Predicting Conflict, Predicting Peace: Explaining Minority Group Decision-Making

Michael Johns
University of Maryland- College Park

Department of Government and Politics
3140 Tydings Hall
College Park, MD
20740

mjohns@gvpt.umd.edu

Prepared for the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference, June 3-6, 2004. Winnipeg, Manitoba

What do we really know about ethnic conflict? Why do some groups choose violence while others do not? Are there some factors which can be identified that make violence more or less likely? This paper is an attempt to answer some of these questions.

There have been numerous attempts at explaining ethnic conflict and providing risk assessment. Some are quantitative, such as the work of Ted Robert Gurr and his *Minorities at Risk* Project.[1] Others are qualitative in nature such as the work of Donald Horowitz[2] or Tellis et al.[3] They all begin with one basic assumption, that violence is directly related to the relationship between the minority group and the state. If the state does not oppress or repress them the group should remain peaceful, conversely if the state attempts to accommodate the group violence should be avoided. This study will look at four cases that fall outside of this general assumption. The Russian community in Estonia and Latvia were politically and economically discriminated against in the period immediately after Baltic independence. Many continue to be denied citizenship and the rights that come with it. Despite this the region has remained peaceful. The Corsicans in France and the Basques in Spain have both had strong nationalist campaigns operating in their region. Violence and the emergence of terrorist organizations have been associated with both groups. This is despite the efforts over the past decades by their respective states to find a peaceful political solution. The main research question for this study

---

[1] Gurr's work using MAR is highlighted by two volumes: Ted Robert Gurr (1993) *Minorities at Risk* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press) and (2000) *Peoples Versus States* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press). Since the second book builds on the first it will be *Peoples Versus States* that is discussed here. For a full list of publications that use MAR please see the Minorities at Risk Website: http://www.minoritiesatrisk.com.

[2] Donald L. Horowitz (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

[3] Ashley J. Tellis et al. (1997) *Anticipating Ethnic Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND).

therefore is: *what are the factors that are or are not present that influence a group to decide to use or to avoid violence?*

By understanding why these outliers act as they do, better explanations for all groups should be possible. With better explanations, better risk assessment is also possible and dangerous situations could be better identified and defused. This could allow for limited resources to be used more effectively to try to prevent future ethnic conflict.

This paper will concentrate on three potential explanations for the groups' behaviour. First the role of economics will be examined. Economics has long been used to explain ethnic conflict so it will be further tested here.[4] Second, the role of the international community is examined. Many authors and the international institutions themselves argue that they are responsible for preventing ethnic conflict.[5] Finally a more radical explanation will be examined. This paper will test the possibility that the prevailing culture of a group can help determine if they will use of violence.

Economics

Of the three potential explanations of the group's behaviour, economics proves to be the least effective. Taken on its own it can only be used to adequately explain the actions of the Corsicans. Based on the economic conditions in the Basque region and in Estonia and Latvia one would expect each group to make the opposite decision in terms of resorting to violence.

---

[4] See for example Ted Robert Gurr (1970) *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p.23, Will Moore and Keith Jaggers (1990) "Deprivation, Mobilization and the State" *Journal of Developing Societies* Vol.6 No.1, pp.17-36 and Susan Olzak (1992) *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition & Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p. 208.

[5] See for example Albrecht Schnabel (2002) "International Organizations and the Prevention of Ethnic Conflicts" in S.A. Giannakos ed., *Ethnic Conflict: Religion, Identity, and Politics* (Athens: Ohio University Press), p.230, Nils Daag (2001) "The OSCE and Conflict Prevention" *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* Vol.8 No.1, pp.23-24 and Michael Keating and John McGarry ed., (2001) *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

While the French government tries to proclaim the island an economic success story, the European Union has declared it an economically disadvantaged region. Corsica's GDP per capita is only 78% of the European Union's average.[6] Of the 196 regions within the European Union, Corsica ranked 143rd based on per capita income.[7] One obvious problem with the Corsican economy is where the majority of the jobs are for the island. While the Basques are heavily reliant on the better paying industrial sector, Corsica has a very small industrial base.[8] Only 21.8% of the Corsican workforce is in this sector, compared to 75.5% of the workforce who are in the low paying service industry.[9] As of 1998, 95% of all Corsican companies employed less than 10 employees and out of a workforce of approximately 100 000 (out of a total population of 250 000), 15 000 were unemployed and an additional 30 000 were employed in precariously low paying or temporary jobs.[10] While the Corsicans cannot change their geography, they have also been the victims of poor economic planning by the French state as well as by the influx of non-Corsicans, all of which has fueled the conflict between nationalists and the French state.

Ramsay contends that while the Corsicans have always been an economically depressed region compared to the rest of France, it was not until the 1960's that they

---

[6] John Laughlin and Farimah Daftary, (1999) *Insular Regions and European Integration: Corsica and the Åland Islands Compared*, ECMI Report #5, Flensburg Germany, p.28.

[7] Marianne Arens and Francois Thull (2000) "Partial autonomy for Corsica splits French government" *World Socialist Website*, September 5.

[8] Interview with Frederic de Touchet, Political Advisor, Permanent Mission of France to the OSCE, July 28 2003, Vienna.

[9] Loughlin and Daftary (1999), p.29.

[10] Arens and Thull (2000).

began to realize exactly how much of a discrepancy existed. As he said: "[w]hen 'exiles' returned on holiday from the continent it was obvious to the resident Corsicans that they were enjoying a higher standard of living than that obtainable on the island".[11] As a result many Corsicans, particularly the young were forced to leave the island for the mainland.

The emigration of the ethnic Corsicans corresponded with the arrival of the *pied noirs* from Algeria. The pied noirs (black feet) were French colonists who were forced to leave Algeria after it declared sovereignty. During the 1960's France integrated over 17 000 of them on the island. These settlers were given (or quickly purchased) the best farming land and the land best suited for tourism. This shut the native Corsicans out of the two most lucrative markets on the island. As a result the pied noirs quickly became economically advanced in comparison to the Corsicans. This economic discrepancy added to the threat to the culture of the Corsican population through the arrival of outsiders was a direct cause of the growth of the nationalist movement and the terrorist organizations that soon followed.

The Basques in comparison have always enjoyed a privileged economic position in Spain. The Basques industrialized early and has been active in steel production, ship-building and banking for hundreds of years. Even when they faced severe repression under Franco, they remained economically profitable. In 1967 for example 4 of the 5 Basque provinces were ranked in the top 6 Spanish provinces in terms of per capita income.[12] Moreover, in terms of disposable per capita income (income after taxes

---

[11] Robert Ramsay (1993) *The Corsican Time-Bomb* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p.31.

[12] Milton M. da Silva (1975) "Modernization and Ethnic Conflict: The Case of the Basques" *Comparative Politics*, Vol.7, No.2, p.240.

available to spend on other goods) three provinces, Guipuzcoa, Vizcaya and Alava were ranked first, second and third respectively, with Navarre sixth.[13]

With economic prosperity came migration from both within Spain and elsewhere throughout Europe. While the nationalists did see this influx as a danger the rest of the region has become tolerant of outsiders. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement "It is a good thing for any society to be made up of people from different races, religions and cultures?" 76% of respondents in the Basque region agreed, and only 12% disagreed. The same results occurred when only ethnic Basques were asked the question.[14] When these same people were asked if they found that "the presence of people of another nationality disturbing in your daily life?" only 4% responded that they agreed with this statement, while 94% disagreed.[15] Finally when asked if an increase of minorities increases unemployment in the region only 41% agreed while 46% disagreed. This is a much lower response in favor compared to other EU countries such as Greece (85% agreed), Belgium (64% agreed), Germany (61% agreed) and the EU as a whole (51% agreed).[16] Economically the Basque have a lower unemployment rate then other areas of Spain (and the EU) they have their own taxation formula negotiated with Madrid and they appear tolerant of outsiders, yet violence has remained a part of Basque society. Clearly it cannot be explained by economics.

Many of the Russians who came to Estonia and Latvia during the Soviet period did so due to the relative economic prosperity of the region. The Baltic states offered a

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] Sociological Survey Office- President of the Basque Government's Office (2003) *Basque Sociometer 21*, Basque government website http://www.euskadi.net/estudios_sociologicos, p.29.

[15] Ibid, p.30.

[16] Ibid, p.33.

chance at a slightly better life than in other areas of the country. During the Soviet period Russians and Russian speaking migrants were the main ethnic group employed in the machine-building, mining, textile and chemical producing sector.[17] This created a condition that some have referred to as 'internal colonialism' where the labor market became segregated. As Mettan and Williams state: "the crystallization of ethnic identities is considered in the context of the structure of labour markets in a multiethnic context and the emergence of localized cultural division of labour".[18] This division of labour has remained in post-independence Estonia and Latvia. The Russians are essentially shut out of some higher paying jobs, particularly those in the civil service, the police and the military. They have been forced to work in heavy industry or as entrepreneurs. Another way to examine the cultural division of labor is to look at what languages are needed where the titular and non-titular populations work. In Estonia 98% of Estonians work in a place that requires Estonian. Only 61% of Russians' workplaces require Estonian. 55% of Estonian workplaces require Russian, compared to 86% of workplaces where Russians are employed.[19] In Latvia the numbers are even more striking. Only 13% of Russians work in an environment that requires only Latvian, and only 34% of the workplaces of Russians use both Russian and Latvian. Almost half of the Russians in Latvia, 48%, work in an environment that uses Russian exclusively. 73% of the Latvians work in a Latvian-

---

[17] Marje Pavelson and Mati Luuk (2002) "Non-Estonians on the Labour Market" in Marju Lauristin and Mati Heidmets, ed., *The Challenge of the Russian Minority* (Tartu: Tartu University Press), p.91.

[18] Collin W. Mettam et al. (1998) "Internal Colonialism and Cultural Division of Labour in the Soviet Republic of Estonia" *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol.4 No.3, p.92.

[19] Richard Rose (2000) *New Baltic Barometer IV: A Survey Study* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Press), p.8.

only environment, with only 18% working in an environment that uses both Latvian and Russian.[20]

In the industries where both Russians and the titular community works there is a clear discrepancy in wages. As the Table 1 illustrates in Estonia in the majority of all fields Russians earn far less than their Estonian counterparts.

Table 1. Average Monthly Net Income by Sector in Estonia (in EEK)[21]

Sector	Estonians	Non-Estonians
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3053	3533
Industry	3767	3508
Energy, Gas and Water	3954	2923
Construction	5323	4027
Transport, Communication	4128	3892
Banking, Insurance, Real Estate	5072	2750
Retail and Services	4141	3387
Education and R&D	3305	3296
Public Administration	4334	3005

Clearly the Russians in Estonia and Latvia are economically worse off than their titular counterparts. This discrepancy may continue in the future. A key issue for the Russian community in both countries is education in their native tongue. They argue that without being able to learn in their own language they will fall further behind their Estonian and Latvian counterparts and be shut out of further high paying jobs. Despite all of this the Russians have remained dormant. Other explanations for their behaviour is needed.

The Role of the International Community

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid, p.45.

No European countries, with the possible exception of the Balkans, have been influenced by the international community more than Estonia and Latvia. With the Russian Army still in the region and ethnic tensions running high, the West through international organizations entered the two countries immediately after independence. The first of these organizations and the most intrusive was the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's High Commissioner on National Minorities the former Dutch diplomat Max Van der Stoel. The High Commissioner position was created in the early 1990's in the wake of the changes confronting Eastern Europe. His exact mandate resulting from the 1992 CSCE Helsinki Summit was:

> The High Commissioner will provide 'early warning' and, as appropriate 'early action' at the earliest possible stage in regard to tensions involving national minority issues, which have not yet developed beyond an early warning stage, but, in the judgment of the High Commissioner, have the potential to develop into conflict within the CSCE area, affecting peace, stability or relations between participating states.[22]

He decided that the places where the mandate allowed him to go and that he could make the greatest impact at that time were Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Hungary.[23] In Estonia and Latvia the areas he was most active in addressing were citizenship and language laws. As Bernier notes: "The High Commissioner made it clear, from the beginning of his involvement, that the path taken by both countries to secure the 'privileged position' of the core group over minorities not only ran against international norms, but also disrupted

---

[22] Quoted in Wolfgang Zellner (2002) "The OSCE: Uniquely Qualified for a Conflict-Prevention Role" in Paul van Tongeren, Hans Van de Veen and Juliette Verhoven ed., *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers), p.19.

[23] Interview with Max Van der Stoel, former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, June 26, 2003, The Hague.

internal social cohesion".[24] It was this danger of a disruption of social cohesion that led Van der Stoel to Estonia and while there was no actual violence, the situation was critical. He felt that two things needed to be done immediately: "calm the Russians down, and change the laws" on language and citizenship requirements.[25] His first trip as High Commissioner was to the Baltic states in January of 1993 and when he returned he produced a list of recommendations to decrease the level of ethnic tension in Estonia and Latvia (as discussed earlier Lithuania did not have many of the problems found in the other two Baltic States). In Estonia the central recommendation was "for the Estonian Government to show a clear intention to reduce the number of stateless persons through naturalization".[26]

The initial response to Van der Stoel's recommendations was not positive. Despite being well received in both countries, neither implemented any of the proposed changes. In June of 1993 the Estonian parliament passed the Law on Aliens which solidified the long term Russian residents of the country as non-citizens and the response in the Russian dominated North-East was a call for a general strike and later to call for greater autonomy. Van der Stoel returned to Estonia and was able to persuade the parliament to add amendments to the legislation which placated the Russian population.[27] In order to reach this agreement the High Commissioner took the highly unusual step

---

[24] Julie Bernier (2001) "Nationalism in Transition: Nationalizing Impulses and International Counterweights in Latvia and Estonia" in Michael Keating and John McGarry, ed. *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.343.

[25] Interview with Max Van der Stoel, 2003.

[26] Walter Kemp, ed. (2001) *Quiet Diplomacy in Action: The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International Press), p.141.

[27] Ibid. p.143

(and went against his own mandate which was designed for 'quiet diplomacy') of making a public statement. This statement told of an agreement he had reached with the Russian leaders in Narva that they would respect the ruling of the Estonian High Court on their rights on autonomy and with this agreement public, the Estonian government was willing to make their own concessions.[28]

Fueled by his success in encouraging amendments to the Law on Aliens in Estonia and the continuing threat to peace and stability in the region, Van der Stoel made repeated trips to the two countries over the next few years. Over time the novelty of international attention began to wear off and the reality set in that there was still a great deal of work to be done. At this point the relationship between the states and the High Commissioner changed and Van der Stoel was put in the awkward position of being disliked and considered untrustworthy by both the majority and minority groups. The Estonians and Latvians saw him as an "agent of Moscow" and to the Russians he was not effective in bringing about the necessary changes quickly enough.[29] It is possible that the High Commissioner's effectiveness was in part due to this lack of support by both sides. While both sides claimed he was working for the other, they did have a common bond in their opinion of the High Commissioner. The High Commissioner needed to reassure the Russian community that he was listening to their concerns and would bring violations of their rights to the attention of the government but he also needed to constantly remind both the Russians and the Latvians and Estonians that his position was the High Commissioner *on* National Minorities, not *for* National Minorities. This meant that he

---

[28] Ibid, and Interview with Max Van der Stoel, 2003.

[29] Interview with Max Van der Stoel, 2003.

was not an ombudsman for all of the Russians' concerns and that he was interested in compromises and agreements.

By the middle to late 1990's the Baltic states were at a point in their development when they 1) believed that they did not need the assistance of the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities and 2) were ready to move towards the rest of Europe by joining the European Union.[30] Any thoughts that they could accomplish both wishes evaporated quickly. Due to the history of the High Commissioner in the region he had become the leading authority on minority issues in the Baltic states as well as throughout Eastern Europe and as a result, other international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union turned to the High Commissioner for advice and recommendations.[31] When the various states in Eastern Europe (and Malta) petitioned to join the EU the existing members needed to determine what requirements needed to be met. As in past accession processes issues such as banking, economics, environmental concerns and farm subsidies were all included in the requirements. A new issue that this group of candidate countries was to be judged on was human rights, with a subsection on the treatment of minorities. As the process developed each country would receive a yearly 'Accession Report' that outlined what changes still needed to be made to meet EU requirements. As the ranking authority the recommendations of the High Commissioner, that up to this point were non-binding, now became part of the accession requirements. Instead of being in a situation where they could now ignore the advice of the High

[30] This paper focuses on the role of EU accession in modifying behavior. The Baltic States also were working towards NATO accessions as well during this time. The issues concerning NATO relate more to security matters and are not incorporated into this analysis.

[31] Interview with Falk Lang, Senior Advisor to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (The Baltics) June 26-27, 2003 The Hague.

Commissioner, the Estonian and Latvian governments were required to meet the standards that he set out, or risk being shut out of the European Union. The 1999 EU Accession report for Latvia is a clear example of the EU deferring to the High Commissioner and the OSCE in addressing minority rights. Despite the High Commissioner's best efforts and attempts at persuasion, the citizenship laws were still not in compliance with his recommendations. The tests to gain citizenship were deemed too difficult but the Latvian government was unwilling to compromise further until the following section appeared in the 1999 Accession report: "A last issue to be addressed in this context, concerns a further simplification of the citizenship test on Latvian history, and the constitution in accordance with the recommendations made by the OSCE".[32] The Latvians now faced the possibility of being denied access to the European Union and the economic and security stability that went with membership if they did not change their laws to comply with the High Commissioner's recommendations. The Estonian government faced similar choices in their report.[33]

The pull of joining the EU has shaped politics in Estonia and Latvia since the accession reports began and these reports and the visits by the High Commissioner put these governments in very difficult positions, particularly in Latvia. Due to the complex coalition governments in Latvia the President and Prime Minister could not always be seen as complying with these international organizations. There is a segment of Latvian society, usually supporters of the right-wing For Fatherland and Freedom Party, who do

---

[32] *1999 European Union Accession Progress Report- Latvia* found on the European Union website, www.europa.org. Also see Michael Johns (2003) "Do As I Say, Not As I Do: The European Union, Eastern Europe and Minority Rights", *East European Politics and Societies* Vol.17 No.4, pp.682-699.

[33] *1999 European Union Accession Progress Report- Estonia* found on the EU website.

not trust outsiders and believe that Europe cannot or will not understand Latvia's history which drives their current actions.[34] As a way of trying to look independent to the Latvian people while complying with these imposed international standards the usual tactic used by the government was to refuse to act until the last possible moment and then pass the law as mandated.[35]

In Estonia the government was more transparent with the population almost to its own detriment. When a recommendation would come from the EU (as a result of the High Commissioner) the Estonian government would change the targeted law and say that this was necessary to get into the EU. The former Minister of Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs, Katrin Saks, believes this had a negative impact on Estonians' view of the European Union and contends that Estonian society was moving in the direction of integration anyway and would have supported laws to give citizenship to children for example, but by saying the government had to do this caused resentment.[36] Saks' contention that by being seen as complying too quickly to EU demands has had an negative impact on Estonians' view of the EU is substantiated by public opinion polls in 2000. The *New Baltic Barometer IV* study asked respondents if they were in favor of their country joining the European Union. 48% of ethnic Latvians responded they were either strongly or somewhat in favor of Latvia joining EU. Approximately the same percentage (45%) of Russian-speaking Latvians strongly or somewhat agreed. In Estonia while 49%

---

[34] Interview with Reinis Āboltiņš, Director of the Society Integration Department- Former Advisor to the President, July 17 2003, Riga.

[35] Interview with John Packer, Director, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities July 26, 2003 The Hague.

[36] Interview with Katrin Saks, Estonian Member of Parliament and Former Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs (1999-2002), July 10 2003, Tallinn.

strongly or somewhat agreed, only 9% fell into the strongly agreed category (compared to 13% of Latvians and 15% of Russians in Latvia). Estonian Russians responded 64% in favor of joining EU with 23% responding that they were strongly in favor. Clearly the Russians in Estonia saw the benefits of EU involvement in their lives more strongly compared to their Estonian counterparts. Table 6.1 illustrates all of the results.

Table 2. Public Opinion on joining the European Union in 2000[37]

Question: *What do you think of the idea of this country joining the European Union?*

	Estonians in Estonia %	Russians in Estonia %	Latvians in Latvia %	Russians in Latvia %
Strongly in favor	9	23	13	15
Somewhat in favor	40	41	35	30
Somewhat Opposed	24	14	19	15
Strongly Opposed	15	9	14	16
Difficult to Say	13	13	20	25

Without the ability to use EU accession as a stick to influence states, organizations such as the EU and OSCE have been less effective in Western Europe. Both France and Spain have rejected any calls for international assistance or mediation. In Spain for example both the United States based Carter Center and an Irish peace organization has offered to provide their expertise but have been continually refused.[38] It should be noted that many of these attempts by outsiders have been rejected by the Basques as well. Unlike the Catholics in Northern Ireland there is not a large Basque

[37] Adapted from Rose (2000), p. 32.

[38] Interview with Francisco Martinez Montes, Counselor to the Spanish delegation, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, July 28 2003, Vienna.

diaspora from which to draw international support. Due to the association of the Basque conflict with the ETA and the resulting violence, the Basques have little sympathy throughout the world and have become somewhat isolated. As a result Basques separatists are leery of the international community.[39]

The Corsicans also have been relatively ignored by the international community. This is largely due to the refusal by France to allow for international negotiations. The French government has made it very clear that the relationship between themselves and the Corsicans is an internal matter. France is willing to allow international organizations (such as the OSCE) to come to the island and monitor elections and referendums to ensure they are fair but it will not allow for any outside mediation or interference.[40] The President of North Corisica, Paul Giacobbi explains the French government's position on the possibility of international assistance to solve the Corsica problem as: "If 200 countries do something one way France would assume that the 200 were wrong and it was right".[41] The Corsicans have had some success in using the EU institutions to their advantage. The EU has helped shape the Corsican conflict because it is now seen as a struggle over sovereignty. As the EU increases its 'federalization' of Europe there are opportunities for 'positive sum' negotiations. Prior to this the conflict was shaped in win-loss terms. There has also been an opportunity for Corsica to work with the other

---

[39] Telephone interview with Prof. Santiago Petschen, Professor of Political and Sociological Sciences, Universidad Complutense Madrid, August 4 2003.

[40] Interview with Frederic de Touchet, Political Advisor Permanent Mission of France to the OSCE, July 28 2003, Vienna.

[41] Telephone interview with Paul Giacobbi, President Haute Corse (North Corsica) August 7, 2003.

Mediterranean islands on issues inside the EU.[42] It has been argued that the European Union's Peace programs designed for conflicts elsewhere in Europe could be a model for Corsica but that would require France's capitulation, which is unlikely.[43]

Clearly at this point the International community has been unable to have an influence on the Corsica and Basque conflicts. Many involved in the politics of resolving these conflicts believe that some form of international influence would be very helpful if not decisive. Paul Giacobbi believes that the influence of an international organization would help prove to the French people that devolution would not end the Republic.[44] In the Basque country there are organizations such as Elkarri, that are trying to raise awareness on the Basque question and is looking for international assistance in ending the conflict. The hope behind this effort is that it would not only present possible solutions for the conflict but it could put subtle pressure on the both the Spanish government and the Basque terrorists to resolve the problem because the world would be watching.[45]

One institution that may play a role in the future could be the new OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Rolf Ekeus. Currently, the mandate for the position prevents the Commissioner from intervening in areas where terrorism is occurring and thus prevents visits to Corsica and the Basque region. There is some reason for optimism that this could change as there have been discussions within the OSCE on

---

[42] Phone interview with Dr. John Loughlin, 2003. Also see Francesco Letamendia and John Loughlin (2000) "Peace in the Basque Country and Corsica?" in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen ed., *A Farewell to Arms?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Phone interview with Paul Giacobbi, 2003.

[45] Interview with Gorka Espiau, Director and Spokesperson Elkarri, August 18 2003, Bilbao.

changing the mandate to allow for intervention in these affected regions.[46] While the High Commissioner admits that some of the tools that were effective in Eastern Europe would not work in the west there is a growing belief that due to the radical changes forced upon the incoming EU members "it is time for everyone to live up to the standards".[47] In a sign of the changing view of conflicts in the west the High Commissioner in a speech on November 5, 2003 (at an event celebrating the success of the Copenhagen criteria on minority rights no less) warned: "the standards on which the Copenhagen criteria are based should be universally applicable within and throughout the EU, in which case they should be equally- and consistently- applied to all member states".[48] It is unclear if the mandate will be changed to allow the High Commissioner to go to Corsica or the Basque country. It is also unknown if he could have any influence if he were allowed to go.[49] As for the European Union, there is hope by some that it could become an important player in both the Basque and Corsican conflict. As Espiau notes in reference to the Basque conflict: "The Basque case *is* a European problem. The priority of the citizens of this part of Europe is pacification and normalization".[50] Only time will tell how the EU and the OSCE begin to address these issues if at all. It is clear, however,

---

[46] Internal OSCE memo, July 1, 2003. Former High Commissioner Max Van der Stoel believes that the mandate should not be changed because if the mandate is open for changes it could also be changed in other negative ways making the position redundant or powerless. Interview with Max Van der Stoel, 2003.

[47] Interview with Rolf Ekeus, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, June 24, 2003, The Hague.

[48] Speech available on the OSCE website.

[49] Petschen believes that the High Commissioner would not be allowed into Spain even with a change in the mandate, but he would not have an influence if he came, as no one would meet with him. Phone Interview with Prof. Santiago Petschen, 2003.

[50] Gorka Espiau (2002) "Spain and the Basque Conflict: Still Looking for a Way Out" in Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen and Juliette Verhoeven ed., *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishing), p. 152.

that many people in both regions expect the EU to become involved and will hold it accountable once it does.

Culture

Of all the possible explanations for the minority groups' activities discussed, the role of culture is the most challenging. It is difficult to discuss the prevailing culture of a group, let alone make predictions on the activities of a group based on this culture. While it is difficult, it is necessary. When two groups have very different cultures they are unable to understand the actions of each other and there is no starting point for discussion, no room for compromise, no way of seeing eye-to-eye. As Cornell and Hartmann note:

> Human beings live not only in the midst of material relationships and sets of opportunities- political, economic, social- but also in the midst of ideas and understandings. The social world is an interpreted world, as much conceptual as it is concrete. Interpretations, ideas, and understandings are part of culture, and culture is an identity construction site of uncommon importance.[51]

What differentiates one group from another is not necessarily the language it speaks or the religion it practices, it is its culture. A culture develops over time based on the specific history faced by the group. If one group has only known war and violence their culture will develop to expect violence but conversely a group never exposed to violence may look for other avenues to prevent conflict. Moreover, the prevailing culture of a group can change over time due to a change in its situation. A peaceful group may become more militant over time depending on their treatment by the state. This occurs when the group's perception of what is right and wrong, proper and improper changes.

---

[51] Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann (1998) *Ethnicity and Race* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press), p.173.

This occurs "first in our heads and then in our practices".[52] In short "[c]ulture is sense-making".[53]

Most believe that it was the repression faced by the Basques during the Franco regime which radically altered the culture of the Basques. As Kurlansky notes for the Basques "culture has always been a political act, the primary demonstration of national identity. One of the keys to Basque survival is that political repression produces cultural revival".[54] Franco treated the Basques more severely than the Catalonians, or any other group in Spain. His goal was the eradication of the Basque culture and specifically the Basque language. This threat to the language had a pronounced impact on the Basques. Much of Basques identity is tied to their language. The combination of the threat of having their language taken from them and the actually physical repression they endured (or heard others enduring) was enough to change how the Basques viewed violence. Due to Franco's repression "Basque nationalism was reborn in a thoroughly new shape" and further "a new Basque identity was formed in the process".[55] When the ETA broke from the Basque Nationalist Party and began to employ violence against the state it was seen by many of the Basque people as a legitimate way of fighting back against Franco. The ETA members were seen as something similar to Robin Hood, while their actions were illegal their motives were right and therefore they were embraced.[56] If Franco had not

---

[52] Ibid, p.174.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Mark Kurlansky (1999) *The Basque History of the World* (Toronto: Vintage Canada), p.158.

[55] Daniele Conversi (1997) *The Basques, Catalans and Spain* (Reno: University of Nevada Press), p.231.

[56] Interview with Ibon Mendibelzva, Adviser- Press Services, Basque Country Delegation to the European Union, July 22 2003, Brussels.

targeted the Basques and their culture to the level he did it unknown if the Basque culture would have changed to such a point where it would have tolerated being associated with violence. As a result "ETA's violence achieved strong affective support within broad sectors of the Basque population, given the total prohibition on public expression of discontent or of any ideological or cultural manifestations from the official ideology. This state violence, symbolic and physical, provided legitimacy to the political violence".[57]

Paul Theroux may best describe Corsica when he says that "it is a French province in name only. Corsica is Corsica".[58] While much of the island has been incorporated into the mainland in terms of economics, education and government, the culture of the Corsicans has never changed. It is still an island that works by its own rules, has its own unique customs and has a culture unlike anything seen in the rest of France. It is this clash of cultures that have lead to many of the problems on the island. The French government appears to not fully appreciate the differences in culture between Corsicans and the mainland and is therefore unable to predict how they will react to proposed changes to Corsican society. The Corsicans have refused to alter their culture to be more in line with not only the rest of France but the rest of Europe.

One cultural difference between Corsica and the rest of France is the role of traditional clans in the day to day business of the island. These clans, the powerful historical families wield enormous influence on politics and business. Throughout recent Corsican history the same surnames appear over and over in various government posts

---

[57] Alfonso Perez-Agote (1999) "The Future of Basque Identity" in William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, ed., *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millennium* (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada), p.63.

[58] Paul Theroux (1995) *The Pillars of Hercules* (New York: Fawcett Columbine), p. 135.

and important segments of the economy. Each clan remains in power due to the loyalty it demands of those within it. The clan system dates back to the 1880's and is similar to other clan systems found throughout Italy. The clan is "the political superstructure of a cultural infrastructure articulated on a base of family and traditional values".[59] The various clans have historically worked not for the betterment of all Corsicans, rather they have used their power to maintain their clan's stature in the community at the expense of all others. This has lead to competition and electoral fraud politically and the hoarding of resources economically.

One of the main consequences of the continuation of the clan system is the acceptance of violence on the island. The clans have been in competition with one another for so long rivalries have developed and over time these rivalries have taken on a violent component. This violence is now seen in business relationships, the prevalence of organized crime on the island and it can be argued in the political arena as well. Quite simply, violence is more accepted in Corsica than in other areas of both France and the rest of Europe. Paul Giacobbi believes that the Corsicans see themselves as a 'mountain people' who are more open to the use of violence within the society. He claims that there is a "tradition of violence" in Corsica that is different from other places.[60] Giacobbi goes further to say that violence is such a common part of Corsican society that when there is an apparent nationalistic terrorist attack it is actually difficult to determine if that attack is for political, economic or personal reasons. By way of example, in July 2003 there were approximately 50 separate bombings in Corsica. Of those, about 20 were directly linked

---

[59] Alexandra Jaffe (1999) *Ideologies in Action: Language Politics in Corsica* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter Press), p.49.

[60] Phone interview with Paul Giacobbi, 2003.

to the FLNC or one of its splinter groups. The rest of the bombings were a result of other non-political disagreements.[61] Violence is a part of doing business on the island. For example, if there are two businessmen who are in competition, Giacobbi contends that the prevailing culture of the island allows for the one who is less successful economically to try to remove the competition by vandalizing the competition. There is less shame in using violence to succeed than there is in failing in a business.[62]

Loughlin concurs with Giacobbi's assessment of the Corsican culture. For him, the need to maintain honor is the most important characteristic of Corsican society. The use of violence, particularly the types of violence usually associated with the terrorist activities of the FLNC and others (bombings, arson, etc.) are not major violations of the codes of the society.[63] Loughlin also ties this type of activity to the traditional Corsican society based on the clans for this acceptance of violence. The competition between the clans have lead to the constant need for retribution by one clan against another. When one clan has been wronged there is a loss of honor which is unacceptable and therefore the clan's honor needs to be regained. This has led to a 'vendetta culture' where one violent act is met with another and this becomes all the society knows as acceptable behavior.[64] This is why, for Laughlin, the main nationalist political groups in Corsica have refrained from condemning the terrorist attacks. While they may not support them directly and may wish to find a political solution to the nationalist problem, they do not necessarily see what the terrorists are doing as not normal. There is no stigma attached to using violence

---

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Telephone interview with with Dr. John Loughlin, 2003.

[64] Ibid.

and so there is no need to condemn such activity. In Corsican society using violence is as normal as negotiating with the state.[65]

If the Corsicans represent a culture that not only accepts violence, but also at times embrace unlawfulness, the Russian community in Estonia and Latvia would represent the complete opposite. The culture of the Russians in the Baltic states has been influenced by both the prevailing Russian and Soviet culture and the Baltic culture in which they have been immersed. The result is a people who lack the organization to carry out violent acts and even if they could organize to such a degree, would not consider violence as an option.

Early Soviet nationalities policies involved the promotion of the 'backwards nations' and the suppression of Russian nationalism. While the Russians remained the dominant group in the Soviet Union they were forced to think of themselves as Soviet rather than Russian. All other groups were allowed two identities, their nationality and Soviet. By 1923 Slezkine argues that the term Russian as a nationality within the Soviet Union "was a politically empty category unless it referred to the source of great-power chauvinism . . . or to the history of relentless imperialist oppression".[66] Falk Lang, the Senior Advisor on the Baltic states to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities describes the Russians who moved to the Baltic states as the prime example of *homo-Sovieticus*. Without the Soviet Union they had nothing to base their culture around[67] and with it gone they are unable to see themselves as Russian because for the

---

[65] Ibid.

[66] Yuri Slezkine (1994) "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism" *Slavic Review* Vol.53 No.2, p.435.

[67] Interview with Falk Lang, 2003.

past 80 years they have not done so. Without the ability to organize they have been unable to act.[68] They represent the clearest example of what Ken Jowitt sees as a consequence of the Soviet period. For them the political realm was "something dangerous, something to avoid. Political involvement meant trouble".[69] A Russian activist in Estonia describes the Russian community as "like a crowd" unable to mobilize.[70] In this regard it is not that the Russian culture is non-violent, it is merely incapable of rallying the nation due to the Soviet history which forced it to the background and made it suspicious of political mobilization.

The Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia have been heavily influenced by the titular populations as well. It would be impossible for the Russian-speaking community to live among the Baltic people during the Soviet period without adapting their culture to be more in line with the Estonians and Latvians. One of the main aspects of both Estonian and Latvian culture is a rejection of violence. Throughout their histories, both Estonia and Latvia have tried to avoid conflict and they describe themselves as pragmatic people who are similar to Scandinavians and Finns in their belief in non-violent strategies.[71] Lieven describes the Estonians as having the "fundamental quality of restraint, pragmatism, and indeed decency".[72] The most recent and most telling example of this commitment to non-violence was seen in the 'singing revolution' of 1989. Many

---

[68] Interview with Reinis Āboltiņš, 2003.

[69] Ken Jowitt (1992) *New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p.288.

[70] Interview with Vadim Poleshchuk, Legal Advisor- Legal Information Centre for Human Rights, July 10 2003, Tallinn.

[71] See for example the discussion of the Estonians and Latvians use of non-violence in Walter C. Clemens (2001) *The Baltic Transformed* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Press).

[72] Anatol Lieven (1993) *The Baltic Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p.20.

believe that the Estonians and Latvians' refusal to use violence in their dealings with the Soviet Union shaped the Russians living in the region to such a point that violence was not perceived as a viable solution.[73] Due to their interactions both the Estonians and Latvians and the Russian-speaking populations within their borders now share a culture that has created a level of patience not found in other areas of the former Soviet Union.[74] This change is seen in the statement by the Former Deputy Mayor of Tallinn, Boris Yulegin:

> The Russians who have lived here all their lives have changed a lot. They have taken on something of the Estonian coolness, restraint and habit of hard work- whether they like it or not! They do not feel at home when they go to Russia. The Russians who come here also sometimes do not understand our character and ask us, 'Why don't you protest? Why don't you go on the streets?'[75]

The adaptation of the Russian-speaking community to Baltic culture is one of the few issues that both sides agree on. The current Estonian Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, Paul-Eerik Rummo contends that one of the leading causes for prolonged peace during the integration process was the embracing by the Russian community of the Estonian ideal of non-violence.[76] His predecessor Katrin Saks believes that the Russians

---

[73] Interview with Illze Brand Kehris, Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, July 14 2003, Riga.

[74] Interview with Falk Lang, 2003 and Mati Luik, Director- Non-Estonian Integration Foundation July 10, 2003 Tallinn. The tolerance of the Latvian society and its impact on the Russian-speaking community was also discussed by Former Latvian Prime Minister Valdis Birkavs in an interview in Riga on July 14 2003.

[75] Quoted in Lieven (1993), p.178.

[76] Interview with Interview with Paul-Eerik Rummo, Estonian Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, July 9 2003, Tallinn.

have learned from the Estonians to "be tolerant, survive and integrate".[77] From the Russian-speaking perspective, Vadim Poleshchuk contends that Estonians and Russians now have the same view of what is involved in identity and have similar views on adherence to state institutions and practices which has led to a lack of violence.[78] In Latvia, Boris Tsilevich notes that the Russians never developed a leader who was willing to be responsible for bloodshed (which would have contrasted with the singing revolution) so violence was never a viable option.[79]

Conclusion

This paper tested three potential explanations for the behaviour of four ethnic groups in Europe. Each group has chosen a path that is somewhat unexpected based on their relationship with the state. Of the three explanations, the role of economics appears to be the weakest. It can only explain why violence has been seen on the island of Corsica. It cannot effectively explain the violence in the Basque country and it cannot explain the lack of mobilization of the Russians in Estonia and Latvia. At best economics can be seen as a sufficient but not necessary condition. To explain these cases and to further explain the actions of the Corsicans the other two explanations are needed. Clearly the international community plays a vital role in explaining when a group chooses violence. If a group sees international organizations acting as their advocate it is in their best interest to remain quiet. Those groups who feel abandoned by the

---

[77] Interview with Katrin Saks, Estonian Member of Parliament, Former Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs (1999-2002), July 10 2003, Tallinn.

[78] Interview with Poleshchuk, 2003.

[79] Interview with Boris Tsilevich, . Former Latvian Member of Parliament and Russian activist July 15, 2003 Riga.

international community may see violence as their only option to raise attention to their situation.

A more difficult and more provocative explanation is that the culture of the group can influence when and if they choose violence. This paper argues that the Basque and Corsican culture is more accepting of violence than the culture of the Russians in Estonia and Latvia. These cultures are influenced by history, past relations with the state and their interactions with other cultures. While it is difficult to make observations on the culture of others it is not impossible and this paper illustrates the value in undertaking such a challenge. More work needs to be done to refine such analyses but the reward will far outweigh the effort. If culture does play an important role in conflict than by better understanding what a group's culture is and how it got that way better risk assessment is possible. Resources could be better allocated and early warning would be enhanced. This paper has identified two powerful forces in predicting group behaviour and one which may have been overstated. More work needs to be done and more variables identified but a clearer starting point is now possible.

Sources

Arens, Marianne and Francois Thull (2000) "Partial autonomy for Corsica splits French government" *World Socialist Website*, September 5.

Bernier, Julie. (2001) "Nationalism in Transition: Nationalizing Impulses and International Counterweights in Latvia and Estonia" in Michael Keating and John McGarry, ed. *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Clemens, Walter C. (2001) *The Baltic Transformed* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Press).

Conversi, Daniele. (1997) *The Basques, Catalans and Spain* (Reno: University of Nevada Press).

Cornell, Stephen and Douglas Hartmann. (1998) *Ethnicity and Race* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press).

da Silva, Milton M. (1975) "Modernization and Ethnic Conflict: The Case of the Basques" *Comparative Politics* Vol.7 No.2, pp.227-251.

Espiau, Gorka. (2002) "Spain and the Basque Conflict: Still Looking for a Way Out" in Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen and Juliette Verhoeven, ed. *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishing).

Gurr, Ted Robert. (1970) *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

_____. (1993) *Minorities at Risk* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press).

_____. (2000) *Peoples Versus States* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press).

Horowitz, Donald L. (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Jaffe, Alexandra. (1999) *Ideologies in Action: Language Politics in Corsica* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter Press).

Johns, Michael (2003) "Do As I Say, Not As I Do: The European Union, Eastern

Europe and Minority Rights" *East European Politics and Societies* Vol.17 No.4, pp.682-699.

Jowitt, Ken. (1992) *New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Kemp, Walter A. (2001) *Quiet Diplomacy in Action* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International).

Kurlansky, Mark. (1999) *The Basque History of the World* (Toronto: Vintage Canada).

Letamendia, Francesco and John Loughlin. (2000) "Peace in the Basque Country and Corsica" in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen, ed. *A Farewell to Arms* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Lieven, Anatol (1993) *The Baltic Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Loughlin, John and Farimah Daftary. (1999) *Insular Regions and European Integration: Corsica and the Åland Islands Compared* (Flensburg: ECMI Report #5).

Mettam, Collin W., Stephen W. Williams and Stephen Wyn. (1998) "Internal Colonialism and Cultural Division of Labour in the Soviet Republic of Estonia" *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol.4 No.3, pp.363-388.

Moore, Will and Keith Jaggers. (1990) "Deprivation, Mobilization and the State" *Journal of Developing Societies* Vol.6 No.1, pp.17-36.

Olzak, Susan. (1992) *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition & Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Pavelson, Marje and Mati Luik. (2002) "Non-Estonians on the Labour Market" in Marju Lauristin and Mati Heidmets, ed. *The Challenge of the Russian Minority* (Tartu: Tartu University Press).

Perez-Agote, Alfonso. (1999) "The Future of Basque Identity" in William A. Douglass, Carmelo Urza, Linda White and Joseba Zulaika, ed. *Basque Politics and Nationalism on the Eve of the Millennium* (Reno: Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada).

Ramsay, Robert. (1983) *The Corsican Time Bomb*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Rose, Richard. (2000) *New Baltic Barometer IV: A Survey Study* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Press).

Sociological Survey Office- President of the Basque Government's Office. (2003) *Basque Sociometer #21.*

Slezkine, Yuri. (1994) "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism" *Slavic Review* Vol.53 No.2, pp.414-452.

Tellis, Ashley J., Thomas S. Szayna and James A. Winnefeld. (1997) *Anticipating Ethnic Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND).

Theroux, Paul. (1995) *The Pillars of Hercules* (New York: Fawcett Columbine).

Zellner, Wolfgang. (2002) "The OSCE: Uniquely Qualified for a Conflict-Prevention Role" in Paul van Tongeren, Hans Van de Veen and Juliette Verhoven, ed. *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

Interviews

Āboltiņš, Reinis. Director of the Society Integration Department- Former Advisor to the President July 17, 2003 Riga.

Birkavs, Valdis. Former Prime Minister of Latvia July 14 2003, Riga.

de Touchet, Frederic. Political Advisor, Permanent Mission of France to the OSCE July 28, 2003 Vienna.

Ekeus, Rolf. OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities June 24, 2003 The Hague.

Espiau, Gorka. Director and Spokesperson- Elkarri August 18, 2003 Bilbao.

Giacobbi, Paul. President Haute Corse (North Corsica) August 7, 2003 Telephone interview.

Kehris, Illze Brand. Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies July 14, 2003 Riga.

Lang, Falk. Senior Advisor to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (The Baltics) June 26-27, 2003 The Hague.

Loughlin, John. School of European Studies- Cardiff University June 30, 2003 Telephone interview.

Luik, Mati. Director- Non-Estonian Integration Foundation July 10, 2003 Tallinn.

Mendibelzva, Ibon. Adviser- Press Services, Basque Country Delegation to the European Union July 22, 2003 Brussels.

Packer, John. Director, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities July 26, 2003 The Hague.

Poleshchuk, Vadim. Legal Advisor- Legal Information Centre for Human Rights July 10, 2003 Tallinn.

Rummo, Paul-Eerik. Estonian Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs July 9, 2003 Tallinn.

Saks, Katrin. Estonian Member of Parliament, Former Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs (1999-2002) July 10, 2003 Tallinn.

Tsilevich, Boris. Former Latvian Member of Parliament and Russian activist July 15, 2003 Riga.

van der Stoel, Max. Former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities June 26, 2003 The Hague.