

ANDRUS PARK AS A THEORETICIAN OF ESTONIAN ETHNOPOLITICS

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Andrus Park was a philosopher of history by training. His desire to reflect on the problems of Estonia's society in transition and to work out theoretical conceptions based on Estonia's path of development brought him together with other scholarly domains, which made his work interdisciplinary. Andrus Park's works from 1990–94 included political sociology, comparative politics, international relations theory, philosophy of history, and regional studies.

In analysing Estonia's political development, Andrus Park began from the premise that Estonia was best seen as an example of a changing East European society. Why Estonia could be of interest to the world academic community as a case study was clear to Andrus Park through his scholarly intuition: through Estonia one could analyse and generalize the whole transformation process in the former Eastern block, while simultaneously perceiving Estonia's particular development in comparison to the other states of the collapsed Soviet Union. Andrus Park said himself that his interest was not so much in describing events as in conceptualizing their evolution.¹

ESTONIA'S PATH FROM TOTALITARIANISM TO DEMOCRACY

The events that began in Estonia in 1985 have been described as a democratic and nonviolent revolution from above.² In this regard, Andrus Park's assessment of Mikhail Gorbachev and of his role in the renewal of the Soviet Union are of particular relevance. Without underestimating the role of Soviet-era dissidents in the collapse of the totalitarian system in the USSR, one can not neglect Gorbachev's revolution from above either. Without that initiative, the Soviet Union could well have lasted in its previous form for another 10 to 20 years.³

Many Western social scientists, when analysing the liberation of Eastern Europe from totalitarianism and communism, often make the mistake of treating the various parts of the former USSR as all capable of similar political development and as equally ready for democratic transition. Andrus Park, in comparison to his Western colleagues, had a

broader view of this question. In terms of comparing Estonia and Russia, he found that up to the summer of 1987, Russia's development in terms of openness and democratization had been very fast, in fact faster than even in Estonia. In this sense, one might have thought that Russia as well as many other parts of the Soviet Union were entirely ready for democracy. Beginning in 1987, however, Estonia was able to move ahead of Russia in terms of the speed of its transition.⁴

Estonia's heyday of revolutionary change was in 1988. In Russia, this came only in 1991 with the August coup. In this sense, Estonia was already some two years ahead of Russia in its development. Moreover, in 1992 the two countries' party and political structures were different: whereas in Russia the dominant role was still being played by individual politicians, in Estonia the political landscape had already been drawn by five or six quite well-organized electoral blocs of parties.⁵

The key points relating Estonia's post-communist democratic transition were perhaps the following:

First, internal opposition to the old system in Estonia developed not only on the basis of dissident or semi-dissident movements, but as a result of Estonia's intelligentsia taking a stand as a pressure group as well.⁶ Namely, early in the process the Estonian intelligentsia distanced itself from the entire system and challenged it instead. Among the more important steps in this regard were the founding of the journal *Vikerkaar* (Rainbow) by the Estonian creative intelligentsia in July 1986, the IME economic autonomy program announced in September 1987, the Estonian creative unions' joint plenum in April 1988, and the creation of the Popular Front that same month. Together with the fight to stop phosphorous mining in northeastern Estonia in 1987, the movement soon expanded to the masses and by the summer of 1988 one could begin talking of a "singing revolution" in Estonia.

As the second major event of this period, Andrus Park noted the adoption of Estonia's sovereignty declaration on November 16, 1988 (by a vote of 258 to 1, with 5 abstentions) by the Estonian SSR Supreme Soviet, which had been elected back in 1985.⁷

Thereafter, Andrus Park considered important Estonia's 1990 parliamentary elections. He nonetheless called them quasi-parliamentary elections, since they were not completely free in the classical sense having still been organized under the influence of Estonia's hitherto sole ruling party, the Communist Party, and its institutions.⁸

The split of the Communist Party in February 1990 into pro-Estonian and pro-Soviet wings also had its effect, as the pro-Soviet wing was mostly Russian-based and was strongest in mostly-Russian industrial areas of the country. Yet, despite of a multitude of growing pains and setbacks, Estonia's transformation process reflects a strengthening of democracy, since all of the main political forces have since taken on the rules of democracy as their own.

In describing various patterns of societal development (such as from totalitarianism to democracy or from totalitarianism to authoritarianism, etc.) and in citing relevant examples from the evolution of the Soviet

republics, Andrus Park could reach the conclusion that transformations as such do not automatically carry a society from totalitarianism to democracy. For example, in Turkmenistan the events of 1985–93 fit mostly the pattern "from totalitarianism to totalitarianism," since no real change of regime was evident. In Kazakhstan, one could treat the changes as "from communist totalitarianism to post-communist authoritarianism." In Estonia's case, Andrus Park had no doubt: the transition was from a totalitarian regime to democracy.⁹

CONFRONTATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT POLITICAL FORCES

In tandem with how Andrus Park viewed the "post-communist conflicts" of the entire Soviet Union, there was also his view of the January 1991 crisis between the Baltic states and Mikhail Gorbachev. In this case, he called it not a political conflict, but an ideological one, since these struggles were clearly between reform communists in the Kremlin and basically non-communist governments in the Baltic states.¹⁰

The fact that Estonia's *perestroika*-based confrontation with Gorbachev's Moscow was almost always viewed as part of a national liberation struggle among Western observers (with the exception of Zbigniew Brzezinski), led these same observers to often see a danger of ethnic conflicts also arising between Estonians and Russians in Estonia.

Andrus Park's achievement was bringing an analysis of Estonia's internal political conflicts also to the level of international political science, which was essential for broadening adequate knowledge about the peaceful relations between Estonia's political forces and ethnic groups.

Andrus Park classified Estonia's internal political conflicts into several groups: 1) left vs. left, 2) left vs. center, and 3) left vs. right.¹¹ He saw the peak of the first, left vs. left, conflict in June 1988, when the old-guard leader of the Communist Party of Estonia, Karl Vaino, was replaced by a younger-generation leader, Vaino Väljas.

The left vs. center conflict developed between the Communist Party and the Estonian Popular Front, for although the Popular Front began within the Soviet ideological structure, by the March 1990 Supreme Soviet elections it had moved clearly toward a centrist position, supporting Estonian independence and the end of the communist regime.

The left vs. right conflict developed for a brief period in August 1987, when several thousand people gathered in Hirvepark in Tallinn to commemorate the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, oppose the communist regime, and demand the end of Soviet occupation. A kind of right vs. left conflict, it should be noted, also existed throughout 1988–92, although it was less apparent in public life, since the communists' power in Estonia dissolved very quickly and pro-independence right-wing political forces therefore pitted themselves more readily against the centrist forces of the Popular Front.

A center vs. right conflict, meanwhile, was noticeable between the Estonian Citizens' Committees movement and the Popular Front. A right vs. right conflict developed briefly before the June 1992 constitutional referendum, when some right-wing leaders came out with the idea of reviving the 1937 Estonian constitution instead. Centrists, finally, have also been in conflict among themselves since 1992, when a part of the Popular Front stopped supporting Edgar Savisaar as their leader. This conflict continued after the September 1992 Riigikogu (parliamentary) elections, when the Moderates in the Popular Front broke off to form their own faction and join the center-right government of the Pro Patria party.¹²

So, based on Andrus Park's various analyses, we can see that conflicts in Estonian society have arisen mostly among different political, and not ethnic, forces. This division is complicated, to be sure, being one between pro- and anti-independence forces, which roughly follows that of language divisions in the country. But it is not fundamentally Estonian vs. Russian.

Looking at the evolution of Estonia's societal transformation, it is clear that already from the beginning of the "singing revolution" the main demands of the people of Estonia were for a faster democratization and modernization of society. This was supported by all of Estonia's main political forces (including the radicals).

ETHNIC TENSIONS AND CITIZENSHIP

Estonia's large non-Estonian population and its ethnic problems, which have complicated its transition in comparison to other Eastern European countries, were analysed by Andrus Park in his article entitled "Ethnicity and Independence: the Case of Estonia in Comparative Perspective."¹³ In this work, Park stressed that immediately after the adoption of Estonia's sovereignty declaration in November 1988, there was a noticeable increase in ethnic tensions between Estonians and non-Estonians (mostly Russians). At that time, Russian political movements were undergoing a deep crisis of adaption, which lasted at least until 1993. As a result, Estonia's ethnic tensions were caused most of all by political changes and the instability that arose from them, and not from ethnic factors per se.

In analysing Estonia's citizenship policy, Andrus Park found that a strict strategy of restitution prevailed (i.e. no automatic citizenship for Soviet-era immigrants to the country) until September 1992. After the first freely-elected Riigikogu took office, there was a liberalization in citizenship policy.

Andrus Park also drew attention to the asymmetry of some of the post-imperial changes going on in Estonia. While the country's political elite and state bureaucracy quickly became more Estonian and migration flows were dramatically reversed, Estonia's educational system, mass communications, and economic activity showed only minor alterations during this period.

In sum, Estonia's minorities policy has been very successful in comparison with many other post-communist states. Ethnic tensions have

obviously diminished, the threat of separatism (in northeastern Estonia) has spread very little, and Estonia's integration with European political organizations (including the Council of Europe) has been successful. International pressure on Estonia, meanwhile, has been mostly friendly from the West, although sharply critical from Russia.

THE PARTICULARITIES OF ESTONIA'S TRANSITION

The particular nature of Estonia's transition has come from several factors. The first is Estonia's peripheral location as viewed from Moscow and the rest of Russia. Second, there was the fact that a majority of Western nations did not recognize the illegal incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union. Third, there is the cultural factor, which maintained the Baltic states' (including Estonia's) special character throughout the Soviet period.

In contrast to many other analyses, Andrus Park in his works always tried to view Estonia's evolution as one of transition to an anti-communist and democratic society, and not just as a freedom struggle, as was often the interpretation.

We would also agree that the uniqueness of Estonia's societal transformation was in the fact that ethnic goals (including the restoration of an Estonian nation-state) were indeed linked to the democratization process in Estonia, yet ethnicity by itself was not the only motivating force in the process. There were still many organizations and societies left in Estonia that represented the roots of Estonia's earlier civil society from 1920–40 and which now considerably facilitated the revival of democratic structures in Estonia during the 1988–94 period.

Andrus Park analysed Estonia's problems in the context of Eastern Europe's newly-democratic states, and not from the angle of the Baltic states as successor states to the disintegrated Soviet Union. This statement was expressed at the third Pugwash Workshop in July, which was the last conference he attended.¹⁴ This was an important message to Western scholars, who (with a few exceptions such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Paul Goble, and Samuel Huntington) have not had sufficiently reliable materials available for analysing Estonia. In this context, it is interesting to quote Zbigniew Brzezinski, whom Andrus Park often cited and who in 1989 predicted the next ten years of change in Eastern Europe, which have now come true:

"History's dilemmas will now be played out east of the central European dividing line. For the next decade, the critical question in Europe will be the fate of Eastern Europe, whether it will succeed in eventually rejoining the rest of Europe, thereby emancipating itself full from the Soviet control. Into the next century, it is also now likely that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and the Ukraine will be the theaters of political contest – reflecting the simultaneous fading of communism as an ideology and of Russia as an imperial power."¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Andrus Park was one of the first social scientists and interdisciplinary scholars to raise the problems of Estonia's societal transformation to the level of international scholarship. Through his membership on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals, he was also able to send to the West for review the works of many other Estonian scholars, whom he was always ready to help. From a professional point of view, one can say that his articles were always very thoroughly thought out, that they always contained reliable theoretical analyses, and that they were always structured in an exemplary manner. It is all the more fitting, therefore, that they be published here again and not just in particular elite journals, which for many of his Estonian colleagues were frequently unattainable.

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