to serious difficulties in other member states. An unusually large number of refugees are passing through the EU with the purpose of going to countries that attract refugees with better economic and social conditions. Nevertheless, in the present case the criticism at the European Union level has been targeted towards the Eastern European countries for not eagerly enough accepting the proposed refugee strategy and quotas. Estonia's opposition to the EU-wide permanent relocation system of refugees has its roots in the conservative line that the country has followed in the national refugee policy for more than twenty years. However in 2016 the positions among the Estonian governmental coalition differ significantly in terms of long term refugee strategy. The current article will focus on the arguments why Estonia has opted for the conservative refugee policy so far and whether it has been in accordance with the country's capabilities and resources. The development of Estonian refugee policy will be analysed, from regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 to the present day. The article will also focus

on security risks that might occur due to the pressure from the EU on the member states to impose decisions that do not have broad support at the national level.

Introduction

In recent years, the European Union (EU) member states have twice confronted the dilemma of whether they should support or not the countries that have broken common rules and agreements. It occurred first during the Greek debt crisis and recurred with the EU-wide refugee crisis. During the Greek debt crisis starting from 2009, the politicians of the EU countries were broadly in agreement that support for Greece should be provided under strict conditions that the country implements austerity reforms and follows the rules of the EU. To quote Dalia Grybauskaitė, the President of Lithuania, for one example: "*Feast time at the expense of others is over, and euro area countries are really not going to pay for the irresponsible behaviour of the new Greek government*" (The New York Times 2015, 1). Thus, criticism has been levelled at the Greek government for not achieving compliance with the commonly agreed rules and the Baltic countries were among the most critical EU members towards Greece.

With the current EU-wide refugee crisis, the situation is not as straightforward as it was during the Greek debt crisis. Paradoxically, at the European Union level the pressure is put on the countries that have opposed EU refugee quotas, rather than on the member states that have lost control over their, and union's, external borders. After the establishment of the Schengen area in Europe in 1995, it was expected that the members of the Schengen regime develop a common policy on external border management and protect external borders. As the current refugee crisis has revealed, some countries such as Greece, Italy and Croatia have not met their obligations, which has led to serious difficulties in

other EU member states. An unusually large number of refugees are passing through the EU with the purpose of going to countries that attract refugees with better economic and social conditions. Nevertheless, in the present case the criticism at the European Union level has been targeted towards the Eastern European countries, rather than at Greece, Italy and Croatia. The Visegrád-countries together with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been criticized particularly by Germany and France for not understanding how European solidarity works and not being ready to share the burden of the growing influx of refugees into Europe. The reduction of EU subsidies to the member states that opposed the EU refugee quotas has been proposed by the German interior minister, Thomas de Maizière (The Economist 2015, 1), and financial penalties on the EU member states opposing the resettlement of refugees have likewise been suggested (European Commission 2015, 1). At the same time, those EU member states that have lost control over the union's external borders have not been considered as being subject to penalties. Thus, at political level, to some extent those EU member states that have complied with their obligations are currently more under pressure than countries that have failed to do so. This leads to the central question of the current study: Is it legitimate and morally justified to put pressure on the Eastern European countries and to criticize them for their decision to oppose the binding EU refugee quota?

The following article will first focus on the arguments why Estonia has opted for a conservative refugee policy so far and whether it has been in accordance with the country's capabilities and resources. The development of Estonian refugee policy will be analysed, from regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 to the present day. It will be followed by the debate whether the ongoing pressure to introduce an EU-wide permanent refugee quota could potentially give rise to dissatisfaction in Estonia, which in turn, could give rise to instability in the country. The

focus of this section is on the various parties or stakeholders of the integration process as the current national integration strategy sees them; these include the public sector and political parties, local municipalities, the private sector and civil society partners. The last part of the article focuses on security risks that might occur due to the pressure from the EU on the member states to impose decisions that do not have broad support at the national level. The distinction is made between security risks presented by the Estonian authorities when justifying the decisions and security threats from the perspective of Estonia in the light of the EU-wide refugee crisis, as the author sees them.

The article will use a descriptive analytical approach and comparative method for analysis and conclusions.

The foundations of Estonian refugee policy during the period 1991–2015

After the European Commission for the first time proposed refugee quotas in May 2015, Estonia strongly opposed the intention to oblige all EU member states to share the burden of the refugee crisis. To quote the representative of the Estonian Ministry of Interior, Toomas Viks, "*The resettlement and relocation of refugees is only one of the possible solutions to express solidarity, but the main way is the financial and technical assistance of other member states./…/ The relocation and resettlement of refugees should remain voluntary for member states.*" (Postimees 2015a, and The Baltic Course 2015). The Estonian Prime Minister, Taavi Rõivas, did not exclude Estonia's participation in admitting displaced persons, however, he argued that the number of displaced persons should be much less than the 326 persons suggested initially by the European Commission (Estonian Public Broadcasting 2015a). Estonia's closest neighbours such as Finland, Latvia and Lithuania, have expressed similar views. As suggested by the Estonian Minister of Internal Affairs,

Hanno Pevkur, in June 2015, the capability of the country to receive refugees should be taken into account when searching for solutions to the crisis. According to estimations from the beginning of summer 2015, Estonia was capable to resettle 84 to 156 refugees in next two years. That is in accordance with the country's decision from July 2015 to host 150 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy over two years, and potentially 20–30 refugees later on. However, in the light of the new proposal of the European Commission from the beginning of September 2015 as regards the refugee quota, Taavi Rõivas has announced that country agrees with the new numbers of asylum seekers to be relocated to Estonia and accepts an additional 373 asylum seekers (Postimees 2015b). This means that the total number of relocated asylum seekers to Estonia over the next two years exceeds the country's initial capability to receive refugees at least three times. However, despite the decision to relocate refugees from Greece and Italy to Estonia, the country is still opposing the idea of establishing a permanent relocation system of refugees. During the debates over the refugee crisis in the Estonian national parliament, the Riigikogu, on October 13th2015, this statement has been confirmed by the chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee, Kalle Palling.

Estonia's opposition to the burden-sharing among EU member states and to the EU-wide permanent relocation system of refugees has its roots in the conservative line that the country has followed in national refugee policy for more than twenty years.

In the early years of re-independence, the conservative approach has been mainly motivated by the fear that due to its geopolitical location Estonia might become a transit country for asylum seekers between Russia and the Scandinavian countries. This fear has been to some extent justified in the early 1990s, when approximately 400 persons were arrested in Estonia who tried to

go to the Scandinavian countries in order to seek asylum there. It is estimated that the same number of persons has managed to reach Finland and Sweden through Estonia (Potisepp 2002, 281). Estonia had not ratified international conventions that guarantee protection to asylum seekers until 1997, which means that until then asylum-seekers and economic migrants were considered as illegal immigrants in Estonia. The lack of internationally recognized legal guarantees for the asylum-seekers in Estonia received negative attention in the international community and motivated particularly the neighbours of Estonia, Sweden and Finland, to put pressure on Estonia to establish the foundations of the national refugee policy. Before the ratification of the international conventions, Finnish public and non-governmental organizations suggested resettling Estonia's asylum seekers in Finland to protect their rights, but the Finnish government argued that constant resettlement of asylum seekers would work as a pull factor for the refugees from Russia and could lead to unintended consequences (Refugee Magazine 1994, 1). However, in 1994, Finland proposed to relocate 89 refugees of Kurdish origin who applied for asylum in Estonia on the basis of a one-time agreement. This took place in 1995 (Bogens 2013, 20).

The ratification of the Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees from 1951[1] and the adoption of the first law regulating this matter, the Estonian Refugee Act, in 1997 were the first steps towards offering refugees guarantees and services in Estonia. The Ministry of Internal Affairs has been made responsible for the status determination procedures of asylum seekers, and the Ministry of Social Affairs has been made responsible for the reception and integration of refugees. In principle, this division of responsibilities is still in effect to this day.

1 All three Baltic countries have ratified the Convention relating to the status of refugees from 1951 (the so-called the Geneva Convention involving 4 treaties and 3 additional protocols) in 1997.

However, some institutional changes have been introduced in October 2014, redirecting within the Police and Border Guard Board the migration-related proceeding from the jurisdiction of a separate department dealing with citizenship and migration to the jurisdiction of the migration bureau of the intelligence management and investigation department.

In Estonia, the legal framework has been further updated in the beginning of the 2000s in the light of the country's EU accession. The legislation in Estonia has been harmonized with the regulations of the EU as regards to gender equality, equal treatment and other issues (Legal Information Centre for Human Rights 2010, 11). The Act giving international protection for aliens has been in force in Estonia since July 2006 and since then is has been revised several times (see, Act of Granting International Protection to Aliens 2015).

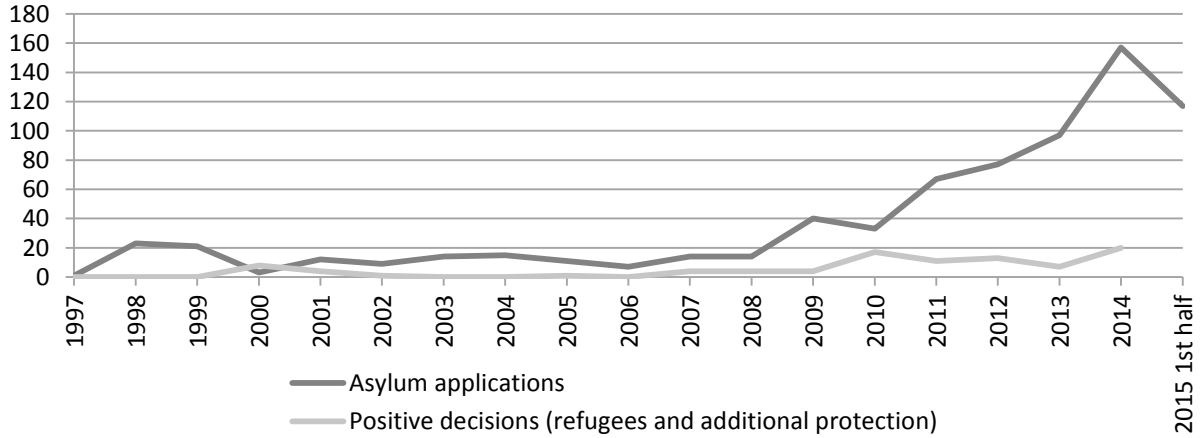
In addition to the legal regulation, strategies have been developed at the national level with the aim to enhance integration and social cohesion in Estonia, such as the State Programme "Integration in Estonian society 2000–2007", "The Estonian Integration Strategy 2008–2013" and the most recent strategy currently submitted to public consultations, "Integrating Estonia 2020" (see Integrating Estonia 2015). The most recent program defines three types of challenges that Estonia is facing today: 1) to increase openness of the society that, among other things, includes the need to influence the attitudes of Estonian-speaking permanent residents with regard to refugees and integration, 2) to support integration of permanent residents of Estonia, whose mother tongue is not Estonian, and 3) to support integration of the "new immigrants" into the local society (Integrating Estonia 2015, 2). According to the strategy, successful integration is based on cooperation between the public sector institutions, local authorities, the private sector and civil society partners, and is taking place on a voluntary basis (Ibid, 3).

Criticism of Estonia's practice both at the international and local levels is mainly directed at the low rate of recognition (i.e. the low number of positive decisions), the lack of efficiency of the asylum process and the low level of guarantees offered to the asylum seekers. The national refugee policy has been particularly heavily criticised by the Estonian Human Rights Centre and the Estonian Refugee Council, pointing, for example, at the poor living conditions of the asylum seekers and lack of a neutral monitoring program at the Estonian border. At the national level, it has been also referred to in the restrictions in the legislation such as the regulation valid from 1993 on, indicating that the number of the immigrants outside the EU (i.e. the so-called immigration quota) should not exceed 0.1% of the permanent population in Estonia.[2] According to this formula, the "immigration quota" in Estonia for 2015 is 1322 persons.

The conservative line in the refugee policy of Estonia is directly reflected in the low number of asylum claims and the even lower number of positive decisions. From 1997 to the first half of 2015, 732 asylum claims have been submitted in Estonia (Police and Boarder Guard Board 2015, 1), that is the lowest number of asylum claims among the EU member states. The pressure on Estonia has been relatively modest particularly until 2008 (see Figure 1).

2 This immigration quota does not concern the refugees that will be relocated in Estonia according to the proposal of the European Commission.

Figure 1: Number of asylum applications and positive decisions during the period 1997-2015 (1st half) in Estonia.



Source: Eurostat, 2015.

However, the number of asylum claims has constantly increased in Estonia since 2009 on, reaching the peak in 2014 and in the first half of 2015. According to the semi-annual data on first-time asylum applications, Estonia has received 54 asylum applications in the first half of 2014, 90 asylum applications in the second half of 2015, and 115 applications in the first half of 2015 (see Figure 2). Whereas in Estonia the pressure has been constantly increasing over the past year and a half, it has somewhat weakened in Latvia and Lithuania in the first half of 2015 compared to the second half of 2014 (see Figure 2). During the period 2009–2014, out of more than 600 asylum applications, less than 100 applicants have received either a refugee status or additional protection (see Figure 1). Estonia's low rate of recognition deserved criticism at the EU level, pointing out that, for example, in 2013 it belonged to the EU member states with an overall recognition rate lower than the EU average (ECRE 2014, 16).

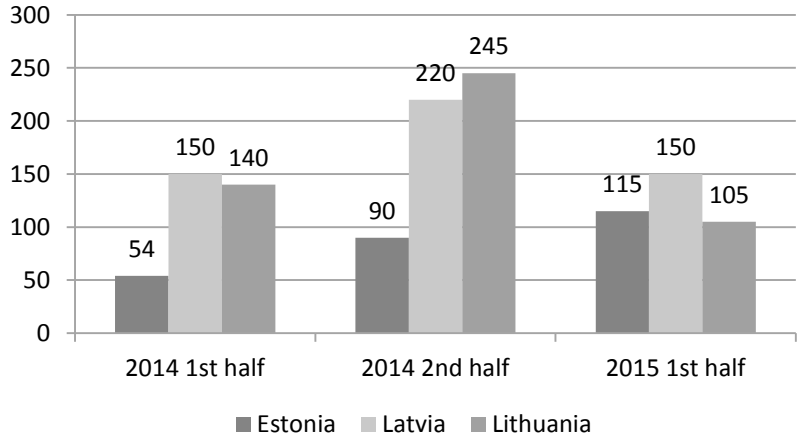
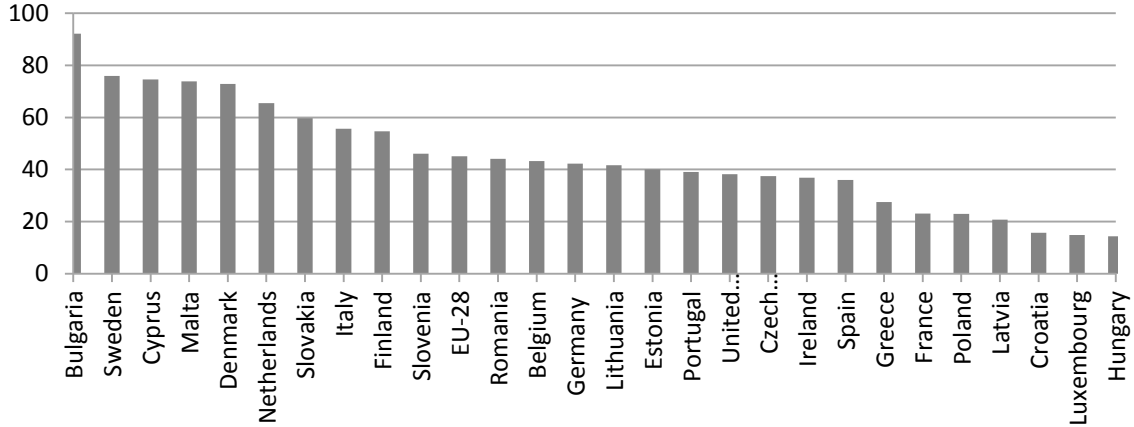


Figure 2: Number of first-time asylum applicant to the Baltic countries during the period January 2014–June 2015 (semi-annual data).
Source: Eurostat, 2015.

This refers to the tendency that refugees, even the asylum seekers from the same country of origin, might be treated differently in the EU member states. However, the number of positive decisions in Estonia is already remarkably higher when data from the last 18 months are considered. On average, approximately 40% of the asylum claims have been accepted from 2014 on. This number is on the same level as the share of positive decisions (measured as % of all decisions) in Lithuania, Portugal, the UK, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Spain (see, Figure 3). According to the country of origin, Ukrainians, Syrians and Sudanese have dominated among the first-time asylum applicants in Estonia from January 2014 to June 2015, whereas Georgians, Ukrainians and Vietnamese were dominant in Latvia, and Georgians, Ukrainians and Afghans were dominant in Lithuania (Eurostat 2015, 1). Thus, despite similar political and economic backgrounds, the three Baltic countries differ in terms of origins of the asylum applicants. However, it should be also taken into account that the Baltic countries differ in terms of language, culture and religion (Macijauskaite 2014, 17).

Figure 3: Total number of positive decisions on average (% of all decisions) during the period January 2014–June 2015 in Estonia (semi-annual data)



Source: Eurostat, 2015.

Against this background, it could be argued that Estonia's conservative refugee policy has been a conscious choice. To quote Marko Pomerants, the Estonian Minister of Environment, "*The conservative refugee policy is in accordance with the Estonian understanding of refugee policy as well as the real readiness of the country. Estonia should be ready to deal with a large amount of asylum seekers but that doesn't mean that Estonia shouldn't keep following the conservative refugee policy*." He also refers to the widespread view in Estonian society according to which at first vulnerable groups among the permanent residents in Estonia need to be supported: *"Estonians usually don't understand why we need to help Greece while there is enough poverty in Estonia already"* (Human Rights Center 2015, 1).

However, as the author sees it, there are several reasons why Estonia has chosen the conservative line in refugee policy and has initially opposed the European Commission's idea to relocate refugees from Greece and Italy to Estonia. Firstly, the country has insufficient financial resources to offer support for the vulnerable groups among the permanent residents in Estonia. It must be admitted, of course, that neither has Estonia built a comparable welfare-model to the Scandinavian states on its own level. So, it is partly an ideological question.

Yet, to some extent, this de facto condition makes the re-allocation of financial funds to the resettlement of refugees with partially unknown backgrounds and future perspectives morally questionable from Estonia's perspective. Combined with uncertain economic times and an unclear outlook as regards the solution of the refugee crisis, this is also one of the reasons why public opinion in Estonia has tended mostly to oppose EU-wide refugee quotas.

Secondly, Estonia lacks the experience and "best practices" in integrating ethnic groups that dominate the current refugee flows in Europe, such as Syrians, Afghans, Albanians and Iraqis. This gives rise to the relevant concern that Estonia may not succeed in integrating the "new" immigrants into Estonian society.

Thirdly, the country's previous experience in integrating the "old" immigrants from the Soviet period has been rather discouraging. More precisely, during the Soviet period, Estonia faced massive inflows of predominantly Russian-speaking immigrants from other republics of the Soviet Union. After restoring independence, persons who settled in Estonia during the Soviet period had to apply for citizenship, following the naturalization criteria and procedures that required basic Estonian language skills. In practice, due to inadequate Estonian language skills among other things, the "old immigrant" have opted for Russian citizenship or remained stateless (Grigas et al. 2013). This has lead to a high number of permanent residents in Estonia that hold the status of "person with undefined citizenship": in 2014, 118191 persons in Estonia had "undefined citizenship" – approximately 9% of Estonia's population (see, Statistics Estonia 2014).

Indeed, what complicates the situation is the fact that these immigrants did not consider themselves in terms of normal immigration. They could rather be seen as colonisers and many subsequent integration problems become understandable when viewed from this angle. In any case, there is a widespread view among the Estonians that the country has performed poorly in integrating these persons into society, creating insufficient incentives to learn Estonian and so on. Fourthly, pressure of the asylum seekers on Estonia has been relatively modest in the past, compared to other EU member states, particularly Estonia's Nordic neighbours, or Germany, Hungary and Austria. This could also be the reason why there were virtually no public debates with

regard to national refugee policy in Estonia. The only exception was the debate prior to Estonia's accession to the EU in 2004 and even then the debates were rather focused on possible emigration and brain drain from Estonia, rather than a massive influx of refugees into Europe and Estonia. The potential security threats to the latter were countered with an argument that the EU external borders are secure and Estonia is not attractive to the massive amounts of refugees outside the EU.

Reactions to the influx of refugees in Europe and the EU refugee quota

The current section focuses on the views and attitudes widespread in Estonia towards the influx of refugees and the permanent refugee quota. Different layers of Estonian society – the public sector, local municipalities, private sector and civil society partners – will be observed to determine the potential sources of pressure at the national level. Thus, the results of public opinion polls in Estonia, the views expressed by the political elite and the attitudes of local municipalities and civil society partners in Estonia will be discussed. The analysis allows us to draw conclusions also on the outlook of the integration process of "new" immigrants in general, as according to the recent national strategy, "Integrating Estonia 2020", the key to integration is the cooperation between the public sector, local municipalities, private sector and civil society partners.

Recent public opinion surveys in Estonia clearly indicate strong opposition both to the growing influx of refugees in Europe in general and to the decisions taken by the government of Estonia with regard to country's obligations in particular. According to the survey of EMOR from June 2015, 32% of respondents (in total, 500 persons were included in the survey) were in favour of accepting refugees into Estonia, 42% of them were against it and 26% had no clear position (Postimees 2015c). However, according

to the survey from the beginning of September 2015, only 22% of respondents were in favour of accepting up to 200 refugees in Estonia (Eesti Päevaleht 2015a). The comparison of the results of both surveys shows a significant drop in support for refugees in Estonian society within three months. However, it is likely that the actual support for refugees was low already in the beginning of summer 2015, since according to another web-based survey from June that included 13 000 persons, more than 80% of the respondents were against accepting refugees in Estonia (Eesti Päevaleht 2015b). According to the public opinion surveys, issues related to the EU-wide refugee crisis have negatively affected the credibility of the Estonian government. This could give rise to the increase in instability at the national level that, in theory, involves high risks and hazards to the country's national security. Navigating between necessary EU initiated policy change and public popularity however has been one of the main dilemmas after the EU accession (Pettai and Veebel 2005, 113-114).

Among the coalition parties, the leading one – the Estonian Reform Party (RE) – has since the beginning of the EU-wide refugee crisis defended the position that Estonia should show solidarity with the EU member states. However, they have expressed more flexible views in the initial phase of the crisis compared to their views today. For example, in spring 2015 some of the leaders of the party stated that countries should contribute to the EU-refugee crisis on a voluntary basis and every EU member state should have the right to decide on the number of refugees (see, e.g. the statements of the Prime Minister, Taavi Rõivas, and the chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee, Kalle Palling). However, after the crisis escalated in summer 2015, high-ranking politicians from the RE tended to support more and more the view that the only option for Estonia is solidarity with the rest of the EU without further questioning the quotas. In this light, Estonia did not oppose the refugee quotas

agreed in July and September 2015, although the number of refugees that will be relocated into Estonia exceeds the country's initial capability to receive refugees several times. Among high-ranking politicians of the RE, the member of the European Parliament, Kaja Kallas, has represented an even more pronounced view compared to other members of the party, by stating that Estonia can't rely on the argument of volunteerism since Estonia has previously hosted only a modest number of refugees compared to the Nordic countries, and, therefore, Estonia's "wish" to contribute to the relocation of refugees voluntarily does not have the scale and the leverage, for example, a similar Finnish statement would have.

The political leaders of another coalition party, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (IRL), have not shared the views of the Estonian Reform Party as regards the refugee quotas. The Minister of Justice, Urmas Reinsalu from the IRL, stated in May 2015 that the EU quota system could violate both the Treaties of the European Union and the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, and that Estonia should reject the refugee quota. He added that the refugee crisis should be combated at the roots of the crisis by creating better living conditions in the refugee camps located close to the countries where conflicts have occurred. The Minister of Social Protection, Margus Tsahkna, has strongly supported the relocation of refugees during the meetings with the representatives of local municipalities in summer 2015, but he also suggested that Estonia should learn from the mistakes other countries have made and proposed that priority should be given to Syrian Christians when relocating refugees to Estonia and that wearing the burqa in public should be banned.

The leaders of the third coalition party, the Social Democratic Party (SDE), have been relatively modest on the issues related to the refugee crisis. The former Minister of Defence until Sven

Mikser from SDE has opposed the refugee quotas, however, he has rather kept focus on the events in Ukraine emphasizing that the EU cannot ignore Russia's behaviour and the recent developments in Ukraine in spite of the escalating refugee crisis. He has also stressed that the refugees themselves should want to be relocated into Estonia. The current Minister of Defence, Hannes Hanso has stressed that dealing with refugees is more reasonable locally, rather than waiting for refugees to move to the EU countries. He supported providing financial support to the refugee camps located close to the countries where conflicts occurred (such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey).

Among the opposition parties, the newly-founded Free Party (VE) has, more than others, focused on the substance of the refugee crisis at the local level, and not just on the process itself, by stressing that the key element of the refugee crisis in Europe is to distinguish between war refugees and economic migrants. As regards the latter, Estonia should rather continue with the conservative refugee policy based on the need for a qualified labour force. As they see it, instead of the mandatory refugee quota, refugees from Greece and Italy should be relocated on the basis of negotiations between the EU member states. The capability of the EU member states to integrate refugees should be taken into account which should guarantee that internal agreement is reached in the society as regards supporting the refugees without generating radical pressure in the society. Next to the relocation programmes for refugees, the return of refugees to their home countries should be encouraged after the circumstances have normalized there. Since Estonia lacks financial resources, Estonia should apply for additional resources from the EU structural funds in addition to the resources that are meant for the allocated refugees in Estonia.

The most influential opposition party, the Estonian Centre Party (KE), has supported the principle that "refugees should be relocated into Estonia as little as possible and as many as necessary". This means that Estonia should afford sympathetic consideration to the refugees coming to Europe, but account must be taken also of the actual capability of the country to integrate refugees. Kadri Simson, head of the Estonian Centre Party fraction in the Riigikogu, has stressed that Estonia lacks any long-term plan as regards the solvency of the crisis and integration of refugees. The deputy head of the Centre Party fraction in the Riigikogu, Mailis Reps, has stated that the current situation in Syria is extremely complicated and Europe doesn't want to deal directly with the issues related to Syria. She has also emphasized that there are people living in Syria and in the neighbouring countries without any chance to leave the region, and if Europe would really like to help somebody, the help should be directed to those in real need.

The third opposition party, the Conservative Peoples Party in Estonia (EKRE), represents the most radical view as regards the refugee quotas among the Estonian political parties. The party leaders, Martin Helme and Mart Helme, do not support the refugee quotas. As stated by Martin Helme, "*the party will continue to put pressure on the government with regards to migration. We don't rule out ejecting refugees from Estonia, should EKRE win next elections*". Another member of EKRE, Jaak Madisson, has stressed that the EU-wide refugee quotas represent another step in the way of losing national sovereignty.

To summarise, the views vary widely in the Estonian parliament regarding how the EU should tackle the current refugee crisis and what role should Estonia play in it. Whereas the politicians from the RE tend to support more and more the view that Estonia should not further question the quotas, another coalition party, the

IRL, stresses the importance to learn from the mistakes other countries have made. Other parties represented in the parliament, except the EKRE, have stressed the solidarity argument, but also recognized lack of capability to integrate refugees.

Most of the local municipalities in Estonia have opposed the idea to relocate refugees on a practical level, referring to the lack of resources such as vacant subsidised housing or services to support the refugees. To quote one of the representatives of the local municipalities: "*If the refugees come with state financing, it is no problem to receive them in reasonable amounts. /…/ The main thing is that the local governments would not run into additional obligations without being provided the funds*", referring to the previous actions of the government (see, Postimees 2015d). At the same time, the representatives of local municipalities in Estonia have also pointed out that they are lacking both preparation and experience in working with refugees and the missing language skills (*Ibid.*). These problems are also understandable, since Estonia has basically been building up the national refugee policy only from the beginning of the 2000s compared to its Nordic neighbours and Germany that have had well-functioning asylum systems already in place since the Second World War. Even in terms of financial support from the EU side for the relocation of refugees in Estonia, the challenges like poor language skills and lack of services at the local municipal level cannot be tackled in weeks and months, as preparations and training are needed. However, since local municipalities play a key role in the national strategy of relocation of refugees in Estonia, it could be assumed that particularly the pressure from the side of government on local municipalities continues. According to the statement of the representative of the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs that if the person who qualifies for refugee status wishes to do so, he or she can settle in also in these local municipalities who have initially disagreed to the relocation of refugees, confirms this view (see, Estonian Public Broadcasting 2015b).

Among the civil society partners, mostly the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church has been active in offering housing for refugees in different locations across Estonia; however, the opportunities of the church are also limited, as they can offer accommodation only for six families of refugees (Postimees 2015e). Specialised non-governmental organizations in Estonia, such as Johannes Mihkelson Refugee Centre and the Estonian Refugee Council have a network of volunteers to offer support for refugees. Early September 2015, before the most recent number of the EU quota refugees, the staff of the NGOs were quite optimistic and started with preparations for integrating the 150 refugees that Estonia agreed to take in according to the initial agreement (The Baltic Times 2015, 1). However, in the meantime the number of refugees Estonia agreed to welcome has increased threefold, and this might pose both significant challenges and a heavy responsibility to the NGOs in view of the public resistance to the relocation of refugees.

The private sector in Estonia has taken a pragmatic approach to the relocation of refugees, as some entrepreneurs have publicly announced that they would like to offer some work to the refugees. However, there appears to be rather little interest in doing so, which is to some extent understandable in light of low public support for the relocation of refugees to Estonia. The Estonian Refugee Council carried out projects in 2012 to increase the participation of refugees in the Estonian labour market and to motivate employers to offer work to refugees. However, only a limited number of asylum applicants and persons who qualified for the refugee status are currently working: approximately 21% of the persons who qualified for refugee status and 11% of the asylum applicants are currently working (Varjupaigataotlejate Majutuskeskus 2015).

To conclude, the decision of the government of Estonia to relocate 550 refugees in Estonia poses a significant challenge to Estonian society. Cooperation is needed between the public sector institutions, local authorities, private sector and civil society partners. However, as the author sees it, the lack of financial resources, experience and skills, combined with low public support and the lack of unanimity in the local political landscape as regards why and how the EU refugee crisis should be solved, significantly reduces the chances of success and increases the security risks at the local level.

Security risks related to the EU refugee crisis from the perspective of Estonia

The current refugee crisis in Europe is to some extent similar to the situation in 2011 when Italy granted visas in the Schengen framework to tens of thousands of migrants from North Africa, including Tunisians who wanted to join their families in France, and allowed them to travel across the Schengen area (BBC 2011). Today, five years later, the Schengen countries are facing the same problem in the European Union, but only on a much bigger scale. However, in 2015, efficient solutions are still lacking for avoiding similar situations that emerged already five years ago. The refugee crisis has clearly revealed the weakness of the European integration model that could lead to the loss of credibility of the EU in the international arena. This could pose a security threat also to Estonia since it has linked its national security with full integration into the European and transatlantic security networks. Indirectly, the security threat is also related to the fact that the refugee crisis showed that in complicated situations, the EU member states tend to protect their own interests, whether justifiably or not. During the current refugee crisis, the member states have accused each other of not following the initial commitments. To bring the most recent example, the Hungarian

government has accused Croatia of having "violated Hungary's sovereignty" and has rhetorically asked from Croatia about the quality of solidarity according to which Croatia sends asylum seekers directly to Hungary instead of honestly making provision for them (see, Reuters 2015).

The refugee crisis has also revealed the vulnerability of the EU in economic terms that also poses security risks. Specifically, the EU countries have to spend resources for the administration costs of processing the asylum applications and offering guarantees and integration services to the huge amounts of refugees. The costs related to the EU-quota migrants from Italy and Greece will be partially covered from the EU budget. However, the costs related to the steadily increasing "ordinary" asylum seekers needs to be covered from the member states' own resources. Whereas the "rich" and more advanced EU countries can afford it, the "less prosperous" member states like the Baltic countries, including Estonia, are discussing with justified skepticism how to cover all the costs from their own limited resources, simultaneously facing worsening demographics (which however can be improved by immigration in longer period, while increasing the costs in shorter period). Higher spending for the increasing number of asylum applicants automatically means that it has to be taken from elsewhere in the countries' own budgets. If the resources will be redirected from those services which citizens receive to the services for refugees, it could create frustration at the national level towards the major political figures of the EU who in their speeches stress the need to support refugees, but in real terms do rather nothing to find a sustainable and broadly accepted solution to the problem and to stop the immigration flows into the EU. As the author sees it, in that regard the European Union is very close also to a loss of credibility in the eyes of its citizens. Particularly, since another intra-EU redistribution of refugees suggested by the European Commission does not represent a sustainable and

efficient solution to the refugee crisis, it also does not boost the credibility of the EU.

On the other hand, the government of Estonia should take more initiative and responsibility for the situation at the national level. Local experts believe that the current low support for refugees in Estonia is, besides the escalation of the crisis at the global arena, related to the poor communication of the national government in explaining the underlying causes of its decisions to the public. As the author sees it, the most questionable issue in giving reason at the local level to the government's decision to accept the EU refugee quota is related to some "over-dramatization" of criticism of the EU core member states towards the Eastern European countries. In Estonia, the politicians of the coalition parties have associated people's willingness to accept refugees with the country's responsibilities towards NATO partners, using the very broad argument "if you want to be protected by the allies, you have to accept refugees". Thus, the refugee crisis has been presented in Estonia as a securitization, meaning that the opposition to compulsory migrant quotas has been "dramatically" described as an existential threat, because it could lead to the isolation of the country from the international community, to the loss of the NATO security network and to exposure to the security threats from Russia. In this light, following the logic of the securitization theory (see, e.g. van Munster 2009, Šulovic 2010, etc.), the migration quotas are justified and should be considered as a priority, since extraordinary countermeasures should be used to handle existential threats. However, in practical terms there is rather little ground for this opinion. To quote principal figures of NATO, e.g. Sir Adrian Bradshaw, different approaches of the allies as regards the refugee crisis do not reduce the contributions of the NATO allies in collective security measures (Postimees 2015f). Also, Estonia does not represent the most "extreme" case among the EU member states and should not be treated as an

"international pariah". The government of Estonia has rather avoided any public debates to discuss the implications of the EU-wide refugee crisis to Estonia on a neutral basis and has constantly ignored the low public support for the decision to relocate refugees to Estonia.

As the author sees it, in real terms the "existential security threats" at the nation-state level, including Estonia are associated with the potential loss of credibility and legitimacy of the national governments. In other words, in Estonia people are afraid of the government's actions and transparency, rather than the refugees themselves. Due to the weak and unfocused strategic communication in terms of refugee crisis, the people of Estonia have already started to have some doubts about the long-term sustainability of the process.

Debate and conclusions

The present article has discussed the moral dilemmas associated with sharing the "costs of solidarity" between the EU member states. In detail, the focus of the study has been on the perspective of a small country, that has not broken the common rules (in a particular context it has not lost control over its borders), but is still facing criticism, alongside other Eastern European countries, for not understanding "how European solidarity works". At the EU level, the EU core countries such as Germany and France have put pressure on the Eastern European countries over the latter's' decision to oppose the binding EU refugee quota.

As the author sees it, one of the morally questionable issues in tackling the EU-wide refugee crisis is related to the pressure from the EU on the member states to accept permanent relocation mechanisms of refugees and to share the burden of "solidarity", even if there is no broad support for that at the national level. In

principle, the ongoing pressure to introduce an EU-wide permanent relocation system of refugees could give rise to dissatisfaction in the society that could, in turn, give rise to instability in the EU member states. Therefore, it is legitimate to ask whether something like this could actually happen in Estonia.

To some extent, Estonia's conservative refugee policy has been a conscious choice due to the lack of resources, knowledge and experience, but also due to the wide-spread view in Estonian society that first the local vulnerable groups among the permanent residents in Estonia need to be supported. What is more, in light of the current refugee crisis, when "calculating" the Refugee quota, the EU has not taken into account country-specific factors such as high numbers of permanent residents in Estonia that hold the status of "person with undefined citizenship" and other issues.

As a result, Estonia had to accept approximately 500 refugees over next two years that exceeds the country's initial capability to receive refugees at least three times. As the author sees it, the pressure at the EU level to accept the EU refugee quota has exposed Estonia to several risks. The decision of the government of Estonia to relocate 550 refugees in Estonia poses a significant challenge to the Estonian society. Cooperation of a hitherto inexperienced sophistication is expected between the public sector institutions, local authorities, the private sector and civil society partners. Thus, the lack of financial resources, experience and skills, combined with the low public support and the lack of unanimity in the local political landscape significantly reduces the chances of success and increases security risks at the local level.

According to the author, in the future the focus should be put particularly on finding support to the plan to relocate refugees among the local municipalities and among to the public. The local municipalities should, in theory, provide accommodation and

other services to the refugees, and the public should help the refugees to better integrate into the society. However, mainly due to poor communication from the Estonian government and the inconsistency in its decisions, the support of both local municipalities and the public is very low as regards the decision to relocate refugees in Estonia.

What has been done wrong? The government of Estonia has rather avoided any public debate to discuss the implications of the EU-wide refugee crisis to Estonia on a neutral basis and has constantly ignored the public opinion. As a result, in Estonia people are afraid of the government's actions, rather than the refugees themselves. To avoid loss of credibility at the national level, it would be justified to follow the legitimate logic of the process. The immigration of third-country nationals has, until now, clearly been within the competence of the EU member states and not of the EU itself. However, the refugee crisis in the EU has been suddenly defined by EU-politicians as a matter of common interest and common concern. The EU migration quotas present a major step in transferring the competence to the EU in this area. However, as the author sees it, since people have not directly given national governments the mandate to agree with the relocation of refugees from other EU countries, the national governments should not delegate the "nonexistent" mandate to the European Commission.

Next to the national government, part of the responsibility for the instability that has been created due to the current refugee crisis is associated with the EU. As the author sees it, from the perspective of a small EU member state such as Estonia, any activities that harm the uniformity of the EU should be avoided and any actions that reduce the tensions between the EU member states should be supported to regain the EU's confidence in the international arena and to guarantee that the EU works as a protection against security

threats. In the context of the current refugee crisis in the EU, the call of the European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, to impose mandatory migrant quotas and the most recent decision based on the qualified majority to impose the quotas despite the resistance of some EU member states, could be rather counter-productive since the countries that have opposed the quotas are still forced to implement the majority decision without essentially supporting it. Since the EU migrant relocation program is, in principle, based on the "push" factor (i.e. refugees are "forced" to resettle to the countries they are not interested in), the measure *per se* constitutes another security risk to those countries that agreed to allocate migrants, since neither migrants nor permanent residents of the country are interested in integration. Moreover, despite the statements that an EU mandatory refugee quota are needed to stop "asylum shopping" (for example, by the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte), it is difficult to see any logic in the migrant quotas. The "voluntary" national migrant quotas apply to the relocation of refugees who have reached Greece and Italy; however, it does not include the main destination countries of the asylum seekers, such as Germany and Sweden. Thus, the asylum seekers are still motivated to come to Germany and Sweden to apply for better economic and social conditions. At the same time no reliable mechanism exists that actually guarantees that migrants will stay in the countries where they were relocated.

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